



Resilience Part 2: Learning Your ABC's

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A Few Reminders from the Last Issue:

In the last ezine I defined “**resilience**” as “the ability to persevere and adapt when things aren’t going the way we’d like.” Fortunately resilience is a skill that is under our control and can be developed.

I described the three dimensions, or **thinking styles**, that we use to explain events which have a major impact on how we bounce back from adversity:

1. **Internalizing** (seeing adversity as due to me and my actions) versus **externalizing** (seeing the cause of the event as external to me)
2. Seeing the impact as **universal** (affecting all areas of my life) versus seeing the impact as **specific** (affecting a specific part of my life)
3. Seeing the dilemma that I face as **ongoing** (continuing for ever to impact my life) versus **temporary** (having an impact for a very short duration)

I also discussed the role that our “self talk” plays in the skill of resilience. Self talk is the internal monologue that we have inside our head (the mind bubbles that you see in cartoons). These thoughts trigger our emotional reactions to an event which leads to our reactions—what we say and do.

Go to the following link to read Resilience, Part I:

http://www.dirigoconsulting.com/articles/WhatIsResilience_PartI.pdf

Scenario:

Brad and Karen have been co-workers for about three years. They have always gotten along but with a recent re-organization and the uncertainty that comes from changing roles and little explanation from senior management, tension has begun to build through out the organization. Recently, Karen questioned the numbers that Brad had given her for a report. Brad became very angry and stormed off. He was certain that Karen doubted his thoroughness and professionalism and was trying to get him fired.

What triggered this reaction in Brad? It wasn't what Karen said. It wasn't work stress. What triggered this reaction in Brad were his assumptions about Karen's intentions. Is it possible that Brad was inaccurate in his thinking?



Breaking Down the Situation – Mapping your ABC's

When questioned later in a coaching session, Brad was able to dissect the situation and understand his reaction to it using the process of mapping out his “**ABC**”.

We get ourselves into trouble because our assumptions prevent us from seeing the reality of the situation. The question we need to ask ourselves when facing an adversity is “**Am I seeing the real picture here?**”

Here is what Brad did to check the accuracy of his thinking by using his ABC's. In working with his coach he specifically described the “A” or **adversity**. He had emailed his report to Karen earlier in the morning. She came to his office at noon and told him that he had made an error in the report and that this was the second time he had done this over the last month. She then said that she was worried that their department would look bad if their reports weren't 100% accurate. She then got up and left his office saying that she had another meeting.

Brad then identified with his coach the “C's” or reactions (**consequences**) that he had at the time. The C's consist of both the emotions that he felt and what he did. He described that his face got very hot and that he could feel a tightening in his chest. He recognized that he was very angry and that he wanted to verbally attack Karen. He actually said nothing as Karen left and sat at his desk for 15 minutes feeling angry and resentful. He was only able to concentrate on this episode and couldn't continue with the report that he was in the middle of preparing.

Next his coach asked him to describe the “B's” (**beliefs**) or “self talk” that Brad had going on inside his head. Brad said that he believed that Karen was undermining him. He had heard that she had been talking with their boss earlier in the morning. Yesterday she had told him that she thought the recent reorganization was going to lead to layoffs in their department because of cost cutting priorities within the company. He saw her as promoting herself at the exclusion of others in a recent department meeting. He believed that she was not coming to him as a colleague to point out a minor mistake that he could correct quickly. He thought that she was highlighting two minor errors he had made in the last month to make him look sloppy in his work and a person who couldn't be trusted to represent the department. He was also imagining what would happen if he should be laid off and thought of the embarrassment and financial crisis that would create. He expected that it would be real difficult to get another job in the current economic climate in Silicon Valley.

Brad's coach explained that when we feel that another person has “violated our rights” or done something that we feel is hurting our reputation we naturally feel resentment and anger. It is this anger that triggers us to action that may be appropriate or inappropriate. He explained that the key to our effectiveness in responding to adversity is to check out our thinking (the B's) and to strive for



being accurate in seeing the reality of what is happening. This will then impact our emotional reaction and our behavior.

His coach also explained that Brad was seeing the situation as having a pervasive and permanent impact on him. It was not just a minor issue of reissuing a report. He might be laid off with the potential for a financial crisis that would impact his family for many years and throw his entire life into turmoil. His self talk was depicting a story that would have catastrophic consequences. In their discussion, Brad realized that this was a habit for him. He often thought of the worst that could happen and he would ruminate about it for hours following the event.

Increasing your ABC Awareness:

How accurate are you in your thinking when facing adversity? Are there common thinking traps or habits that you fall into? We all fall into these traps. The key is increasing our self awareness of how we get inaccurate and decrease our effectiveness at responding to situations at work or in our personal lives. If you want to improve your accuracy, begin the practice of mapping out your ABC's for the next month. After the fact identify one adversity per day. Write three columns on a sheet of paper labeling the first A, then B and then C. Use it as a worksheet to capture your thinking and improve your awareness.

- A. Describe the adversity of the triggering situation—objectively describe who, what where and when of the situation. Avoid emotionally laden terms or language designed to justify your reaction to it.
- B. Identify the assumptions and beliefs you had about that situation. What were the ticker tape beliefs that went through your mind during and after the event?
- C. Identify your reactions to the event – What did you say and do as a consequence of the triggering event? What was the emotion that was evoked?

In the next issue, I will identify ways to increase our thinking accuracy and our resilience.

John Cronkite works with leaders faced with the challenge of implementing change that will be sustained over time. Sustaining change requires effective leadership and top performing people. John will provide you with practical, hands on coaching and consulting to build your confidence and effectiveness at providing this leadership and bringing the best from your people. To contact John send an email to cronkite@dirigoconsulting.com and for more information about John and his work visit his website at www.dirigoconsulting.com.