TRANSCRIPT DOWNLOAD

HOW DO I IMPROVE MY RESILIENCE AS A LEADER

Welcome to The Highly Valued Leader podcast where I make it simple for leaders at all levels to amplify their value. My name is Mel Savage and I went from working in the mailroom at a small ad agency to making multiple six figures in senior management at McDonald's, to running my own multiple six-figure executive coaching business. I've had huge successes in my career and epic failures. All of it taught me the world-class leadership, mind and skill sets that I simplify for my clients and share with you on this podcast. I'll help you reset your leadership style, demystify the politics, and help you become the highly valued leader everyone wants on their team. Get ready for the most honest, direct and revolutionary leadership coaching you've ever heard. Let's simplify leadership together.

Welcome back, leaders. It's great to have you on the podcast. Thank you for coming. Today, we're talking about something kind of a hot topic that lots of leaders talk about, lots of coaches of leaders talk about, lots of leadership experts talk about, and that's your ability to be resilient, and the role resilience plays in your ability to lead effectively. What I want to talk about is how to develop resilience, because I don't think it's a huge debate topic to say, oh, resilience is or isn't important.

I think resilience in life and certainly in leadership is pretty much universally accepted as something that demonstrates a high emotional intelligence and is critical to be able to communicate effectively, do your work effectively, and live your life effectively in the world. But the question is, how do I become more resilient? Is it just like doing the same things over and over and over again until I learn my lesson? Is there a fast track to resilience? Today, I want to talk about how I coach my clients on quickly increasing their resilience, increasing their ability to be resilient, how that works, and what the practice is to be able to do that.

Before I begin, I think it's important to just level set on what resilience is, so that we're all talking about the same thing. We could all have a slightly different definition of it, and I want to share where mine comes from. Resilience, to me, is just foundationally your ability to bounce back from whatever happens in your life. In a corporate environment, and truly in any environment, it's your ability to recover from an emotional reaction to something; your ability to recover quickly and not be triggered. And even if you are triggered, to not react to that trigger.

I want to just underline something because I know a lot of people. Have you ever heard that *duck-on-water* analogy where the duck on top of the water looks like it's just gliding, but underneath its feet are going crazy? I think people talk about that as your ability to be a great leader is to never let them see you sweat. I think that's great in a pinch, and I'm going to talk about that. But actually, I talk to my clients about this too, I would rather that you were the duck swimming calmly on the surface, and that your feet weren't going crazy under the surface. That you were calmly able to paddle forward and move forward without all of the internalized stress.

© SAVAGE LIFE

When I think about resilience in your ability to recover from an emotional reaction, it's not to avoid the emotional reaction or bury the emotional reaction; it's your ability to feel the trigger, see the trigger, and don't give a lot of importance to the trigger. Be able to feel the emotion that comes with it and move on. That's the ideal situation. And we're going to talk about how to create that ideal situation more often than the other situation which a lot of us experience, which is, *I'm just going to pretend that didn't happen. I'm going to put on my game face. I'm going to just tense up and put on a smile and get through this moment so that I can go and freak out somewhere else later.*

That is great in a pinch, but you cannot live that way because it is exhausting. Resilience, the bottom line, is your ability to recover in a healthy way, let's call it, from an emotional reaction to something. And what that requires is for a leader to level up their EQ. Specifically, what I've been talking about most recently is, that as you become a leader, it's your ability to scale your emotional capacity. Your ability to feel negative emotions without reacting to them, without being afraid of those negative emotions, by being able to normalize those negative emotions, and quickly process them and get back to normal. That is what emotional capacity is: building that capacity to feel things without freaking out.

As a reminder, why would I even talk about emotional capacity? I'll just say this: I want to remind you that emotion is everything because shit's going to happen. Things are going to go sideways at work, and someone's going to say something—all the stuff. It's like this crazy—I have talked about it—this *Hunger Games* environment where you're constantly being triggered. There are constant opportunities to be triggered in a corporate environment. And every time something happens, a circumstance happens, you have a thought about it, and that's where all your power is. Your power is in the thoughts you have when shit happens. And when you have a thought, it causes an emotion. It creates an emotion in you, and then you act out from that emotion.

