

Leadership Resilience

An Update for 2024

March 2024



BEVINGTON GROUP

PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES DELIVERED



The topics to be covered today

01. Managing ourselves to be effective over the long-haul
02. Reframing how you think about your challenges
03. Integrating “reframing” with other techniques
04. How do we lead others to cope over the long-term
05. In summary
06. Thank you

COVID stresses might be reducing, but we still live in a world which challenges leaders



In our work lives, the pace of change is not slowing, and there are plenty of challenges, indeed:

- Inflation is still present
- Supply chain disruption is still possible
- Regulation is increasing
- Technological change almost "demands" adoption
- Industries are still challenged to find qualified and experienced staff
- Many of Bevington Group's clients are reporting declining productivity
- They have also not yet found a "resting place" on "hybrid work"
- Many industries are facing the challenge of major demographic shifts



Customers often face cost of living pressures, housing pressures, and increased incidents of anxiety related challenges



AI is making ever increasing gains, and with that comes further disruption and uncertainty for staff

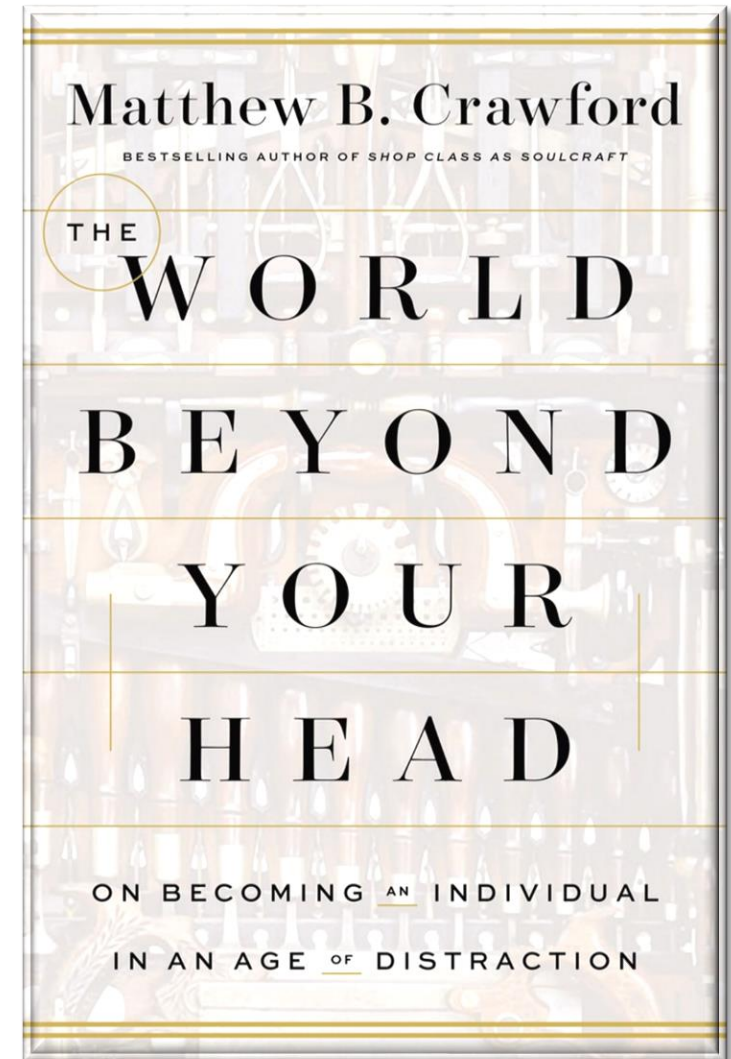


In short, we are still in a period of *turbulence*.

Neither VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) nor TUNA (Turbulent, Uncertain, Novel, Ambiguous).

Furthermore, the way we live might make us less able to handle the challenges and stresses with which we are presented

- Let's take M. Crawford's "The World Beyond Your Head"
- Crawford posits some **important ideas** and backs it with **serious evidence**
 - We are bombarded with demands for our attention
 - The "app-ification" of society can make this worse
 - This leaves us less time and energy for that which is the most important to make progress - focused attention
 - We may be damaging our long-term ability to maintain focused attention
 - We may be damaging our ability to cope with the inherent uncertainty in life
 - We may be reducing our genuine abilities to interact with human beings (outside of texts and apps)
- All the above is likely to reduce our resilience in one way or another
 - Reduced ability to focus reduces problem solving abilities
 - Reduced ability to interact socially can dramatically reduce psychological resilience
 - If we buy the argument that "you are what you attend to" then our attention is serially being put in the wrong place



Sources: M. Crawford, (2016), "The World Beyond Your Head"

