



The future depends on what you do today

By Jo Beckett, Joint CEO, IDPE

Jo is a qualified Psychologist and Executive Coach, trained in teaching resilience and mindfulness

Are you suffering from virtual overwhelm? Invitations coming in thick and fast to join webinars and discussions forums, whilst we accept virtual meeting invites and are distracted by messages pinging into our inbox at an alarming rate. Maybe your hours have been reduced or you've been furloughed and are wondering what this means for you in the long term.

The world is in 'fight or flight' mode right now and alongside crisis management and contingency planning, many of us are juggling home working, childcare and home schooling. How can we even begin to make sense of the impact that COVID-19 means for us professionally? We may not know exactly what the future holds, however, we can take practical steps today to prepare to embrace it.

Here are 5 things you need to know:

1. Know your resilience bandwidth

A healthy amount of stress is good for us, however when we are under pressure for a prolonged period, it not only compromises our immune system but can affect our performance at work and the way we show up at home too. We all have different bandwidths in terms of our capacity to cope with uncertainty and pressure.

There are often early warning signs when we reach the top of our bandwidth for example waking in the early hours; becoming addicted to news updates; catastrophising about the future. It's understandable when there is so much beyond our control that even the most resilient of us are reaching our limits.

Look out for your early warning signs and start to do something different today.

2. Move your body

It sounds obvious, but daily physical exercise is integral to managing the physiology of stress. Moving your fingers on a keyboard and sitting for long periods at your desk means that stress chemicals such as adrenaline and cortisol, build up and contribute to a general

state of heightened anxiety. To help our body re-balance, we need to incorporate regular physical exercise into our daily routine. Most of us blame our lack of physical activity on ‘not having enough time’ – **use the time you would normally have spent commuting for physical exercise instead.**

Ask yourself:

- What exercise do I enjoy most and what new exercise would I like to try?
- How can I ring fence time in my diary each day?
- Who can support and encourage me to do this?

3. Build resilience

Resilient people are adept at selecting where they focus their attention. We are hardwired to look for threats and tend to focus on our weaknesses, especially when we are in ‘fight’ of ‘flight’ mode. When our stress hormones are raised it affects our ability to think clearly, rationally and strategically – we may over focus on things or suffer from ‘negativity bias’s where we see the ‘lack’ and not the possibilities.

We can learn to become more resilient – we just need to hunt for the good stuff – take note of the things you enjoy and that you are thankful for.

[This reflective exercise can help you identify the good stuff.](#)

Ask yourself:

- Is this helping me?
- Does this make me feel better or worse?
- Is the way I’m behaving going to help the situation or not?

4. Breathe with awareness

We don’t usually think about our breathing as this happens automatically. When we feel stressed our breathing can become shallow and elevate our feelings of anxiety. Think of your breathing as a stress management app which needs updating to cope with the current challenges. A useful resource for this may be [Headspace](#), an online mindfulness platform.

7/11 breathing

By deepening and extending each breath you can re-set yourself to ‘calm’ mode’.

Try this simple exercise, 7/11 breathing, to bring your stress levels down or prepare yourself before a difficult meeting or conversation.

- Place your hand on your abdomen
- Breathe in for the count of 7, focussing on drawing your breath all the way down to your abdomen
- Pause momentarily at the top of the breath
- Slowly release your breath to the count of 11
- Repeat this for several minutes

Meditation

Neuroscience has proven that meditation quietyens the mind and reduces cortisol levels. Breathing mindfully can help ‘cool’ our emotions. Having more time at home means we can practice new things. By spending 10 minutes meditating either at the beginning and or at the end of the day can reduce the ‘busy -ness’ of our mind.

- Put yourself back in the driving seat
- Switch off your phone, laptop and tablet
- Spend a few minutes re-setting your breathing and recharging your batteries

5. Make space for solutions

Press pause

Have you ever arrived home from a day of back-to-back meetings and not been able to remember what you have actually done?

We can suffer from ‘brain fog’ when we move from one task to the next without allowing time to pause in-between. Allow yourself breaks between calls, meetings and home schooling to give your brain a much needed re-charge.

Writing

They say hindsight is a wonderful thing. It is only when we emerge from a challenging situation that we are able to put things into perspective. Try writing about this situation you find yourself in now.

Putting onto paper what’s occupying your mind can not only be therapeutic and distil the things that concern you most, but by ‘downloading’ your thoughts you make space for solutions to appear.

Try this exercise: ask someone you trust to ask you the following questions and write down your immediate responses.

Imagine yourself in five years' time looking back on this period:

- What would you tell yourself?
- What helped you get through this?
- Now that you have this perspective, what will you do differently as a result?

Summary

Stress management is like an app that needs updating. Resilience can be learned and just like building muscle at the gym needs practice. Use this time wisely, to re-set your daily routines and introduce activities that will help you keep within your stress bandwidth.

What is the one thing you will take from reading this that you will commit to doing each day?

To arrange a time for a confidential conversation about any of the above email info@idpe.org.uk.

Reflective practice

These questions support individual or team reflective practice and can be done daily, weekly or monthly. By noting the activities, interactions and experiences that elicit positive or negative emotions we develop greater awareness about what drives us, brings us greatest fulfilment and energises us. Through awareness, we can then consciously choose to focus on what nourishes us and at the same time be more mindful about detaching from things that deplete us.

The key is to make time to reflect on a regular basis – you may choose to do this on your own or with colleagues or member of your family. It is important that you begin with 1. ‘Nourishers’ and end with 3. ‘Looking forward to’.

1. Nourishers

Note any activities, experiences, interactions that have elicited positive emotions e.g. feeling energised, inspired, grateful, excited, content, upbeat, calm, fulfilled, positive, satisfied, optimistic, confident, joyful, proud.

Work	Personal

2. Drainers

Note any activities, experiences, interactions that have provoked a negative response e.g. anxiety, tiredness, lethargy, fear, boredom, panic, dread, uncertainty, shock, distress, helplessness, sadness disappointment, irritation, anger, annoyance, intimidation, resentment, guilt, shame, hurt, exasperation, confusion.

Work	Personal

3. Looking forward to

Think about what’s coming up that you are looking forward to – things that evoke feelings of excitement, contentment, positivity, hope, interest, enthusiasm, intrigue, peace, eagerness, curiosity.

Work	Personal