



ROAR

HOW TO BUILD
A RESILIENT
ORGANIZATION
THE WORLD-FAMOUS
SAN DIEGO ZOO WAY

SAN DIEGO ZOO
GLOBAL

Sandy Asch and Tim Milligan



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This groundbreaking book shows you how the San Diego Zoo has created that resilience with a roar of purpose and passion that drives engagement and inspires extraordinary effort."

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Introduction

More than education, more than experience, more than training, a person's level of resilience will determine who succeeds and who fails. That's true in the cancer ward, it's true in the Olympics, and it's true in the boardroom."

– Dean Becker

The way we're working isn't working. The manic demand and pressures of the workplace have caused us to neglect our health and well-being, our families and personal lives. We are sicker, more disconnected, and less fulfilled. There is little buffer between demand and response, call for action and expected result, messages requesting information and anticipated acknowledgment. We're struggling to maintain peace, calm, and tranquility in the storm of stress, and the focus and energy we need to harness innovation and creativity.

It's no wonder there is so much illness and despair in the world. It has been estimated that 75 to 90 percent of all visits to primary care physicians are for stress-related problems. We are being challenged to adopt a new normal, a new way of thinking about how we work, to find a better way to balance the pressures and demands of work with a healthy personal life, and rediscover joy, equanimity and peace that extend beyond our workday into our homes and communities, and ultimately the world.

Building Immunity to Disruption

It's a fact that we're living in disruptive times. Industries are collapsing, financial markets are imploding, oil and commodity prices are plummeting, and terrorism is shutting down major urban areas. Preventing

these hardships would be everyone's first choice. But in an increasingly complex and volatile world, it's impossible.

To survive and thrive, organizations must be purposeful, agile, tenacious and balanced. They must find a sustainable means to proactively protect their most valued assets and resources—their employees, to mitigate the risk of economic pressures and uncertainty and continue to innovate and thrive. “Today it's become essential for companies (and individuals) to become more agile—not just in the face of the risks we know, but in the face of the ones we won't see coming,” says Andrew Zolli, the executive director and curator of PopTech and the co-author (with Ann Marie Healy) of *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*.

The key to not only surviving the events of today's world, but to prosper is resilience. While human resilience may be thought of as a personality trait, in the aggregate, groups, organizations, and even communities can learn to develop a “culture of resilience” which manifests itself as a form of “psychological immunity” to, or the ability to rebound from, the untoward effects of adversity.

Resilience is more than survival. It is the ability of the individual and the organization to endure while remaining true to closely held values. Resilient people and companies do not only rebound from challenging circumstances; they seek out meaningful ways to learn from those experiences and build capacity for the future.

Resilience Means Growing Stronger

Resilience is a hot topic in business. Some might say it's the new buzzword, especially as it relates to financial resilience. Does it matter in the workplace? Yes, probably more than intelligence, skill or ambition. Resilience is the backbone of any organization—the ability of its employees to respond effectively to the demands and pressures of the work world to meet goals and expectations while possessing perpetual fulfillment. The business world has excelled at mastering the art of achievement, yet many still hunger for fulfillment. The lack of fulfillment in the workplace may indeed be the reason so many organizations constantly struggle with recruitment and retention, and—as

Gallup has proven for the past decade or more—why they have been beleaguered by concerns around declining employee engagement.

The solution to happiness and wellbeing is to cultivate resilience. Resilience is complex, subject to varied interpretations. It is perhaps one of the greatest puzzles of human nature. Resilient people possess five key characteristics: the ability to control their response; proficiency at managing time and energy; deftness at consistent authenticity; finesse at maintaining meaningful connectedness; and a prevailing perseverance.

Resilience is something you typically realize you have after the fact, perhaps following a challenging experience. Yet it is most valuable when developed before the fact. You tend to underestimate its importance when things are going well, and you most sorely feel its absence when times are tough. Everyone needs resilience. It's a virtue essential to growth and key to happiness and success.

The Biosphere 2 project was created as a research tool for scientists to study Earth's living systems, and it allowed scientists to experiment with farming and innovation in a way that didn't harm the planet. One of the most significant discoveries made by the scientists had to do with the wind's role in a tree's life. It was found that the trees inside Biosphere 2 grew rapidly, more rapidly than they did outside of the dome, but they also fell over before reaching maturation.

After studying the root systems and outer layers of bark, the scientists realized that a lack of wind actually caused a deficiency of stress wood. Stress wood helps a tree position itself for optimal sun absorption and it also helps trees grow more solidly. Without stress wood, a tree can grow quickly, but it cannot support itself fully. It cannot withstand normal wear and tear, and survive. In other words, the trees needed some stress in order to thrive in the long run.

