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LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 120: MARGARET LIPTAY - RESILIENCE

Ken White

From the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, this is Leadership & Business. The podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host Ken White. Thanks for listening. Well, we've all been there at various points in life. Everyone faces a major problem or tragedy, a life-threatening illness, a significant other dies, or a job is eliminated. Whatever the specifics, it's next to impossible to go through life without facing major setbacks or trauma. Dealing with that requires resilience. Margaret Liptay is a certified leadership coach. She partners with leaders, CEOs, and executives to help them become more effective in their roles in a quality necessary for success is resilience. She joins us on the podcast today to discuss resilience, why it's important, and how you can become more resilient in your work and professional lives. Here's our conversation with leadership coach Margaret Liptay.

Ken White

Margaret, it's been a while since you've been on the podcast. It's great to have you back. Thanks for joining us.

Margaret Liptay

Thank you, Ken. It's great to be here as always. It's a joy.

Ken White

You know I thought I would start off with something I was thinking about as I was actually walking downstairs to meet you. Years ago, I was offered a position, and they said you just have to meet the chairman of the board just for a meet and greet, and then we're done, and I said fine and met the chairman, and he looked at me, so I have one question. Tell me about a time when you were fired, and I hadn't been fired, and I said I don't have anything for you. I've not been fired at least not yet. Then he said that's disappointing. I said, why is it disappointing? He goes, I want to see how resilient you are. And I never even. That never occurred to me. And resilience was so important to him. He wanted to make sure if you're going to be on this team, a leader on this team, you better know how

to bounce back. Resilience might be something we might not think about that much, but it's important, isn't it?

Margaret Liptay

Absolutely. It's important to everyone. It's important to leaders. It's important to those who are being led. It's important to shareholders. It's important to anybody that you do business with. And it's really important on a colleague to colleague situation.

Ken White

How do you define resilience when you think of that? What are some of the words that come in mind?

Margaret Liptay

Well, let me give you a textbook definition.

Ken White

Ah, yeah.

Margaret Liptay

And then I'm going to put the Margaret Liptay spin on it. How does that work?

Ken White

That's great. Yeah.

Margaret Liptay

Okay. In a textbook word. Here it goes. Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant forces of stress. For example, family problems, relationship problems, serious health issues, workplace challenges, disappointments, and financial stressors. Resilience means bouncing back and moving forward through difficult experiences. So I look at resilience. There's two points I look at resilience as resilience allows you to change your relationship with what's happened. You don't deny what's happened, but you don't let the memory of what has happened take total control over you. And I just saw a quote recently which to me encapsulated resilience. And I'd like to share it with you.

Ken White

Yeah, please.

Margaret Liptay

The quote is life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning how to dance in the rain. It's by a woman by the name of Vivian Green. And the more I think about resilience, can you ask me what my point of view is on it. I think that sums it up. Resilience gives us the ability to change the story around what's happened. We have to face it realistically and move on. But it gives us the ability to see it in another way. And it gives us the ability to stand in that storm, work through that storm, being that storm, but yet dance in the rain.

Ken White

That's great.

Margaret Liptay

And I just love the concept of that because the storm doesn't always pass immediately. A storm, you know,

Ken White

Yeah.

Margaret Liptay

we talk about it as a memory. You know resilience, you need to you know change your relationship to the memory, but sometimes that memory sticks with you. That's the way our brains work.

Ken White

Yeah.

Margaret Liptay

You know our brains are active all the time, and things are bouncing around in there all the time. So you really need to accept your reality. And then I love the idea of dancing in the rain.

Ken White

Yeah.

Margaret Liptay

And make something about it work for you.

Ken White

So some people are good at it. Some people aren't. Are we born with resilience?

Margaret Liptay

No, we are not born with resilience, but the beauty of resilience is we can learn it, we can be taught it, we can recapture it if it gets temporarily lost, and we can pivot around it. And let's just use the example of a baby because actually resilience starts thriving within us early on. But the problem with resilience is that you don't really know you have it until you need it. So you start having it when you're actually a child. Think of a baby. A baby is walking across the room. Maybe it's only going six feet, and there's someone on the other side saying come on honey come on. And so that baby gets targeted on where it's going, and it sees that something unconditional is waiting for it on the other side. And so it starts to move forward. It falls down, and then you say get up, get up, you encourage it and get up, and the baby gets up and continues on. Well, the reason the baby continues on is because again, there's some focus there's something waiting for it at the other side; it knows it's not alone. But the baby isn't saying gee I have resilience. So you really start having resilience and understanding resilience and learning resilience at a very young age. And so what's really important from the time your very little is to start learning about resilience, and what it is, and how you can grow that muscle more all the time because let's face it it won't be as easy as just having your mom six feet away from you in life.

Ken White

Right. Right.

Margaret Liptay

It's going to get trickier.