Let's say your boss openly disagrees with you or just basically says they don't like your idea in a meeting in front of other people, perhaps more senior people than even your boss. And you are in that moment where your boss doesn't agree with you in front of people, and you have a thought about it, which is, *"I can't believe he did that. They did that to me. I can't believe this just happened. That was wrong. They're putting me down. They're throwing me under the bus."* Whatever your thought is, you have this thought, and from that thought, maybe you feel embarrassed, or maybe you feel angry, and then you act out from that embarrassment or that anger.

If you're embarrassed, maybe the actions that you take are that you just don't take action—you shut down. You stop talking. You're very hesitant to speak again. You pout. At that moment, maybe you complain after the meeting. You take it very personally, that sort of thing. If you're angry, maybe the actions that you take are you get flushed, your face goes red, you try to defend yourself, you come back later and try to clean up the situation. I don't know, but notice how the actions are tied to the emotion that comes from the thought that you had.

If the thought that you had at that moment was, *"Oh, my boss has a different opinion. That's okay. I don't care. I'm good at my job. Everyone in the room trusts me. This is no big deal,"* if you actually believed those thoughts—I'm not saying you pretend to have those thoughts—if you actually believed, "Oh, it's not a big deal that my boss disagreed with me. He's allowed. They're allowed. She's allowed," then you're not going to be embarrassed, you're just going to be calm, and the actions that you're going to take are just to continue the dialogue unfazed.

But notice that the different thoughts that you focus on in those moments determine your emotions, and you act from emotion. What you want to be able to do as a leader is intentionally reset yourself when triggered to ground yourself in an emotion that you want to take action from, and to limit the kind of action that you take from an emotion that's going to negatively impact your ability to be a great leader. Hopefully, I'm being clear about that.

© SAVAGE LIFE

My bottom line is emotion is everything. And when you're a leader, when you're scaling yourself as a leader, when you're growing as a leader, you're essentially, foundationally, what you need to do is grow your emotional capacity for recognizing your emotions, being willing to feel those emotions without acting out on them, and then being able to calmly, kind of reframe the situation in your mind and choose the way you want to feel so that you can act out from a place of intention on purpose.

Your resilience is determined by the time it takes for you to move through that process where you might be triggered, you normalize that trigger, reframe the situation and act as the leader that you want to be on purpose, not by force, not through gritted teeth, but with ease. I know that sounds, to some of you, completely impossible, but when you practice it, like any other skill set on purpose, you get way better at it.

The key is to know how to practice it, which is what we're going to talk about today because people don't tell you how to practice it. What ends up happening is you just fail so often that you learn over time. Your capacity for emotion in a certain situation grows because you've just kind of been through that situation so many times that your capacity grows, and that is a way to do it. But what I'm trying to say is we're going to shorten the growth cycle on this so that you do not have to go through these negative and emotional cycles over and over and over again for long periods of time before you increase your resilience. You can increase your resilience on purpose.

Why's that important? I know we talk about resilience being important, but why it's important is because you, as a leader, are a thermostat for your team. I say that all the time: you are a thermostat for your team. If you're running hot, they're running hot. If you're calm, they're calm. If you're running around in the *Chihuahua* energy, freaking out and everything's in chaos, and there's no time for anything, and oh my god, I'm so busy, that's how they're going to be. So you want to be a thermostat. You are, whether you want to be or not, you are a thermostat for your team. So you have to decide what the temperature is going to be in your team.

As I always say, your job is to create an environment for results to happen. So what is the temperature going to be in your environment? How are you going to get results through your team? And if you're stuck in a reactive, negative emotion, it inhibits your ability to provide effective leadership, because you're not thinking clearly. You become the role model of someone who's being very reactive, which is not probably the role model that you want to be, and so it not only inhibits your ability to provide effective leadership, but it also inhibits your team's ability to do their job. So you don't get the results you want in the time frame that you want them, with the kind of emotional expenditure that you want to expend.

