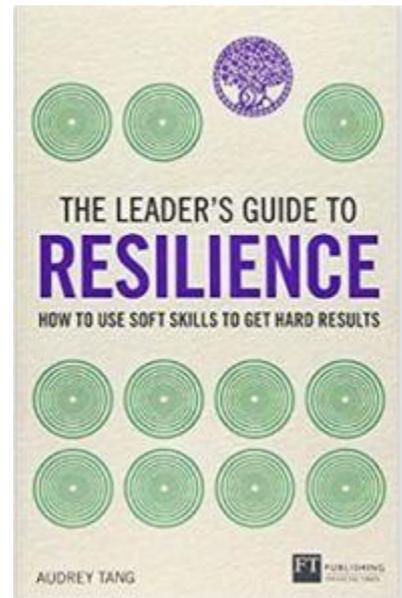


## The Leader's Guide to Resilience

How to Use Soft Skills to Get Hard Results

**Audrey Tang**



### Recommendation

Psychologist Audrey Tang offers a guidebook for leaders who want to build their – and their team members' – resilience. She explains that everyone has innate resilience, and leaders can use research-backed practices and tips to find and fortify it. Tang's accessible, inspirational guidance will help leaders cultivate self-awareness, authenticity and inner strength; build passionate teams; and embrace an ethos of corporate responsibility and sustainability.

### Take-Aways

- Resilience is innate. Learn how to unlock it.
- Use the five-component “ADOPT” model to build resilience.
- To lead courageous, passion-driven teams, focus on alignment.
- Stop playing roles and embrace your authentic self.
- Navigate uncertainty by deepening your understanding of change.
- Practice sustainability on a micro and macro level; prioritize long-term survival.
- Build team resilience with five confidence-enhancing practices.
- Foster a confident mind-set and focus on the future.

## Summary

### **Resilience is innate. Learn how to unlock it.**

You have innate resilience – the ability to survive, recover and flourish amid adversity. When you feel unable to cope with difficult situations, you can tap into your resilience, nurture it and restore it. Being resilient means accepting the reality of your situation and learning from your mistakes. It requires being “selfish” – reflecting on your choices, behaviours and needs, and cultivating the self-awareness to avoid reacting ineffectively or alienating potential allies.

*“Resilience and thriving begin not with disregard of what may have caused us pain or distress, but with acceptance and learning.”*

To expand your resilience, focus on healthy collaboration and foster supportive relationships. Understand your value as an individual contributor and your capability to create and co-create solutions. Reflect on your sources of inner strength – your unique “pillars” of resilience. Are you neglecting your pillars? If your family members, for example, constitute a pillar of resilience for you, then nurture your connections with them. Strengthen the pillars that need your attention.

Psychologist Kathryn McEwen suggests these steps to help you sustain long-term resilience:

1. **Connect with yourself** – Identify your values, and make sure your daily life aligns with them.
2. **Align with your organisation’s values** – Share your company's values with your team to make sure everyone is pulling together.
3. **Cultivate a positive outlook** – Aligning with your organization’s broader mission helps you withstand unexpected challenges.
4. **Minimise stress** – Identify your daily tension triggers, so you can manage them.
5. **Manage your competitive impulses** – Cooperation often serves you better than competing, and it draws in people who share your mind-set.
6. **Maintain your physical and mental health** – Organizations should support their employees' well-being.
7. **Develop your broader network** – Form partnerships with aligned groups and community members.

### **Use the five-component “ADOPT” model to build resilience.**

ADOPT stands for Act, Deal, Optimize, Prepare and Thrive. Act by becoming the proactive director of your life and taking ownership of your choices. Deal by tackling situations right away, rather than procrastinating. Optimize by taking care of your mental and

physical health and being present and engaged while looking for ways you can improve. Prepare by considering potential undesirable outcomes and planning ahead to avoid them. And thrive in the face of challenges by surrounding yourself with people who boost your strength and support your growth.