So, today we are going to talk about the techniques you can use as leaders of yourself, and to some extent, as leaders of others, to enhance resilience

- In this presentation we will review some of the practical - yet literature and research based - approaches to dealing with the stressors and challenges that are typical for a contemporary leader
- We will be viewing personal (and indeed organisational) resilience through a lens proposed by Nicolas Taleb
 - In simple terms he proposed a form of being “anti-fragile” whereby with the right “stress and rest” cycles we can become better as a result of our challenges
- Ryan Holiday, a public proponent of resilience strategies, takes an aligned perspective (based on ancient stoic texts) in saying that
 - We should see the “obstacle as the way”
- These provide a way for us to
 - Think differently about our challenges
 - Respond productively to our challenges
 - Find ways to pace ourselves in dealing with these challenges



In orientating ourselves to this, it is worthwhile noting that leadership has always had stressors - and historically, many of them have been more extreme than those we face today. For instance, the Antonine plague killed half the population of the Roman empire

Managing ourselves to be effective over the long-haul

Life's (mostly) not a sprint

Let's start with the basics

If you don't look after yourself, it is a lot harder to look after others

So, your duty to others over the long-term means you have a duty to look after yourself



- In this section we will look at:



Stress management basics

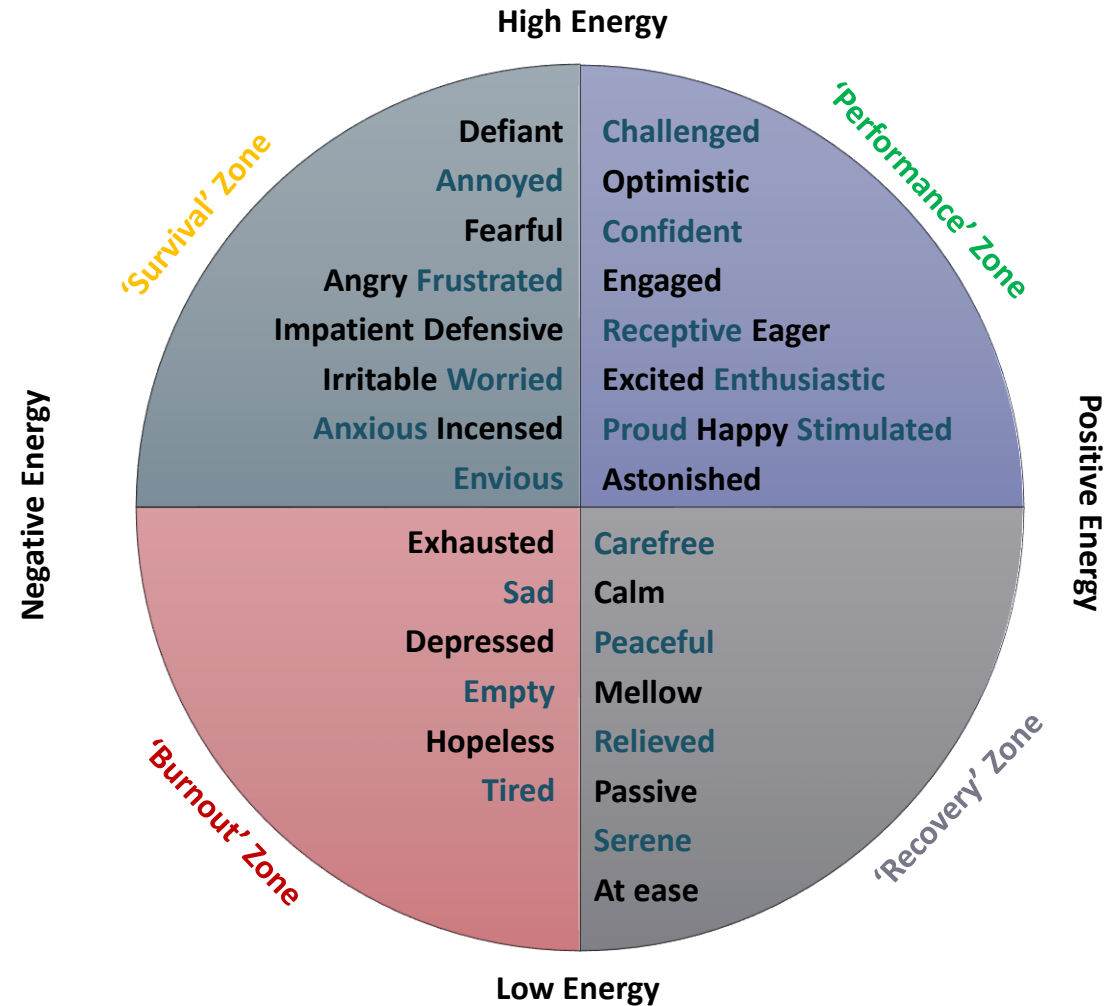


Some ideas arising from philosophy



