

# It's About Time



## When the Going Gets Tough, Does Your Workforce Have the Resilience to Keep Going?

Ask any employee or manager. A work environment of fast pace, chronic pressure and high performance demands is widely acknowledged as the “new normal.” So much so that statistics like the following are almost commonplace:

- 80% of American workers say they have experienced stress-related problems;<sup>1</sup>
- 36% of employees say the stress they feel affects their health;<sup>2</sup>
- 54% of employees say they frequently feel physically or emotionally drained at the end of the workday.<sup>3</sup>

But the documented costs of stress are far from commonplace. One million workers are out with stress-related illness every day, costing American employers about \$300 billion per year.<sup>4</sup> Stress impairs performance and exemplifies itself in burnout, work-life conflict, reduced customer service, lowered morale, and higher medical and disability costs.

The combination of a continually changing workplace, a relentless business need for high performance, and growing concern about the costs of stress is causing many business leaders to focus on the need for a resilient workforce. Research in companies such as Dell, Johnson & Johnson, Dow Chemical, Motorola, 3M and GlaxoSmithKline find that resilience transforms the stress-illness relationship and enables employees to remain productive and healthy in pressured and demanding situations.

A new national study, conducted by WFD Consulting in collaboration with Opinion Research Corporation, finds that resilient employees report less stress and burnout. (See graph.)

### What is Resilience—and Where Do You Get It?

Originally described as an ability to bounce back or recover from adversity, resilience is assuming a broader definition in the workplace. “We can recognize resilient employees by two characteristics,” says Amy Richman, senior consultant and researcher at WFD Consulting. “Resilient workers feel confident that they can manage the pressures of their work and that they can maintain job performance during times of change.”

*WFD's expertise in creating more effective workplaces has helped hundreds of companies both in the U.S. and internationally become more profitable by increasing employee commitment and retention.*

*Through its People Strategy consulting practice, WFD enables companies to develop work environments that build organizational resilience.*



### About IAT

IAT is a quarterly research brief from WFD Consulting on important workplace issues. Electronic subscriptions to this brief are available.

<sup>1</sup> Gallup 2000.  
<sup>2</sup> WFD database representing over 750,000 employees from more than 25 leading companies/organizations.  
<sup>3</sup> WFD database.  
<sup>4</sup> American Institute of Stress.

Based on WFD's national survey of 1211 full-time U.S. employees conducted during April 2004 in collaboration with Opinion Research Corporation.

Whereas resilience was once thought to be an inborn personality trait, it is now clear that resilience can be learned and that it has strong organizational components. "Our research shows that organizational factors nurture and sustain resilient attitudes and behaviors in individuals," says Richman. "So while it's important to promote individual resilience, you can't ignore the importance of organizational actions and interventions in teaching and supporting resilience."

WFD's national research finds that the organizational drivers of resilience include giving people flexibility and some measure of control over their work, offering access to training and development, fostering work-life integration, and providing effective managers.

### Managing for Resilience

Given the importance of resilience for sustaining high performance, it is good news that resilience can be learned and that organizations can teach it. But they can also squelch it. "When it comes right down to it, every organization and manager is either building resilience or killing it," observes senior consultant Karen Noble, who works with managers to build resilience in work teams. "Even the most resilient, optimistic person will be worn down by ineffective manage-

ment practices. But if managers understand how to foster resilience, they can help their teams manage change and pressure more effectively."

Skeptics may ask, "Isn't a focus on building resilience just a way for employers to squeeze more out of workers?" To the contrary, there is some evidence that resilient employees may be more likely to question excessive workloads. Creating manageable workloads is one of the organizational factors that research shows is important for promoting individual resilience. The benefits of creating supportive environments and learning resilience go beyond just surviving turbulent times. In fact, research has shown that employees and businesses are better able to thrive.

Karen Noble summarizes the win-win case for resilience and notes why resilience is likely to get increased attention in the coming years. "A resilient workforce gives business the nimbleness and staying power required to keep up with the speed of change. But resilience also benefits individuals. The sense of well-being and confidence that comes from knowing we can manage the pressure of our daily lives enables resilient people to realize their full potential and reach their personal goals."

## Meet The Experts



### Amy Richman

Amy Richman is Director of the Resilience Practice at WFD Consulting. She has more than twenty

years of experience in workplace consulting and research. A principal contributor to WFD's groundbreaking investigation of the drivers of commitment and resilience, she is a resource for companies that want to understand and apply research on burnout, turnover intention, workplace supports, and workload management. In addition to working with many leading companies in the U.S., Ms. Richman's work includes studies in several countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America.



### Karen Noble

Karen Noble is Director of the Everywhere Workplace Practice at WFD Consulting. For over 25 years she has

consulted in human behavior and organizational change with a consistent focus on optimizing individual performance. At WFD, Ms. Noble consults internationally to senior management teams, coaches executives regarding strategies to enhance employee resilience and commitment, and facilitates work redesign processes to enable intact work groups to enhance their business outcomes and personal work-life effectiveness

### Indicators that your company needs to manage for resilience...

Employee survey results find significant levels of burnout and concern about workload

Managers feel increased pressure for delivery

Company is driving for rapid growth

Company is going through transitional or challenging times

"Work-life" issues are not understood at the manager and line levels

Find out where your company stands in terms of promoting resilience

Visit the WFD website and complete the Organizational Resilience Scorecard

Learn more about managing for resilience and the research on resilience, stress and performance

Contact Amy Richman or Karen Noble at 1.800.447.0543

**wfd**  
CONSULTING

### Contact Us.

200 Talcott Avenue West  
Watertown, MA 02472  
ph: 617-673-3100  
fax: 617-926-6443

[www.wfd.com](http://www.wfd.com)

[Its\\_about\\_time@wfd.com](mailto:Its_about_time@wfd.com)