

The 8 Imperatives

An Overview of Eight Foundational
Building Blocks to Individual
Performance and Growth



Introduction

The 8 Imperatives skills involve how we feel, think and act at a **foundational level**. They are distinct from, but build upon, one's bedrock "Who I am" identity. Developing our Imperatives is one of the surest ways to improve our relationships and boost performance in our professional roles. When strong, the skills serve as a universal and basic support to our ability to feel, learn, work and communicate.

Human development, like a building, is a step-by-step progression that begins at the foundation. Once laid, foundations often go unnoticed, but the simple fact is that they are one of the most important aspects of the structure. What happens if we fail to fortify the ground-level Imperatives? In the end, we are less solid in our ability to function with, or in support of, others. Of course, just as different buildings need different foundations, work that primarily deals with data, things and ideas may not rely as heavily on the base Imperatives as jobs that deal with people. But a full-strength foundation will provide for all cases.

The Imperatives are consistent with the exhaustive neurological, psychological and organizational science made prominent by renowned psychologist Daniel Goleman ("Emotional Intelligence," 1995). Five of the Imperatives map to the "Self" domain of Goleman's Emotional Intelligence model: *Emotional Self-Awareness*, *Self-Assessment*, *Self-Confidence*, *Self-Restraint* and *Resiliency*. Elaborating on these, PAIRIN's science also includes the attributes — *Self-Alignment*, *Self-Blame* and *Stress Tolerance* — three additional lenses for focusing on the essentials.

Who can utilize the Imperatives measurements?

Workforce Development Programs: For measuring and developing job seekers and program participants — especially to identify barriers to employment

High Schools & Post Secondary Education Institutions:

For measuring and developing SEL skills in students to align with college and career readiness goals

Professional Coaches: For identifying skill gaps and areas of interest for growth in coachees — as well as overall coachability

Businesses: For identifying skill gaps and designing professional development plans for staff (PAIRIN also produces job-specific targets that can be used for skills-based hiring)

The 8 Imperatives are:

- Universal building blocks to performance and growth
- “Me narratives”— the stories I tell myself, about myself: “What do I feel, believe, value?”, “How will I cope?” and “What can I do?”
- Foundational for relating to myself and functioning with, and in support of, others
- My capacity to realize and utilize my emotions to enhance thinking and behavior
- Helpful groundwork for the development of higher-order skills such as *Creativity* and *Problem-Solving*

Resiliency

Stress Tolerance

Self-Restraint

Self-Criticism

Self-Confidence

Self-Alignment

Self-Assessment

Emotional Self-Awareness

Emotional Self-Awareness

Definition: Sensing and understanding one's emotions and how they impact one's behavior.

Our emotions and associated needs are driving forces behind our behavior. The word emotion means “move out,” and the function of emotion is to move us out to meet needs. So, a first step toward improving our behavior is becoming aware of these stirrings. *Emotional Self-Awareness*, like a motion-sensor light, is a skill that lets us see and tend to our feelings.

With development, we can overcome common challenges to *Emotional Self-Awareness* such as:

- Our feelings change from moment to moment and include a mixture of several together.
- Sudden emotions hijack our ability to tune in and rationally choose how to respond.
- We mistake our thoughts (opinions, evaluations) as feelings:
 - Incorrect: “When you don’t greet me, I feel neglected.” (evaluation)
 - Correct: “When you don’t greet me at the door, I feel lonely.” (feeling)
- We shift blame rather than take responsibility for our feelings and their underlying needs and values.
- Historical mental blocks distort or inhibit our recognition of certain emotions.

The process of *Emotional Self-Awareness* includes: Sensing the physical onset of an emotion, acknowledging its presence, identifying it by name, accepting it and pinpointing its source. Typically, we need to respond somewhere along that timeline, but the process becomes quick and natural with practice. When integrated, this skill lets us predict emotions and needs in advance and regulate with poise.

Finally, it's not that something or someone makes us feel anything; rather we sense that our felt-needs are being met or not met. All human beings hold varying degrees of the same needs. Needs are universal — the common motivational drivers that stimulate our emotions, and ultimately, our behavior.

