

THE AGE OF RESILIENCE



RESILIENCE FOR A NEW ERA

Resilience is the capacity to adapt to change, adversity and stressors in a way that allows people to bounce back, but also to bounce forward – to grow and improve.

WHY RESILIENCE? WHY NOW?

The world today can feel stressful. The news is filled with stories of divisive politics, dramatic social change, dire consequences of climate change, and helplessness in the face of global conflict and terrorism. With all of this as a backdrop it would seem like the workday would come as a welcome relief. But this is not the case. In fact, this is where stress becomes more personal — relentless deadlines, difficult people, ambiguous assignments, constant change, and not enough autonomy — these stressors can adversely affect emotional and physical health. All of these issues are a wake-up call for people and organizations to be proactive about developing Resilience.

This paper discusses the rapid pace of change in the modern era, the adversities that people face in the workplace and the effects this has on health and performance. Keep in mind, the human brain does not always help people in their battles against adversity, but Resilience can be learned and developed with training that focuses on helping people adjust the thoughts and behaviors they have in response to life's challenges. Research will show the many benefits that Resilience provides for people and organizations.



BOUNCE FORWARD WITH RESILIENCE

Resilience is about more than “rolling with the punches.” Instead, it is a skill that helps along a broad spectrum of challenges, from minor annoyances (the little voice of doubt before asking a question at a department meeting) to much larger adversities that confront people, like losing a job, getting transferred, or even seemingly positive events like getting promoted or leading large-scale change. At a minimum, Resilience ensures people can endure challenges by overcoming their natural tendency to harbor self-doubt or self-defeating thoughts that interfere with optimism, self-assurance and problem solving. At the highest levels of performance, Resilience accelerates the potential to thrive in spite of major stressors, because people learn to use opposition and disruption as a catalyst for creating new opportunities.

Resilience isn't just a personal skill, it's an essential skill for enhancing organizational performance. Resilience training provides practical, applicable strategies that are easy to learn, remember and apply. Training improves outcomes in areas critical to employees and organizations, such as engagement, work/life balance, sales, collaboration, leadership and change management.

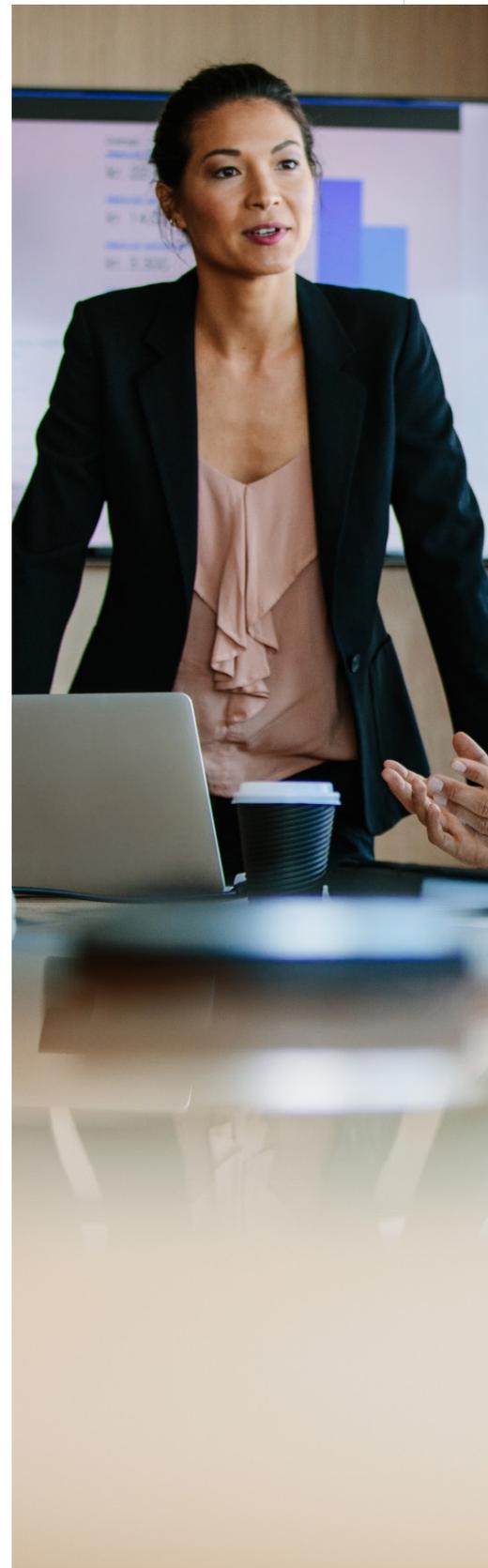
Of all the life skills, Resilience is arguably one of the most important. Doctor Peter Kramer, the author of *Listening to Prozac* and *Against Depression*,¹ has said that “the opposite of depression is not happiness, but Resilience.” This is because Resilience helps people remain strong, energetic, optimistic, and committed in the face of difficulty. Resilience is not a *soft* skill, it is a *survival* skill that enables people to move through life's challenges; to not only bounce back but to bounce *forward* and grow from adversity. Resilience is such an integral skill that one of the largest organizations in the world, the U.S. Army, runs an in-depth course on the topic, teaching tens of thousands of soldiers, their family members, and others, Resiliency skills.²

