

Resolve: What it Takes to be a Determined Leader



What is the Competency of Resolve?

“...sometimes the hardest thing and the right thing are the same...” — The Fray

Leaders who are hesitant about doing the hard, but right, things will often fall short of getting the organizational results they desire. The most effective leaders are quick to take appropriate action because they are driven by a firmness of purpose that outweighs the discomfort. And, they are able to frame this critical responsibility as one that intentionally supports the strategic outcomes they hope to achieve. Resolve is having the fortitude to do the hard things day after day because the end results are essential.

Finding the right balance between focused determination on results and rigid inflexibility. The flip side to resolve can be rigidity or stubbornness. It is important to recognize the fine balance at play with this competency. To prevent this strength from becoming a weakness, effective leaders ensure they have four key pillars in place: **passion, intentionality, courage, and steadfastness.**

Why it matters:

Cultivating talent is essential to organizational results. To cultivate is to promote growth. If leaders lack the resolve to hold the crucial conversations with employees that help improve performance, outcomes will be compromised.

Passion

Leaders must understand what inspires them to be where they are. The power of an inner driving force is evident in all they say and do, resonating with those around them. For some leaders passion lies in fostering, developing, and coaching others to be the best they can be. Other leaders are laser focused on getting results and engaging all the right people to follow the critical

path to reach them. Others deeply believe that the mission and vision of their organization is crucial to a better life for everyone. Passion is a necessity. It feeds the fuel tank providing you the vitality needed to overcome obstacles that will inevitably block your path. **Passion nurtures resolve.**

Intentionality

Think of intentionality as that space that lives between your dreams or goals and the full realization of them. Intentionality can be a concept or term that is hard to precisely articulate, but you feel it when it is present. Effective intentionality is rooted in core values and beliefs. It is demonstrated by consciously making decisions in alignment with your values and the proof is consistently achieving the goals you set. Without that grounding in beliefs, leaders may pursue ego-driven outcomes like status, prominence, or power. These outward driven needs often create rigid and unyielding leaders who fail to focus on cultivating talent because it may get in the way of what their own needs are. **Intentionality promotes resolve.**

Courage

Winston Churchill said, “Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.” As leadership attributes go, this is the big one. Leadership is about making daring and often unpopular decisions. In fact, it is fair to say that leaders without courage will have impoverished willpower. Resolve drops off the radar when you are afraid to face your fears or refuse to take the needed steps to overcome adversity or challenges.

There is nothing quite as challenging for leaders as being courageous supervisors or managers of people. The hardest things for leaders to do are to tell employees what needs to be said and doing it as soon as the situation arises. Real conversations are uncomfortable, especially if conflict is involved. But there is nothing healthier than clearing the air and resolving issues by having the courage to tell an employee the truth about their behavior and the impact on others. The next hardest thing for leaders to do is to have the humility to hear what others have to say to you. Asking for and receiving feedback requires bravery. **Courage is the backbone of resolve.**

Steadfastness

Let’s say as a leader you have abundant passion, high intentionality, and the courage of a lion. What happens, though, when the going gets tough....not just a couple of weeks of tough, but months of harsh realities? What do you do in the face of overwhelming adversity?

Steadfast leadership is shown through patience, tenacity, faith, and the ability to set a pace for yourself that helps you survive sprints and marathons. Effective leaders keep their eyes unwaveringly focused on the purpose for undertaking any initiative – the intended outcome. Effective leaders are keenly aware that the purpose will not be accomplished without high performing employees. And high performing employees must trust and have confidence in a leader who is calm, firm, stable and capable of enduring strain, navigating them through whatever storm is present. **Steadfastness perpetuates resolve.**

Resolve in Action

One of the most common situations in which leaders' resolve is tested is when they must hold conversations with employees about performance. The higher the level of discomfort to address these situations, the greater a leader's resolve and courage must be brought into play. In Susan Scott's book, *Fierce Conversations*, she states, "Leaders get what they tolerate. People do not repeat behavior unless it is rewarded." When leaders are resolute about holding critical conversations or confrontations, Scott provides helpful steps (below) to facilitate effective outcomes.

Preparation is Key

Identify your most pressing issue

- The issue I need to resolve is ...

Clarify the issue

- What is going on? How long has it been going on?
- How bad are things?

Determine current impact

- How is this issue currently impacting me?
- How is it currently impacting others?
- When I consider this impact (on me and others) what is my emotional response?

Determine future impact

- If nothing changes, what will likely happen?
- What's at stake for me? For others?

Examine your personal contribution to the issue

- How have I contributed to the problem?

Describe the ideal outcome

- When this issue is resolved, what difference will that make?
- What results will I enjoy? What results will others enjoy?
- When I imagine this resolution, what are my emotions?

Commit to action and contract with yourself

- What is the most important step I could take to move this issue toward resolution?
- What's going to attempt to get in my way and how will I get past it?
- Write down the action and when you are going to do it. Script your opening comments.

Framing the Conversation (preferably less than 5 minutes)

Name the issue

- Jack, I want to talk to you about the effect your behavior is having on the team

Select a specific example that illustrates the behavior or situation you want to change

- Example should be succinct—no long stories

Describe your emotions about the issue

- "I'm concerned," "I'm frustrated"

Clarify what's at stake

- Why is this important?

Identify your contribution to the problem

- No long confession, but “I’ve contributed to this problem by ...[not addressing it when the behavior first occurred.]”

Indicate your wish to resolve the issue

- This is what I want to resolve (use the word)

Invite the person to respond

- “I want to understand what is happening from your perspective. Please talk to me about ...”

Inquire about his or her views

- “Please say more about this. I see it quite differently, so I’d like to understand your point of view.”

Come to an agreement

- What have we learned? What needs to happen now?
- How will you check-in with each other about the issue moving forward?

Managing Strong Emotional Responses

If you’re not in danger, go straight to the emotion that you observe (anger, fear, hurt)

- Don’t get hooked, one-up them, patronize, or tell the person to calm down. Instead:
 - Ask—Why does this make you so angry?
 - Mirror—You seem really upset about this.
 - Guess—Are you upset because you feel as if I’m treating you unfairly?
- It’s okay to take a break first—go to your office, take a breath, and talk later when everyone’s calmer

Doing the right thing as a leader is often the hardest responsibility to undertake. Exceptional leaders display professional willpower by drawing on four powerful forces: passion, intentionality, courage, and steadfastness. Becoming a more resolute leader is within reach. Begin by assessing where you are against the four pillars and refining one small step at a time. The more you develop any aspect of the pillars, the sturdier your resolve will become. This alchemy of elements will produce consistent organizational results and highly effective leaders.

References:

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