

# 7 Strategies to Build a More Resilient Team

by Keith Ferrazzi, Mary-Clare Race, and Alex Vincent

January 21, 2021



*This article was originally published on [Harvard Business Review on January 21, 2021](#).*

Announcing Q4 results that exceeded Wall Street's expectations, Apple CEO Tim Cook identified resilient, high-functioning teams as a key element that fortified the company in the midst of the pandemic's unprecedented challenges.

"Even though we're apart, it's been obvious this year that around the company, teams and colleagues have been leaning on and counting on each other more than in normal times," Cook said. "I think that instinct, that resilience has been an essential part of how we have navigated this year."

The pressure for teams to be resilient is more urgent than ever as we're entering a new year with new quarterly targets and milestones. Unfortunately, for every Apple there are just as many — if not more — examples of organizations that discovered, after the pandemic struck, that their teams did not have the necessary skills. That has left many business leaders wondering what they can do now to build resilience.

To start, leaders need to ask some tough questions to determine whether their teams have what it takes to qualify as truly resilient.

Through our research and experience coaching leading executive teams, LHH and Ferrazzi Greenlight have identified four critical characteristics of resilient teams: candor, resourcefulness, compassion, and humility.

- **Candor: Is your team able to have open, honest dialogue and feedback with each other?** Resilient teams are able to speak truth to each other in order to collectively identify and solve for the challenges they face.
- **Resourcefulness: When faced with challenges or problems, can your team pull together to build creative and effective solutions?** Resilient teams rebound from

setbacks and welcome new challenges. They devote their energy to solutions and remain focused on outcomes regardless of external conditions.

- **Compassion and Empathy: Do your team members truly care for each other and share both success and failure?** Resilient teams consist of individuals who deeply and genuinely care about each other. Resilience is often expressed in deep commitment to “co-elevating” the team rather than seeking individual recognition or success.
- **Humility: Can your team ask for and accept help from other team members?** Resilient teams are willing to admit when a problem has become intractable and ask for help, either from someone else on the team or someone else in the organization. They do not hide their struggles but lean into the group responsibility for facing challenges and finding solutions.

If these are some of the core qualities and values of a resilient team, that still leaves open the question about what to do if your team is suffering from a resilience deficit.

Resilience requires a level of self-awareness and empathy that may not come naturally to all team members. Leaders must assess the state of their teams, identify weak spots and then deliver strategies that will help team members break down barriers and build foundations of trust, transparency and self-awareness.

Our GoForwardToWork.com initiative, for which we spoke to hundreds of executives, identified a set of interventions leaders can use to build resilient teams that we call High-Return Practices™.

While there are many practices that may foster your team’s resilience, here are some that we recommend:

**Candor Breaks:** Psychological safety — the belief that any team member can speak out without consequences — is crucial to creating resilient teams. When it feels like there’s an elephant in the room, leaders of high-performing teams create what we call “candor breaks” to encourage team members to share their thoughts and feelings.

At Ferrazzi Greenlight, we also refer to these as “Yoda in the room” moments. Any team member can call one and if necessary, we break into smaller groups (using breakout rooms if the meeting is virtual) to further encourage frank and honest discussion.

**Independent Observers:** To help team members embrace frank assessments of their work, resilient leaders invite outside experts to offer an objective perspective on issues/ team dynamics.

**Story Sharing:** To foster participation, trust, and engagement, leaders of resilient teams often encourage team members to map out their life’s journey, including highs and lows, and share highlights with the rest of the team. In being vulnerable, the team creates an environment where compassion and humility are welcomed.

**Owning Challenges:** Resilient teams express their fears and concerns with each other. To build trust and honesty, leaders must facilitate this process and encourage people to admit fears or relationship challenges and canvass the team for solutions.

For example, a facilitator can ask each team member to express their feelings about the state of the team, and what problems exist. The facilitator should encourage team members to “own” their part in any existing problems and not resort to blaming other teammates.

**Show That You Care:** Leaders have to regularly demonstrate that they are genuinely interested in the progress the team is making, asking probing questions to understand underlying issues.

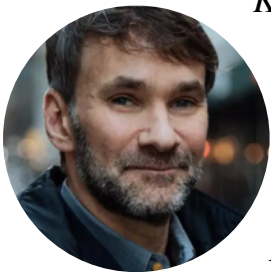
But asking is only half the equation: Resilient leaders must also listen carefully to the answers they get from team members. This is where a resilience deficit will be revealed.

**Temperature Checks:** At the beginning of every meeting, ask everyone to state their energy levels on a scale of one (low) to five (high). This simple and fast exercise that will

quickly determine whether there is someone who needs attention or is outside their normal range of fatigue and frustration.

**Commit to Building Each Other's Resilience:** We call this “co-elevation.” It's essential to establish clear and unambiguous expectations around team unity and peer-to-peer support. Any hesitation or reluctance to help a struggling colleague is a sign that deeper interventions may be needed.

Ultimately, team resilience is similar to a battery. It needs to be restored and recharged regularly. Teams that put in place measures to do that will find that they are better equipped and – more importantly – willing to undertake any challenge throughout the pandemic and beyond.



*Keith Ferrazzi is founder and chairman of Ferrazzi Greenlight, which coaches teams and boards on increasing adaptability and collaboration to capture unexpected growth opportunities and avoid unsuspected risk. He is also a bestselling author on the subject of leadership and teams, and his latest book *Leading Without Authority* was recently published.*



*We transform enterprises through high-impact hybrid teams that transform the world. If you have questions about this article, workshops, or to explore how we can help you solve for a high-impact hybrid team, book a [call with us here](#).*