This helps soldiers prepare for the adversities they may face in combat and long-term duties away from home, with the ultimate goal of helping more people avoid negative effects such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

RESILIENCE IN THE ERA OF STRESS

While the importance of Resilience in the military is clear, the general workplace has, in the past, been considered a cocoon of sorts; a place where people were expected to set aside their personal lives, be immune to the stress that comes from the workplace itself and get on with the job. But that view is outdated and was always contrary to reality. The annual *Stress in America* survey conducted by the American Psychological Association (APA) has found that work is a significant source of stress – the most recent study showing this is true for 61% of people.³ The 2017 APA survey found that people’s average stress level had risen dramatically in just one year, and more people had experienced physical and emotional symptoms of stress, health symptoms that the APA warns could have long-term consequences. In fact, 75 to 90 percent of all physician office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints, and stress is linked to the six leading causes of death — heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide.⁴

Recent research by Stanford business professor Jeffrey Pfeffer and his colleagues showed that more than 120,000 deaths a year and roughly 5 to 8 percent of annual health care costs may be attributable to the stress that results from how U.S. companies manage their workforces.⁵ The American Institute of Stress claims that stress is costing employers \$300 billion a year. Dr. Pfeffer cites other research showing that in the U.S. there are over 2 million workplace violence incidents reported a year.



HUMANS ARE PLAYING CATCH-UP

Unfortunately, in today's world stress begins earlier in life than it did in the past. Recent research finds that compared with past generations, today's college students put more pressure on themselves and those around them to be perfect. Between 1989 and 2016 students' average perfectionism score (reflecting an unrealistic desire to be perfect) increased by 10 percent, feeling pressure from others to be perfect increased by 33 percent, and holding others to unrealistic standards increased by 16 percent.⁶ In research from 2016, the National Institute of Mental Health estimated that 3.1 million American adolescents aged 12 to 17 (12.8% of the population in that age group) had at least one major depressive episode.⁷

CHANGE IS ACCELERATING. HUMANS ARE NOT

These are grim statistics, to be sure. There are many reasons underlying these findings, but one common truth exists: the world is changing quickly but people are not. Human evolution is not keeping pace with the technological revolution. Today's adolescents are the first generation to experience the stress of social media, constantly comparing themselves to the perceived success and popularity of their peers. The rise of artificial intelligence is quickly bringing dramatic change to people's work lives, in some cases making jobs unnecessary or at the least changing the ways people work. Technological advancements are happening exponentially faster than in the past. The last 150 years have seen the most remarkable advancement of technology in world history. Electric lighting, cars, plastic, the telephone, and television are all less than 150-years-old, while a recent innovation, the internet, has spurred ever more rapid societal and economic change.