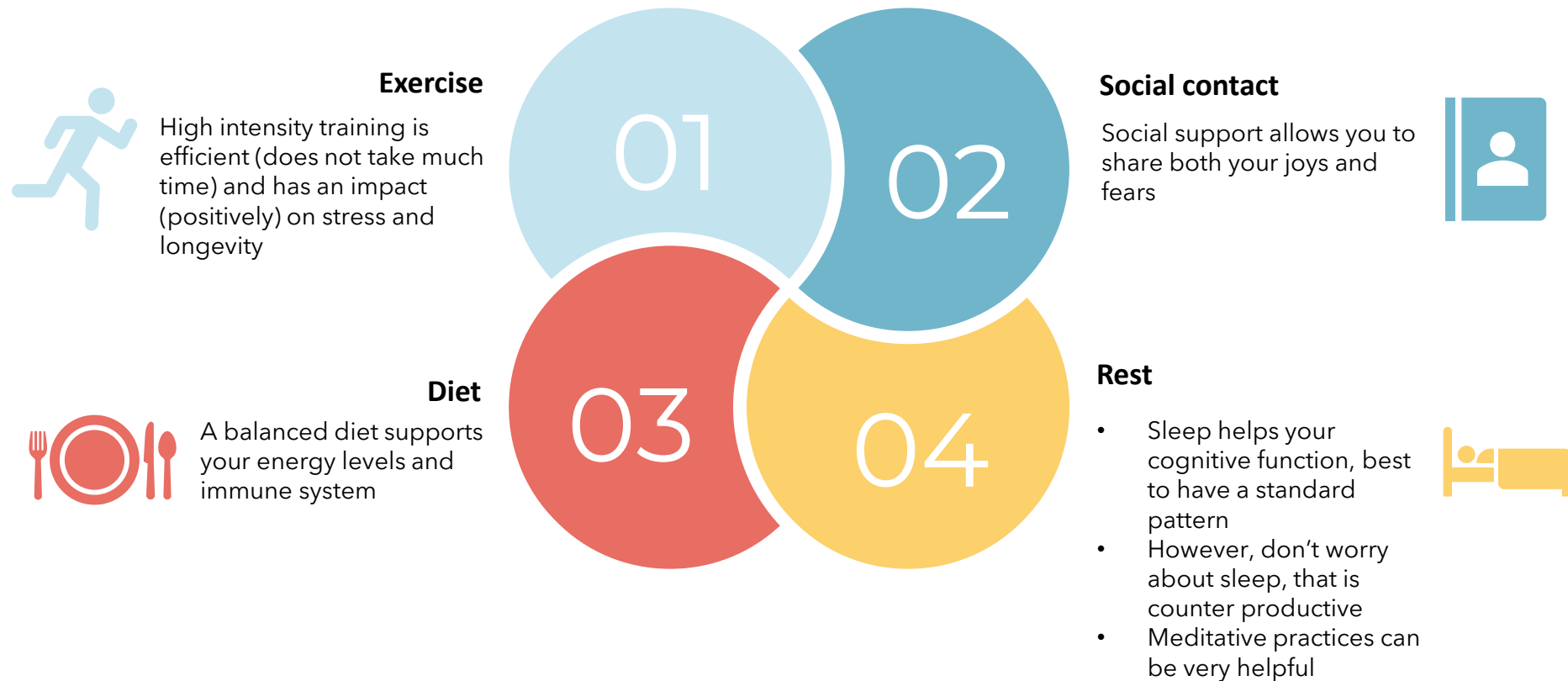
Some ideas arising from contemporary psychology

Sometimes a “self-assessment” is useful to stimulate a different approach to managing yourself



Source: Loehr and Schwartz, (2018), "Power of Full Engagement"

We will take the basics as a given, as you will all know this to some extent



Source: Gervais (2020), "How to Manage Your Stress When the Sky Is Falling", Harvard Business Review

Reframing

How you think about your challenges

It is important to note that not all stress is bad

- Firstly, it is important to understand that **not all stress is bad**
- **Good stress** has been associated with **a lift in job performance** and engagement. Good stress is essentially the feeling of excitement that allows you to perform at an enhanced peak
- Even bad stress has been associated with increases in performance, but it also has a close association with burn-out – which is a plummeting of performance as a consequence of long-term grinding demands (found in the Global Corporate Challenge study over a 12-year period)
- The issue is **not the elimination of stress**, but the management of stress such that you become more “anti-fragile” over the long term
- Donald Roberston, the psychotherapist and philosopher, points out that there is evidence that those who think all stress is bad, actually do worse in managing stress
- Challenges are inherent in a full life – we should not always seek to eliminate all stress



Source: Scherrer, Sheridan, Sibson, Ryan, & Henley, (2010). Employee engagement with a corporate physical activity program: the global corporate challenge. *International Journal of Business Studies*, 18(1), 125-139.

