

TRACOM[®] GROUP

THE SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE COMPANY[®]



RESILIENCY AND WELLNESS PROGRAMS

BY CASEY MULQUEEN, PH.D.
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT, TRACOM



MIKE'S STORY

MIKE IS STRESSED.

He likes his job as a supervisor in a call center for a large insurance company. Each day brings new challenges and he hears firsthand and from his team about how their customers' lives are affected—both good and bad—through their insurance and care.

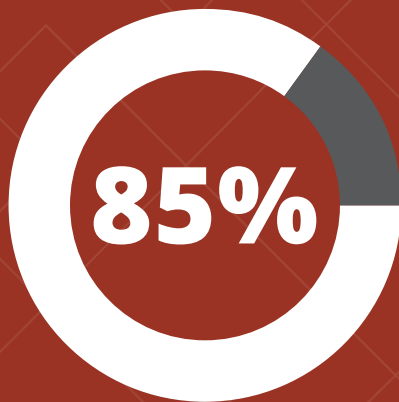
However, some of the things that make his job great also make it very stressful. People dealing with healthcare claims are often fearful and tense. They can be impatient or angry with the call center representatives that Mike oversees. And some of the representatives can turn those emotions back on Mike and others on the team. His hours can be long and shifts rotate so he's physically tired often. Because of his schedule he often eats quick meals in the building cafeteria, and during his time off he sleeps and watches a lot of TV to recuperate. He knows his diet and lack of exercise are taking a toll; he has high cholesterol and is overweight. There have even been moments when he's craved a cigarette, even though he gave up the habit.

Fortunately his employer offers a wellness program. Mike attended a couple of sessions to help kick start an exercise and diet regimen. He stuck with the program for a little while, but after a couple of weeks, he was back in the same routine of making poor food choices and avoiding the treadmill. ***"My schedule and the stress of this job are just too much to fit it all in," he tells himself. "If I start exercising I know I'll just stop after a few days anyway. I'm lazy."***

MIKE IS NOT ALONE IN HIS COMPLACENCY.

In fact, he's doing more than the average person. Most employees of companies that offer wellness programs don't even sign up – participation estimates range from only 20 to 40 percent¹. This is despite the widespread availability of these programs. A RAND Corporation study found that more than 85 percent of U.S. companies employing 1,000 people or more offer some sort of wellness program². One of the primary reasons for such low usage, and success, is that *most programs focus solely on physiological wellbeing*.

As an employee of a healthcare insurer, Mike fully understands the importance of maintaining a physically healthy lifestyle, but even he is not adhering to his wellness program. Mike might get more benefit out of his program if it addressed the whole picture of employee wellness.



OF U.S. COMPANIES
EMPLOYING 1,000
PEOPLE OR MORE
OFFER SOME SORT OF
WELLNESS PROGRAM



PARTICIPATION IN WELLNESS PROGRAMS IS
ESTIMATED AT ONLY **20-40%**

Most wellness programs primarily target physiological aspects of wellness with **63 percent target smoking**, and **53 percent focus on weight loss**³.

While physical wellbeing is certainly important, a more holistic approach to employee wellbeing is starting to be researched and understood, incorporating elements such as **employee purpose** (like what you do each day), **social wellbeing** (have supportive relationships), and **physiological resiliency**⁴. These newer models account for the stressors within the workplace that are affecting people's wellbeing, as well as the psychological and behavioral factors that impact people's ability to maintain their own wellbeing.

Even today's limited wellness programs show positive results. One meta-analysis of 42 corporate wellness studies found:

- **25% reduction in absenteeism and sick leave**
- **25% reduction in health costs**
- **32% reduction in workers compensation and disability costs**⁵.

ACCORDING TO RESEARCH BY GALLUP, ADJUSTING WELLNESS PROGRAMS TO ENCOMPASS ELEMENTS OTHER THAN JUST PHYSICAL WELLBEING CAN IMPROVE THE BOTTOM LINE EVEN MORE.

A comparison between adults involved in physical wellness programs versus those involved in wellbeing (physical and emotional) programs, studies found those in holistic wellbeing programs do better⁶:

- **Report 41% fewer unhealthy days**
- **Are more than twice as likely to say they always adapt well to change**
- **Are 36% more likely to say they always fully bounce back after an illness**
- **Are 65% less likely to be involved in a workplace accident**
- **Are 81% less likely to look for a new job when the job market improves**





Gallup's research also shows a ***clear link between employee engagement and wellbeing***, meaning that as people succeed in enhancing their wellbeing they also become more committed and productive employees.

