

Resilience 3.0

Guidance Toward a Next Generation of Work-Centric Initiatives



By Organizational Wellness & Learning Systems - *catalyzing healthy work cultures for the inside out with science*



***Workplace resilience programs are needed now more than ever.
The guidelines here help you create and assess your efforts
to transform stress into thriving work.***



Introduction

The world faces a crisis in mental health [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]. A variety of mental well-being conditions affect employee engagement and productivity. Those conditions most cited are personal stress, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. However, risks also stem from problems with sleep, fatigue, and eating-related disorders. Add in marital, family and financial stressors -- and significant stressors from inside the workplace itself. It is no surprise employers have a growing interest in proactive efforts within or through their workplace (*workplace-centric* efforts).

Such efforts go beyond reactive (post-adversity) interventions. These include critical incident stress debriefing (CISD), one-on-one counseling, standard Employee Assistance counseling, and both access to and financial support for treatment. Such approaches are essential to have. Employees need to know that help is available when they need it. However, work-centered proactive efforts are becoming “a must have” (e.g., [Benefits Magazine](#)). Years of [research](#) shows that employees who need support typically do not access it. *Evidence-based resilience initiatives* can shift you from a reactive to a more inclusive proactive strategy.

Human resource and related professionals are increasingly willing to admit two things. First, that their workplace itself harbors risks (e.g., [toxic bosses](#), [unhealthy work climate](#), [workaholic social norms](#), and [heavy workloads](#)) as well as protective factors (e.g., [positive leadership](#), [psychological safety](#), presence of a [wellness](#) and [EAP program](#)). And, second, those protective factors, at least in their current state, do not sufficiently offset the risks.

Defining Resilience: Beyond the Bounce

Scientific reviews suggest that the biggest problem in workplace resilience research is the lack of a clear and common definition. Resilience is a personal, messy, and open-ended concept; it means different things at different times to different people. Workplace resilience is even more complex.

However, almost all definitions include the “ability to bounce back or adequately recover from adversity or stress.” Our programs always add **“the ability to learn and grow from the stress.”** Resilient employees and organizations not only adapt and overcome, they also learn to mean in, take on stress, and thrive.

Otherwise, who really wants to only keep bouncing back?

In his 2018 book “[Dying for a Paycheck](#),” Stanford organizational scientist Dr. Jeffrey Pfeffer documents work factors that damage employee mental well-being... to the tune of \$300 Billion in the U.S. alone. Research has proven these negative impacts for years (e.g., see [2017 Handbook on Stress & Health](#)). However, Pfeffer and colleagues have now made a very strong and defensible case for the costs associated with workplace stress.

And the negative impacts are growing. For example, the [2018 Mental Health and Substance Abuse](#)

[Benefits Survey](#) from the International Foundation of Employee Benefits Plans surveyed 278 benefits specialists and related professionals. Respondents represented corporations, multi-employer plans, and public sector employers in U.S. and Canada. Roughly 60% report that their workers experience more mental health and substance use issues than in 2016; and 55% report an increase in costs due to these issues. Yet, despite this prevalence, roughly 85% of respondents reported decreases, no change, or only slight increases in EAP benefits utilization. Evidence shows that [EAPs can be effective](#). More efforts are needed for employees to proactively access and benefit from these services.

My View Point, A Disclaimer

Over the past 20 years, my organization has designed, implemented, and evaluated resilience and healthy culture interventions. [This includes training, and learning from, dozens of trainers who deliver our programs into work settings](#). The ideas below come from *process* insights (i.e., how to do things) from both our work and the research literature. Resilience is less about individual-level *outcomes* and more about team-level and organizational *process*.

Professionals in workplace mental health know that listening, attuning, and responding to those we serve is more important than aspiring to outcomes (e.g., reducing health care costs). In fact, due to the very private, often stigmatized, and even more often vulnerable nature of this work, a sole focus on outcomes can be detri-mental (that is a pun).

Building resilience is an ongoing process. It requires sensitivity to the level of organizational readiness. [Various stress management approaches can also be helpful](#). At the same time, let's take things up a level. Let's strengthen resiliency within the workplace as a whole.