Indeed, stress and rest builds resilience

- One of the important things to realise about **“hard times”** is that we can in fact use them to **our advantage**. This is **true** of individuals, teams, enterprises, organisations, and even families
- The research (Taleb, 2012) is clear that we become **stronger physically, mentally**, and possibly even **emotionally** when we are
 - **Stressed** - BUT THEN
 - **Rest**
- It is like building fitness or muscle groups. Stress the body (not so much that it breaks) but then **rest to allow recovery**
- So, **the rest is as important as the stress**
- This is where coping mechanisms to turn down the intensity of negative stress, or take a cognitive break becomes important
- We will review a number of means to achieve that outcome

“Difficulties strengthen the mind, as labour does the body”. Seneca (Roman Philosopher and Statesman)



**REST
& RECHARGE**

The practice of managing how we think goes all the way back to the stoics of ancient Greece and Rome, but is now part of modern psychological advice

- The stoics thought that the “event” was often **not what caused pain**, but **our judgement of the event**
- How are you judging the current crisis? Can you see the opportunity therein?

“People are not affected by events, but by the view they take of them” (Seneca - Roman philosopher and statesman).

“Too many people are unaware that it is not outer events or circumstances that will create happiness; rather, it is our perception of events and of ourselves that will create, or uncreate, positive emotions.” (Albert Ellis - Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy)

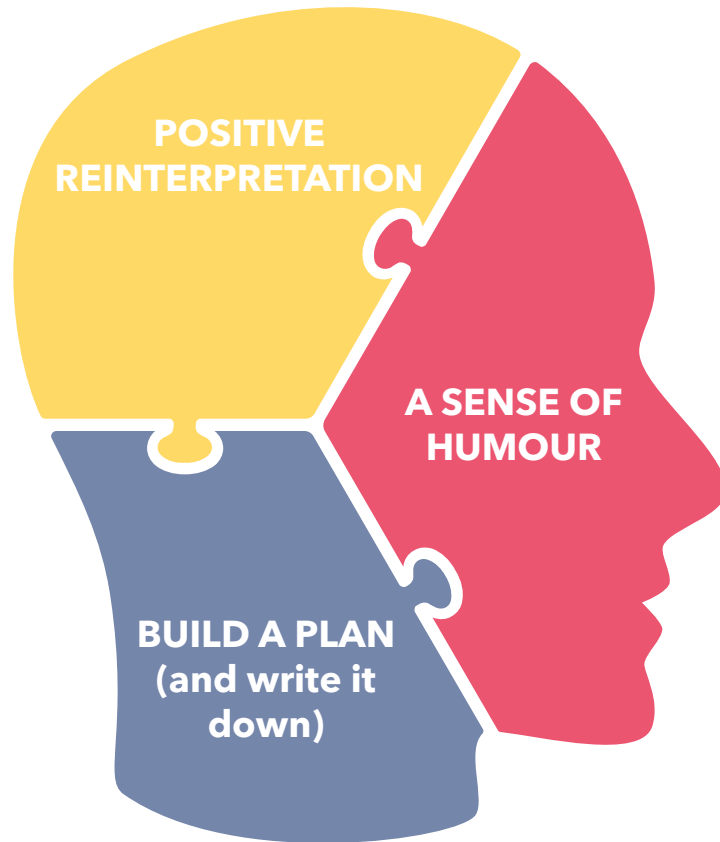
“People are not disturbed by things, but by the view which they take of them” (Epictetus - stoic philosopher)

“There is nothing good nor bad, but thinking makes it so” (Shakespeare - from “Hamlet”)



Managing the way we think, can involve avoiding common cognitive traps. A good way to avoid such traps is to start with 3 simple principles

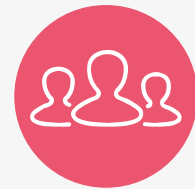
- As a student in psychology, I was taught the first three practical lessons in stress management



Re-framing

Positive reinterpretation allows you to put the challenge in context

- If the worst happens, can I respond or cope with it?
- Can I find a way to make a positive of the situation?