*“If you know what you need to be strong, you also know what you need to reinforce in case of damage.”*

Use this ADOPT model exercise to build strength as a leader by drawing from your individual sources of support and power:

1. **Act** – Carve out time to reflect on your strengths and on the areas where you need support. Consider who in your network can help you compensate for skills or expertise you lack.
2. **Deal** – Create “If X happens, then I will...” statements to prepare coping mechanisms for stressful situations. Keep easily accessible items around that help you stay grounded and respond to stress. For example, if you know you will feel overheated if you get upset, have a small fan at your desk.
3. **Optimise** – Make personal development and reflections a part of your team meetings, and share improvement ideas.
4. **Prepare** – Just as you target muscle groups you want to build when you exercise, identify and reinforce areas of weakness you face in the workplace.
5. **Thrive** – Celebrate the victories you already achieved. Self-development is a continuous process.

### **To lead courageous, passion-driven teams, focus on alignment.**

Create opportunities for your team members to learn to care more about your organisation’s mission.

*“Every person you work with, everything you do – that’s an opportunity to make a difference – if not on a wider scale, at the very least within your immediate environment.”*

Unleash their drive and passion by pursuing three facets of growth:

1. **Awareness** – Through coaching, appraisal or training, help team members identify and address ineffective habits or practices.
2. **Development** – Give people the tools they need to make meaningful change and correct their mistakes. Make sure your team members have the learning opportunities and support they need.

3. **Opportunity** – Provide people with safe spaces and sufficient time to try new things and improve their skills. Expect that some mistakes will occur as a natural part of any individual’s learning curve.

This ADOPT exercise can help leaders attract, retain and manage courageous talent:

1. **Act** – Identify three core values you treasure and incorporate them into your life as a leader. This will attract people who align with you.
2. **Deal** – Navigate disappointing situations with your team members by asking individuals what they think they should do to solve their problems; this empowers them to discover solutions.
3. **Optimise** – Aim high when working toward specific goals, maintain a positive attitude and focus on future rewards.
4. **Prepare** – Create a more positive culture by embracing small acts of kindness, such as telling people when they do a good job.
5. **Thrive** – Connect with people in person and show up when it counts. Your most meaningful connections occur in real life, not online.

### **Stop playing roles and embrace your authentic self.**

It’s easy to lose your authentic self in projecting your “adaptive” self, the version of you shaped by other people’s expectations shape and the roles you play when navigating different contexts. Overcoming your fear of what others think enables you to connect with your authentic self and become a more resilient leader.

To cultivate authentic professional relationships, you must hold onto that connection with your true self. Reflect on your unique “VITALS” (Values, Interests, Temperament, Around-the-clock rhythm and Strengths), and make sure that your workday aligns with – rather than opposes – them. To assess your rhythms, reflect on the time of day you’re most productive.

*“While you may be extremely successful ‘playing a role’, I ask you to consider the following coaching question: Would the younger version of you be happy with you as a role model?”*

Manage the emotions you display at work, so they aren’t out of sync with your true feelings. Publicly managing your feelings to match organizational norms is emotional labour that can lead to exhaustion, resentment and frustration. To be a more authentic presence in your professional life, connect with someone you respect, a mentor who can challenge and guide you. Practice gratitude to root yourself in the moment, and focus on being a better version of yourself, rather than chasing fantasies of what you or your life ought to look like.

## Navigate uncertainty by deepening your understanding of change.

Change occurs in these phases, and each one holds learning opportunities:

- **Pre-contemplation** – A crisis hasn't hit yet, and you haven't thought of what behavioural changes your organization might need to make.
- **Contemplation** – You're aware of a pressing issue, but you haven't yet made an organizational commitment to take action. Be wary of falling into habitual responses to problems. Be open to innovative solutions.
- **Preparation** – Begin creating an action plan. Time is a precious resource at this stage, so use it wisely.
- **Action** – You make behaviour changes.
- **Maintenance** – Form necessary new habits in response to organizational change.