Building Emotional Self-Awareness Here are three practical steps for learning to see, understand and benefit from your emotions as they arise.

- ① **Detect.** Pay attention to your bodily cues. Notice what stirs within, so you can name and tame emotions with your mind.
 - What is showing up in my body? (tensing, clenching, churning, sweating, trembling, pounding, etc.)
- ② **Inspect.** What are your emotions saying? Feelings alone are neither positive nor negative, but valuable tools to serve us. For example, fear can spur you to move out of the path of an oncoming train, or sadness may nudge you to connect with those you love. Here are some questions with which you can explore the nuances and roots of your emotions. Be as precise as you can in answering:
 - What am I feeling? (free of thoughts: “I feel” not “I feel like...” or “I feel that...”)
 - The specific need I sense is/is not being met is _____.
- ③ **Reflect.** Have a look back. What were your related behaviors?
 - These were my actions and thoughts (fact-check important!): _____.
 - Ideally, I would have thought/done/said: _____.
 - When is the next time I might encounter this emotion?

Benefits of Emotional Self-Awareness

Emotional Self-Awareness will help you sense what you, and others, need. It will allow you to invite people to contribute to your needs (and you theirs) in a life-giving way. The more directly you link your feelings to what you desire — without demanding — the easier it is for others to respond compassionately. For example:

- I felt sad about your absence, because I had hoped for your support. Would you be willing to attend tomorrow?
- I'm afraid. Would you please drive at or below the speed limit?

Needs alone contain no reference to specific people taking specific action, but most people find immense joy in enriching the life of another.

Emotional Self-Awareness is our internal “motion-sensor light,” giving us clarity to respond rather than react. It detects the motion of our emotions, nudging us toward what we need for a full life.

Self-Assessment

Definition: Self-reflection to determine strengths and limitations in one's values, actions and resources.

Like gazing into a mirror, *Self-Assessment* involves checking our “reflection.” We use this skill to observe ourselves: how we reason and relate, our ability to perform various tasks or succeed in a given field. In reflecting, we learn what's working and what's not. We decide how we want to change, and we monitor our progress. Each improvement, in turn, boosts our confidence with added alignment and perspective.

When we are eager for self-understanding and habitually think about what we could do differently, our *Self-Assessment* is high. This, however, does not guarantee that it is strong. *Self-Assessment* can only be strong when accurate. Accuracy keeps us from over- or under-estimating ourselves. It requires that we gather and integrate data from additional viewpoints. As social beings, we see ourselves most fully as reflected in others. We need honest feedback from someone with whom we have an attuned connection to verify that what we perceive is true.

Before beginning Self-Assessment, make sure to set the stage for accuracy:

Recognize Your Image: Of the estimated 90 billion people who have lived, no one is just like you. Your DNA, fingerprints, intellect and aspirations belong to one precious you! *Self-Assessment* involves connecting with yourself as a unique, immeasurably valuable and growing individual. Don't fixate on what's not, or focus on others. **Connect** before you compare or correct.

Stand in the Light: Practice *Self-Assessment* in a positive light with warm regard and self-acceptance, whether you are observing yourself or analyzing feedback provided by others. Observe, but avoid judging or labeling yourself, which results in fear, guilt and shame.

Adjust the Mirror: Some people are fortunate enough to understand their strengths and weaknesses clearly. Others, however — even when high in *Self-Assessment* — may struggle with a dim or distorted mirror. Ask for feedback from someone with whom you have a deep and open connection. Consider their objective thoughts about your skills, abilities and approach so you can strengthen the accuracy of your looking glass.