A Sense of humour

A sense of humour, laughing at the situation, gives you perspective

This is a “muscle” you can build



Build a plan

Your brain responds incredibly well to the knowledge that you have a plan

- So, build a plan
- Write it down
- Put it somewhere safe you can refer to

So, reframing is an important part of your mental armour to protect yourself against the darker side of long-term stress



Graham Jones (2018) advises us to **love the pressure**



Jones also advises us to **celebrate the victories**



...And it is important to

- **Reframe** anxiety as excitement
- **Own** the challenge (it is a life you have chosen)



If we understand that **stress and challenge** makes us **better and stronger** people, then that helps to reframe (Taleb, 2012)



Bennis and Thomas (2018) note that high stress experiences are often the “Crucibles of Leadership”. In other words, they can form the character of our leadership practices going forward. So, the challenges really are our opportunities to grow



Neoteny, or the retention of “child-like attributes” (Bennis and Thomas, 2018), is like a sense of excitement at the challenge, an enthusiasm for learning and personal growth and **a sense of wonder**



But don't forget to rest after stress!



Seeing the situation as a challenge and a growth opportunity takes practice

James Stockdale



Arianna Huffington



This is Stockdale's favourite - by "master of my fate", Stockdale (and Henley) meant master of how you respond

Poem "INVICTUS"

"Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul."

William Ernest Henley



Philosophers, psychologists, and essayists have throughout history proposed that our ultimate freedom, and our mental health, lies in how we respond to challenge

- Victor Frankl, a holocaust survivor, noted that one of the most essential freedoms that a human being has is to
 - **“choose one’s attitude to any given circumstance”**
- Modern psychological therapies such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy encourage us to establish a different relationship to our stresses
- Essentially, these thinkers and practitioners are not suggesting an elimination of stress, but do suggest that you can:

Think about your stress differently



“you are not your stress. It is a thing you are experiencing”

Cognitively distance yourself from the stress

Use the experience to grow

Managing the way we think about challenges, helps us avoid vicious cycles



Integrating “reframing” with other techniques

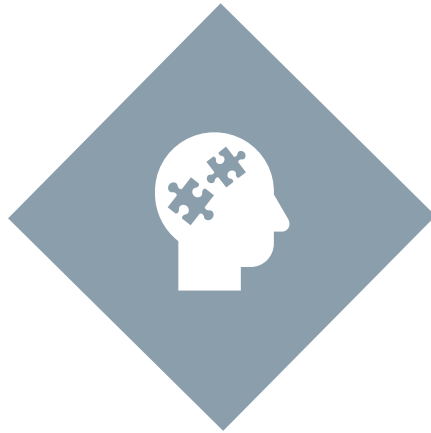
Seligman's "master resilience training" focuses on 3 elements

- Martin Seligman is, to many, the founder of the positive psychology movement
- He has recently been turning his mind to resilience training

01	Building mental toughness especially	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reframing, sense of humour and a plan• Albert Ellis developed an ABCD model for reframing so that the underlying assumption/interpretation on the situation/event is assessed (check out Reivich and Shate, 2002)
02	Signature strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We can use our signature strengths to cope - we can better deploy them if consciously aware of them• We can build on our strengths through the "stress and rest" pattern
03	Strong relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We feel stronger when "someone has our back"• We process stress better if we have someone to talk to

Sources: Seligman, (2018), "Building Resilience". HBR "On Mental Toughness"
Reivich and Shatté, (2002), "The resilience factor: 7 essential skills for overcoming life's inevitable obstacles"

So, we have talked a lot about “stress and rest” - but how do we do the rest?



Compartmentalise your mental load

- Set aside “worry time”
- Write down where you go to
- Remember to ‘reframe’, sense of humour, plan



Take detachment breaks

- There is evidence that a break every 90 to 120 minutes is good for performance
- Taking a day off to reflect occasionally can be very useful