Ken White

Yeah, I mean, if you live, you're going to run into something. I mean, that's life right. And so you've got to deal with it. But how can people improve? What can you do to build it? Once you're a professional and an adult.

Margaret Liptay

Well, there's a lot of things. One of the things that seems to me to be so clear and yet we don't do it. The brain is active all the time. Even when we're sleeping, the brain is active. So the brain is in motion all the time. So what's a requirement to really build your resilient resilience is to get some rest. If you don't get rest, your brain gets foggy; it gets fatigued just like the rest of you. What happens when your brain gets fatigued? Everything goes haywire, and it's been proven there's research around this that if you multitask from 60 to 90 minutes straight, your brain does get fatigued, and therefore, you get brain fog. When you have brain fog, what happens. You make mistakes; you're not resilient; you don't bounce back. You have emotional hijacks. You make silly errors things that should be relevant, lose their perspective. And so you spend more time on irrelevant things than relevant things.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Margaret Liptay

Operating around managing your brain's rest is really important. Staying calm is very important. Putting down technology walking away from the digital world for a while is really important because that stimuli coming at your brain all the time. Go outside, take a walk, watch a bird, look at the flowers, just be for a minute, just be, and focus on one thing.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Margaret Liptay

In addition, in terms of how do you build your resilience, you've got to do something that gives you purpose sometimes even beyond your work. Work should not be your sole purpose for living. I don't think it is most people's sole purpose for living, so you have to find a purpose beyond yourself and beyond your work that'll build your resilience. Also, you have to have courage to do new things, to be vulnerable, to go into your boss and say I'd like to try something new, give me a new opportunity, I'm willing I'm able I want to do it and then if you fail so be it. Failure is the greatest teacher in the world. But that'll build your resilience so that next time if something goes awry or you're in a position that isn't the right fit for you, you won't feel so discouraged, you won't get paralyzed, you won't get stuck in the storm.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Margaret Liptay

You'll just say okay I'm going to dance in the rain and move on. So those are just a few things

Ken White

Yeah.

Margaret Liptay

That that whole concept of refreshing your brain as you refresh your body is very, very important to building your resistance.

Ken White

We'll continue our discussion with Margaret Liptay in just a minute. Our podcast is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at William & Mary's School of Business. Are you investing enough time in advancing your career? If it's time to grow your business acumen or revitalize some outdated skills. The Center for Corporate Education has the program for you. The Certificate in Business Management. It's a five-day program that includes the essential topics found in our highly ranked MBA program, and it's taught by our MBA faculty. The faculty ranked number one in the nation by Bloomberg Businessweek. It's designed for professionals seeking key concepts and tools that will enhance your career. A full day is devoted to each topic communication, accounting for managers, business strategy, operational effectiveness, and leadership. The program takes place October 21st through October 25th. To learn more about the Certificate in Business Management program, visit our website at wmleadership.com. Now back to our conversation on resilience with leadership coach Margaret Liptay.

Ken White

There was an interesting piece in the most recent issue of Harvard Business Review regarding how people should react when a colleague is facing a tragedy, and they're trying to be resilient. In fact, the article is called when a colleague is grieving how to provide the right kind of support, and it explained what a leader should do. A colleague should do what direct reports should do, and basically, the bottom line was be supportive. So when you see somebody dealing with a trauma or a tragedy in the workplace, be supportive. What are some effective tactics you've seen that people embrace when a colleague or a boss is in distress at work?

Margaret Liptay

Well, I can tell you a few things that I wouldn't do, and I'll give you a funny example. So in my own life, when I was coming along in my career, I was approached about moving out of a position that I was in that I absolutely loved it and asked to take on another position that was a brand new created role, brand new in so many ways. And they said we think you'll be great for this job. But of course, because I was young and not quite as experienced, I started perseverating and awfulizing about they're trying to take me out of my current job. Now they're putting me in this other job. Oh, my goodness. You know I was having a real pity party, I felt down. I accepted the other job, but I felt I was you know leaving my people and a friend of mine called and she said Margaret I heard about what's going on with you, and I feel awful. I just feel so awful for you. And I said Jean, why do you feel so awful. And she said well they didn't invite me to take on your job. And so I feel awful. So what I'm getting at there, is there are people around you who will lack self-awareness. And so what you really need to do in situations where you're highly stressed, you have a tragedy, you have a challenge, is surround yourself with real people, real

friends. People who are interested in you are unconditional about you, like the little baby, you know.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Margaret Liptay

People who are interested in where you're going and where you're headed. And that's I think that's a key that relationship building that connection with other people. And don't say to somebody, oh, I feel your pain. Oh, I've had a similar experience. In fact, I've had the exact same experience. That's not always comforting.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Margaret Liptay

What's more comforting is a hug or just someone to sit next to you.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Margaret Liptay

And just say, how are you doing?

Ken White

Yeah.