What is clear is that ***wellness is enhanced when employees are guided to understand how their mindsets—their attitudes and beliefs— affect their behaviors*** and how these belief systems can be influenced toward healthier lifestyles. Without addressing mindset alongside other aspects of wellbeing, these programs often fail to achieve their objectives. To enhance effectiveness, the first step is to ***help employees understand how their behavior is often undermined by their beliefs***. Second is to ***practice strategies for altering beliefs and attitudes***, ultimately having positive effects on health and wellbeing.

One such concept that is gaining prominence is ***Resiliency*** — people's ability to respond to challenges with flexibility, recover from setbacks, and most importantly, find opportunities to thrive when confronted with workplace challenges. Instead of simply bouncing back from adversity, Resilient people bounce forward through growth and an enhanced ability to withstand future stressors. Research shows that Resilient people perform more effectively in their jobs, are more engaged with their work, are more committed to their organizations, and are more supportive of organizational change⁷.





Resiliency can be learned and developed, and when included with other elements of wellness can significantly enhance the success rates of these programs. Developing Resiliency helps employees to reframe their stress and develop strategies for coping with challenges. This is imperative since stress in the modern workplace has become pervasive. In fact, the American Psychological Association (APA) reports that **75% to 90% of all physician office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints**⁸, and has found that **job pressure is cited as the leading cause of stress in the U.S.**, being linked to the six leading causes of death⁹.

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT RESILIENT PEOPLE PERFORM MORE EFFECTIVELY, ARE MORE ENGAGED, COMMITTED AND SUPPORTIVE OF CHANGE⁷.

Let's return to Mike. It's not that he's incapable of being Resilient and taking better care of himself. He just isn't as Resilient as he could be, and he's being held back by his own beliefs. He's abandoned his diet and exercise routine—not because of the stress and his schedule—but because he believes that even if he tries he'll fail. Thoughts like this are common, although they're often below our conscious awareness. Psychologists have described the most common patterns of self-defeating assumptions as **"automatic beliefs."** When people are confronted with stressors, even minor ones, they have instantaneous automatic beliefs that precede and influence their subsequent behaviors. For example,

when a change is announced at work, many people automatically think of the worst possible outcomes—that they'll lose their job, be relocated or have to move to another department. In turn, these automatic thoughts influence behavior—being overcome by anxiety and paralysis instead of being proactive or positive.

A wellness program that **targets Resiliency, alongside physical wellbeing**, would help Mike to recognize and challenge his automatic beliefs. It is a straightforward process, but does require reflection and practice. Along with understanding his automatic thoughts, he would learn about the brain—how and why it responds to stressors the way it does. All humans are hard-wired to focus more on negativity than positivity, and it is a primary reason why we have self-defeating automatic thoughts. Fortunately, through practice we can overcome this tendency and enhance our resiliency by challenging these thoughts and adapting more positive and realistic beliefs.