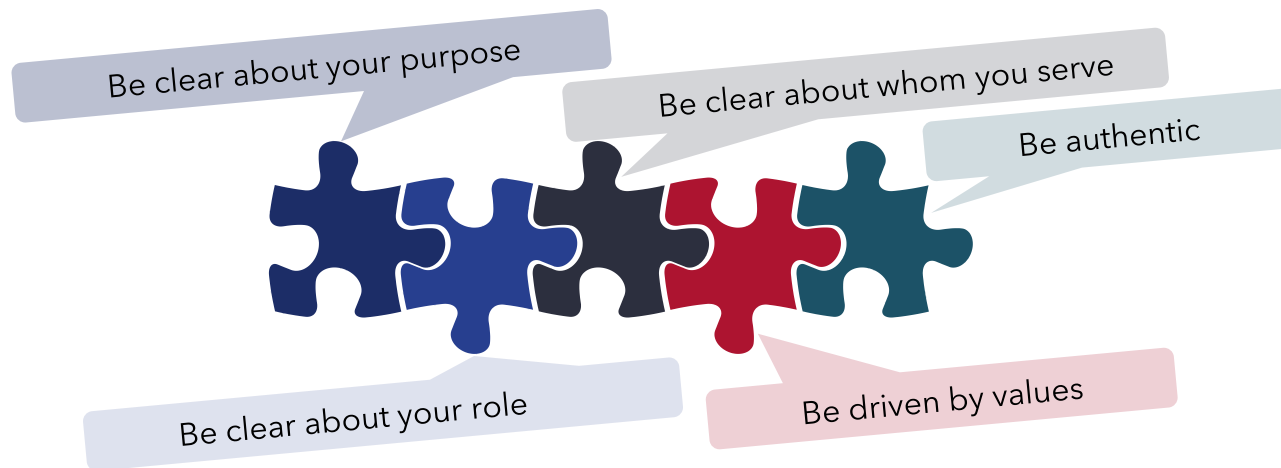


Practice mindfulness

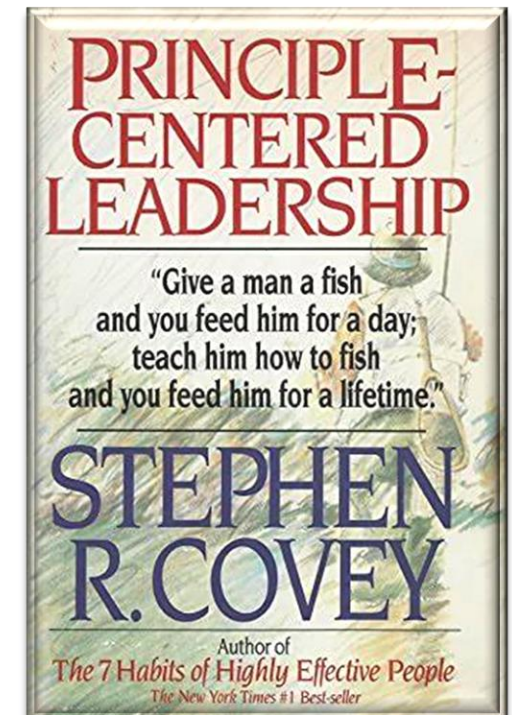
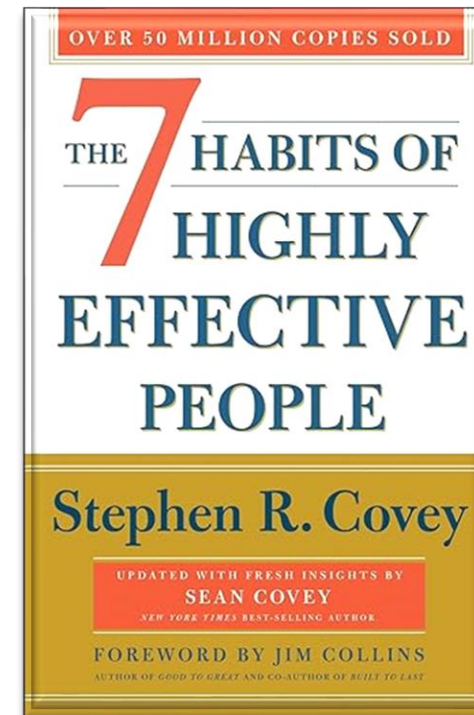
- Kiken and Shook found that mindfulness predicts judgement accuracy and insight-related problem solving
- Malinowski and Moore found that mindfulness enhances cognitive flexibility
- Aitken et al found a direct link to resilience
- Try: Headspace, Spire, Mental Workout, Calm, While and Simple Habit

Purpose is a key touch-stone to a healthy mental state

- Frankl proposed that having a purpose had a massive impact on resilience
 - “Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how!'”
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy leaders bring us constantly back to the **purpose**
 - This form of psychological intervention has some excellent tools to discover what you can commit to



- Leadership thinkers are encouraged to have a greater purpose, preferably beyond themselves
 - Stephen Covey's "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People"
 - Stephen Covey's "Principle-Centered Leadership"