Building Self-Assessment

Below is a three-staged exercise that will help you dial up your *Self-Assessment*:

- 1 **Self-monitoring.** Monitoring yourself is a way to acquire data for accurate *Self-Assessment*. What you monitor depends on what you want to assess. What specifically do you want to discover about yourself? For example, if you want to understand if you are an active conversationalist, ask yourself, “How often am I contributing when I’m in a group conversation?”
- 2 **Self-evaluation.** Evaluate yourself using a predetermined target. This might be a goal you design yourself or in agreement with someone else. You might start with a lower, more reasonable target and then increase the expectation over time. Expanding on the example above, you might decide that a good goal is to speak up 10 times. You can then compare yourself to this frequency to determine how well you met the target.
- 3 **Reflection.** Take time to give thoughtful consideration to experiences that have occurred. This will often uncover growth opportunities that you had not noticed in the moment. For example, you might reflect on a conversation you had with a friend and realize you could have offered more empathy. This is something you could then revisit with that friend or work on the next time. Without ongoing reflection, you will likely miss opportunities for personal growth.

Are you looking for someone to improve your life? Take a look in the mirror. Change starts within the image gazing back at you. Here is a list of questions to help you reflect on what is and what will be:

- What five core values are deeply important to you?
- What do you know or do well?
- How do you best contribute or add value to others?
- Where is your greatest potential for growth?
- What is the one thing you could start doing or stop doing that would bring the biggest change to this area?
- What specifically do you need and are not getting?
- How would your friends, family, coworkers and enemies answer these questions about you?

Self-Alignment

Definition: The sense of agreement between a person's real self-image and ideal self.

Operating within the framework of self-concept, *Self-Alignment* indicates how well we believe our attributes, behaviors and social roles line up with what is assumed to be ideal. *Self-Alignment* is distinct from, but usually reflective of, self-esteem.

Self-Image = How we perceive ourselves

Ideal Self = How we perceive the ideal

Self-Esteem = How we feel about ourselves

When our self-image and our ideal self are similar, we show high *Self-Alignment*.

Strong Self-Alignment

To ensure that in reaching high *Self-Alignment* we simultaneously achieve strong *Self-Alignment*, we must accurately assess our real self and seek to align with an attainable ideal. Problems occur when our self-image is inflated or when our ideal self is beyond reach. These distortions leave us uncomfortable in our own skin — with an exaggerated or perpetually unfulfilled sense of self.

To be strong, like sturdy buildings, we must use realistic standards and feasible blueprints. As with all building processes, there will be reality checks, miscalculations and construction redos along the way. And as with building plans, the ideal self is not static and subject to many revisions.

Those Low in Self-Alignment:

Perceive a gap between their real and ideal selves.

Downplay positive traits and are often modest and unassuming.

Can lack stability and be quick to blame self or others.

Doubt their abilities to attain goals or personal meaning.

May struggle with morale or give up before starting.

Those High in Self-Alignment:

Perceive that their real and ideal selves agree.

When Accurate:

- Honestly compare to their true, objective ideal.
- Are stable, self-accepting and feel genuine self-worth, despite failings.

When Distorted:

- Exaggerate strengths or underestimate weaknesses.
- Strive for impossibly high ideal; lack self-esteem.

Building Self-Alignment

The process of forming strong *Self-Alignment* involves co-creating your life by collaborating with your architect, fellow developers, carpenters, electricians, roofers and inspectors in an iterative progress toward your unique design. It takes overcoming negative experiences, embracing your intrinsic value and purpose, and developing your skillset for contributing in life. Solid *Self-Alignment* is reflected in mindsets that are satisfying and clear. It is free from distortion and operates:

- 1 **Without Punishing.** Treat yourself kindly. Self-criticism and belittling labels undermine your functioning as a loved and loving person. Life-affirming self-talk doesn't mean you don't recognize and address problems, it means you are patient with yourself. Seek connections with those who offer feedback with honesty and empathy.
- 2 **Without Protecting.** People with shaky *Self-Alignment* are quick to react (defend, withdraw, attack) to avoid feeling shame. Practice responding vulnerably, without blaming or self-protecting. Express what you feel and desire. For example: "I feel upset when you raise your voice. I want to stay connected. Would you be willing to speak more softly?"
- 3 **Without Pushing.** People strong in *Self-Alignment* neither over-promote nor withhold their abilities. What strengths might you offer to others? Find a coach or mentor to help you identify how you can make your best and most natural contributions.
- 4 **Without Perfection.** *Self-Alignment* increases only as we make mistakes and adjust accordingly. When you fall short of your ideal, recognize what you can improve upon next time while avoiding self-alienating judgments like, "I'm a failure." Learn to celebrate and enjoy "what is," as you iterate toward "what will be." Alignment hinges less on getting everything right than on how you adapt when things go wrong.
- 5 **Without Performing.** Consciously choose the actions you take. Don't be tricked into allowing extrinsic rewards or a drive to impress prompt your actions. Operate out of a desire to contribute to life rather than out of internal or external coercion in the form of *should, must, have to, supposed to, can't, etc.*

