

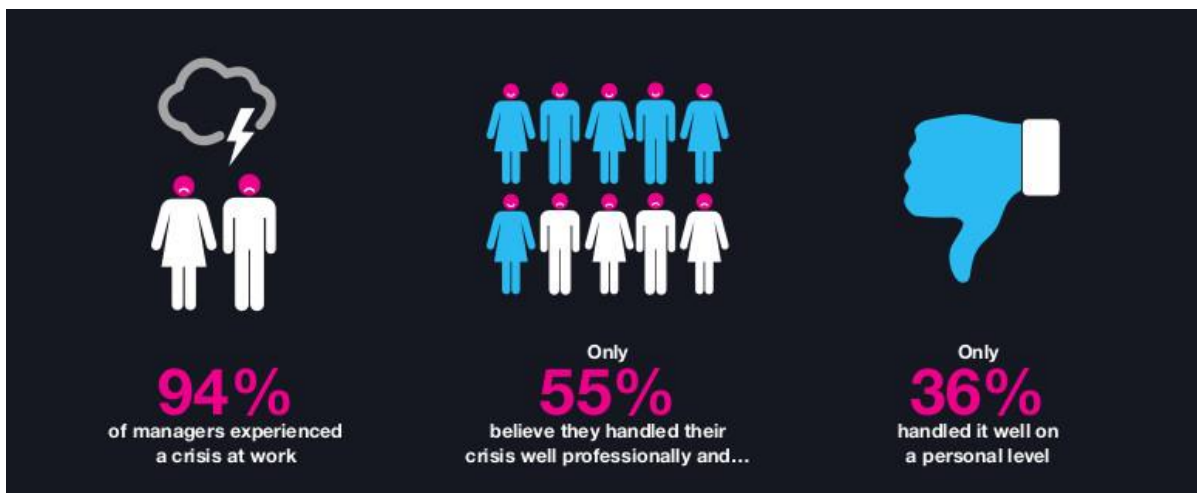
# BUILDING RESILIENCE.

## Checklist 278

### » INTRODUCTION

Failures and crises are an inevitable part of a manager's professional life. They can be devastating, life-changing, and transformative. They can make or break a career, ruin working relationships and working cultures, and potentially break a business, with detrimental effects for all concerned. Several high-profile cases have shown how catastrophic failures have seemingly done irreparable damage to personal and organisational reputations.

Although mistakes and crises are acknowledged as part of a manager's working life, they are too often ignored or, worse still, frowned upon. Whether the nature of the crisis is personal or related to business challenges, whether the causes were external economic factors or internal matters, crises can deeply affect those involved and their performance in the workplace. The scale and impact of mistakes come in all shapes and sizes, from project failure and workplace conflicts, to complete business failure and bankruptcy. Managers are encouraged to take risks but when those risks don't pay off, a failure of one kind or another is the evitable consequence.



CMI Bouncing Back 2016

However, if managed correctly, resilience can be built up following a significant personal or business fallout. Resilience is an essential part of bouncing back from workplace failures. Learning to be resilient can have a positive impact on well-being, performance, productivity, confidence, and efficiency. With time and experience, everyone has the ability to learn to become resilient; enabling managers to recover from setbacks that might previously have stopped them in their professional tracks.

CMI's *Management 2020* report identified resilience as one of the top ten characteristics needed by managers today. The financial crisis of 2010 equally demonstrated that the working world needs managers who are able to talk openly about mistakes and crises, but in doing so can bounce back from them better and quicker.

This checklist sets out what it means to be resilient and outlines actions that individuals can take to develop

their own resilience. It draws extensively on the CMI research report *Bouncing Back* (2016). This report highlights that 94% of managers have experienced some form of crisis in the workplace, the most common of which are of a personal nature – conflict with colleagues or perceived unfair treatment. 82% report that the emotional impact on them was severe. Therefore, it's paramount that managers learn to become resilient if they are to continue to contribute without fear of failure.

## » DEFINITION

Resilience is having the ability to bounce back after facing adversity. Resilience can be applied at the organisational, team or individual level. At a personal level it is about strengthening your ability to deal with challenges and crises that affect you in the workplace and also in your private life. Having a high level of resilience enables you to remain strong and effective while facing up to these demands and challenges, and growing stronger as a result. For organisations and teams it is about building a supportive and open culture that reacts positively to failure and provides appropriate networks to support the individual.