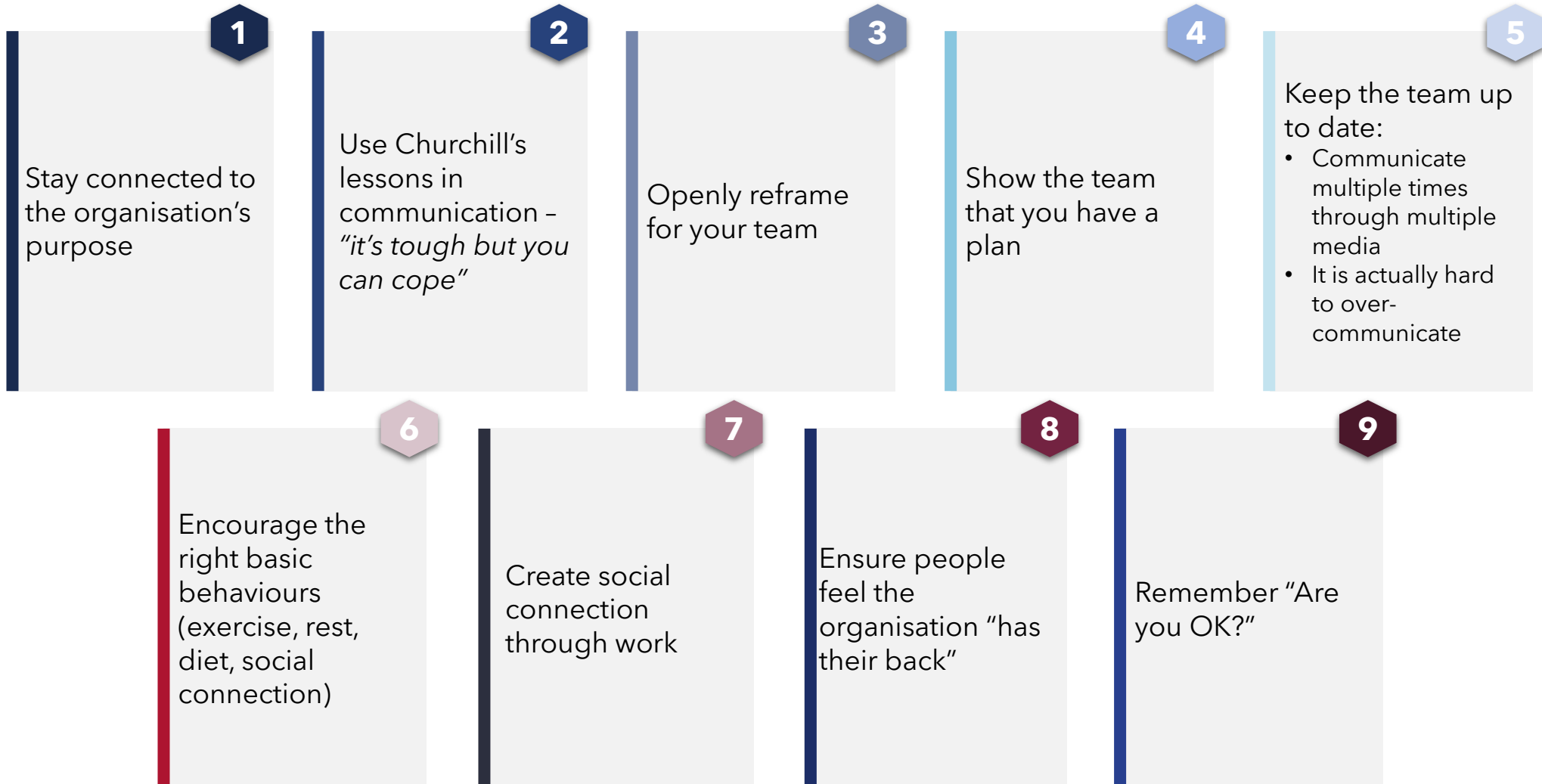
Source: S.Covey, (1989), "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People"
S.Covey, (1992), "Principle Centered Leadership"
Frankl, (1946), "Man's searching for meaning"

So, to manage ourselves long-term you might consider



So, how do we lead others
to cope over the long-term

So, having looked after ourselves, how do we look after our teams?



Churchill had a brilliant way of communicating in a crisis - building the nation's belief in itself

" I have **nothing to offer** but **blood, toil, tears and sweat**. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering.

You ask, what is our policy? I can say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime.

This is our policy. You ask, what is our aim?

I can answer in one word: **It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be, for without victory, there is no survival."**



All of this requires communication

01

Keep it **real** (no bull!)