The same is not true of people; we cannot change so quickly and fundamentally. The human brain was not designed to adapt to rapid change on such a grand scale. Instead of helping us to feel calm and optimistic, people's brains usually interpret all this exciting change as threats to survival.

THE BENEFITS OF RESILIENCE

When people are told that they will be working alongside robots and will have to fundamentally change how they perform their jobs, most people don't get excited, they get scared. When leaders are required to implement a change in course, their own doubts and insecurities creep into their communications and interactions with their teams, and this in turn makes their teams less capable of moving forward. The same thing happens in response to most big changes and, over time, people endure a chronic feeling of being threatened, which results in lingering stress with all its physical and emotional manifestations.

Right now, the world is confronted by change like never before, and it is only going to progress more quickly and with larger consequences for everyone. Now, more than ever, people need Resilience.

RESILIENT PEOPLE ADAPT BETTER

Being Resilient can help people across all roles, from salespeople to accountants to CEOs, in all aspects of their work lives. It is a life skill that generalizes across all experiences and helps people withstand and bounce back from challenges quicker and thrive in the face of adversity. Research shows that Resilience is significantly related to job performance, job satisfaction, work happiness and commitment to the organization.^{8/9} This means that people who have learned to be Resilient are exactly the kind of people companies want: They are high performers with good attitudes and are committed to helping their organizations. Further, people with high Resilience are more likely to support organizational change, possibly because they experience more positive emotions and optimism while going through the change.¹⁰ This is critical since organizations are constantly in a state of change. Resilient people look beyond the difficulties and the hassles of change, they find the benefits new approaches will have for the organization and themselves, and how they can contribute to making sure change is successful.

IN-PERSON TRAINING IS SUPERIOR

Further, in a study that focused on understanding workplace stress, researchers found that Resilience was positively related to quality of life and work-life balance and was negatively related to physical and emotional symptoms and workplace injuries.¹¹ Resilient people show emotional stamina in all spheres of life and this helps them to have less carry-over of stress from home to work and vice versa. They are also healthier and happier.

The many benefits of being a Resilient person were neatly summarized in a research report by the American Heart Association (AHA)¹² that noted Resilient people are better able to cope with stress, remain calm, lower their risks for medical problems, manage emotions, guard against burnout, and remain productive. In short, Resilience is one of the most valuable skills a person can have.

TRAIN, COACH & REINFORCE FOR BEST RESULTS

Since stress has become such a critical issue confronting people and organizations, and since Resilience buffers against stress and has

many positive outcomes for individuals and organizations, there is interest in understanding how to enhance Resilience through training. The best evidence for the effectiveness of Resilience training comes from meta-analyses. [A meta-analysis is a research study that combines the data from multiple studies, resulting in more reliable and conclusive results]. The recent AHA report pooled the results of two meta-analyses and synthesized results from four systematic reviews (which included 28 unduplicated randomized control trials).¹³ This is the most comprehensive overview of Resilience training so far, and found that training works, but the *format, theory, and content* of training are important for maximizing success.

The AHA review found that Resilience training has a statistically significant effect on a broad range of physical, mental health, well-being, psychosocial and work performance outcomes. This is very encouraging considering that multiple types of training programs were included in the research, some better designed than others. In particular, the report notes that the format of training matters: Personalized coaching and classroom-based training are more effective than

computer-based and train-the-trainer formats. This is because in-person training is more intensive and includes more opportunities for personal feedback, group discussion and practice using real-world scenarios. With computer-based training there is less, if any, opportunity for the participant to get feedback from an expert or even other co-workers, and it is up to the participant to find opportunities to practice new knowledge.