Levels of Resilience Initiatives

Resilience is itself a dynamic process. As we learn from the earlier challenges, we develop new skills and resources that allow us to embrace future challenges. Hence, there are actually levels of resilience and levels of building resilience.

One can implement resilience initiatives at three levels (1.0, 2.0, 3.0), as described below. Each one can be effective depending on the balance of risk and protective factors. A more advanced level will be needed when chronic risks outweigh internal strengths. Still, even a solid “nudge” with a 1.0 program can move things along. Knowing these levels can help you select the right solution. Very often, the first step is a stress or resilient culture audit (see [SlideShare image](#)). We provide two assessments in my book, *Raw Coping Power*; I also designed one for [Beacon Health Options](#).

PERSONAL

ENVIRONMENTAL

Not all Stressors are the Same

Stressor Assessment Grid					
controllability: 0-high 1-medium 2-low			resource access/agility: 0-high 1-medium 2-low		
Stressor Types		Nature of Stressor			
Stressor	Examples	Occasional	Incidental	Critical	Chronic
Intra-psycho	relapse, life-stage, uncovering, burn-out	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Life-event (situation)	family, accident, loss, relationship change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job role	ambiguity, overload, conflict	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job design	effort-reward imbalance, monotony, isolation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Toxic climate	harassment, bullying, injustice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Economic	insecurity, layoffs, salary cuts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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RESILIENCE 1.0 (INDIVIDUAL LEVEL & PROGRAMS)

These are time-limited and only address individual resilience skills. However, multi-session programs can be very effective if they include self-guided and self-tailoring aspects, multimedia, and use cognitive-behavioral training. If level 1.0 is continually used in an otherwise unhealthy work environment, employees may become disengaged. Sometimes, if expectations are not set right, the token message employees receive is “Learn resilience skills so you can push through the toxicity and put up with our work environment.”

RESILIENCE 2.0 (ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL & INITIATIVES)

Building upon Level 1.0, employers use a dual strategy and emphasize the environment. Here, skills training aligns with efforts to reduce or buffer actual stress exposure. This can include restricting layoffs, implementing fatigue risk management, building participatory management, offering on-site health care, and creating a supportive and psychologically safe team environment. Employer’s genuinely communicate “I care about you and I want you to care for yourself.” Employees respond to this message with increased engagement.

There is great power in the resilience of entire groups of people, a power significantly overlooked by businesses.

RESILIENCE 3.0 (SYSTEMS LEVEL & INTEGRAL APPROACH)

An [integral approach](#) incorporates individual-level, social, and systemic initiatives, while drawing from group-level strengths. Employees get the message that the organization is strong, can bounce back from various adversities (economic or otherwise), and that doing so requires a team effort. In other words, a 3.0 approach is much like a [comprehensive](#) wellness program, or a [high-systems](#) or [systemic stress initiative](#), or an [integrated mental health approach](#). It includes programs (training and development), policies (e.g., adequate stress leave, constraints on overtime), and environmental (e.g., breaks, access to attractive space) components. And, in all of this, the work group

and social connections are emphasized. By its nature, resilience is more historical than episodic; how we respond to current stress depends on exposure and response to previous adversity.

I have had the privilege of working with Native Americans who have suffered generations of oppression; military service members returning from deployment; ex-offenders re-integrating into society; and emerging adults entering the world of work for the first time in their lives. These experiences have taught me that there is great power in the resilience of entire groups of people, a power significantly overlooked by businesses.