Ultimately, *Self-Alignment* is you becoming the "home" of your dreams. Let attention to detail, dependable measurements and the true blueprints within your heart guide your process.

Self-Confidence

Definition: A sense of trust in one's overall abilities that leads to poised and secure behavior.

Confidence comes from the Latin word *fidere*, which means “to trust.” When we are self-confident, we believe that we can be successful in what we undertake. Having *Self-Confidence* does not mean we are unrealistic about ourselves or that we feel certain in all situations; but when a specific endeavor (e.g., public speaking, extreme skiing, passing an exam) stirs waves of doubt, we reach for courage. We move forward toward our goals — starting small, working through challenges, practicing and learning from mistakes — until courage crystallizes into confidence.

To be self-confident is to trust in yourself. Thus, to strengthen *Self-Confidence* is to become more “self-trust-worthy.” Only in gaining trust within, can we act and interact reliably. Beyond something with which we serve ourselves, confidence empowers us to give to others. True confidence — as opposed to the show people put on to mask insecurity — is a radical superpower.

Those Low in Self-Confidence:

Demonstrate quiet and unassuming behaviors as they doubt their overall ability to contribute.

Prefer to stay in their own comfort zone and avoid taking risks that could lead to failure.

Have trouble making decisions, worry about others’ opinions and view their resources as limited.

May exaggerate, posture or pretend to cover over insecurity.

Those High in Self-Confidence:

Believe in themselves and win the confidence of others.

Know how to fight and overcome self-doubt.

Are not easily swayed by someone else’s arguments.

Trust their ability to find the resources needed for success.

Can be so optimistic or assuming that they don’t make enough effort to truly succeed.

Like the roots supporting a tree, *Self-Confidence* will stabilize, protect and nourish your contributions in life. What outcomes do you want to realize? Discover the river of belief within yourself, and you’re halfway there. Winds of testing will come, but hold fast to that faith. There are things the world awaits that only you can bring about. Contribution flows from confidence.

Building Self-Confidence

Equipped with awareness, an inventory of your resources, and the guidance of solid blueprints, you are now ready to go to work on *Self-Confidence*. Below are a few strategies to help you get started.

- 1 **Embrace Vulnerability.** It may seem counterintuitive, but risk, fear, weakness and exposure make up the soil in which authentic confidence and the resultant fruit — our creativity, abilities and accomplishments — grow. You will need to call on courage to take action when you feel uncertain.
- 2 **Do What Scares You.** You'll never know what you're capable of until you learn to get out of your comfort zone. Begin by doing some small and simple tasks well, celebrating every little success. In time, stretch yourself with more significant challenges. As you lean into challenging experiences, distance yourself, at least mentally, from disheartening people, associating instead with those who believe in you and cheer you on. As you evaluate your progress, reject all toxic, self-defeating thoughts.
- 3 **Practice, Practice, Practice.** Just as trust builds on historical facts, *Self-Confidence* is rooted in the past. It draws on the evidence of what we have already heard, experienced or achieved. Repeating a skill over and over until you can perform without a second thought is key. With effective practice — consistent and focused on the areas that lie at the edge of your abilities — *Self-Confidence* increases like the “growth rings” of a tree.
- 4 **Fail Forward.** Failure is not fatal; and, in fact, it is almost always a prerequisite for success — as long as you don't (ironically) fail to learn from it. Failure is a part of your training. Expect to fail to gain *Self-Confidence*. Search for the positive side of your mistakes and setbacks. Be committed to persist — no matter what.
- 5 **See the “I'm possible.”** Visualize and “feel” your desired success in vivid detail. Make your own “brag sheet” — a list of all the reasons you can trust yourself and think about these things. These self-affirmations will help you focus on your strengths to combat doubt, fear and mind-games. Remember to be grateful for what already is. Gratitude fuels *Self-Confidence* with the hope you'll need to imagine possibilities.