Second, the theoretical underpinnings of the training program are important. Programs that are classroom-based and also include content based on Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) had larger effects than other types of programs. CBT focuses on modifying unhelpful thinking patterns by learning to challenge those thoughts with more realistic thoughts; this leads to more adaptive and productive responses to stress. CBT is at least as effective as medication for treating depression and anxiety, and when adapted to more generalized stress situations, as in Resilience training, is a highly effective mechanism for enhancing Resilience to the types of stress common in the workplace.^{14/15}

Finally, the content of training is important. The AHA report recommends that training programs assess not only individuals' overall Resilience, but also incorporate factors that lead to Resilience, such as problem-solving skills and strategies for enhancing self-efficacy and social support. This is in line with research from the American Psychological Association (APA), which advises on ways to build Resilience. These include using strategies to challenge unrealistic thoughts, developing a good social network, goal-setting, problem-solving, developing optimism and self-confidence.¹⁶ A high quality training program should incorporate these elements, all of which are proven to enhance Resilience.

When Resilience training programs are offered to employees, both they and their organizations benefit. In a Harris Poll of 1,001 working adults [commissioned by the AHA], participation rates in Resilience training was 78% among those working for companies that offered training.



RESILIENCE TRAINING BENEFITS ORGANIZATIONS

This indicates that Resilience programs may be tapping into a need that is unmet by other types of wellness offerings. Further, 76 percent of employees perceive Resilience training as valuable, whether or not they've participated in training. Offering training also benefits the organization – the majority of employees who participated in Resilience training (94%) agree that “My employer gives me the training I need to withstand, recover and grow in the face of stressors in the workplace and changing work demands.” Perhaps most importantly, there is a highly positive outcome: 73 percent reported positive outcomes and said training improved health “a great deal” or “a fair amount.” For these reasons, the AHA report states that Resilience training not only has the potential to improve individual and organizational health, it can also positively influence perceptions of employers and strengthen commitment to organizations.

TRACOM’s own research has found that Resilience has large benefits on organizations. Utilizing multi-rater assessments, we have collected job performance data in conjunction with evaluations of people’s Resilience. This multi-rater format is a very powerful and accurate method for assessing both Resilience and job performance, including ratings from supervisors, peers and other co-workers. Findings concluded that compared to their less Resilient peers, those who are seen as highly Resilient are:

- 22% more likely to positively influence others during change
- 21% more comfortable initiating change when needed
- 19% better at helping others navigate through change
- 18% more constructive in building a positive culture
- 16% better at actively supporting change when it occurs
- 16% better at consistently performing at a high level

These findings come from analysis of 533 participants, with over 2,500 raters, from a variety of industries and job roles.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

In today's world, Resilience is not a "nice to have" skill, it is a necessity. With the right training program, it is possible to enhance individuals' Resilience in ways that help them and their organizations. The evidence for this is becoming more clear as research is accumulated.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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In his role as Director of Learning and Development for TRACOM Group, Dr. Casey Mulqueen is responsible for leading the company and clients in developing and implementing learning solutions that reflect the latest science within the field of organizational psychology.

To this end, Dr. Mulqueen has worked with companies across the world to develop more effective teams, sales processes and large-scale change models. He has developed custom programs and been a professional speaker for organizations such as Ernst & Young, PepsiCo, the Environmental Defense Fund, Reed Elsevier, and ExxonMobil. His work involves the development and validation of individual and organizational assessments, including TRACOM's world-renowned Social Style Model®.

Dr. Mulqueen earned his PhD at the Illinois Institute of Technology and has served as an adjunct faculty member in Colorado State University's Department of Psychology. He is a member of the American Psychological Association, the Society for Industrial & Organizational Psychology, and the International Association of Applied Psychology.

SOURCES

¹ Listening to Prozac, Against Depression. Peter D. Kramer.