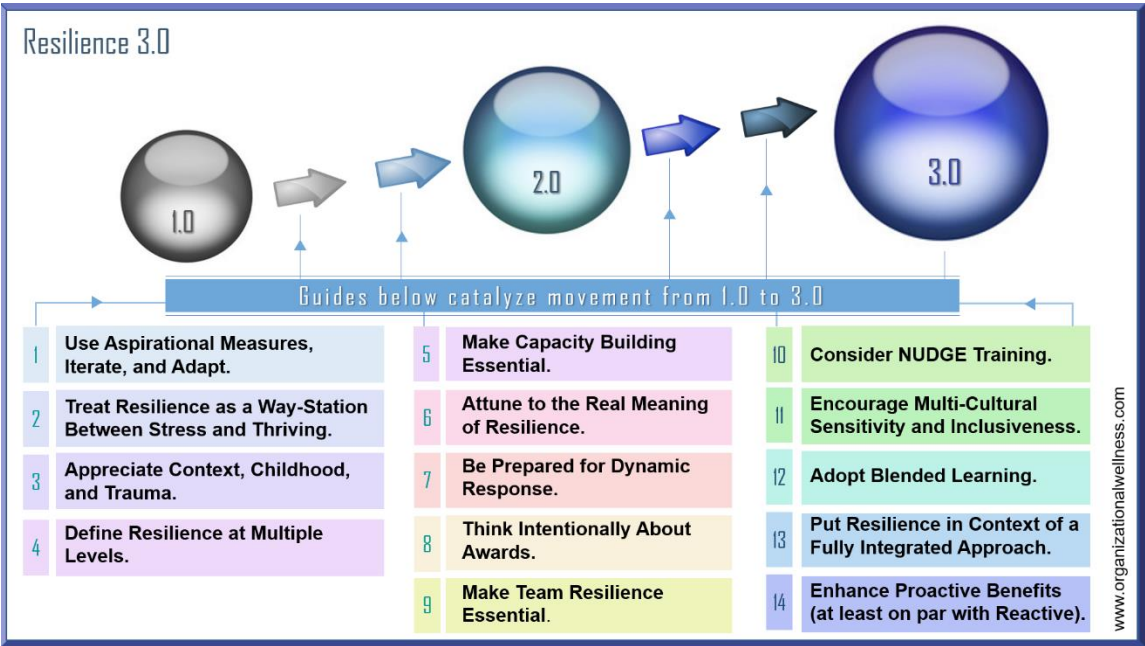
Some Guidelines

To "guide" means to move forward. Resilience is always about moving forward... with aspirations, real meaning, and intention... especially as an inclusive team.

The key to any real change lies in what you do AFTER any workplace stress assessment. Unfortunately, despite a proliferation in culture assessments, most organizations lack the skills to interpret results. They don't know how to apply the iterative or adaptive solutions required for a resilience strategy to take hold and remain sustainable. Accordingly, I offer the following guidelines to help you both prepare for and implement a resilience initiative at any level. The more of these you use, the more likely your approach will work. That is, these guides activate or catalyze movement from 1.0 to 2.0 to 3.0 (see image).

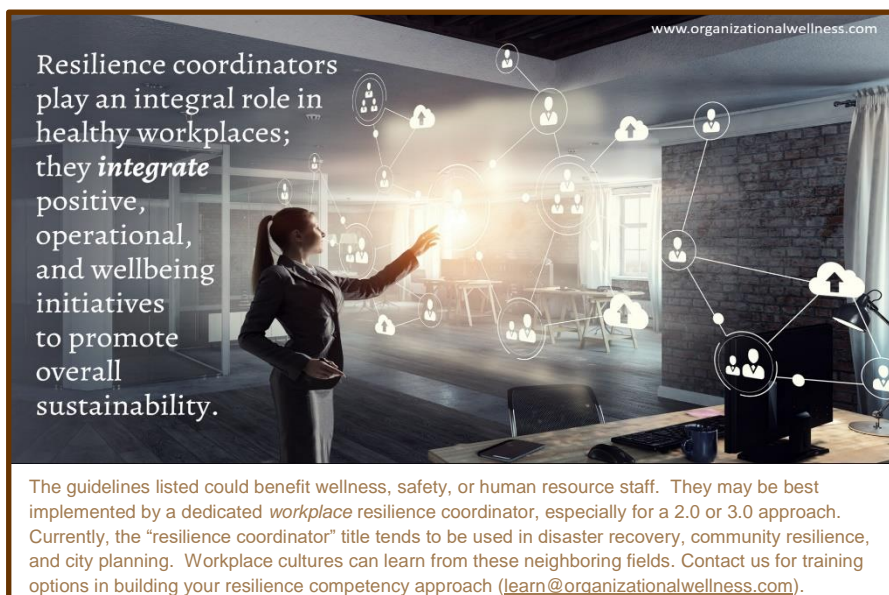
1. **USE ASPIRATIONAL MEASURES, ITERATE, AND ADAPT.** In his book, Dr. Pfeffer outlines five steps for “fixing the problem” of toxic work stress. I interpret these steps to mean that leaders set aspirational sights on human health.