Self-Blame

Definition: The drive to consider ourselves inferior or at fault, and thus undeserving or inadequate in relationship or work.

On occasion, and in small doses, *Self-Blame* may contribute as a step toward our well-being. It can be life-serving to seriously evaluate, identify and own things we need to do differently. Feelings of sadness, remorse or frustration can mobilize us to pursue responsible lifestyle changes or bring a degree of humility. These feelings are saying: “I myself am not behaving in harmony with my own needs.”

However, when we blame and belittle ourselves through the lens of angry self-judgment, “should haves,” or comparing, we are not free to learn or grow.

This type of *Self-Blame* is a self-destructive drive that diminishes our sense of fulfilled alignment. So long as we engage in reproachful self-blame, we’re in a double bind — both the bully and the victim. Feelings of self-anger, -threat, -hatred, shame or depression impact our spirits and bodies in a way that is not healthy, but “toxic.”

Sources of “Toxic” Self-Blame

Common, and often subconscious, contributors to toxic *Self-Blame* include:

Historical Models & Messages. If you had a caregiver who was quick to take responsibility or accept blame in all circumstances, you may have adopted this mental model. Or, maybe you internalized harmful (restrictive, rejecting) messages directed toward you. For example: “If you were more like your sister, I wouldn’t have to be so hard on you.”

Low Self-Concept. A deep sense of unworthiness may cloud your perception of your true identity. Both your power to attain perfection and your ability to control every outcome are limited. Do you blame yourself for falling short of an impossible standard? Or, do you suffer from self-condemnation because you are unable to find forgiveness for wrongs from your past?

Distorted Empathy. When seeing someone suffering, perhaps you internalize their feelings of pain as your own — possibly even as your fault. You may go to great lengths to rescue them. Meanwhile, your effort to help may both deplete you and enable the other individual.

“Perhaps the single most important life affirming human quality is the ability to feel love — to feel compassion and empathy for and express kindness, generosity and tenderness toward other people. Learning to love others requires first valuing oneself.” – Robert Firestone

Those Low in Self-Blame:

Evaluate and forgive themselves in a way that inspires learning and positive change

Tend toward self-respect and self-compassion rather than self-hatred, shame or guilt

Express with energy and directness as they seek creative ways to contribute to life

Could tend to shift blame to another or make unfounded excuses

Those High in Self-Blame:

Often demonstrate a modest and unassuming approach

Use judgments and comparisons to belittle themselves — both internally and in the eyes of others

Apologize in advance to pre-empt criticism or stay small to avoid attention

Are often inhibited in expression and creativity by negative self-talk

Checking Self-Blame

There are no definitive, quick cures for high *Self-Blame*. However, it is a common struggle, and you can move toward liberation by beginning with self-compassion. To move forward, you will need to become free from any ingrained, damaging experiences and identities from your past. No matter how you were raised and conditioned, patterns can be broken. Ask for help from experts and friends/family that you trust.

- 1 **Tune in.** Pay attention to what happens internally when something negative is said or occurs. In relating with your spouse, family or colleagues, do you allow destructive thoughts such as: “I am not ____” (adequate, smart, good)? How might you avoid making it about you? Are you speaking to yourself with less compassion than you extend to others? Be vigilant to identify judgmental self-talk.
- 2 **Align with Life.** Focus your thinking on what makes life fulfilling versus what diminishes you or others. Connect with your feelings and needs. To accept legitimate responsibility is not the same as automatically assuming the blame. Distinguish where your personal ownership does and does not lie. Become attentive to your thoughts and emotions to separate from counterfactual thinking and become the author of your own story.
- 3 **Check with Confidence.** Work to become free from the “at fault” default. Learn to verbally check in with people to ensure you are understanding their feelings and needs. For example, if someone snaps at you, you could respond, “Hey, I’m sensing you are angry. Are you feeling upset about ____ or is there something else going on?” Accept responsibility for your intentions rather than for the feelings of others.