² See University of Pennsylvania Positive Psychology Center for a full description: <https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/services/Resilience-training-army>

³ For details see <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/index.aspx>

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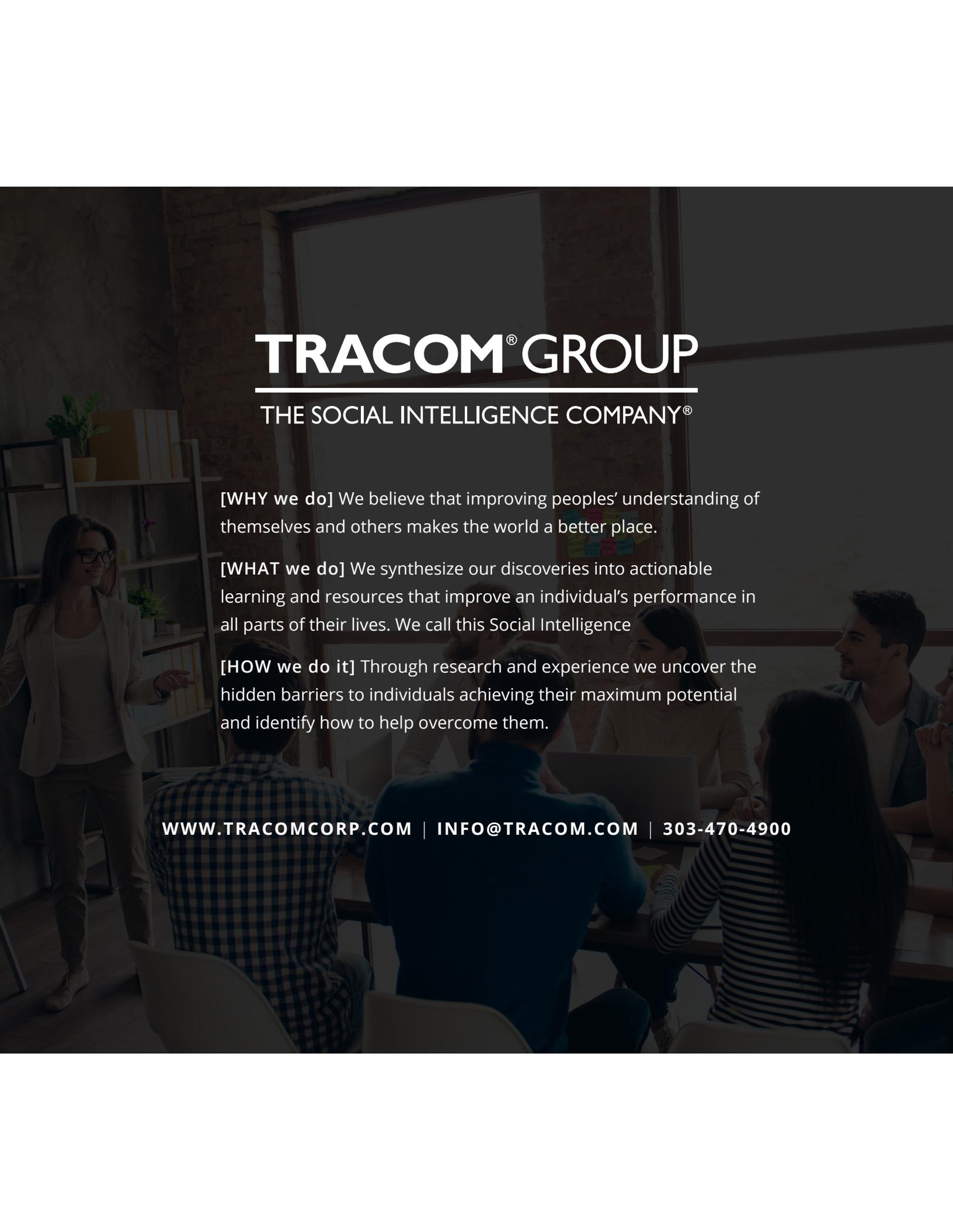
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¹⁶ American Psychological Association. The road to Resilience. Retrieved on April 17, 2018, from <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-Resilience.aspx>

¹⁷ For more information see <https://www.tracomcorp.com/Resiliency-training/>

A woman in a white blazer and glasses stands on the left, gesturing towards a group of people seated around a table. The room has a whiteboard and a bookshelf in the background.

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