



# IMPROVING HEALTH AND SAFETY THROUGH EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

## Pressure and performance

Life in the 21st century is pretty full on and we all experience pressure from a range of sources e.g. from our work lives, from our home lives and from our own expectations and aspirations. Pressure can be a good thing, in that, we all need a certain amount of pressure to motivate and challenge us and when we experience a level of pressure that we can cope with, we are engaged, happy and perform at our best. When the level of pressure exceeds our ability to cope, however, we become stressed and it has a negative impact on our physical and mental health and ultimately on our performance. Equally where staff have insufficient challenge in their work, they can also experience stress and the accompanying negative impact on their physical and psychological health.

The impact of these symptoms can be damaging enough for the average working environment but for safety critical environments, it can impose a high level of risk.

## Symptoms of Stress

Physical Symptoms	Cognitive/Mental Symptoms
Feeling Fatigued	Feeling Overwhelmed
Reduced Efficiency	Impaired Decision Making
Higher Accident Rates	Impaired Long Term Memory
Not Sleeping Well	Irritated/Less Patient
Aches and Pains	Impaired Decision Making
Low Mood	Selective Attention
Upset stomach, including diarrhea, constipation and nausea	Lower Confidence Levels

There is a wealth of research demonstrating that mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression have a significant negative impact on performance but stronger evidence exists for the impact that 'frame of mind' can have on safety. This means that the way people are thinking and feeling at any point in time can cause or contribute to them having an accident, behaving unsafely or making a mistake. The effect of 'frame of mind' has been found to be similar to the effect of experiencing a mental health condition. This means that the performance of someone who is feeling anxious on a particular day, for example, is affected in the same way as if they were experiencing clinical anxiety.

Imagine one of your safety critical staff experiencing a combination of those symptoms, how confident would you be about their health and safety and the health and safety of others who rely on them e.g. passengers on a high speed train, where the driver is experiencing a sub-set of the above symptoms.

The impact of stress does not end there, as stress can also increase our risk of experiencing serious health disorders e.g. cardiovascular disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes. Prolonged exposure to stress can also lead to mental health conditions e.g. anxiety and depression.

## Improving Health and Safety Through Emotional Resilience

Some workplace pressures can be reduced or changed, however there will always be pressures that are an intrinsic part of the nature of the work/job and these cannot be changed. What can be changed, however, is the way in which people think about pressure and the types of coping strategies that they use to manage those pressures.

We are all born with a degree of Emotional Resilience and some of us have higher levels than others, however, regardless of the level that we currently have, we can all further develop our Emotional Resilience.

Our level of Emotional Resilience determines our ability to cope with or adapt to stressful situations. It also determines whether we remain physically and mentally well whilst coping with difficult situations. Being emotionally resilient is not just something that helps us cope better with pressure, it is a life skill that helps us to continue performing at our best and avoid the negative impact that stress has on our mental and physical health.

## What is Emotional Resilience?

If you look at the literature on emotional resilience, there are many definitions and they usually describe emotional resilience as being the ability to bounce back from adversity. This is one aspect of emotional resilience but it is much more complex than that. Emotional resilience is a multi-faced construct composed of the following elements:

- Having self confidence
- Having a sense of meaning and purpose
- Having social support
- Having cognitive flexibility
- Being self -aware and knowing when to ask for help
- Being able to flex/adapt and go with the flow
- They are able to find a silver lining in every cloud
- They cultivate healthy habits e.g. exercise, active relaxation, healthy diet etc.

## What Format Does Emotional Resilience Training Take?

Emotional resilience training is usually delivered to small groups of staff/managers, although it can be delivered more flexibly using coaching and/or blended learning. A course for non-managerial staff would normally last for half a day whereas a 'Resilient Leadership' course would be more effectively delivered as a full day course. This is because individuals have to learn about their own resilience before they can be effective in facilitating resilience in others.

## Does Emotional Resilience Training Work?

There has been research carried out into the effectiveness of emotional resilience with a range of different groups e.g. schoolchildren, nurses etc. There has also been research carried out in occupational settings which have demonstrated that the coping strategies acquired during emotional resilience training have a beneficial impact on wellbeing and the way in which individuals interpret and experience pressure. In addition, higher levels of emotional resilience have been linked to:

- Improved decision making
- Greater ability to deal with pressured/difficult situations
- Recover faster from adversity
- Improved relationships with colleagues
- Better conflict management
- Ability to cope with change and challenge

This also means that the personal health risk to individuals is reduced and that the individuals themselves pose less of a health and safety risk to others, when holding safety critical roles.

## Wellbeing is an Investment not a Cost

Evidence is still emerging with regard to the return on investment for money spent on wellbeing but, not surprisingly, many organisations are reporting real bottom line results in terms of: reduced sickness absence/presenteeism, higher engagement/productivity and reduced accident rates.

British Gas	Return on investment was £31 for every £1 invested
Astra Zeneca	Savings of £500-£600K
Parcelforce	An investment of £2.25 million yielded a return of £6 million

## Resilient Performance

Cognoscenti have taken Emotional Resilience one step further and have combined it with research from the following areas to create a model of Resilient Performance:

- Hardy personalities
- Neuroscience
- Mental toughness
- Growth Mind-Set
- Mindfulness

The 'Resilient Performance' model emphasizes the crucial cognitive strategies that enable staff to maintain high performance in pressured environments. We have produced a series of workshops, based on this model, to help high stress professions where it is crucial to maintain high performance and high client satisfaction/safety. The workshops are designed to enable participants to develop cognitive/thinking strategies for success so that they can thrive and not just survive.

## How Will the Workshop Benefit Participants?

After completing the workshop, participants will be:

- More In-Control and Optimistic
- More focused and Determined
- Confident Making Good Business Decisions
- Comfortable recognising and eliminating self-imposed limitations on their ability to succeed
- Able to Challenge and Manage Pressures Effectively

Benefits for the organization include: Lower sickness absence/presenteeism levels More resilient staff who can cope well when under pressure More harmonious working relationships. if you think your staff would benefit from this type of workshop, then please ring Sharon on 0161 344 5492/07771 870 547. Alternatively, you can email her at: [sharon@cognoscenti.uk.com](mailto:sharon@cognoscenti.uk.com)