Self-Restraint

Definition: To hold instinctive desires in check and refrain from giving full expression to them in conduct.

There are times when it is critical for us to refrain from spontaneity to direct our behavior in constructive ways. *Self-Restraint* gives us the ability to patiently put our urges on “lockdown.” But how useful is a lock without its matching key? In practicing *Self-Restraint*, it is important that we also maintain the freedom to fearlessly unleash words or actions for the good of others or ourselves.

Those who can moderate this skill understand when it is wise and appropriate to express, when it is best to wait, and how to redirect and rework thoughts and actions in a productive manner. They are typically resilient, self-disciplined and able to guide their behavior in socially acceptable ways.

How Restraint Differs From Discipline and Control I

If we liken our instinctive desires to a coursing river, then self-discipline is learning to channel the cascading water, while *Self-Restraint* is damming up the river’s misguided offshoots. And *Self-Control* is self-discipline exercised over a lengthy period.

For example: When your alarm rings at 4 a.m., self-discipline resolutely prods you sit up at your bedside in preparation for your morning run. When the temptation to crawl back in and sleep for another 10 minutes arises, *Self-Restraint* kicks in and says, “No!”, reminding you that training for this marathon meets your greater need for challenge, growth and freedom. *Self-Control* is when you have completed your morning runs every day for a month straight.

Those Low in Self-Restraint:

Tend toward unfettered actions and attitudes

Like to have fun, pursue exciting risks and be free of boundaries

Speak out if they feel something needs to be said

Can become easily bored or impatient when gratification is delayed

Can appear overly aggressive, uncompromising or insistent with others

Those High in Self-Restraint:

Keep their impulses and actions in check; avoid risk-taking

Are often diligent, reliable and peaceable

Decide and prioritize based on traditional values and perceived duties

Are more susceptible to overwork and burnout

May come across as unfriendly, inaccessible or passionless

Building Self-Restraint

Below are some strategies for strengthening *Self-Restraint*:

- 1 **Recognize.** When you sense a rise in the stream of your emotions, use your body to downshift: Connect with your breath. Suspend hasty judgments, think and understand your environment. What is tempting you away from your goal? Feelings are not facts. Identify the thinking and felt-needs behind your impulsive urges.
- 2 **Assess & Align.** Dig deep to understand what you genuinely want. Decide your ideal. Which steady mindsets and practices will take you in that direction? Does what you're about to do/say reflect who you want to be? Commit to behaviors that promote your long-term happiness, relationships and productivity.
- 3 **A Disciplined Response.** As you exercise and engage in a behavior aligned with your long-term goals, reward yourself, rest and persevere! Through practice, you can gain appropriate control — the freedom to consistently choose productive actions.

Checking Self-Restraint

While *Self-Restraint* is a skill that prevents us from indulging, it is possible for one to overindulge in *Self-Restraint*! If there are patterns of over-restraint in your behavior, these steps may help you to relax and recalibrate.

- 1 **Realize.** Over-restraint can bring about rigidity, exhaustion or serious stresses. Do you have a tendency to repress feelings and needs? Identify the fears, judgments and tyrannical standards with which you restrict or overthink your actions.
- 2 **Assess & Align.** What long-held belief, tradition or constraint could you update? Connect with a goal that will expand you — take you beyond where you are in reaching your desired self.
- 3 **A Confident Response.** What might you do in the next 24 hours as a step toward relinquishing control? Could you change up your routine? How might you “unplan” some time or open yourself up relationally? “Plan” some spontaneous smiles, as a pleasant demeanor will invite others to you.