02

Reference **purpose**

03

Tell them **the plan**

04

Tell them when the plan **changes**

05

Tell them **why** the organisation will be better and stronger and more relevant as a result of this crisis - therefore, **give the crisis meaning**

06

Say it in more than one way

07

Use **multiple modes** of communication

08

Repetition is fine when it **reinforces the message**

09

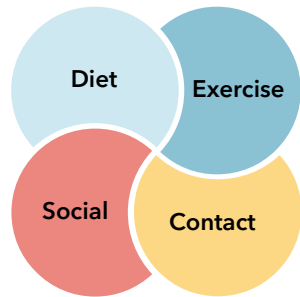
Use **feedback loops** to check you have been heard

In summary

In summary, you need to look after yourself so you can look after others

Looking after yourself actually involves a set of skills, at which you can get better over time

1. Do the basics



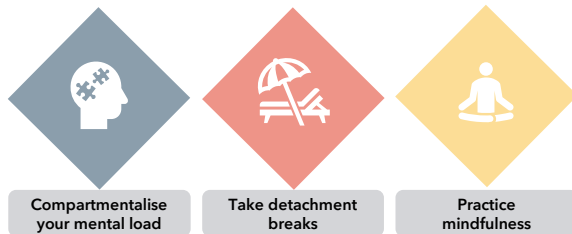
2. Accept that you have the ability to improve your response to stress



3. Reframe the challenges in your mind

- They can make you stronger
- They can be exiting

4. Try to structure "stress and rest". The balance of those varies by person

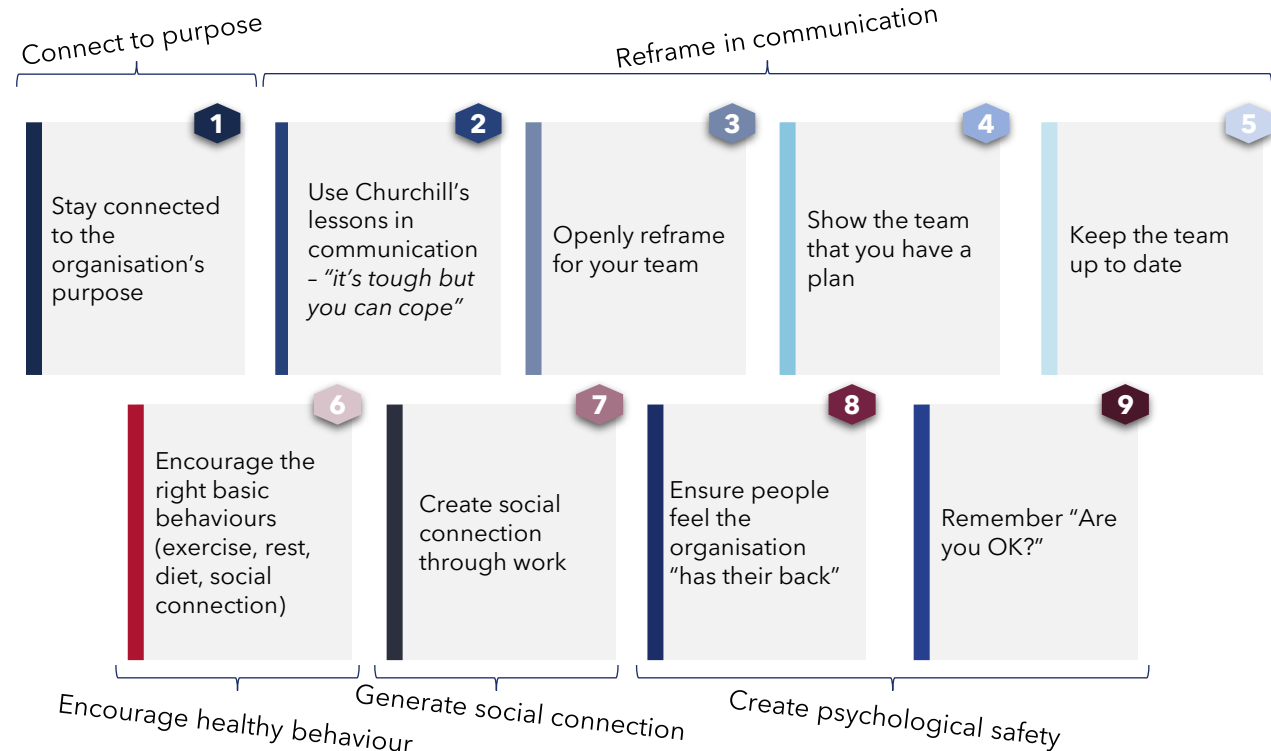


Compartmentalise your mental load

Take detachment breaks

Practice mindfulness

Looking after your team has many of the same principles as looking after yourself



Thank you

References

1. M. Crawford, (2016), "The World Beyond Your Head"
2. Taleb, (2012), "Antifragile: Things That Gain From Disorder". See also: <https://hbr.org/2013/06/make-your-organization-anti-fr.html>
3. Loehr and Schwartz, (2018), "Power of Full Engagement"
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7. Bennis and Thomas, (2018), "Crucibles of Leadership". HBR on "Mental Toughness"
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Contact details and disclaimer

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