While many people would prefer to avoid stress in the workplace, we all know it's inevitable. Rather than viewing stress as a negative factor, it can be used to build resilience; and enable employees to thrive by developing critical skills and characteristics to support themselves—to move through the demands of the business world with greater ease.

Building a Resilient Workforce at San Diego Zoo Global

Since a strong sense of purpose is a vital component of resilience, it follows that the most successful organizations and people possess clearly articulated value systems and a vision and mission that engage both hearts and minds. This is the case at San Diego Zoo Global. “What has saved an Diego Zoo Global and allowed us to prosper for the past 100 years, becoming one, if not the most recognized, zoo in the world, is our purpose,” says Doug Myers, SDZG president and CEO. “Everyone who works for us, volunteers or supports us shares a common set of values.” Although SDZG’s mission and strategy have changed, the values have always remained constant.

Anyone can lead but few are able to win the hearts and minds of their team to evoke a roar of purpose and passion. When you rally people around a cause they care about deeply, extraordinary things are possible. Such is the case at San Diego Zoo Global, a 100-year-old non-profit organization that has earned the reputation of “World Famous.”

More than five million guests visit the San Diego Zoo and San Diego Safari Park each year to view the renowned animal exhibits, enjoy the attractions and learn about conservation. SDZG is not only known as a sanctuary for animals, but also a sanctuary for people. “We must take extra good care of our employees as we do our animals to ensure we are able to achieve our goals and fulfill on our mission,” says Myers. “Although we pay our employees fairly, we realize they deserve much more. This is why we go the extra mile to take care of them and support them in living a healthy, balanced life.”

Building a resilient workforce at SDZG is founded on purposeful architecture of an organizational culture that thrives on the mission and purpose. Leaders are grounded in doing the right things, and called forward by an overwhelming passion for the mission. Commitment to the vision of ending extinction is infectious.

Becky Lynn was hired in 1975 and currently serves as director of employee communications. Forty years later she is still as excited

about her job as when she first started working for the Zoo. “I stay because of the important conservation and animal care work we do, as well as the amazing people I’ve been fortunate to work with,” Becky explains. “In the early 1980s, SDZG and other conservation organizations brought in the last 22 California condors from the wild to help them back from the brink of extinction. It was a controversial move at the time. Our people were so dedicated to this challenge. We were excited together at each success. My job has been to communicate these and other conservation achievements for all employees to share.”

“There are now more than 400 California condors, with over half of them returned to the wild. Recently, my 37-year-old son was hiking in the mountains above Big Sur and he had the opportunity to sit quietly near two wild California condors on a ledge. He was thrilled, and so was I. It felt as if my career and connection with SDZG had come full circle. We work to conserve these endangered species so that our children and grandchildren will be able to appreciate them in their natural habitat—and that is exactly what happened. A week later, my son took his 8-year-old daughter camping on the beach in Big Sur and they saw two California condors flying above. Heart-warming!”

Going for the ROAR

It seems everyone wants to work at the Zoo. After all, how many people have the opportunity to feed breakfast to lions or watch monkeys during their lunch break? SDZG’s recruitment tag line “Put Your Passion for Wildlife to Work!” attracts approximately 15,000 applications each year from highly talented people eager to be part of its “world famous” organization. Of these, about 900 are accepted. People don’t want to leave either. The average tenure of Zoo employees is 20-plus years, with an attrition rate of less than five percent.

Above all, the factor that bonds SDZG employees, volunteers and supporter is their commitment to the ROAR. The ROAR is the list of values or core tenets of the San Diego Zoo Global culture. “We like to say those are the things that have always been here,” says Ted Molter,

chief marketing officer. “They always will be here. They’re not necessarily things we’re good at. They are the things that we care about and we’ve always cared about since the Zoo was founded in the 1900s. The things we will continue to care about far into the future.”

Now, 100 years later, “the roar” is the theme of SDZG’s centennial. The “roar heard around the world” is being marked by an event where tens of thousands of supporters will gather in a ROAR and be recorded in the Guinness Book of World Records. “The ROAR is the mark in the world in terms of the impact we have,” says Myers. This includes more than 34 research projects in 33 countries; the drive to save endangered species; renowned education programs that have touched hundreds of thousands of children; and the mark SDZG has made on millions of people from around the world who have visited the parks.

Becoming World Famous

Conventional thinking used to be that SDZG’s reputation would ensure its long-term success. But, the organization also realized that in order to accomplish this goal, it would have to nurture world-famous leaders.