They can then iteratively measure and modify as they reach their goals. Pfeffer’s steps are: (i) measure health and well-being; (ii) put social pressure on unhealthy workplaces to do better; (iii) make companies share costs of the



decisions they make that bring ill-health; (iv) help companies confront the trade-off of emphasizing productivity while ignoring health; and (v) insist that corporate leaders make human health a priority.

2. **TREAT RESILIENCE AS A WAY-STATION BETWEEN STRESS AND THRIVING.** The best kept secret about resilience is that it holds the seeds of transformation. To be resilient means more than merely NOT succumbing. Instead, it means we have an innate ability to tap into an inner strength that not only drives us to return to a state of health but, because it is an innate drive, **we can aspire to even higher states of well-being.**
3. **APPRECIATE CONTEXT, CHILDHOOD, AND TRAUMA.** While the workplace itself can be a significant stressor, it can also be a “trigger” for employees who have unresolved trauma from past or [adverse childhood experiences \(ACEs\)](#). We need to appreciate the broad context of human development across the lifespan. For the majority of people between the ages of 20 and 60, the workplace can be a key arena where adults work out, work through, and overcome their own internal psychological risks. Resilience programmers can better utilize EAPs in two ways: (i) provide and relentlessly promote assistance through individual counseling; and (ii) provide managerial consulting when “triggers” are themselves due to cultural toxicity (e.g., bullying, harassment, abusive supervision).
4. **DEFINE RESILIENCE AT MULTIPLE LEVELS.** Studies on resilience indicate it emerges across all social levels. Individuals, families, teams, managers, organizations, communities, and urban infrastructure all vary in their degree of resilience. In fact, they *co-vary* in resilience: the more that a community is resilient, the more likely a family is resilient, the more likely an employee is resilient, and so on. Organizations should recognize the role they play in shaping community resilience. The [Rockefeller Foundation](#) has made strong efforts in assisting cities in their resilience strategies.
5. **MAKE CAPACITY BUILDING ESSENTIAL.** Hallmarks of [effective prevention](#) are readiness assessment, ongoing relationship building, and meeting workplaces where they are at. Building capacity means you take the time to listen, get to know, and empower employees. You do this before, during, and after any program you deliver. Indeed, even if you are only working at a Resilience 1.0 level, capacity building can, potentially, make your intervention as effective as a 3.0 strategy.
6. **ATTUNE TO THE REAL MEANING OF RESILIENCE.** Having worked with hundreds of employees in our training programs, I know that resilience takes on profound meaning within one’s life journey (including [in business](#)). It can



mean *redemption* for those previously involved in immoral, illegal, or abusive acts; *recovery* for those who have suffered from addiction, depression, loss, divorce, etc.; *reconciliation* for those estranged from loved ones (or even coworkers!); and *revival* for those who’ve been hiding, down-trodden, or forgotten (... by coworkers!). A robust initiative embraces the very personal ‘meaning-making’ aspects of resilience.

