

How to Create a Resilient Workforce

Guidance for
Organizations
and Leaders



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Introduction

Given these extraordinary times, “resilience” has become a very popular word used to refer to a capacity that can be developed in people to withstand disruption or recover from adversity more quickly and completely.

It is important to ensure teams remain ready and able to adapt to increasing demands. Historically, more pressure is put on leaders, especially those who need their teams to continue to perform at a high level when it matters most.

In our experience, organizations and their leaders truly care about their employees and understand that while some individual skills can be self-developed, **leaders themselves need tangible strategies** to create conditions for resilience development and thriving. If a leader has the tools first, then it is easier to set a good example for and have a foundation for transferring these skills to their teams.

Magellan Federal delivers cognitive training and coaching services to over 700,000 Department of the Army personnel and civilians each year. We have gained valuable expertise and insights on implementation strategies that can enhance resilience development. In this white paper, we will detail our unique approach based on experience implementing systems that embolden leadership to invest in their most important asset—their people.



The Problem

Quite often, people are promoted into a leadership position because they excel at their job, which intuitively makes sense since they are likely a top performer at what they do. What we find overlooked is whether people are ready to lead and influence other people. When they get into a leadership role something shifts and they can't quite do what you thought and hoped they could.

Additionally, leaders face higher demands than the general worker population because they are responsible for their own performance plus those they lead. It is not uncommon to observe these individuals with higher levels of cortisol, an indication that their bodies are not adapting well to these demands. The ability to respond favorably following increases in demands is an essential quality for sustained readiness in a leadership position. Resilience is a term often used to label this quality, but resilience is a complex concept that is often misunderstood, and therefore treated reactively, not proactively within organizations.



Resilience is personal

Resilience can be defined as resources and processes that combine to restore equilibrium, counter challenges, or transform an individual or group. Resilience is a dynamic construct made up of personal and environmental factors such as **hardiness, grit, self-efficacy, social support and other lived experiences and learning** that combine uniquely for an individual response. Essentially, we all respond very differently to demands and challenges based on a multitude of individual and social resources. Given that these unique resources and processes are able to be influenced, resilience can change and develop over time.

Since leaders generally experience higher demands and resilience is malleable, Magellan Federal believes it is essential to **equip leaders with methods to enhance positive adaptation following adversity**, laying a solid foundation for increased resilience across the entire workforce.



Our Solution — Human-Centered Leader Training

Resilience is teachable

Research is clear that leaders play a significant role in the performance, resilience, and wellbeing of their people. Therefore, targeted training and coaching for leaders can be a force multiplier for a resilient workforce.

Our depth of knowledge in the science of cognitive performance is broad and deep, particularly in the psychophysiological mechanisms of learning, thriving, and resilience. We have learned it is valuable to first train leaders, so they are equipped to be resilient themselves and better positioned to support their teams. Leaders then need to be supported and coached how to transfer resilience principles to their peers and subordinates.

Our successful coach-the-coach approach has three tenets: Leading Self, Leading Others, and Leading Teams.

Leading Self: Helps ensure a wider swath of potential future leaders has the self-management skills which are foundational for Leading Others, particularly through volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Principles include:

- Personal philosophy, values, and core beliefs (self-awareness)
- Fueling behaviors and restoration (diet, hydration, movement, sleep)
- Presence (mindfulness, authenticity, confidence)
- Psychophysiological regulation (readiness for the task and situation)
- Mental rehearsal (intentionality, deliberate practice, imagery)
- Self-motivation

Leading Others: Provides new and seasoned leaders the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the human side of leadership and how to have the most beneficial impact on the lives of those they lead. Principles include:

- Build trust (consistent discipline and follow-through through the ability to lead self)
- Develop psychological safety (transparency and vulnerability, applying presence in communicating with others)
- Promote growth (feedback, mentoring, peer support)
- Foster motivation (autonomy, supportive leadership, behavior)

Leading Teams: Provides senior leaders a necessary opportunity to reflect and recalibrate with their internal compass, adjust their approach to leading others at a larger scale, and align both with the goals of the organization so they can move forward with increased intentionality and commitment. Principles include:

