

Understanding Resilience

By Lt Col Jill Silverman, MD, CAP

Command Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF) Joann S. Bass provides a leadership perspective on resilience when she states: "We have got to take care of each other, mentally, physically, socially, spiritually. When you are resilient, ready, trained, and developed to perform and execute the things that our Air Force asks of you, our readiness as an Air Force is optimized. Readiness, resiliency is readiness, and readiness breeds culture." The same is true for the USAF Auxiliary Civil Air Patrol. Resilient CAP airmen make CAP more mission capable and contributing to mission success.

Mental health professionals and media have highlighted the importance and need for resilience to counter the cumulative stressors of the pandemic. Many have, in fact, called this the "2nd Pandemic". Most people demonstrate some degree of resilience. One's resilience is based on their unique biopsychosocial-spiritual nature, and enables one to cope with anxiety, distress, and trauma.

The Air Force defines resilience as "the ability to **withstand, recover, and grow** in the face of stressors and changing demands." That is, it is the ability to withstand (work through in the moment), recover (to gain an adaptive perspective), and grow (to learn from and generalize to other situations) in the face of stressors. Learning and using resilience skills is akin to physical training for your mind. Resilience is a major factor in allowing one to cope and adapt to daily adversities and stress in preparation to successfully deal with moments of significant stress. Resilience training includes multiple tools designed to help one be mentally prepared and improve one's personal and team performance.

Research has demonstrated that resilience matters for our performance, health, and happiness. Compared to non-resilient people, the benefits of enhancing and strengthening resilience consist of better personal performance, more capable of adapting to demands of the moment, and recovery from stress. Resilient people are better equipped to respond to new opportunities or risks. Individuals who are resilient are better at communicating and rated by others as strong team players and leaders. As a resilient member of a team, they are more open to feedback from members of their team, more valued by members of the team, and more skilled at reaching consensus. A resilient person performs better in a variety of areas, including creativity, academic achievement, and decision-making.

Since 2011 the Air Force has recognized the importance of resilience to the accomplishment of its mission. The Air Force has focused on promoting resilience skills for everyday living to promote a culture of resilience among its airmen. Resilience skills are taught to all First Term Airmen and ongoing support provided. The Air Force workshop sessions include: Values-Based Goals: What do you stand for? Bring Your Strengths; Reframe; Balance Your Thinking; Celebrate Good News; Mindfulness; Be Present; Gratitude; Look for the Good; Physical.

Resilience is a key influencer related to personal performance, team performance, and happiness. It is about a daily lifestyle that contributes to one's wellness and happiness. In addition, resilience positively impacts personal and team mission performance.