7. **BE PREPARED FOR DYNAMIC RESPONSE.** Above, I mentioned training different groups: military service members; emerging adults; and ex-offenders. While each group draws their strength in different ways, their response to training is uniformly dynamic. Some take longer to work through past harm, some move quickly to thriving, but most go through an up-down-up cycle. There is no straight or linear “bounce back.” That is more of a myth than a reality. Hence, it helps to relax expectations about general outcomes and pay attention to – and respond – to where people are in the stress > resilience > thriving cycle.
8. **THINK INTENTIONALLY ABOUT AWARDS (E.G., [APA](#), [WELCOA](#), [HERO](#), [KOOP](#)).** In keeping with an aspirational view of resilience, you may consider criteria associated with applying for a healthy workplace award or acknowledgment. Among these, I recommend the American Psychological Association’s [Psychologically Healthy Workplace Awards](#). This is because the focus is explicitly on mental well-being. Previous PHWA award winners provide numerous examples of how the work environment can foster resilience.
9. **MAKE TEAM RESILIENCE ESSENTIAL.** There is growing recognition that resilience happens in teams, and there is also more and more research on team or social resilience within work settings (see [our review](#)). Using our own evidence-based [Level 1.0 model](#), including [an online version](#), we ask employees two questions: “How do your strengths contribute to the team and the well-being of its members?” and “How do the strengths of your coworkers – individually and as the team – contribute to your own well-being?” When coworkers attend to and focus on these questions, they see the work environment in a more positive light.
10. **CONSIDER NUDGE TRAINING.** There are two types of “nudges” – environmental (i.e., behavioral economics) and interpersonal. Our experience suggests that training coworkers on compassion and encouragement can promote mental well-being. According to behavioral economics, nudging people toward lifestyle decisions, by giving them one option in the environment as the default, can influence important health choices. There has been debate over whether behavioral economics can effectively change health behavior [1] [2]. In contrast, our trainings – [Team Awareness](#), [Team Resilience](#), [Team Readiness](#) – help workers to N.U.D.G.E. their coworkers: **N**otice someone with problems; **U**nderstand if you have a role to play; **D**ecide if and how you should approach them; if you do, utilize specific **G**uidelines (we train them in); and then **E**ncourage. Research suggests that this approach destigmatizes mental health and leads to greater help-seeking for mental well-being and substance abuse concerns.
11. **ENCOURAGE MULTI-CULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND INCLUSIVENESS.** As noted above, different groups (e.g., military, Native American, young adults) experience resilience in different ways. As groups, also benefit from the shared experience of drawing on strengths together. This extends to all types of racial, ethnic, and “minority” groups across all spectrums of society, especially [whose experience of trauma or adversity is linked to their culture or race](#).



The concept of [multi-cultural wellness](#), developed through the National Wellness Institute, provides a working model for how to appreciate and promote the strengths of different groups. For example, in one of our training programs we explore questions like: “How has your cultural background, upbringing, or gender/ethnic orientation influenced your strength and resilience (as a person, as an employee)?”

12. **ADOPT BLENDED LEARNING.** With a growing tendency to utilize Internet-based and mobile or [Smartphone-based approaches to mental health](#) and resilience, organizations should be aware that these may not be as effective as an approach that involves capacity building and also embeds team-based, interpersonal, and more Level 3.0 features. This claim does not mean that electronic methods should be abandoned altogether. They can also be



effective nudges and we have successfully tested an [online, team-based intervention](#) of our N.U.D.G.E. model. However, what we found – and other research supports this – is that success is greater from *how coworkers go back into the work environment and interact with each other* to share and use what they learned from the online lesson.

13. **PUT RESILIENCE IN CONTEXT OF A FULLY INTEGRATED APPROACH.** In our model of [Integral Organizational Wellness™](#), resilience is one leg of a three-legged stool for building a truly health workplace. [Positive organizational behavior](#) (POB) refers to positive organizational development practices that foster employee’s personal growth, learning, and productivity. [Wholeness](#) refers to the next wave of wellness and well-being initiatives that, from the get go, focus all dimensions of health: physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual. Taken together, resilience, POB, and wholeness make a truly robust and highly impactful strategy. Importantly, Resilience 3.0 can, by itself, help catalyze the other two.
14. **ENHANCE PROACTIVE BENEFITS (AT LEAST ON PAR WITH REACTIVE).** Let’s return to the opening paragraph of this article. I hope you like the idea of being proactive when it comes to adversity. Evidence-based resilience initiatives can help turn the tide from reactive to proactive mental well-being efforts. Indeed, each of the preceding suggestions have some basis in evidence. In addition, awareness of one’s level of programming (1.0, 2.0, or 3.0) and assuring the right level for the right set of risks is also an evidence-based approach. Fundamentally, the more that human resources and benefits managers can “nudge” themselves and others by incorporating the above suggestions, the more they will build a resilient organization, resilient teams, and resilient employees. This means trying one thing at a time. Eventually, you will drive thriving internally. Eventually, you will arrive at Level 3.0.