*“Building resilience isn't new; it's commemorating and restoring what works and creating room for new growth.”*

When you find yourself rebuilding during a crisis, the following architect-inspired principles apply to a wide range of circumstances:

- **People often want to save the facade** – People may react with ego and hope to preserve their image, but this isn't always possible when rebuilding. Sometimes you must embrace vulnerability.
- **Keep things that work** – Just as you'd preserve worthy internal structures in a building as you redesign it, reflect on whether new aspects of your growth can align with older structures that still work well.
- **Prepare for surprises** – You may encounter resistance or adaptations as you begin the work of change. Reflect on them.
- **Be mindful of your impact on others** – Consider whether you'll need to negotiate and how to communicate effectively.
- **Reflect on your scaffolding** – Make sure you have an appropriate support network, say of mentors and professionals, to oversee change.
- **Redevelopment is ongoing** – Change is a long-term process, so arm yourself with a positive mind-set and prepare for inevitable mistakes.
- **Respect foundations** – Your new normal is more likely to succeed if you don't demolish your history; pay homage to your past.

## **Practice sustainability on a micro and macro level; prioritise long-term survival.**

Some crises will take you by surprise, but – for example – climate change isn't one of them. If you believe in preparing for crises before they happen, embrace corporate responsibility today. To become a more sustainable organization, manage your resources, reduce waste and prioritize efficiency in your micro environment – at the level of your business – and your macro environment – your community and society at large.

Millennials demand environmentally responsible products and will pay higher prices for sustainable goods. Avoid misleading the public by green-washing or exaggerating your sustainability claims.

*“Resilient thinking is looking beyond the present. It sees a future that can exist beyond your lifetime. If you want your business, your work – your legacy – to continue beyond you, then you have to look beyond your backyard.”*

Consider how your organization can maintain and restore the resources that contribute to its long-term survival and that of its community. Sustainability should occur parallel to contributing to your workers' well-being. Make your workplace more environmentally sustainable in areas ranging from design choices to energy management to food sources. Adopt the mind-set of shepherding the use of energy in multiple forms by treating it as a valuable resource.

## **Build team resilience with five confidence-enhancing practices.**

Don't wait for a crisis to build resilience. Build it pre-emptively. When resilient practices become a daily part of a team's routine, people will feel confident in their ability to survive unexpected challenges.

*“Resilience is about ‘knowing’ you will be OK.”*

Use the following practices to cultivate organizational resilience:

1. **Build trust** – Resilient teams trust their leaders, who in turn trust their employees. Consider doing a trust audit, or evaluating trust levels, by assessing trust-revealing metrics in areas such as sales targets, media reports, employee satisfaction, turnover and retention.
2. **Live and own your narrative** – Craft your desired story and communicate it to the world when your company is doing well, rather than trying to tell your story from a defensive standpoint after you made a mistake.
3. **Respond to mistakes** – Admit to your mistakes, take responsibility for them and learn from them. Use Toyota's “Five Whys Technique” to understand failures more deeply. Ask five “why” questions after an error. With each answer, probe deeper

with another “why” to find the best corrective action. When a mistake happens, apologise sincerely.

4. **Be flexible** – Be open to directional shifts that could help you pivot toward greater success after a crisis.
5. **Engage your community** – Leverage the power of electronic word-of-mouth (EWoM) tactics by prioritizing and answering customer emails, inviting and responding to reviews, and creating a way for people to rate the helpfulness of reviews. Optimize your online presence by posting content; tagging your posts with common search keywords; effectively using links; leveraging your analytics; and using hashtags to make your brand relatable.

### **Foster a confident mind-set and focus on the future.**

Help your team members overcome the fear of failure and develop inner confidence – a prerequisite for resilience in the following ways:

- Familiarise yourself with people’s strengths and any areas they need to strengthen.
- Coach people to commit to ongoing development.
- Help employees overcome inferiority complexes and imposter syndrome – the insecure belief they don’t deserve their position – by helping them view their strengths and weaknesses objectively.
- Commit to your personal growth and encourage those you lead to follow suit.

Future-focused leaders understand that building resilience is an ongoing process. You can prepare to cope with adversity before a crisis, constantly replenish your energy and protect your health.

*“Resilience is about being ready to go faster, to swerve corners, to brake but not crash.”*

It’s never too late or too early to begin cultivating resilience by building the strength and flexibility you need to survive, restore yourself and thrive in an uncertain world.

### **About the Author**

Psychologist **Audrey Tang** also wrote *The Leader’s Guide to Mindfulness* and *Be a Great Manager Now!*