Just as the Zoo has been recognized internationally as a leader in conservancy, working tirelessly to save endangered species from extinction, it too, has been acclaimed for its efforts to build a “world famous” place to work. It has flaws like any other organization, but is fiercely committed to architecting a culture where every person is fully engaged in providing a GRRREAT guest experience. After all, if you have the reputation as a world-famous organization, it’s important to be a world-class employer too. To accomplish this it have embarked on a systematic Zooprint for Success—a roadmap to develop best-in-class people practices, all on a shoestring budget. If the SDZG can, you can!

As with any new employee, interns attend extensive training, job shadow animal experts, and are rigorously oriented to the “world-famous” way. On Day One, new hires are imprinted for success with the Rules of Engagement. Described in Chapter 2, these are SDZG’s

code of conduct, a set of standards and expectations. The rules establish a common language, shared vision, and accountability for being world famous. They help to build a positive, productive workplace and a resilient culture.

And, thus begins the story—one of how SDZG is forging a leadership identity, and building an organization that keeps getting better and better. Its success over the years has been validated by significant growth in the number of visitors to the Zoo and Safari Park, with park attendance in 2014 breaking a 100-year record. It has achieved a 10 percent improvement in overall employee engagement scores, and has received seven awards for workplace excellence. It's bold, audacious goal is to end extinction. It isn't the perfect organization, but we think it's doing a GRRREAT job.

In *Roar: How to Build a Resilient Organization the World-Famous San Diego Zoo Way*, we share with you what SDZG did to get where it is and how they did it. We offer you a Zoo Print for Success—a roadmap peppered with creative ideas and insider stories to build resilient employees who are proud and passionate. The book begins with an exploration of Resilience including the five-step Resilience at Work™ model, and how to calculate the financial impact of resilience. Then you will learn about many of the innovative strategies SDZG uses to build a resilient organization. Next, in each of the sections, you will delve into the five core competencies of resilience supported by real stories from the San Diego Zoo.

We will show you how to build a resilient organization while having fun, even if you don't have a monkey exhibit. So put on your safari hat and come along for the ride.



CHAPTER
1

Measuring the Value of Resilience

*I don't measure a man's success by how high he climbs, but
how high he bounces when he hits bottom.*

—George S. Patton, Jr.

In 1999-2000, Xerox faced a weakening economy, a massive reorganization that didn't go very well, shrinking revenue, weak profits that cut shareholder stock value in half, and nineteen billion dollars in debt. Customers were unhappy, employees defecting, and if that weren't enough, the company was under a worldwide SEC investigation for fraudulent financial practices.

According to Anne Mulcahy, former President and CEO, Xerox could have managed a few of these issues, but the cumulative impact was overwhelming. Was the company resilient enough to rebound? Did employees have what it would take to weather the storm? Would Mulcahy and her leadership team be able to maintain self-control, be proactive rather than reactive and retain a calm focus? People were writing Xerox's obituary, but it made a remarkable comeback.

Communication and connection, while always important in an organization, become the number one priority in times of crisis. Mulcahy's straightforward style and commitment to what she refers to as "the brutal truth"—her authenticity and willingness to be vulnerable, may have been one of the single most important factors in Xerox's recovery. At times like these, when leaders typically "go underground", and a veil of secrecy emerges around strategies and decisions, Xerox leaders were open and honest.

For most of her first year as President and CEO, Mulcahy traveled around the world talking, and mostly listening to employees and stakeholders. She invited employees to roll up their sleeves and be part of the recovery or leave. Her message, clear and simple: “Here’s the problem. Here’s the strategy. Here’s how you can help.” Mulcahy’s humility and transparency trumped adversity and loyal employees and customers worldwide united to rebuild Xerox’s powerful presence.

To succeed, to excel, you need to build organizational resilience. That’s the ability to quickly adapt to disruptions while maintaining continuous business operations and safeguarding people, assets, and overall brand equity.

We live in a time of relentless demand and extreme pressure. The pace of both work and life is faster than ever. We are bombarded by buzzing, pinging, ringing, tweeting, posting, Snapchatting, and Facebooking—a syndrome that fragments our attention while stealing our time and energy. Change is constant. Workplace stress and burnout are epidemic.

While we once were able to maintain a semblance of separation between work and home, nowadays there is an unavoidable bleeding of jobs into our personal lives. It has become normal to check email after dinner, before bed, and first thing upon waking. Whose idea was it to reach for the mobile phone at the sound of the alarm clock to check texts and emails before we greet the people we love? How did this become the new norm?

In his book, *The Turning Point: Creating Resilience in a Time of Extremes*, Gregg Braden, *New York Times* bestselling author and thought leader on bridging science, spirituality, and the real world, writes, “Our lives are changing with a speed that we’ve never seen, in ways that we’re not prepared for, and faster than we’ve been taught to deal with. It’s a new normal.” Resilience, Braden claims, is critical to

our ability to ride the winds of change and stand firm in the face of chaos and adversity. “We’re living in a time of extremes . . . resilience is our greatest ally . . .” he says.

