

## Skills and Techniques

### *Mindfulness in applied psychology: Building resilience in coaching (Anthony Schwartz)*

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Mindfulness seems to be everywhere these days. A staggering number of books are published every year, and in the business world more and more organisations are introducing mindfulness training. As for the coaching profession, recent surveys suggest that a growing number of executive coaches apply mindfulness techniques with individuals and teams. Having applied mindfulness in organisations for 20 years Anthony Schwartz discusses the benefits of using mindfulness approaches to enhance resilience of modern employees.

#### **Resilience in the workplace**

It should not come as a surprise that psychological flexibility and resilience make employees more adaptive to change, improving their capacity to deal with stressful situations. In fact, studies conducted across industries show that individual resilience is a good predictor of job performance, job satisfaction and wellbeing. Building resilience can therefore only be a win-win for employees and employers alike.

#### **But what exactly is resilience?**

Many definitions have been provided over the years; Schwartz joins the growing number of researchers arguing that resilience is not a trait, rather than 'something that can be learnt and developed'. Looking at resilience as a process highlights personal agency in adapting and growing through adverse events. It also explains how personal, interpersonal and environmental factors interact with each other to either hinder or encourage resilience.

#### **How can mindfulness make employees more resilient?**

Mindfulness has been primarily used in organisations as a stress reduction intervention. Developing an ability to stand back and reflect before engaging can be critical under pressure and when dealing with conflict at work. Schwartz acknowledges that mindfulness alone cannot increase resilience, however it can impact on emotional regulation, and in-the moment awareness alongside situational factors and individual qualities.

#### **What can executive coaches learn from this?**

More often than not executive coaches are called upon to address work related problems at a variety of levels to increase productivity and effectiveness in organisations. Developing coachees' resilience through mindfulness allows them to re-appraise situations compromise, and consider other perspectives. It provides space for a mental or even physical 'pause' so that coachees can really 'notice' issues, and even allow them to 'pass by' without frenzied attempts at control or active management.

Similarly by encouraging coachees to stop, breath, and notice what they are doing and feeling in the moment enables them to observe their options before engaging with their priorities. According to Schwartz this create a pathway to dis-engaging from thoughts and feelings, and refocusing attention to the context in which experiences occur – in this case the work environment. Mindfulness skills can therefore help coachees become more aware of the need for change in the environment, rather than always assuming they or their teams need to adapt to whatever situation may arise.