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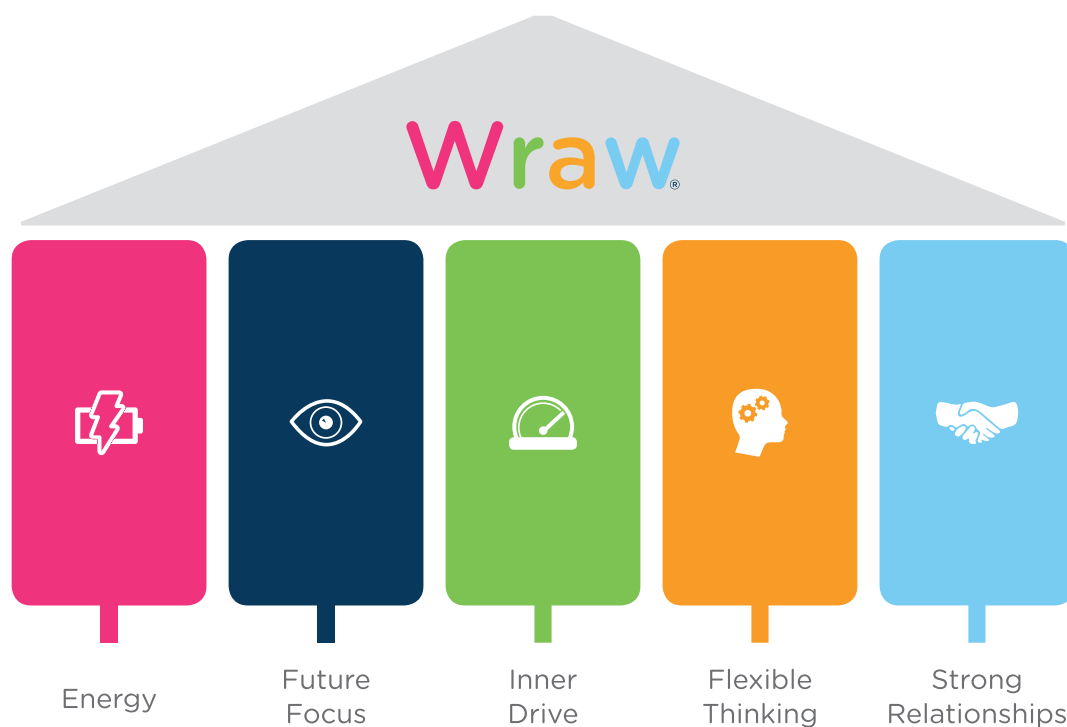
Workplace resilience
and wellbeing

MASTERING RESILIENCE

STRONG RELATIONSHIPS TOOLKIT

INTRODUCTION

Wraw is founded on the 5 Pillars of Resilience, a validated and evidence-based model, offering a holistic view of five key elements that support wellbeing:



Energy

Sustaining and renewing physical energy to have the capacity to keep going through challenging times.

Future focus

Having a clear sense of purpose and direction to help to move forwards without getting stuck or feeling held back.

Inner drive

Sustaining self-belief when times get tough, displaying confidence, motivation and perseverance.

Flexible thinking

Having an open and optimistic mindset, enabling a positive and adaptive response to change and challenges.

Strong relationships

Building open and trusting relationships, and being willing to call on these for help and support if facing a challenge.

We hope you enjoy working through the exercises and reflections in the Strong Relationships Toolkit. There is a Toolkit for each of the 5 Pillars.

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THE STRONG RELATIONSHIPS PILLAR

Strong relationships are a key enabler in achieving resilience. People who build open, honest and trustworthy relationships with others, and are able to share their challenges and ask for help, have a strong network and support system that enables them to be highly resilient and achieve their goals.

It's a common myth that resilient people are fiercely independent or lone warriors. In fact, science has proven that the most resilient people are those people with strong relationships and good support networks both at home and at work - individuals who are humble enough and confident enough to put their hands up and ask for help, who recognise that they don't have all the answers and that the more people you talk to, the more potential solutions you are likely to come up with.

Strong relationships are built on empathy, trust and mutual respect. They rely on effective communication - enough of it, done in the right way and managed well if it doesn't go quite to plan! Getting it right takes a lot of time and application.