I want you to think about this: You have a finite amount of energy in a day. And do you really want to expend energy on lots and lots of negative emotions? Because when you expend energy on negative emotion, or through force, trying to force yourself to do something through gritted teeth, that's energy that you can't spend somewhere else. So if you have 100 bucks, where are you going to invest that 100 bucks? I want you to think about your energy as that. Do I want to put energy into this? Is this something that's worth my energy, which is such an important, valuable asset to you?

Because when you spend time, more time in negative energy, or forcing yourself to do things and smile through gritted teeth, you suffer more, you get exhausted faster, and you don't feel your emotions. You just are avoiding your emotions so they build up and they're going to come out at some point at the wrong time on the wrong person. And that's not leadership. So it's important to have resilience so that you can move through the process of your emotions and bounce back faster. And you can practice that on purpose.

© SAVAGE LIFE

I kind of talked about the gritted teeth thing. I have these phrases that I use, one is *sustainable resilience*, and what it one is I'm going to call *spot resilience*. Sustainable resilience is what I want for the people that I coach 95% of the time. I don't want to call this effective and ineffective resilience, because they both can be effective. It's just one is sustainable and one is something you need to do on the spot because you're stuck in a situation where you can't take a moment to ground yourself. You have to just react and so you need maybe to get through the moment. Let's call it that. But ultimately, you can't be doing that all the time.

Sustainable resilience is resilience with ease, moving through the process, feeling your emotions, not feeling forced, and not being that duck with crazy feet under the water. It's just always calm. It's always on point. It's always intentional. That is what I would call sustainable resilience because you can do that. It doesn't suck up a lot of energy, and that's where you want to be 95% of the time.

Spot resilience is, like I said, in a pinch, you're like, everyone's looking at you. You got to do the thing. You have to be calm, even though you haven't had time to process your emotions, which doesn't take a lot of time, but you just need to be very reactive in the moment. And so you might have to do things, smiling through gritted teeth. It's good in a pinch, but you can't operate that way all the time because it sucks up all your energy, and that strategy will fail quickly. You can't even get through a day like that. It sucks up so much energy, and the minute you're not thinking, the minute you're not in control, everything comes out. You can't operate effectively that way.

What we want to be able to do is help you get to that sustainable resilience more often, so you can get up to 95% of the time, you're in sustainable resilience and the spot resilience is more like 5% of the time. That's what we're going to talk about today–how to increase your emotional capacity for resilience and shorten that learning curve on growing your resilience.

I'm going to give you the solution right now, and it's very simple to do, but people don't do it, and that's why you have a coach. I want to give you the process, and I want you just to try it this week. It feels awkward, it feels weird. You don't have to do it 100% of the time. You can start doing it 10% of the time, more each week. Give yourself a goal. Like, I'm going to do it at least three times. So you do it three times. I'm going to do it one more time. So I have four times now. I'm going to do it another time. Now, you have five times you're doing it in a week. The more you do it, the more you practice it, the more it becomes a habit to practice. It's a very simple process.

Something happens. Let's go back to that example. Your boss says in the meeting, *"That's not a good idea."* Let's just say these are the literal words, and it's a room full of not only your peers, but your boss's boss, and your boss's boss's boss, maybe some of the executive team is there, and your boss says, *"That's not a good idea. We're not doing that."* And then moves on. It could be that simple. And your thought about it is, *"Oh, my God, how could they do that to me? That's so embarrassing. They just threw me under the bus."* You feel anger and you feel humiliation. That's the trigger. You get triggered into anger and humiliation.

There's more to it than this. You need to practice that. You need to get yourself grounded before you go into the room. We'll talk about that. But the steps at that moment are very simple. Step one, you need to notice your own reaction. The key, the number one thing in emotional intelligence is awareness of what you're thinking and feeling. You need to slow things down enough to be able to observe yourself. You need to notice yourself. That alone is going to be a game changer, where you just stop and notice how you're thinking. Most people don't. They just go with their reactiveness and then they blame others for their situation. *I'm going to blame my boss for the fact that I'm angry because they said this in the meeting.* No, you didn't have to be angry and humiliated. You chose that because of the thoughts that you had at that moment.

