



Building a More Resilient Workplace

by Jamie Ford

Kiwis are notoriously pessimistic – sometimes it shows as **endearing self-deprecation, but too often it leads to negativity and unproductive workplaces. While changing your attitude may seem easier said than done, there are some simple things you and your team can all do to be more optimistic and resilient and work more productively together.**

1 TAKE OWNERSHIP With an ever-increasing drive towards accountability it's staggering the way people still pass the responsibility for their moods and emotions over to others. Every time you catch yourself saying "She (or he) has really upset me" you are passing the buck. You may be upset, but no one did this to you. And don't let members of your team blame others for their upset either – acknowledge their distress and search for a solution that doesn't involve making anyone else the bogeyman.

2 RECALL THOSE REMOTES Passing the buck for your attitude is rather like handing out remote controls for your emotions to all and sundry. Recall all those remote controls, and be very selective as to who you give them to in future.

3 REVIEW YOUR THINKING HABITS Einstein said that a problem can't be solved with the same kind of thinking that caused it. Psychology tells us that the major reason for our attitudes (our moods and emotions) lies in our thinking habits. Many of these habits began in childhood, but as adults we've never scrutinised them. Reflect on your thinking habits and examine whether they still work for you. When a member of your team is behaving negatively, find out what they're thinking – and calmly challenge them to come up with a more optimistic explanation.

4 TAKE CHARGE OF THE ELEPHANT Think of your moods and emotions as the elephant and your intellect as the rider. An elephant can be very productive if it is well-trained, cared for, and given proper direction. Or it can be destructive. You need to be in charge, to train and give direction to your own moods and emotions.

5 ASSUME GOOD INTENTIONS Many people develop bad attitudes by assuming bad intentions on the part of others. Nine times out of 10 when a member of your team is bleating on about the way a co-worker has angered or upset them, the co-worker has no idea it is happening. So rationally ask whether that co-worker intended to upset anyone. When your team member applies some adult thinking, they'll probably realise there was no intention to upset.

6 RECOGNISE AND MASTER THOUGHT ATTACKS When your emotions start running away from you it's a sure sign of a "thought attack" – a childish response to a situation that requires cool adult thinking. Stop and ask yourself, "What was I thinking that triggered this thought attack?" Then go get some better thoughts. If a team member's emotions are running away, ask them why. Then suggest more benign explanations for the situation distressing them.

7 BUILD AND STOCK A QUALITY THOUGHT LIBRARY Most of us are content with thoughts collected from the \$2 shop when the quality thoughts we needed could only be found at Smith & Caughey's or Kirkcaldie & Stains. Without a good library of thoughts it's difficult to come up with better responses. Observe how positive, successful people think about the world. Then put some of their thoughts into your library.

8 OVERWRITE THE BAD PROGRAMMING When a computer program is corrupted, you replace it with a better one. The same applies to thinking habits. The dud or corrupt thinking programs you installed as a child may no longer be adequate. Create new and more effective programs and when the old ones start up, immediately switch over to the new ones.

9 GET YOUR EMOTIONS INTO REVERSE AND YOUR THINKING INTO DRIVE Road rage is a highly visible example of the way otherwise mature people accidentally put their emotions into drive while thinking takes the passenger seat. It is much more useful to quickly get emotions into reverse and thinking into drive. Catch the surge of emotions early – it's much easier to stop them before they get out of hand. Secondly, have a good vocabulary of adjectives for describing and naming your emotions. This gives you power over them. And you could involve the team in fun ways to make it easy to switch from emoting to thinking – perhaps "Stop" signs to hold up when emotions are running riot, and "Let's Back up and Start Thinking" signs around the office. Make it normal in your office to acknowledge emotions and move to rational thinking.

10 ADD SOME NEW CLOTHES TO YOUR WARDROBE Get some Velcro and Teflon suits and hand them out. When things are going wrong at work, put on the Teflon and let it slide off so you can quickly move to productive problem-solving. Stop blaming yourself, and don't let your staff blame themselves either. When something goes wrong, most Kiwis put on the Velcro, beat themselves up and waste time wondering "What if, why and who?" Then down goes morale and motivation. The time to put on the Velcro is when things are going well, to build momentum and drive. So when you or your team achieve success, own it, praise it, and make it stick. **M**

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