Strong
Relationships



WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Strong relationships are key when it comes to resilience. We all need good support networks - people we can turn to for advice, for support, for help; people with different and complementary skill-sets to our own, and even people we can turn to in a crisis. It's another way of becoming unstuck, getting different perspectives, coming up with new ideas and ways to move forward. In other words, ensuring we are at our most effective, productive, positive and creative, i.e. resilient.

We can view the Strong Relationships Pillar as comprising two key areas:



Building Trust

Seeking to develop trust, understanding and emotional awareness with others.



Accessing Support

Sharing what you are going through and being prepared to access support.

Building trust and resilience

Building trust and connection is linked to the hormone oxytocin. This hormone enhances pro-social behaviour and promotes trust.

Oxytocin plays a key role in reducing anxiety during the experience of stressful events.

Source: M. Heinrichs, B. von Dawans, & G. Domes, 'Oxytocin, vasopressin and human social behaviour'. *Frontiers in Neuroendocrinology*, vol 30, no. 4, p 548 - 577, 2009.

If we feel connected and are able to trust people, this greatly reduces anxiety and enables us to strengthen our resilience.



Accessing support and resilience

Supportive relationships are beneficial to the general population and are also protective for many physical health conditions, as they prevent the development of mental health issues, for example, in arthritis patients.

High levels of social support are protective against mental health issues, such as clinical depression.

Source: T. Reveson, 'Social Support as a double-edged sword: The relation of positive and problematic support to depression among rheumatoid arthritis patients'. *Social Support & Medicine*, Vol 33, no 7, p807 – 813, 1991.

As with the ability to build trust, being able to access support can reduce the negative impact of external events.

Humanitarian workers report less trauma when they have high levels of social support.

Source: J. Fawcett, 'Stress & Trauma Handbook: Strategies for flourishing in demanding environments.' World Vision International, 2003.



PRACTICAL EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1 - MAPPING YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK

Knowing who you can go to for support in different areas of your life is fundamental to your ongoing resilience.

Activity

In this first exercise, simply note down the name of the person whose support, advice and friendship you value in the following areas:

Area of Support	Name
Work-related issues (person outside of work)	
Work-related issues (person within work)	
Family-related issues	
Personal issues (e.g. health)	
Relationship issues	
For fun and laughter	
Exercise buddy	
In a crisis (at 4am)	



Do you have any gaps in your support network? If so, consider how you might fill the gap. Who can you reach out to or who will you ask for support and help when you need it?

It's also important to note that support networks work both ways. People are far more likely to support you if you support them. So, how do you offer support to these individuals? How much quality time do you afford them? Would you be one of the key people in their support network? If not, why not?

Finally, think about who the most important person or people are in your support network and come up with three ways to make them feel more special and show your appreciation for their support:

Action 1	
Action 2	
Action 3	

By looking after our key relationships when times are good, we effectively invest in them so that they are 'topped up'. In this way, should things change, we know who the key people are that we can turn to when we need some advice, support or even simply a shoulder to cry on. Because we have nurtured and cared for the relationship, there is a 'healthy' deposit of support that we can draw on to see us through difficult times.



EXERCISE 2 - PUTTING YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES

Showing real empathy and acting on it can be very challenging. The fact is that we're all so busy pursuing our own agendas, juggling our own lives, trying to make ourselves look good with the boss or our clients and dealing with our own challenges that it can be hard to take time out, stop thinking about ourselves and truly think about someone else. However, the rewards in terms of relationship-building are huge.

Activity

For this exercise, think of a work relationship you would like to improve. Who would you like to get on better with than you do at the moment? Who rubs you up the wrong way and vice versa or who do you simply not 'get'? When you've decided on that person, take some serious time out to focus on them and their situation as objectively as you can and answer the questions in the following box:

1. What are their main work goals - what are they seeking to achieve?

2. What are their biggest challenges, stressors and demands?

3. What's important to them? What motivates and drives them?



4. What are their key strengths?

5. What are their weaknesses? What do they struggle with/find most challenging?

6.. What are their passions in life?



Now think about your key learnings from this exercise. How easy did you find it putting yourself in their shoes? How confident were you answering these questions? How well do you know them? How different are you? Where's the common ground? Did you have a lightbulb moment when you suddenly realised what the main problem was between you?

