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THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A HARDY EXECUTIVE

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The advantages of being a hardy executive

Successful gardeners know when to harden their plants in the nursery, preparing them for the stressors of the outside world. As employees, we are also faced with a constant barrage of stressful conditions, yet those who handle these events well, exhibit just three unique personality traits. A hardy executive, unlike a plant, needs a certain personality.

In the early 80's, the concept of 'Hardiness' as a measured personality trait emerged, when research by Suzanne Kobasa and Salvatore Maddi showed that managers with a 'Hardy' disposition, benefited from a buffering effect for stressful events. Hardy executives just cope better.

The traits associated with a hardy personality, are commitment, challenge and control (the three C's).

People strong in commitment find it easy to be involved with what they are doing – they don't ration the calories of effort. Alienated people, in contrast, are seldom strongly involved, yet often appear taxed.

People strong in control act (and believe) that they can influence outcomes. They never take things at face value, in contrast to passive victims who have a limited sense of resources, preparing themselves for the worst.

People strong in a sense of challenge expect things to change, and see life as a strenuous activity filled with obstacles to be overcome. People who are low in hardiness, feel it is natural for things to remain as they are – for them, change is unwelcome.

Below are 10 ways to build hardiness personality traits:

1. Commit to what you are doing, or find ways to commit to it. The immediate relief from passing the buck is transient.
2. Expect things to change.
3. You do have control. You can start by controlling how you feel.



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4. Dig. Become aware of what is really upsetting you. Did you get upset in the meeting, because of your fear of being jobless, or was the criticism you received really unfair?
5. Understand that you are not your work.
6. Don't regress. For example, you may have difficulty in producing a report on time. A regressive stance would be to state: "They never give you enough time for anything here". It could be your fear of failing that's slowing you down, and will continue to do so until you recognise it. Also, don't always look for a sympathetic ear who agrees with your assertions that so-and-so is a jerk. Rather find objective feedback.
7. Reconstruct. After a stressful event, imagine three ways in which the event could have been worse than it was. Then three ways in which it could have been better. Then ask yourself what needed to be different for these versions to occur.
8. Introduce a mild challenge to your life. This could vary from bungee jumping to getting to work on time. A new skill can have a marked effect on hardiness, especially when undergoing a protracted stressor, such as a divorce.
9. Paradoxical intention. At first, this appears stupid. However the founder of this technique, Victor Frankl, is anything but, to the countless phobic patients he has helped. The technique is simple: imagine the worst scenario possible and try to induce it. So, if you're afraid of sweating in front of an audience, try to sweat as much as you can. After a while, many people find that sweating becomes an unlikely event.
10. Exercise. Sorry about this one, but the evidence suggests that physical exercise has a marked synergistic effect – with hardiness traits – on reducing the effects of stress. However, you can take comfort in the fact that, like palm trees, we become hardier with time.

Reference: Maddi S R, Kobasa S C. The Hardy Executive: Health Under Stress. Dow Jones-Irwin, 1984. ISBN 0-87094-381-2

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