- Executive messaging, modeling, implementing, and promoting performance psychology principles across the enterprise
- Building trust in relationships (consistency in Leading Others across the organization)
- Mental agility, situational awareness, pattern recognition (consistent yet adaptive)
- Authenticity & alignment
- Cultural awareness and sensitivity


Guidance for Organizations

Focus on manager training and support

Meaningful growth requires transfer of knowledge, demonstration, practice, feedback, adjustment, and repetition. Expertise is accelerated with support of a coach who can provide both the right level of challenge or adversity and effective feedback to unlock solutions to overcome these challenges and facilitate growth. **We have found our greatest success when we take a human-centered approach, arming leaders not only with foundational knowledge communicated with stories and science, but coaching through authentic interactions.** Organizations should support their leaders by:

- ✓ Training leaders on general learning principles and how to effectively teach psychological and interpersonal skills to their teams.
- ✓ Providing leaders ongoing coaching support in the following areas for improved thriving and resilience:
 - Establishing a secure base
 - Facilitating connection
 - Building and sharing meaning
 - Enabling growth
 - Reinforcing work-life flow
- ✓ Using a holistic approach that values principles of physical fitness, mental fitness, social fitness, and spiritual fitness, as well as targeting opportunities for change by leading self, leading others, and leading teams.

Providing growth opportunities in these areas will fill an often much-needed gap—the human dimension of leadership.



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Guidance for Leaders

Based on our experience, we recommend starting with these individual steps to build a more resilient workforce:



Develop **deep personal awareness** (e.g., purpose, vision, mission, motives, beliefs)



Develop personal and team **mindfulness practices**



Build systems and practices that help you **be intentional with time**, both yours and your team members



Establish regular, if not daily, check-ins with team members



Develop an **understanding** of what drives your team members



Celebrate, cultivate, and grow team member strengths



Express **gratitude** authentically and liberally



Learn and **respect team members'** boundaries



Recognize and address the role of **emotion and empathy in the workplace**



When facing change or adversity, **reinforce a sense of community** and shared meaning




Innovating for the Future: Digital Coaching & Mentoring


Many thought leaders in human performance and resilience lead with high-tech solutions and simulation exercises to accelerate learning and optimize performance. While there is utility in technological advancements, we firmly believe in the power of **trusted relationships and high-touch engagement**.

Magellan Federal recently piloted a digital training and coaching intervention with midlevel managers in the corporate space. The overwhelming majority noted a desire for ongoing human engagement both with an outside expert coach and with a community group. Unsurprisingly, these leaders felt a strong sense of investment in themselves as people but understood how the content, strategies, techniques, and skills would apply in both their work and personal lives.

We are engaged in product development of digital coaching and mentoring technology that will allow for follow-on support with tactical personnel as they rotate duty stations, deploy, or otherwise distribute geographically. We understand that trust is the bedrock of personal and professional development, and that trust is a uniquely human, high-touch phenomenon. Our vision for the near future is service provision that begins human-centered, customized to the client, augmented with technology that allows our coaches and mentors to remain connected and engaged beyond the training environment, affording individual leaders more timely, relevant coaching feedback.



We firmly believe in the power of trusted relationships and high-touch engagement.



If you are interested in learning more about Magellan Federal's Resilience training program, please contact our director of human performance, Dr. Jon Metzler, at metzlerjn@magellanfederal.com.



About the Author

Dr. Jon Metzler, Ph.D., CMPC® is the Director of Human Performance at Magellan Federal. He provides strategic leadership to help organizations optimize performance, enhance resilience, and sustain readiness through coaching innovations taught by a highly specialized staff of cognitive performance coaches.

Dr. Metzler has over 20 years of extensive experience providing direct performance psychology consultation to teams and athletes representing many different sports of various competitive levels including intercollegiate athletes, Olympians, Paralympians, and professional athletes. Over his 10 years directly supporting the U.S. Army in performance psychology and resilience, he has helped develop the course content that Magellan Federal has delivered to over 2.7 million training and coaching engagements across the Army in the past five years.

He is a past president and fellow of the Association for Applied Sport Psychology and currently serves as Chair of the Council for Certified Mental Performance Certification® and is a member of the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee Sport Psychology Registry. He holds three bachelor's degrees from Concordia University – Portland, a Master of Arts in Sport Psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Kinesiology with a specialization in Psychology of Movement and Sport from the Pennsylvania State University.





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