## » ACTION CHECKLIST

### 1. Take accountability for failure

Openly discuss the failure with those parties involved and admit your part in the process. Offer apologies and, most importantly, sincerely mean them. Don't ever be tempted to play the blame game and pass the buck to someone else. Colleagues, peers and bosses will respect you far more if you admit the role you played with your hands up. Showing others that you are taking ownership of the failure might take a bit of pride-swallowing, but it will help you to retain and regain the trust of others with your honest approach. If damage limitation is necessary, consider how you will go about doing this. If the situation is redeemable, find ways to redress the negatives to help restore your own confidence levels as well as those of others.

### 2. Deal with the immediate fallout

The consequences of your mistake will depend upon the scale of the failure and the impact it had upon you and others. The consequences may be self-imposed e.g. you choose to resign of your own free will, or alternatively be imposed by the organisation e.g. dismissal. You may be moved to another department, branch, assigned a new team or line manager, or face demotion. Paradoxically, you may be offered more training or supervision if the failure was the result of a lack of experience/knowledge. The immediate aftermath is likely to be a time of high emotion and upset so desist from taking action you may later come to regret.

### 3. Take time to reflect

The professional and personal impact of a setback can be considerable, so take time to reflect on how this has affected you. The scale of the setback will determine how you respond to it. You may lose confidence in your own ability and others may lose confidence in you too. This could lead to:

- › a decline in work quality/output
- › a loss of respect or trust from your staff and/or clients
- › a loss of responsibility – either imposed by you or by senior management
- › a real fear of failing again
- › an unwillingness to take on new projects, businesses, clients, etc.
- › feeling like you've let yourself down and/or that others around you have let you down.

It is only natural to experience negative emotions such as anger, frustration, pain, anxiety, sadness and despair. Such feelings are likely to affect your personal life as well as your working one. Take the time you

need to reflect on things and allow yourself to deal with these complex, and sometimes damaging, emotions. It might be necessary to remove yourself from the immediate situation in order to think clearly. High stress levels, for example, can reduce your ability to 'bounce back' so taking some much needed time out could effectively speed up your recovery.

#### 4. Re-evaluate your ideas and ideals

A significant failure or crisis often prompts us to revisit our ideas and values. Priorities can change; so too assumptions that you might have always had: about yourself, your colleagues, your employer, and your own abilities. Your personal goals and ambitions may change after a negative fallout too. Re-evaluate your perspective on your career and life, and reconstruct a new vision, if appropriate. Revisit organisational goals and consider how strategically aligned they are with your own. Think about your own personal development objectives and how these may need to change or be adapted in the light of what you've experienced. If your values and strategies are not aligned with those of the organisation, now may be a good time to consider moving on.

The period of recovery is the time to re-evaluate such things and to use your conclusions to help shape the way you move forward positively and proactively.

#### 5. Face forwards and move on

It is all too easy to become consumed with failure and let it affect your professional and personal life for the long term. However, there is no set time for accepting the status quo and moving on. This will all depend on the scale of the failure and your personal response to it. For some, they are determined to bounce straight back and face the next challenge with renewed vigour. For others, a big knock to their confidence can have a detrimental emotional, physical and psychological impact that won't be resolved overnight. However long the recovery time takes, what is important is that managers reach a point of acceptance of the status quo and prepare to move on from it. Don't dwell on the past. This will simply make you fear the future. Rather, take a proactive approach to rebuilding confidence levels and restoring well-being in order to begin the step-by-step process of bouncing back.



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#### 6. Begin building a framework of resilience

Whatever the scale of failure or wrongdoing, it's important to build a framework for resilience to ensure you learn how to identify and handle risk more effectively in future. Adopt recovery tactics and learn to develop the tools, techniques and traits that will improve your ability to cope in the face of adversity and minimise the fallout from any future mistakes or crises.

#### 7. Create a support network

Having the support of colleagues, peers and bosses is invaluable and is imperative when facing any

kind of problem in the workplace. By creating a professional support network, you have the backing and trust of those around you who can offer guidance and support when you need it most. Focus on building a professional network with people you trust. This may be those who were there for you during a previous time of crisis and proved themselves invaluable allies.

As well as developing a strong professional network, it's just as important to develop a personal one too. Family, friends, colleagues and clients can all offer you the support you need to get back on your feet and inspire you with the confidence to move forward in a positive way.

A mentoring scheme is especially helpful in a workplace environment, so consider whether this form of one-to-one support and learning could benefit you. In time, you may also like to think about becoming a mentor too; imparting the benefit of your own experience to help others in a similar situation.



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## 8. Learn to identify and manage risk

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, yet we all have to approach risk as we see it presented to us at the time. Turn the negatives of a past failure into a positive by looking at how you could have approached the situation differently. Find ways of identifying risk at the early stages before its impact becomes unmanageable. In retrospect, were there warning signs that you failed to heed? Did you ignore the obvious or simply fail to spot them? The earlier you detect a potential calamity, the easier it'll be to reverse the damage and reduce the impact.

