



Resilience

Module Six (2)

A Promoting Excellence
Online Course

This is part of a series of online courses
available from Promoting Excellence
Leadership Consultants.



Promoting
Excellence

Module 6: A Case Study – with Key Points to help Leaders with Resilience

Resilience – Playing the Long Game

*It is often said that there is a light at the end of the tunnel but sometimes there's just another tunnel.
You'll reach the light at some point.*

Read the following and then reflect on the key points

How would you react in similar circumstances?

What can you learn from the case study?

Asymmetric warfare, [where the strategy or tactics employed by groups differ significantly], is a term that is not often used when talking about schools, but when you are trying to do the right thing in the face of embedded resistance, the term seems rather apt. Looking back on several years of leadership, I have witnessed a number of respected professionals, who have tried to do the right thing, step back from a school they have invested all their energy and passion in. One common factor leading to this is the willingness, or not, of staff to share concerns in a professional manner, and in a way that can address directly to achieve a positive outcome.

Personally, on reflection, my approach to school leadership, where I always aimed to promote fairness and a professional approach, made it difficult to understand the resistance and negativity underlying everything we tried to do as a school. **After several weeks in the role, I had to manage what could only be described as an attempted coup.** Although I promoted an open-door culture, staff decided to approach individual governors directly with their 'concerns'. I was approached by one governor who told me that staff had said that they were truly miserable, and morale was at rock bottom. They added that staff were 'keeping books on me' and waiting for me to make a wrong move that could form the basis for a formal complaint.

I decided to meet this head-on, whilst still operating in what I felt was an ethical manner. I arranged a meeting with the governing body and all staff. I calmly and politely explained that I had always been willing to listen to staff and that this meeting was a chance for them to air their concerns and know that the presence of governors meant that the process was open, and everything would be addressed. I asked for everyone to share their concerns, regardless of what they were. You could have heard a pin drop, for a very, very long time. **After nothing was contributed, it soon became clear that addressing the 'concerns' was not going to be possible at this time.** Although this was very frustrating, I still believed that the ethical approach was the way forward, and also the only way I could operate and still retain my integrity. On reflection my personal resilience was vitally important here. It helped me keep going under very difficult circumstances.

The negativity persisted, without any chance to address it through appropriate channels for more than three years. Staff refused to discuss things directly with the leadership team and a self-sustaining culture of negativity by a small number of staff impacted upon the climate as a whole. Families moved their children to other schools and staff, who appeared to operate in a professional manner in most aspects of their work, were suppressed.

One day however, a key contributor to the negative culture surrounding school, chose to act in a way that provided the evidence required for them to be held to account. Procedures were followed and the result was an improvement in overall behaviour. This was due less to a change in attitude but more from realisation that the consequences of not doing so were potentially serious. The climate improved and a

resilient approach towards the 'long game' eventually topped the balance in favour of a more positive culture within school.

Resilient leadership requires a high degree of faith that good will win through in the end and a **strong sense of optimism combined with an acceptance that in the short to medium term it might not**. It also helps immensely to have access to a network of wise and positive people to call upon for support when times are tough.

Key Points

1. Your integrity is your shield. Protect it at all times and it will protect you.
2. Keep your vision in mind when times are tough – there is often a much bigger reason behind everything you need to do.
3. Don't make hasty judgements about people from what you have heard, been told or observed during when taking on a new leadership role. Sometimes it can take a while to ascertain a person's true character. Some who resist at first might just need time to see that you share common values and can make trusted allies.
4. Build, and tap into, trusted support networks and make sure you give as much as you get when someone else is having a difficult time.
5. A lot of the job is telling people things they don't want to hear, but it does help a lot to be honest in a sensitive manner.
6. Try to react to events if you have time to *respond* in a considered manner. If you don't appear to have time, try and make it.
7. The truth usually comes out in the end and justice is often served.

How you manage situations will be scrutinised by the often-silent majority. Keep things fair and operate within policy guidelines. They are not just pieces of paper.

8. Keep your perspective and sense of reality in challenging times. The sun will come up tomorrow.
9. Look after your nearest and dearest; they also deserve care if they are frequently called upon to offer another perspective / shoulder to cry on.
10. Smile, make time to enjoy your life and maintain a sense of humour and sense of perceptiveness.