Margaret Liptay

That's more comforting. The less said, the better. But knowing that there is someone there. I mean, when was the last time you got a hug from your cell phone? Never, so to know that there's a real person there who's not telling you about them but is really there for you is a very important part of building resilience around any kind of tragedy or disappointment.

Ken White

Leaders. Why is it critical for them to be resilient?

Margaret Liptay

Well, getting back to what we said earlier. Think about it. If a leader is not resilient, they get brain fog. They are in a state of disarray. They are not operating in a leadership capacity. They perhaps get emotionally hijacked, so they abuse themselves. They abuse their staff; they abuse the people around them. They say things they shouldn't. They do things they shouldn't. They make bad decisions. So everything I mentioned before about young professionals coming along applies to leaders. They need to sort of detox from technology. They need to take a time out. They need to rest their brains because the more that they do not do that the more chaos organizationally that they can create. The good news and bad news about emotions is that they're contagious. So if your leader is you know out of whack and is not operating in a leadership capacity because of stress because of their own personal issues that impacts everybody that impacts the staff that impacts people's reactions that impacts your retention that impacts the culture of the company. So it is so critical for leaders to take all the same advice you know and being a leader. That's one of the loneliest positions in the world.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Margaret Liptay

The higher up you get, the fewer people you can trust.

Ken White

Sure.

Margaret Liptay

The fewer people that want to come visit you frankly. So, as a result, you really need to have those real solid relationships. You need to do the same things that everyone else does. They need to find something bigger than themselves. They need to get outside of themselves. They need to find some something that's other; that does not cause the fatigue that is wearing them down.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Margaret Liptay

And we've all been there.

Ken White

Sure.

Margaret Liptay

And we know how it impacts our ability to make decisions.

Ken White

Yeah absolutely. You mentioned courage a little while ago. What's the link between courage and resilience, or is there a link?

Margaret Liptay

There's I think there's a very direct link. Courage is like a muscle. So the more you try to do things that require courage. I think the more it helps your resilience. So to me, courage is not ignoring fear. It's accepting fear. So to do a podcast that's a little fearful for me. So I accept it. I love it. I want to do it. I enjoyed partnering with you. So what you've got to do was overcome fear. And how do you overcome fear through your courage? And it's a muscle much like resilience. If you don't keep doing things that you're fearful of, then you will never overcome that fear so that you can move forward. So, for example, a colleague of mine once said when we were going through a big merger and acquisition. She said I'm just going to stay below the radar. I'm going to stay out of everybody's way. And I said boy I'm taking a different tactic. I'm going to go meet every new executive we have, and I'm going to find out what this new organization offers.

Ken White

Hmm-mmm.

Margaret Liptay

Those were two different things. She was afraid.

Ken White

Right.

Margaret Liptay

Her fear paralyzed her. I was not afraid, or I was kind of, but I said, what the heck. What do I have to lose? So on you go. So that's where there is a very distinct relationship between being courageous and using that courage to sort of motivate your resilience. And I think the more resilient you are; the more courageous you are because you're not afraid to fail.

Ken White

Do we really have a choice? Don't we have to be resilient? What's the alternative?

Margaret Liptay

That's a really good question. And sometimes in spite of the fact that you have to be resilient for one reason or another, you don't have it either it's too soon after a tragedy or too soon after a trauma, and you're not healing, and maybe you need additional help. Sometimes you're alone. You don't have those resonant wonderful real relationships. Sometimes your brain is in a fog, and you can't get it out of there. Sometimes you're awfulizing and catastrophizing and perseverating, and it's the same thing over and over again. You're digging yourself deeper and deeper. There's many reasons why we get stuck. What you have to understand, or hopefully, a loved one around you will recognize that you're stuck and over time. And the thing about resilience sometimes it comes incrementally not exponentially. So if you get a little bit at a time, you get some movement forward, or you can move out of that memory, or you can move forward and maybe put one shoe on to go dance in the rain, not both shoes on. Little by little, you'll get there. But I think what happens is sometimes your expectations for yourself doom you to failure, and therefore, the message here is that you have to start working on resilience at a very early stage in your life and your parents with young children. And then, from there, everyone has to work on their own resilience so that they can when that tragedy comes and it will. And when that awful thing happens that there are tools that you have inside of you to move forward.

Ken White

That's our conversation with certified leadership coach Margaret Liptay, and that's our podcast for this week. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the William & Mary School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education can help you get to the next level with business and leadership development programs taught by the William & Mary MBA faculty. The faculty ranked number one in the nation by Bloomberg Businessweek. If you're interested in learning more, please visit our website at wmleadership.com. Finally, we'd love to hear from you regarding the podcast. We invite you to share your ideas, questions, and thoughts with us by emailing us at podcast@wm.edu. Thanks to our guest Margaret Liptay. Thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Till next time have a safe, happy, and productive week.