When you've had time to reflect, answer the following question:

1. How can you best support them?

--

Last but not least, come up with three actions or three things you can start doing differently as of today which you think will make the biggest difference to your relationship:

Action 1	
Action 2	
Action 3	



EXERCISE 3a - HOLDING COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

Communicating effectively is tough. Firstly, we are communicating all the time - verbally and non-verbally, face to face, by email, text, social media, telephone, etc. Secondly, often what we think we're communicating is misinterpreted. People make sense of the world through their own filters based on context, personal experiences and so on - it's very hard to ensure that what you wish to communicate is what is actually received! Furthermore, we often fail to recognise or take personal responsibility for our communication. In NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) they say 'the power of your communication is the response you get', i.e. if you don't get the response you want, change your communication.

A courageous conversation is based on respect - identifying a mutual purpose, creating a safe climate which supports transparency and builds rapport, and which allows for both parties to contribute equally.



The steps outlined below can be used to help you prepare for a courageous conversation and consider what the best outcome for both parties might be.

1. Preparing - Decide WHAT outcome you want and IF you think that is realistic. Decide IF you are going to hold the conversation. Then plan HOW and WHEN to hold that conversation.
2. Opening - Invite agreement on mutual purpose and explain your motivation.
3. Inquiring - Seek to understand the other person's perspective and motivation.
4. Acknowledging - Recognise the alternate perspective and confirm your understanding of it.
5. Telling - State your perspective clearly and simply.
6. Testing - Seeking an agreeable solution that both parties are going to be committed to.
7. Closing - Summarise the commitments.

Activity

Now, consider a current situation - how could you use steps 1-3 to prepare for a courageous conversation?

Once prepared, pay attention to steps 4-7 and use them as a guide to steer the pace and flow of the exchange.

Following the conversation, reflect on how it has differed from other conversations with this individual. What did you notice?



EXERCISE 3b - ACTIVE LISTENING

Great communication is not simply about being able to express your thoughts and opinions clearly. An equally important foundation stone of effective communication is what we call 'active listening'. Yes - we all listen, but how well? To test this, answer the following questions:

Activity

On average, what percentage of the time do you do the following?

Answer 10%, 50% or 90%.

1. Stop what you are doing and give the person your full attention? _____
2. Truly listen in a meeting or conversation rather than thinking about what you're going to say next? _____
3. Give the person lots of space and time rather than second-guessing what they're going to say and interrupting? _____

If you mainly answered 10%, you're effectively not listening at all and it will be having a major impact on your relationships.

If you mainly answered 50% that's not bad, but you've got a long way to go to truly maximise your relationships.

If you mainly answered 90% - congratulations - you're a rare person!

By spending some time focusing on and improving your scores in these three areas, you may notice a difference in your relationships, your empathy and understanding of others both at work and at home.

Reflecting on a current situation, how will active listening support a courageous conversation?



EXERCISE 3c - POSITIVE INTERACTIONS

Being positive in your communication is harder than you think. Research suggests you need nine positive interactions to one negative interaction to keep relationships on a positive footing. That's a high ratio!

Think of a key relationship in your life. How many positive interactions have you had in the past 24 or 48 hours? How many negative ones or even neutral ones? Scary, isn't it?

Take a few moments to list 10 examples of positive interactions. You need a lot of them up your sleeve! What constitutes a positive interaction? Examples might include a good conversation, having fun together, laughing, sharing experiences, praise, thanks, extending an apology, etc.

Activity

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.



Then list 10 potential barriers. What is most likely to prevent these vital positive interactions from occurring? What do you think the ones are that affect your relationships most? These might include stress, anger, frustration, apathy, time, defensiveness, mistrust, sarcasm, etc.

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

Using your key relationship as a test case, see how many positive interactions you can achieve in the next week and what you can do to overcome the barriers.



An interesting example of positive versus negative interactions is highlighted by the way we respond to someone sharing good news with us.

There are four types of typical response as shown in the box below.

Type of Response	Response
1. Active, constructive	Verbal - 'That's brilliant! Well done!' Non-verbal - lots of eye contact, smiling, laughing
2. Passive, constructive	Verbal - 'That's good news. You deserve it.' Non-verbal - little or no expression; neutral
3. Active, destructive	Verbal - 'That sounds like a nightmare - a huge responsibility. How will you cope?' Non-verbal - furrowed brow, frowning, shaking head
4. Passive, destructive	Verbal - 'I've been feeling really poorly to-day' (i.e. ignore it completely) Non-verbal - turn away, leave room, etc

The ideal is the first one called Active, Constructive where you truly share in the excitement and positivity of the other person.

