

6 ways to build your team's resilience

An inspiring conversation with Virginia Ali, the sole surviving founder of Ben's Chili Bowl, a Washington landmark, took us back through one of the most turbulent periods in our nation's history, the late 60s race riots following the assassination of civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. We also explored the role resiliency plays in building a team's longevity.

Ali has managed the restaurant since 1958 in a historic section of Northwest D.C., widely revered for its African-American history and status as the "Black Broadway." As Ali stated, it was not uncommon to see such luminaries as Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Bessie Smith, Ella Fitzgerald, Nat King Cole, Martin Luther King, Jr. and others at "The Bowl."

Ali's story is a steadfast reminder of resiliency as a critical skill set to all organizations as they confront innumerable obstacles over the years. Following are six hallmarks of a resilient team that understands how to manage stress, solve problems and bounce back from adversity.

1. Positive thinking. Leadership consultant and neuroscientist Tara Swart explains that exercises such as smiling, showing gratitude and using positive self-talk have the ability to "reprogram the neural pathways in the brain and prevent automatic shortcuts to negative thought patterns."

2. Humility. Organizational psychologist Stanley Silverman identifies humility as a correlate of successful leadership and resilient teams. At the opposite end, arrogant behaviors jeopardize interpersonal interactions, feelings of customer satisfaction, loyalty and relationships among co-workers.

3. Intuition. An empowering leadership tool in the workplace, intuition helps a team excel in social situations and navigate complex change management. It also points to higher social intelligence (a theory developed by American psychologist Edward Thorndike), defined as "the ability to understand and manage to act wisely in human relations."

4. Courage. Harvard business school professor Amy Edmondson reports that fear is the #1 destroyer of great teamwork and productive workers. Challenging our fears helps us take ownership, breed clarity through action and foster assurance to attain larger individual and organizational goals.

5. Gratitude. One Glassdoor survey found 81 percent of employees are motivated to work harder when they feel appreciated. It is an important facet of job satisfaction, employee productivity and retention. Professor of psychology at Northeastern University David DeSteno claims it "increases perseverance on difficult tasks by over 30 percent."

6. Emotional agility. Harvard psychologist Susan David defines this as the ability to "face emotions, move forward deliberately, recognize when we're feeling stressed and act in a way that is aligned with our personal values and goals." This quality is pivotal in enabling a team to effectively transform challenges into opportunities. Focusing on solutions, not mistakes, increases motivation exponentially.