A healthy balance of *Self-Restraint* lies at the foundation of one's ability to impact this world. Too little, and that impact could leave lasting scars. Too much, and the riches you bear remain hidden from those who most need it. Calibrating this skill is often the first step to mastering your future.

Stress Tolerance

Definition: To endure pressure or uncertainty without becoming negative (e.g. hopeless, bitter or hostile) toward ourselves or others.

People use the word “stressed” to describe their reaction to a wide range of situations — from getting caught in traffic, to changing jobs, to the loss of a loved one. *Stress Tolerance* is the ability to withstand life’s pressures.

When we feel stressed by something, our bodies react by releasing “fight or flight” hormones, such as adrenaline, into our blood to produce more strength, energy or focus. This can be a good thing if the stress is caused by physical danger. But this can be harmful if it is an ongoing response to something emotional, and there is no outlet for this extra energy and strength.

Like diamonds and other strong material bodies, humans high in *Stress Tolerance* are able to endure the forces of life’s constant wear. But whatever our *Stress Tolerance* level, we must be vigilant to manage stress through regular times of rest and unload. Small, steady stresses can accumulate slowly and go unnoticed until the point of sudden overload.

A build-up of stress, not to mention the shock of a sudden blow, is dangerous to health and can ultimately cause us to shatter. Much will depend upon how we manage stress and incorporate our final imperative — *Resiliency*.

Those Low in Stress Tolerance:

Look for potential problems and are not overconfident
Become easily overwhelmed
Avoid new endeavors, sensing they lack needed strengths and resources
Tend toward self-criticism, negative thinking, perfectionism or very quickly giving up

Those High in Stress Tolerance:

Withstand, and may even thrive in, high-pressure situations
Cope well with fluctuating emotions
Can wrestle through challenging problems or strengthen others in times of uncertainty
May overstress firm resolve or resilience at the expense of sufficient rest, resulting in breakdown

Building Stress Tolerance through Stress Management

We can only tolerate stress as far as we manage it. Sustained pressure requires offsetting times of decompression. The workplace resounds, “Do more with less,” but paradoxically, sufficient “less” enables us to do more. There are many relaxation techniques.

Here are two with a history of success:

- 1 **Visualization:** Visualization forces you to clear your mind of the many thoughts you are juggling. You can then replace those thoughts with ones that are purposefully calming and relaxing.
 - a.) Sit or lie down comfortably and close your eyes.
 - b.) Think about a place you find relaxing, preferably one you have been to before. Perhaps a quiet forest, a mountain overlook, a beach or even your bedroom.
 - c.) With your eyes still closed, clearly imagine yourself entering this place.
 - d.) Use your senses to see, hear, smell and feel the surrounding details.
 - e.) Picture yourself finding a comfortable spot and unwinding in this place.
 - f.) Stay here until you feel calm and relaxed.
- 2 **Progressive Relaxation:** Focus on each muscle group in your body, one at a time, tensing and relaxing them. It may seem strange to tense your muscles while trying to relax, but doing so allows you to relax more deeply.
 - a.) Sit or lie down in a comfortable position, closing your eyes.
 - b.) Starting with your toes, tense them tightly by curling them under and holding for five seconds. Then, relax them.
 - c.) Repeat this process with your feet, ankles, calves, thighs, core, hips, lower/upper back, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, neck and face.
 - d.) Pay close attention to how each muscle group feels after tensing it.
 - e.) Finish by tensing your entire body at once, holding for five seconds, and releasing.

Not all stress is bad — in healthy amounts, it helps us become stronger and learn future coping mechanisms.

Resiliency

Definition: To recover positively toward self and others; to rebound after a setback, difficulty or unexpected change.

Strength alone cannot withstand sudden, crushing or prolonged pressure. We also need *Resiliency*. Resilience is the restoring force by which a body regains its original shape and size. *Resiliency* is *Stress Tolerance* fortified with flexibility. It is the “toughness” property that allows a material body to recover from shocks and vibrations. For example, titanium, which some consider “the most useful strong metal,” is wondrously strong and springy. It is softer than steel, harder than aluminum and tougher than almost anything.