You probably think you respond in this way most of the time. Think again!

The next time someone shares some good news with you - notice your response. Is it 1, 2, 3 or 4? You might be surprised! The best relationships tend to be when individuals genuinely celebrate and recognise each other's successes and strengths, reflecting active, constructive responses.



EXERCISE 3d – TAKING OWNERSHIP

For the final part of exercise 3, let's consider the concept of the feedback loop.

Maintaining strong relationships is not easy; it takes a lot of application and hard work as anyone who is married or in a long-term relationship will know. The fact is that with the stresses and strains of modern life, you will hit challenging times and you won't always be communicating effectively or perhaps even at all!

In John Gottman's excellent book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* he states he can predict divorce with 91% accuracy, often after only listening to a couple talk in his Seattle Love Lab (a renowned research centre) for as little as five minutes.

One of the ways he does this is by looking out for certain types of negative interaction which he believes are so lethal to a relationship he calls them the 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse'. These are:

1. Criticism, e.g. blaming the other person and often labelling them/making it a personal attack.
2. Contempt, e.g. sarcasm, cynicism, eye-rolling, mockery and hostile humour.
3. Defensiveness, e.g. taking the moral high ground, refusing to take any personal responsibility for the situation, etc.
4. Stonewalling, e.g. blanking the other person, ignoring them, disengaging, leaving the room, etc.

How often do you use any of these 'lethal' negative interactions in your key relationships either at work or at home?

When we are in conflict or disagreement, we may resort to one (or several) of the above approaches. None of these approaches supports open, constructive conversations.

What very few of us realise is that we're in a constant feedback loop of communication - essentially what we give out we get back, and vice versa.

Thus, if you are defensive, the person with whom you're communicating is likely to be defensive; if you're angry the person you're communicating with is likely to get angry, and so on. Think of a typical argument and how it escalates.

One of the best ways to manage conflict is to interrupt the feedback loop.



It only takes one person to take ownership of their communication and to break that loop, thereby causing the nature of the interaction to change. Not as easy as it sounds, because we are often entrenched in our own positions and don't want to be the ones who make the first move towards reconciliation. However, that's what it takes!

Consider the feedback loops in your different relationships. Notice how conversations escalate or de-escalate as people change the way they interact. Notice too how non-verbals come into play - body language, a touch, a smile and how they are so often mirrored back. Then try it out in a relationship you want to improve.

Top tips for strengthening your strong relationships

Make time for people. It's all too easy to think you're too busy to meet someone for a coffee or to phone a friend, but it's really important.

Show empathy by putting yourself in another person's shoes. Think about what they want and need, not what you want and need (the mode we're usually in).

Work hard on your communication skills, especially your listening skills. Try giving people your full attention when they are talking to you.

Separate behaviour from identity and avoid labelling yourself and others. A person is not a bully because they are acting like one - they are simply displaying the behaviour of a bully.

Recognise that you are in a constant feedback loop of communication, both verbal and non-verbal. Essentially you get back what you give out. So, if you want someone to be more supportive of you, step up and be more supportive of them

SUMMARY

Developing and maintaining strong, supportive relationships is fundamental when it comes to resilience both at work and at home. We all need good support networks - people we can talk to, people we can share problems with, people we can bounce ideas off and so on. Fundamentally strong relationships rely on effective communication - truly listening to the other person, showing empathy and understanding, maximising your positive interactions and taking responsibility for your communication and the impact it has on others. When you do, the results will be transformative and your resilience levels will soar.



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The Resilience Factor: 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles, by Karen Reivich (Broadway Books, 2003)

The Resiliency Advantage, by Al Siebert, PhD (BK Publishers Inc, 2005)

The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work, by John Gottman and Nan Silver (Orion, 2000)

Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High, by Kerry Paterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler (McGraw-Hill, 2002)

Leading With Emotional Courage, by Peter Bregman (John Wiley & Sons, 2018)

Difficult Conversations: Harvard Business Review Press, 2016

TED Talk: Vulnerability, by Brene Brown

https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability

TED Talk: Connected, But Alone, by Sherry Turkle

https://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together

TED Talk: Empathy, by Brene Brown

<https://www.thersa.org/discover/videos/rsa-shorts/2013/12/Brene-Brown-on-Empathy>

TED Talk: How To Have A Good Conversation, by Celeste Headlee

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6n3iNh4XLI>

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