Risk is an inevitable part of being a forward-thinking manager, and without it, nothing would change or improve. The key is to recognise when risk becomes in danger of derailing everything you've worked for. Identify and report risk as soon as it emerges. Once you've been 'burnt' you're far less likely to overlook the warning signs in future. Learn to think and work strategically; taking account of potential risk at every turn.

## 9. Identify and develop winning traits

In order to bounce back from adversity, it's important to spend time identifying and developing winning traits and strategies. Be honest with yourself and consider what behaviours you may have previously displayed which led to your mistakes. For example, did you lack good communication or interpersonal skills? Were you too secretive, or conversely too trusting of others? Were you too bullish; refusing to listen to advice or ignoring the warning signs? Think about your approach and attitude. Do they need to change for a crisis to be averted again? Learn from your mistakes to develop a winning, and workable, strategy for the future.

There are lots of examples of high profile cases of managers and senior leaders who've made catastrophic mistakes only to redeem themselves at a later date. Look to such figures for inspiration as to how they coped when faced with adversity. What tools and techniques did they employ? What behavioural characteristics did they adopt? Developing good communication and interpersonal skills are paramount; so too self-awareness

and humility. Take an honest look at your own personality and competencies, and consider how these may need to change or be developed further to avoid future mistakes.

## 10. Identity training and development needs

Mistakes are often made because the requisite skills, knowledge and/or training are inadequate for dealing with things appropriately. If you feel that your setback was on account of any of these things, consider how to redress this. Formal and informal training can help to build your knowledge, as well as your confidence. A lack of practical experience can also be a cause of failure. If this is the case, consider taking on projects and tasks that you know you readily have the experience and skills to complete well. Don't set yourself up for failure. If you don't feel ready or experienced enough to take on the challenge be honest with whomever has set the task.

## 11. De-stigmatise failure

All too often companies' negative attitudes towards failure means that managers are afraid to take ownership of their mistakes for fear of the implications their honesty might have. Eradicate this blame culture by fostering an open and collaborative environment where mistakes are tolerated, and accepted, as part of working life. Creating an inclusive culture will encourage workers to admit to mistakes while allowing them to learn from them in order to develop and grow. If workers fear failure they are less likely to involve themselves in challenging projects, and innovative, original ideas will go unheard. Talk openly about fear and failure and encourage your team to inform you of any issues early on so you can intervene if necessary before a mishap turns into a full-blown crisis. Manage the fear that surrounds failure. Maintain a trusting relationship with your colleagues and employees so that open and honest communication becomes an integral part of the organisation's working practices.

## » POTENTIAL PITFALLS

Managers should avoid:

- › Ignoring risk
- › Working in silos without developing a strong support network
- › Blaming others for your mistakes
- › Adopting and/or supporting a blame culture where employees are afraid to admit mistakes
- › Failing to learn from past errors
- › Dwelling on the past too long.

## » ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### BOOKS

**The resilient manager: navigating the challenges of working life**, Adrian Furnham  
Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013

**Coaching for resilience: a practical guide to using positive psychology**, Adrienne Green and John Humphrey  
London: Kogan Page, 2002

### CMI RESEARCH

**Bouncing back: leadership lessons in resilience**, Katrina Skoberne and others  
London: Chartered Management Institute, 2016

## Management 2020: leadership to unlock long-term growth

London: Chartered Management Institute, 2014

### JOURNAL ARTICLES

#### Destigmatising adversity, Matt Scott

Professional Manager, Summer 2016, pp16-17

#### Building resilience, Michael Pearn, Jill Flint-Taylor and Cary Cooper

Training Journal, September 2013, pp32-35

#### Pulling off the comeback: shrink, expand, neither, both? Michael Braun and Scott Latham

Journal of Business Strategy, Vol 33 no 3 2012, pp13-21

#### Building resilience, Martin E. P. Seligman

Harvard Business Review, April 2011, Vol 89 issue 4, pp100-106

#### The comeback kings, Anthony Harrington

Director, Vol 59 no 11 June 2006, pp70-72

#### How resilience works, Diane L. Coutu

Harvard Business Review, May 2002, Vol 80 issue 5, pp46-55

### RELATED CHECKLISTS

**082** Developing a mentoring scheme

**118** Networking

**264** Strategic risk management

**268** Communicating in a crisis

**279** Staff welfare and well-being



## NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

This checklist has relevance for the following standards:

- › Unit AA1 Manage yourself
- › Unit AB9 Promote staff wellbeing



## MORE INFORMATION

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