

# Emotional resilience

## KEY WORDS

- » Difficult conversations
- » Emotional intelligence
- » Emotional literacy
- » Emotional resilience
- » Reflection

In the previous papers we explored what emotional intelligence (EI) and examined how it can help to make managers more aware about the impact they have on others around them. We came to the understanding that it is not about the overt display of emotions, but rather gaining an understanding of how emotions affect the way we act as a manager and how the team act around us. We also explored strategies for becoming emotionally literate, such as honesty and active listening, and using this literacy in our interaction with others. In this paper, we will define emotional resilience (ER). We will consider some of the strategies and tools needed to develop ER as well as discussing some of its benefits to the manager as well as the person away from work.

Being a manager carries an emotional burden as he or she is most often likely the person team members go to when they need to talk through issues about their personal or professional lives that are emotionally loaded. As the team's figurehead, a manager receives queries, comments and complaints from internal and external sources about each team member. Managers are also expected to lead change and set goals and the vision for the team.

As well as having the emotional literacy that comes with EI, the manager also needs to be able to shoulder what is a large emotional burden and still function as a manager and a person in day-to-day life. One of the key strategies in the armoury of the manager is ER; that is the ability to cope with the stresses and strains of management and day-to-day life without the strain being obvious to those working with you.

## DEFINING EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

The ability to manage stress, however, comes with the key feature of ER. This may not be just about managing your own stresses and strains, but also the stresses and strains of your peers, your team, your patients and their friends and family.

The acid test of resilient managers is their ability to enter highly charged situations and manage them, without appearing to lose control. We saw that EI 'is the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's

emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically' (Ellis, 2017b); ER is the ability to exercise EI time and time again, without it affecting how you behave. In this respect, ER is about being responsive to situations you find yourself in as a manager.

The emotionally resilient manager will also have the capacity and capability to push through things that are challenging. Being proactive about change and not backing away from necessary confrontation are key features of ER.

That said, managers need to be able to set the tone in the management of stress and find ways to ensure that they leave work stresses at work rather than allowing them to impinge on their day-to-day lives (Ellis, 2017a). As Templar (2005) suggests, work has a context and we should never let it overwhelm us or make us unwell. Emotionally resilient leaders understand the intrinsic value of work and why it is important, but they also recognise the importance of their health and take steps to safeguard it.

ER is therefore an amalgam of various things:

- » The ability to understand and use the language of emotion in the workplace (EI)
- » Good problem solving skills
- » Courage to face difficult tasks and conversations
- » Proactive management of personal stress
- » A good work-life balance
- » Optimism
- » The ability to reflect.

## REFERENCES

- Beddoe L, Adamson C, Davys A (2013) Educating resilient practitioners. *Social Work Education* 32(1) 100–17
- Ellis P (2017a) The impact of stress on the team and how to manage it. *Wounds UK* 13(1) 54–6
- Ellis P (2017b) What emotional intelligence is and is not. *Wounds UK* 13(3) 62–3
- Ellis P (2017c) Learning emotional intelligence and what it can do for you. *Wounds UK* 13(4) 66–8
- Grant L, Kinman G (2012) Enhancing wellbeing in social work students: building resilience in the next generation. *Social Work Education: The International Journal* 31(5) 605–21
- Johnson J, Louch G, Dunning A et al (2017) Burnout mediates the association between depression and patient safety perceptions: a cross-sectional study in hospital nurses. *J Adv Nurs* 73(7) 1667–80
- McCabe C, Timmins F (2006) How nurse managers let down staff. *Nursing Management* 13(3) 30–5
- Rogers C (1975) Empathetic: an unappreciated way of being. *The Counselling Psychologist* 5: 2–10
- Templar R (2005) *The Rules of Management*. Pearson Education, Harlow
- Wiegand DL, Funk M (2012) Consequences of clinical situations that cause critical care nurses to experience moral distress. *Nurs Ethics* 19(4) 479–87
- Zuzelo PR (2007) Exploring the moral distress of registered nurses. *Nurs Ethics* 14(3): 344–59
- Of great importance at this point is the suggestion from many commentators that ER, like EI, can be grown and developed and is not just an innate capability (Beddoe et al, 2013). The challenge for the health care manager is therefore to engage with the strategies to grow and develop ER.
- The emotionally resilient manager needs to learn to exercise ER at all times. As with almost all aspects of being a leader or manager, ER cannot and should not be turned on and off to suit individual circumstances. The team need to know how the manager will behave in any given circumstance, that the reception from the leader will be consistent and supportive. The strategies used to ensure the self-protection of the manager are strategies for daily use; good work-life balance, optimism, reflectivity etc.
- WHAT EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE IS NOT**
- ER is not the ability to ignore or dismiss the emotional responses one has to a situation, nor indeed the emotional responses of others; it is the ability to put these responses in some sort of context.
- Grant and Kinman (2012) point out ER is not about becoming overly emotionally involved or distressed but it is about developing ‘accurate empathy’. Rogers (1975) coined the phrase accurate empathy to mean the ability to see another person’s point of view without becoming lost in their view of the world.
- Emotional resilience should also not be used as a weapon to overwhelm others (McCabe and Timmins, 2006). The ethically active manager understands the difference between being destructive towards others (not what ER is about) and how to act assertively in ethical and morally testing situations (Zuzelo, 2007).
- Therefore, what ER is not, is a weapon to use at the expense of others to brow beat or overwhelm other people just because the manager is more resilient or understands how to use other people’s emotional responses to situations to their own advantage.
- DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE**
- There are many facets to being emotionally resilient each of which requires developing, maintaining and growing. There are many things the manager can engage in in order to grow their ER. These include:
- ▶ Exercise some self-mastery: learn to accept and understand yourself and what makes you tick, turning challenges into opportunities. Engage in self-reflection and use your experiences to enable you to grow and develop
  - ▶ Reflect and learn with others: use one-to-one time and supervision to explore the meaning of events and what you and the team can take from each day
  - ▶ Finish jobs, especially ones that are difficult; this will increase your self-belief and demonstrate to others how resilient you are
  - ▶ Grow your emotional intelligence (Ellis, 2017c)
  - ▶ Learn to rely on yourself and your instincts
  - ▶ Keep an eye on reality, work is not the be all and end all and some perspective on challenging situations enables the manager to grow
  - ▶ Find your supporters and develop your coping strategies and try to retain a good sense of humour.
- BENEFITS OF EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE**
- Stress is a day-to-day reality of the modern health care setting; anxiety, mood swings even depression are among its signs and symptoms (Wiegand and Funk, 2012). There is some evidence to suggest that stress and burnout may have an impact on patient safety and are therefore worth addressing not just for the manager’s sake, but for the sake of patients as well (Johnson et al, 2017).
- Growing ER will help managers in preventing stress and burn out. Managers who are engaged with EI and ER will have more reserve when times are tough and will be able to retain their optimism and steer the team through change and growth.
- Developing ER will enable the manager to face head on some of the situations that they find challenging; while the challenge remains it will be more manageable. Staff will be able to trust the emotionally resilient manager more as they will always know how the manager will behave and that their optimism is infectious.
- On the positive side developing ER allows the manager to grow as much as a person as it does as a manager. The development of self-confidence and self-worth translate well over into a life where the needs of family and of work are well balanced.
- CONCLUSIONS**
- ER is integral to both survival as a manager or leader in health care as well as being a great tool for self-development. The emotionally literate manager who develops ER will take this learning in to their day-to-day life and will see the benefits there as well. **WUK**