



Guide to **Resilient Leadership**

Best practices for leading during times of uncertainty

INTRODUCTION

If the past two years have taught us anything, it's that success as a business and as a leader requires the ability to embrace change and adapt to unexpected circumstances. After all, organizational vitality begins with resilient leaders.

In AboveBoard's recent webinar, we collaborated with a panel of experts to outline strategies for resilient leadership during turbulent times, from cultivating resilience and maintaining stamina to striking balance in the midst of it all.

Resilient leaders "overcome obstacles without withering in the face of challenges," says panelist Robin Axelrod, Co-Founder and Chief Clinical Officer at Boon Health.

To do this, leaders need to prioritize self-care, focus on interpersonal connection, and communicate with integrity. Ultimately, it's about maintaining your well-being so you can be engaged and fully present with yourself and your team during difficult times.

"It is in everyone's best interest if our mental, emotional, and physical well-being are in good shape. Then we show up more prepared and better able to do the work at hand."



Robin Axelrod
Co-Founder and Chief Clinical Officer at Boon Health

As today's workforce faces unprecedented challenges, from supply chain issues and economic uncertainty to the Great Reshuffling, resilient leadership is as important as ever.

That's why we teamed up with experts in human resources, executive coaching, and organizational strategy to bring you this guide on resilient leadership. Ahead, we'll outline strategies for developing resilience, staying engaged as a leader, and maintaining personal and professional well-being in today's ever-changing workplace.

Let's get started.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF RESILIENT LEADERSHIP

Cultivating a resilient leadership style begins with first confronting our own personal resiliency, says Boon Health's Robin Axelrod. Tumultuous times often serve as a "wake-up call" to check in with ourselves and take stock of the practices, resources, and even people that can help us move forward.

Axelrod recommends the following strategies to start developing and embracing a resilient leadership mindset:

- 1 Look inward.** As a leader, it's important to practice self-examination and invest in yourself where necessary. There's a reason airline safety guidelines tell us to put our oxygen masks on before assisting others. Unless we tend to ourselves first, we're in no position to do the same for others.
- 2 Distinguish between the urgent and the important.** Impossible standards often set us back rather than propel us forward. Channel any feelings of overwhelm into assessing priorities, accomplishing what's urgent, and making a plan to tackle what remains.
- 3 View setbacks as temporary.** All setbacks can be overcome. This simple mindset shift is key to resilience—recovering from and adjusting to change is much easier when you know adaptation, adjustment, and recovery *are* possible. It may be easier said than done, but that doesn't mean we don't need to be reminded of it.
- 4 Prioritize mental well-being.** Many national insurance companies rate mental health or mental well-being as big a risk factor as smoking, according to Axelrod. Engage in practices that support your mental health, and seek resources like counseling or coaching as necessary.
- 5 Ask people what they need.** Intentionally connect with the people on your team or in your sphere of influence. Use one-on-one conversations to check in on how others are doing and ask what they need to feel supported. You may be surprised by the simple, yet impactful, ways you can make a difference. Along the way, you may even find that you feel more purpose-filled and connected as a result.
- 6 Create professional development opportunities.** Do what you can to offer your team members access to growth opportunities. This can help them feel seen, supported, and encouraged. Even something as simple as being more available as a team leader can be a concrete way to show support and help others level up.

HOW TO MAINTAIN STAMINA AS A LEADER

In many ways, resilient leadership is the byproduct of self-care and paying attention to the needs of those around us. But how do you maintain such focus and capacity as a leader, especially in fast-paced or evolving circumstances?

For Robin Axelrod, it comes down to being nimble. Nimbleness—being agile, alert, and responsive — is the key to maintaining energy while quickly reorienting or revising professional or personal priorities. Developing this quality allows you “to pivot or change course” while staying on track to accomplish big picture goals.

