NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

HIGH-PERFORMING AND RESILIENT TEAMS: PREVENTING BURNOUT

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes—with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

THE GOAL

Improve team resilience and performance and reduce burnout by relying on less-obvious sources of support.

NANO TOOL

Much has been said (and written) about the importance of individual resilience as critical to success. But although the bulk of organizational work is done by teams, there is little acknowledgement of—never mind guidance relating to—team resilience.

There are plenty of factors beyond a team's control that have an impact on its resilience, and, in turn, its performance. Most teams, for example, aren't able to access more members, a bigger budget, better equipment or technology, or a more manageable workload. But that doesn't mean they have no control. Resilient, high-performing teams recognize that in addition to those critical tangible resources, there are many intangible resources available, and these teams improve access to, and take advantage of, those resources. Six such resources are described below, including ideas for how you and your team can leverage them.

ACTION STEPS

According to a 2020 study about the drivers of work engagement, focusing on creating more job resources, rather than on decreasing job demands, increases the odds of preventing burnout. Beyond required tangible resources—finances, personnel, technology, and/or equipment, which may be beyond your control—consider these less obvious but no less important intangible ones.

1. **Find aspects of your work that are consistently repetitive.** Can any be made into templates for easy access and sharing? By not reinventing the wheel or starting from scratch each time, you'll save one of your most valuable and finite intangible resources: time.

2. **Learn lessons from previous challenges.** Personal and collective stories about overcoming obstacles help to access positive emotional resources and point the way to applying their lessons in the future. Consider designating a few minutes during regular meetings for team members to share their stories.

3. **Identify people internal to the organization that your team relies on to do its work well.** I have talked to teams, for example, that don't know that the group has a marketing professional to help them with messaging. Thinking you have to "go it alone" adds to your team's workload and stress. By finding someone in a different func-

tional area willing to help you meet a goal, you can leverage their expertise to create better outcomes and reduce burnout potential.

4. **Promote a culture of learning on your team.** A learning culture supports experimentation, innovative thinking, and risk taking, all of which can be encouraged using these ideas from recent neuroscience research. In addition, if there are existing training and development opportunities, make sure team members are aware of them.

5. **Put someone in charge of monitoring your industry for early signs of emerging issues** by following the Action Steps in this Nano Tool.

6. **Determine how you will support each other when the going gets tough.** Because everyone is affected by your team's collective performance, it makes sense to reach out to another member when early signs of burnout start to show (see those signs in this Nano Tool).

HOW LEADERS USE IT

In my work with a large Canadian-based bank, I encouraged members of the legal and operations team to talk about previous work challenges and share stories of resilience. Five members individually recorded a three-minute video of themselves explaining how they successfully overcame a work-related challenge. We discovered that there was always a positive aspect of the challenge to leverage. One of the lawyers thought of herself like a quarterback on a football team. As a leader, she said, "It is my role to elevate the quality of the team by demonstrating an uncomplaining attitude myself, in an effort to foster positivity. I have learned that being authentic about challenges we all face . . . demonstrates a certain humility that fosters [resilience]."

One of the first things Satya Nadella did when he became Microsoft CEO was to institute a change from, as he said, the "know-it-all company" to the "learn-it-all company." A learning culture is now one of the pillars of the company, helping it drive digital transformation, embracing what Nadella calls "tech intensity." That means not only adopting new technologies, but also building the capabilities needed to put them to use (in Microsoft's terms, Tech intensity = tech adoption + tech capability). In a "learn-it-all company," that means continuous acknowledgement of what you don't know coupled with continuous upskilling of your workforce.

CONTRIBUTOR TO THIS NANO TOOL

Paula Davis, JD, MAPP, founder and CEO of the Stress & Resilience Institute, a training and consulting firm that partners with leaders and organizations to help them reduce burnout and build resilience at the team, leader, and organizational levels.

KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION: RELATED EXECUTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Becoming a Leader of Leaders: Pathways to Success; *The Neuroscience of Business: Innovations in Leadership and Strategic Decisions*; *The Adaptable Leader: Leading in a Virtual World*

ABOUT NANO TOOLS

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, director of Custom Programs at Wharton Executive Education. *Nano Tools for Leaders®* is a collaboration between joint sponsors Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management. This collaboration is led by Professors Michael Useem and John Paul MacDuffie.