As with titanium, humans high in Resiliency are tough and thus high in their capacity to perform. They operate with an “expectant” mindset that is firm, but flexible. There is a vast difference between expectation and expectancy. Expectation is fixed on our presumed what, when and how ideas. And when our expectations are not met exactly as foreseen, this mental model leaves us disillusioned, frustrated and disappointed.

In contrast, expectancy says, “I don’t know what the outcome will be, but I will believe and work toward something good.” It is open-ended with the exact terms of how goodness will happen. Expectancy does not disappoint. Martin Luther King Jr. said it well, “We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.” Practices like reframing, prayer, meditation and relating with encouraging people expand us with expectancy, ongoing joy, peace and gratitude.

Those Low in Resiliency:

Often think about what might go wrong so they can plan and take precautions

Prefer a work environment of predictability because new ideas and challenges produce skepticism and stress

Are prone to negative thinking, losing motivation or becoming stuck after a setback

“Internalize” or “externalize” adversity — i.e. paralysis (freeze), protest (fight), or withdraw in fear (flight)

Those High in Resiliency:

Maintain (or regain) functionality and vitality despite trouble or setback

Effectively combine strength and adaptability See difficulty as “opportunity” and failure as “growth”

Assume their personal best is yet to come and don’t get stuck in disappointment

May exaggerate the positive and lose touch with what is realistic

Building Resiliency

A proven technique for building *Resiliency* is reframing. Reframing is intentionally wrapping a new narrative around an upsetting event. We can enhance the way we think and feel about difficulties by taking a realistic and positive perspective. Here are five steps with examples to get you started:

- 1 **Identify your challenging situation or event.** (For example, *"I worked long hours preparing for the interview only to learn that I've been rejected for the position."*)
- 2 **Observe your thinking about the situation.** (For example, *"I should have been chosen for this job. I was prepared for every question; they rejected me because they saw there is something wrong with me. I'm a bad husband and father. My wife will surely lose trust in me."*)
- 3 **Identify the potential consequences of your thoughts, including their related feelings and actions.** (For example, *"I feel worried, ashamed and am telling myself to just give up. I've started withdrawing from my family, avoiding serious conversations."*)
- 4 **Objectively decide which of your views or expectations are false/rigid.** (For example, *"The diminishing of my professional and personal value is false self-deprecation. Expecting my wife will lose trust in me because I didn't get this job is unfounded."*)
- 5 **Reframe your situation with more hopeful, realistic thoughts.** (For example, *"To date, my family has always been provided for. A better fitting job opening might be just around the corner. I didn't get that job, but I will do my best next time around and make the time I have at home count. My wife and kids adore me unconditionally, as do my friends."*)

Resiliency is open-minded expectancy of good outcomes. It tempers rigid expectations of what, when or how they will happen. Both firm and flexible, those high in *Resiliency* are tough like titanium, with great capacity to perform.

"I'm excited that IRIS is giving me more robust and nuanced language to describe intended outputs of the leadership development and coaching work I do. As a leader with direct reports and organizational influence, I feel more motivated to understand what motivates those I work with, and to discover how I can provide more opportunities to help shore up 'The Imperatives' in those I care about and am responsible for."

- Roy Dockery, Swisslog

"We now know longer, better matches on both job-fit and worksite-fit for our coachees. The IRIS platform helps us immediately start individualized coaching so we can make a more meaningful impact from day one."

- Kathy Hardy, YUPRO

"IRIS is a critical tool for understanding our high-risk student population. The IRIS platform enables us to create robust and actionable student profiles marrying academic data and emotional growth data. Our staff uses the data to fuel relevant and meaningful conversations with students, which strengthens that relationship."

- Interim Assistant Executive Director, GOAL Academy

"IRIS allows us to identify job-ready candidates using a strengths-based approach that is positive and, at the same time, identifies areas for growth that are crucial for our candidates to succeed."

- Dan Kaskubar, Spur Coaching