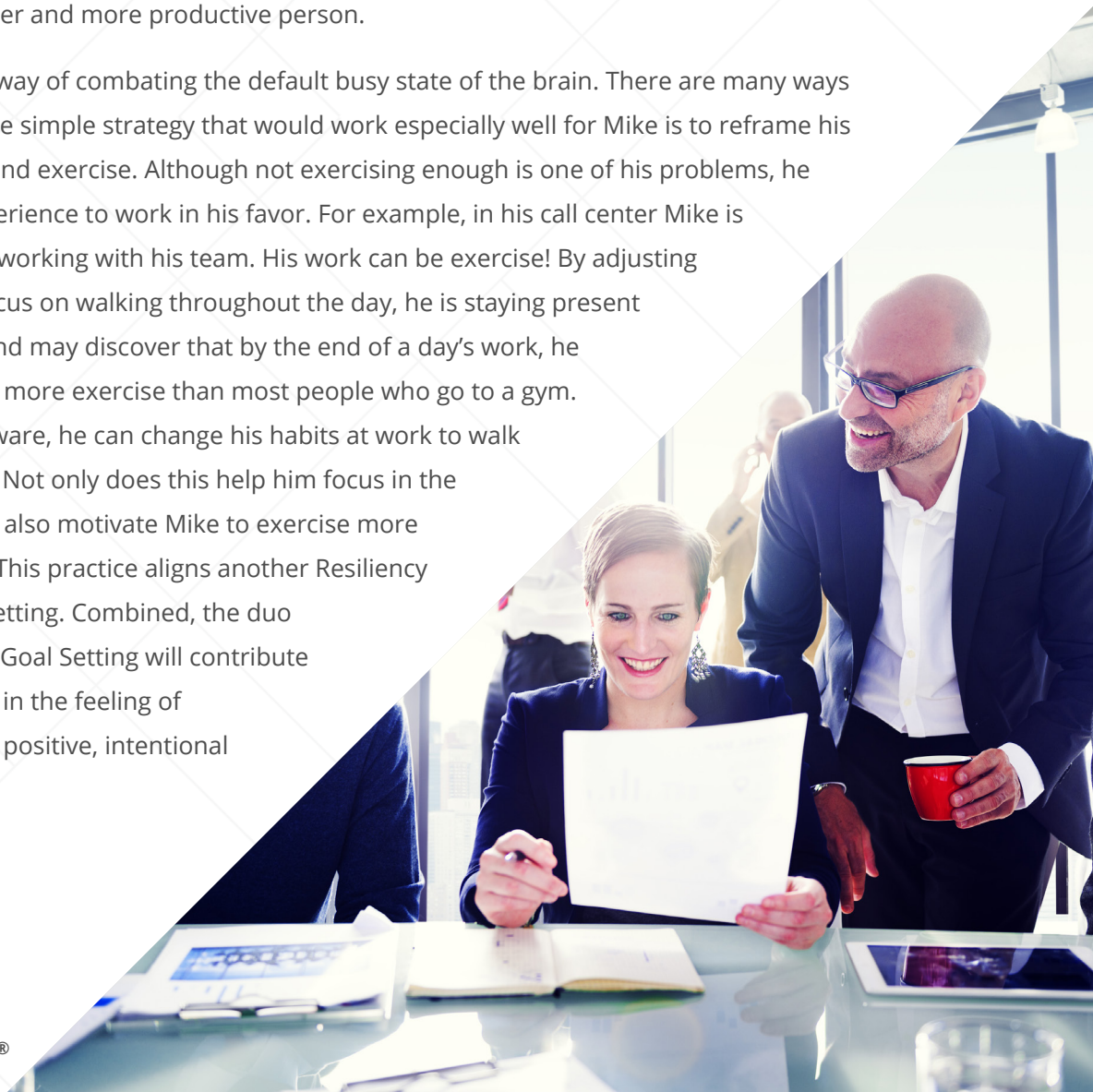


BECOME MORE RESILIENT

Next, Mike can learn additional strategies for developing greater resiliency. These are research-based techniques that have proven to enhance people's ability to thrive in the face of workplace challenges. In Mike's instance, two strategies that would help are mindfulness and goal-setting.

Mindfulness is simply staying focused on the present moment, and helps people to be more engaged and productive. Research shows that humans spend an inordinate amount of time either reliving the past or ruminating about the future. This is literally wasted time and energy. The network of brain regions that generate this thinking originally evolved to help us plan for the future, review the past and improve our skills. However, over time these brain functions caused excessive and unproductive rumination. For instance, Mike spends more time beating himself up about his past failures and worrying about his future than he does exercising! If he adapted these thoughts and habits, and instead focused on the present, he would be a happier and more productive person.

Mindfulness is a way of combating the default busy state of the brain. There are many ways to be mindful; one simple strategy that would work especially well for Mike is to reframe his experiences around exercise. Although not exercising enough is one of his problems, he can alter the experience to work in his favor. For example, in his call center Mike is often on his feet working with his team. His work can be exercise! By adjusting his thinking to focus on walking throughout the day, he is staying present in the moment and may discover that by the end of a day's work, he has accumulated more exercise than most people who go to a gym. By being more aware, he can change his habits at work to walk more frequently. Not only does this help him focus in the moment, it could also motivate Mike to exercise more outside of work. This practice aligns another Resiliency strategy—Goal Setting. Combined, the duo Mindfulness and Goal Setting will contribute a significant boost in the feeling of engagement and positive, intentional action.