© SAVAGE LIFE

Now I want you just to notice. I want you to observe your reaction. *"Oh, I'm really angry right now. I'm really humiliated right now. Why?"* You have to ask yourself why you're feeling that way. You have to understand the thoughts that you're having that feel so real to you, that feel like facts to you, that are creating this emotion. And the thought is, *"They shouldn't have said that. They threw me under the bus. They threw me under the bus in front of the executive team. I've just lost credibility with the executive team. That's really the reason underneath it. I've just lost credibility."*

I encourage you, and this is why a coach is so important. But if you can do this on your own, great. I find it personally very hard, without a lot of journaling, to get underneath the initial *"Oh, they shouldn't have done that. Why? Because it wasn't—because it didn't make me look good. And what's the problem with that? I'm losing credibility with the executive team."* I want you to observe your reactions and why you're having them. *"I'm so angry right now and humiliated because I've just lost my credibility. My thinking is—the thought is that I'm telling myself I've just lost credibility. They just threw me under the bus and took away my credibility with the executive team,"* which ultimately is destabilizing, because you're worried about what that means for your reputation, for your ability to do your job, for your safety in your role. Everything comes back to safety. But ultimately, that's the thought that's creating that emotion.

First, notice. Second, normalize. It's okay. *"Of course, I'm having that reaction."* I want you to normalize it as a normal thing. *"Of course, I'm having this reaction because I'm worried about my credibility with the executive team. Of course, I'm having this reaction that my boss disagreed with me. It's normal to be triggered like this. My brain is just worried that I'm not safe. It's thinking that this is going to set me back. It's thinking that I look stupid. My brain is just worried about that. So of course, I'm having these thoughts."*

I want you to remember your thoughts are optional. You have so many thoughts about the situation that your brain is serving up. It thinks it's under attack, and so it's serving up thoughts that it thinks are creating safety for you, but it's not. So just normalize it. *"Of course, I'm having these thoughts. Of course, I'm feeling this way. Of course, I don't like it when my boss questions my thinking in front of the executive team. That's no fun. Of course."* Don't think you're wrong. Don't make yourself wrong for having these reactive thoughts. You're not wrong for having them. Of course, you're having them. That's not the problem. The problem is if you act out from them or you stay stuck in these negative and humiliating emotions.

What you need to do is just recognize the thinking and the emotion. Notice, then normalize. My favourite word is "of course." Of course, I feel this way. Of course, that sucked. Of course. And then I breathe. So notice, normalize, and then just breathe. It's like a deep breath in and out. It doesn't have to be demonstrative.

The key thing with breathing is you're soothing your nervous system. That's why when you're in a yoga class, or you're stretching after a workout, or whatever, when you're in those situations, that's why yoga is so restorative—because it's all about breathing. The whole time they're talking about breathing in and out of your nose because it soothes your nervous system. People come out of yoga class going, *"Oh my God, that was amazing."* It wasn't necessarily the stretching; it had a lot to do with the breathing.

Breathing soothes your nervous system, and it creates safety. It calms you down. So you just want to breathe for a second. Not only are you intellectually normalizing the situation as not being wrong, which creates safety in your brain, but you're also physically breathing and soothing your nervous system. It's for your somatics, which I won't go into because I'm not an expert at it. But you want to just physically also create safety, not just intellectually. When you do that, when you actually just normalize the situation and you breathe—I often, by the way, before I go to the last step—when I breathe, because I do a lot of working out, and I've done yoga and

© SAVAGE LIFE

stretching and working all the things—like, for instance, if you ever stretch, you know the tension that you feel in the stretched muscle.

Oftentimes, an instructor will say to you, *"Breathe into the stretch."* Basically, what they're saying is, to send oxygen, and soothe your nervous system into the tension. You can't actually breathe into the stretch because your breath is in your diaphragm, is in your lungs, but you're basically saying to your nervous system, *"I am creating ease. I am easing the tension in this muscle."* When you breathe, I want you to breathe into the emotion. Somewhere in your body, there's a tension around the emotion.

