

Resilient Leadership Guide

Avoiding thinking traps

Overgeneralisation

The first thinking trap is overgeneralisation. It's when you say to yourself you apply one experience to all other experiences, even future events.

OVERGENERALISATION EVENT	IMPACT AND OUTCOMES
ACTION PLAN TO AVOID FUTURE OVERGENERALISATION	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Permanence thinking

Research tells us that successful leaders attribute positive events to internal, stable and global factors. This means, when they achieve ambitious targets, they know it's they that created that outcome, they have the ability to do this all the time and they can do the same again and again.

On the flip side, when events don't turn out as expected or desired, these leaders believe this is to do with events outside of their control, these things happen sometimes and in some specific situations.

Negative permanent statements

When you face big obstacles does your mind start to think 'this always goes wrong...' or 'we never deliver as a team on these projects...'. Whether this is accurate or not - atomically going to this way of thinking is not going to help you perform at your peak.

Avoiding permanent negative statements and thinking ‘it did go wrong last time, but this is how we’ll adapt our approach...’ or ‘we can deliver as a team if we figure out the best approach collectively...’ is much more likely to help you deal with challenges as a leader, and enhance your resilience in the process.

Dealing with challenges effectively

Activating event:

Beliefs about the event:

Consequences:

Disputing / challenging beliefs:

Effective new response:

Avoiding catastrophe

If you're not conscious of your thinking process, challenging events can turn into a psychological catastrophe, where you feel like you're facing mountains you'll never be able to scale, and the chances of finding a positive solution is slim. Three strategies can help with this.

Realistic optimism

This isn't about replacing every negative thought with a positive one - there is no evidence-based research to suggest this works. Rather, it's about not letting paralysing and importantly unrealistic thoughts derail you.

Rather than letting your mind only consider the catastrophe on the horizon, you challenge those thoughts and consider what could happen if events go well, and how you'll find a way to cope if they don't.

Gathering evidence

This can help to make what could be a disaster feel less overwhelming. Gathering evidence is about taking a step back, being objective and not letting emotions take over. Of course you should allow yourself to have a healthy emotional response, but it's about stepping out of this murky water and not dwelling to feel in control of your destiny and next steps.

Look for evidence to support and challenge your negative thinking about a potential catastrophe, so you can take an overall objective view. Once you have this balanced evidence, you can objectively choose how you want to think about the situation, rather than letting negative thoughts take over.

Putting the situation into perspective

You may be facing a huge challenge and you may start to fixate at the negatives in the situation. By taking a step back and thinking, yes you could look at the situation in a negative light, but if you were forced to look at things another way, what could this look like? Or, if you were an objective outsider, how might you think about the situation?

Playing to leadership strengths

1. What are you naturally good at?

Getting really clear on where your skills lie as a leader gives you a good indication of where your strengths are. Are you good at absorbing and analysing data quickly to make decisions? Are you great at motivating and keeping your team engaged? Is networking and building really strong relationships your forte?

2. What activities absorb you and make time pass quickly?

Let's be honest, as a leader you won't be working on activities all day, every day that you enjoy - no one does. However, activities that cause enjoyment for you are likely to identify a strength. The smart move here is to figure out where your strengths are, what you enjoy, and create a team around you with alternative and complimenting strengths so you can focus on what makes you excel as a leader.

3. What activities make you invigorated?

Strengths give you energy. When you're working in that zone of focus and you're feeling energised, the chance are you're working with your strengths. It's often these activities that make you stand out as a leader, and when thinking about how you can be an authentic leader, and leave a unique leadership legacy, I recommend using this invigoration as an indicator of where to spend your time and energy.