WHY DOES GOAL-SETTING WORK SO WELL AT ENHANCING RESILIENCY?

The second strategy for Mike is *goal-setting*. Goal-setting is a proven technique to help people maintain focus, be proactive and persistent through challenges, and achieve goals. *Why does goal-setting work so well at enhancing resiliency?* The brain can't distinguish between what we want and what we have; therefore, when we set a goal we feel as though we've already accomplished it. If we fail to meet our goal, we feel like we've lost a valued possession or even a part of ourselves. This is why goals are such effective drivers of behavior.

For Mike, his goals can be tied to his mindfulness and exercise strategy. When setting goals there's an important distinction between *outcome goals* and *process goals*. Outcome goals focus on the end result—losing weight and lowering cholesterol. Process goals are the specific activities for achieving those results. For example, in addition to walking during work, run for 15 minutes per day, three days per week and/or substitute french fries with a salad at lunch.

Many people fail to achieve results because they focus on the outcome instead of the process. It is much more effective, and rewarding, to focus on the more manageable daily processes that ultimately lead to the end result.



By following these simple strategies, Mike is much more likely to achieve the results he desires. Not only that, but he will be exercising his brain to become more Resilient when faced with future challenges and stressors.

Most organizations find that wellness programs are a sound investment, but the impact can be increased by adapting a holistic approach to employee wellness that encompasses the effects of employees' mindsets on their wellness.

TRACOM's Adaptive Mindset for Resiliency Model[®] and training program teaches strategies that are effective because they address critical psychological and behavioral aspects of wellness that contribute to more engagement, healthier lives and more satisfied employees.

REFERENCES

1. RAND Health: Workplace Wellness Programs Study 2012. Mattke, S., Schnyer, C., Van Busum, K. (2012). A Review of the U.S. Workplace Wellness Market. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <http://www.dol.gov/ebsa/pdf/workplacewellnessmarketreview2012.pdf>
2. RAND (2012).
3. Mattke, S., et al. (2012).
4. Gallup (May, 2014). Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/168995/why-workplace-wellness-program-isn-working.aspx>
5. Fast Company (July, 2014). Retrieved from <http://www.fastcompany.com/3033411/do-corporate-wellness-programs-really-boost-productivity>
6. Gallup (May, 2014).
7. Luthans, F., Avolio, B., Avey, J. B., & Norman, S. M. (2007). Psychological capital: Measurement and relationship with performance and job satisfaction. *Personnel Psychology*, 60, 541–572. Youssef, C. M., & Luthans, F. (2007). Positive organizational behavior in the workplace: The impact of hope, optimism, and resilience. *Journal of Management*, 33, 774–800. Shin, J., Taylor, M.S., & Seo, M. (2012). Resources for change: The relationships of organizational inducements and psychological resilience to employees' attitudes and behaviors toward organizational change. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(3), 727-748. Siu, O., Hui, C., Phillips, D. R., Lin, L., Wong, T., & Shi, K. (2009). A study of resiliency among Chinese health care workers: Capacity to cope with workplace stress. *Journal Of Research In Personality*, 43(5), 770-776. doi:10.1016/j.jrp.2009.06.008.
8. American Psychological Association. Retrieved from <http://psychcentral.com/lib/how-does-stress-affect-us/>
9. American Psychological Association (2009). Stress in America 2009. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2009/stress-exec-summary.pdf>. American Psychological Association (2007). Stress in America 2007. Retrieved from www.apa.org/pubs/info/reports/2007-stress.doc. Statistic Brain (2014). Stress Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.statisticbrain.com/stress-statistics/>.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Casey Mulqueen oversees the research and development of TRACOM's various assessment instruments and products. He has experience in developing a wide variety of assessments such as personality inventories, 360-degree feedback programs, performance appraisal systems, and employee opinion surveys.

ABOUT TRACOM® GROUP

THE SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE COMPANY®

We provide the "AH HAS" to people as to how and why they act and interact with the world around them the way they do. We do this by teaching people about the core elements of an individual: their behavior, their emotions and their mindset and the impact these elements have on them each and every day. We call these core elements Social Intelligence. Most people are completely unaware of the impact that these elements have on them each and every day in how they interact with others and how they frame what is happening in the world around them.

For more information, visit WWW.TRACOMCORP.COM
or call (303) 470-4900 — (800) 221-2321 (U.S. only)