If you're humiliated, it might be in your throat, where you feel a lump in your throat or tension in your throat or chest. If you're feeling angry, it could be like this boiling sensation in your belly or tension in your shoulders. I want you to find where that emotion is—like, where you actually feel it, physically feel it in your body, where that tension is—and just breathe into the tension. Calm it down, soothe the tension. That's what you want to do. Breathe into the tension.

So you've noticed, you've normalized, of course, I feel this way, you've breathed into the tension, and then that creates enough space in your brain to start thinking logically versus reactively. *"What really happened here? My boss just disagreed with me. It's not a big deal because I already have credibility with the executive team. I'm not a newbie. I know what I'm doing. People are allowed to disagree with me. I'm just going to stay engaged in this dialogue because staying engaged demonstrates that it's not a problem. My ego is not so fragile that I can't be disagreed with."* These are also thoughts you believe.

Somewhere in there is a thought that normalizes the situation in a different way, and you just need to find that thought to go, *"This is not a big deal. Yes, I feel angry, and I'm breathing through that. And also, that's what I'll do. And also, this is not a big deal. They're allowed to disagree with me. I understand. I'm going to stay engaged. I am above my ego in this situation. I am confident enough as a person to be disagreed with. Of course, I am. It's not a big deal."* When you think that, it's almost like the emotion goes from humiliation and anger to calm, dispassionate, and neutral. It's almost like there is no emotion. It's just, like, focused. You're focused again, if you will. You're focused on the dialogue. Focus as an emotion.

And it's almost like, *"Oh yeah, that just happened."* You're not taking it personally. You're not hurt, and that allows you to continue to be involved, to say things, to understand, to be appreciative of your boss, to demonstrate to the executive team that you're someone who can be disagreed with and you don't have a problem with that. That's what you want to be able to be. And even if your team came up to you afterwards and said, *"Oh my God, I can't believe they said that, or they said that to you in the front of this meeting,"* you can say, *"Yeah, so? It's totally fine. People can disagree with you in a meeting. It's not the point. The point was the objective. We collectively together are solving the objective."*

And even if your boss was being unprofessional at that moment, in the way they disagreed with you, you can go up to them after and say, *"Hey, that meeting went really well. I like where we landed. I understand. By the way, the way you disagreed with me was kind of harsh. What do you think about that?" d*epending on the relationship that you have with your boss. You're still not taking it personally. Do you understand what I mean?

So your job as a leader is to increase your emotional capacity for resilience, and you do that by just noticing your human reaction, your reactive reaction to a situation, normalizing that as, *"Of course, I'm a human being. I have an animal brain, a lizard brain, that wants to take this personally, but you know what? I'm going to breathe through that*

© SAVAGE LIFE

initial emotional reaction, just as I would if I were stretching a tense muscle, and I'm just going to reframe it into something more logical here, into the leader that I want to be."

I know this is a very simple process. It's not easy to execute at first. It feels weird. It feels hard. You will not be able to do it alone at first. You will do parts of it really well. But if you keep practicing, if you keep trying, if you keep this whole process top of mind throughout the day as much as you can, even if it's only 10% more than you're doing right now, not 100% of the time, you will get better at it. And even if you're only doing it 50% of the time, it's going to make a huge difference in your leadership style.

I talk to other coaches all the time who are making six, seven figures, and even in my own business making multiple six figures, I'm like, I can do this with a half-managed mind. I don't have to be perfect all the time. I wish I had known this when I was in corporate. I wish I had hired a coach way earlier in my life to be able to help me emotionally handle and build my emotional capacity. It would have saved me so much drama. I made all the mistakes, my friends. Anyway, I recognize that this might feel weird, but just try it and let me know how it goes.

If you want to talk about it more, if you want to get help practicing this process, just come book a leadership strategy session with me, and we will talk about how coaching can help you build your emotional capacity for resilience as a leader.

Okay, my friends. I'll talk to you soon. Bye for now.

Hey, if you want to simplify leadership while amplifying your value, then you need to get your hands on my free training. Head over to melsavage.com/simple for instant access to the training and get a taste of how I help my clients lead with ease and make more money in the process. I'll see you there.

© SAVAGE LIFE