Here are three practices Axelrod recommends leaders incorporate in order to maintain their stamina:

- 1 Let go of perfection.** “A person once said to me, ‘Perfection is the enemy of progress. To improve is to change,’” Axelrod said. Being nimble means embracing change and changing often, even if it’s “changing course to stay on track.” To do this, it’s often necessary to let go of preconceived notions of what needs to happen (the “perfect” plan) and come to terms with what is happening and how you can or should respond (nimbleness).
- 2 Practice self-care.** It’s usually once we are rested and renewed that we can draw the strength and stamina needed to move forward in the midst of challenges. For some, self-care can be as simple as prioritizing sleep, establishing an exercise routine, journaling, or incorporating more breaks throughout the day.
- 3 Give your mind the gift of time/escape.** As a decision-maker, sometimes stepping away can provide you with the clarity and energy you need. Axelrod recommends taking time to unplug or get away from work. Even an act as simple as changing your physical location can make all the difference. Whether you choose to read a book, watch a movie, or go for a walk, it’s important to give “your mind the opportunity to escape from all the stressors,” she says.

FOCUSED, ENGAGED LEADERSHIP IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Resilient leadership doesn’t happen in a silo. Often, there are various elements and particular stressors competing for your time, attention, and capacity. That’s where practices like self-awareness, self-care, and teamwork come into play. These simple strategies can help you keep tabs on your limits and boundaries so you can lead from a place of calm, even in the midst of uncertainty.

Ultimately, leading with resilience in the midst of tumultuous times comes down to communication, says Patricia Wortham, founder of HR Progressive LLC and fractional human resources executive for Ophelos Advisory Group. “To remain engaged, a leader needs to communicate with staff and also their manager,” says Wortham. “They need to let everyone know when they need a break. They’re entitled to a break.”

A break can be a single hour, a workday, or even a three-month sabbatical—whatever’s needed to help you refocus and recharge. Taking a break can be necessary for understanding “what is happening in front of you and how you can control it and how you cannot control it,” Wortham says.

“It’s OK to remove yourself, especially during these times when people have really reinvented themselves while working from home,” Wortham says. This process of recognizing your needs and then communicating them to your support system can help keep you afloat, giving you space to reconnect with yourself, your goals, and your vision.

Additionally, Wortham strongly recommends that leaders rely on their support system, their “right-hand person,” during overwhelming times. Not only can this ease some strain, but it also opens up a leadership, and even a mentorship, opportunity for another colleague “to work on something they never would’ve been able to work on.” Other levers that leaders can pull to maintain residency include: engaging in employee assistance programs, seeking therapy, and staying connected to meaningful community or family relationships.

KEEPING BALANCE AS A FULL-TIME CAREGIVER AND EXECUTIVE

From caregiving or parenting responsibilities and community obligations to career development and just learning and growing as an individual, work-life balance is an ever-evolving, and maybe sometimes daunting, target. Though the term encompasses an equilibrium most of us long for, Ophelos’ Patricia Wortham says she’s convinced that the perfect balance may not be possible, or even ultimately desirable.

“Instead, we need to develop an overall sense of fulfillment,” Wortham says. “We need to ask ourselves and ask our teams what fills us up, what are we doing that’s meaningful for us, and what are we not doing that we could add to our work days, our work life, and our home life.”

Here are some personal practices and professional policies that Wortham suggests for supporting fulfillment inside and outside of the workplace:



Adopting flexible or hybrid work schedules. Flexible schedules often make the biggest difference for working parents and executives. And it doesn’t need to be complicated.



Leaving work at work. Leaders play an influential role in modeling this for their team. With laptops nearly as ubiquitous as phones, it can be easy to carry work over into other spheres of life. Instead, make time to intentionally unplug during your off hours. You may find that you and your team show up better and stronger for the next work day.



Build support networks. “We’re not the first people to go through stress; we are all standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us,” Wortham says. Identify role models and colleagues who have “been there, done that,” and tap them for insights on work-life balance.



Work with a coach. Coaching, whether for yourself or for your team, can be transformative. “Coaches are partners to help us go from where we are to where we want to be,” Wortham says.



We hope this guide provided some valuable guidance for cultivating resilient leadership.

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