In this extreme world—where work and life seem to have merged, crisis is commonplace, change is constant, pressure is relentless, and stress is overwhelming—we must develop a new set of rules regarding the way we think about how we work.

Resilient Individuals Make Resilient Organizations

When you are resilient, you are able to rebound, recover, and quickly bounce back from setbacks. You cope with disappointments and stress, overcome obstacles, and easily recover from or adjust to change or misfortune. You are proactive vs. reactive, controlling any egotistical expression and desire to be “right” and make others wrong.

Organizations are the same way, and that is no coincidence, considering that the lifeblood of any organization is its people.

For individuals and organizations alike, resilience is a mindset, skillset and toolset that provides a roadmap to maintain physical, emotional, mental, and relational health irrespective of the circumstances.

“Since companies are made up of employees, for a company to be “fast, friendly, flexible, and focused,” it obviously needs employees who possess these qualities. Workers who feel stressed out and overwhelmed don’t. Resilient employees do.”

– Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Professor of Business, Harvard Business School

Like people, resilient organizations are able to quickly and effectively bounce back and recover from adversity. A resilient workforce is a productive workforce. A resilient workforce is healthy, energetic, durable, and enthusiastic. Employees remain engaged, focused, and

productive. Truth telling, transparency, honesty, and vulnerability are valued. Trust remains intact because employees are informed about decisions and how they were reached. There is no secrecy about who is going, who is staying, and why.

In this environment, employees are “always apprised and never surprised” when a colleague is escorted out the building. It’s expected (but not celebrated) that companies engage in layoffs during time of turmoil or downturn. Courageous leaders avoid labor cuts at all costs, knowing that the backlash can be costly. In an environment of uncertainty and overload, the “survivors,” i.e., employees who remain, tend to settle into a malaise of disgruntlement. Top talent may choose to go elsewhere while the remaining people hunker down and hope for the best wondering who’s next. It’s no surprise that in these circumstances there is secrecy, resulting in apprehension and an erosion of trust. The outcome is the emergence of gossip and speculation.

While organizational leaders may expect remaining employees to be more productive to make up for the loss of their colleagues, that typically doesn’t happen. Instead, added pressure leads to increased stress and burnout. It’s the paradox of the weak organization—one that does not possess adequate resilience.

While the internal struggle and despair are evident to those inside the organization, external impact is often more significant. The brand equity of the organization is negatively impacted by gossip and storytelling, which creates a public perception that can take years and sizable resources to repair.

“When times are tough, employees at great workplaces show the resiliency to pull through. When times get better, those same employees are ready to lead the rally. It all adds up to cumulative success 2x better than the market average.”

– Great Place to Work Institute

Protecting Your Greatest Assets

It takes courage and commitment for an organization to place a priority on protecting its greatest assets—its people. The world-famous San Diego Zoo, operated by San Diego Zoo Global (SDZG), has done just that. It has created a world-class workforce through a sustained high-performance culture, organizational goals and drivers, a big-picture plan for the future, and numerous employee engagement programs. The result has been expanding global influence and success, anchored by a memorable experience for every guest. While it's not the perfect organization, it has been acclaimed for its forward-thinking philosophies and people-centric focus. SDZG was named the “Best Place to Work in San Diego,” by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), and many other organizations are turning to SDZG for help on various human resources best practices.

While “going for the roar” might be considered a playful take on animal behavior, at SDZG the concept of the “roar” is carefully woven through its strategic plan to create and sustain a workforce that is proud, committed, and fully engaged in its mission and vision.

When employees roar, you can see it in their eyes. You will observe it in their interactions with colleagues and guests. They are joyful, energized, polite, and helpful to colleagues and guests alike. With the roar comes the necessary creativity and energy to fulfill SDZG's vision to end extinction. The roar can build resilience in your organization as well.

SDZG'S CORE VALUES: The ROAR

- Make a difference for wildlife.
- Share the wonder of nature.
- Feel the passion for what we do.
- Breed financial stability.
- Succeed together.
- Remember the roar...and pass it on.

Building resilience in an organization not only fosters a healthier, more productive workforce, but it also serves to build brand equity. SDZG is highly regarded in the international conservation community, recognized for its best practices in animal care and preservation. Its Global Academy is the recognized source for animal care education, as well as soft skill training and development. It boasts over 125 member organizations, which equates to thousands of participants.

The American Zoological Association and the International Association for Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) has recognized SDZG as a leader in the attraction industry, and for its people practices. Tim and his team are asked to present on SDZG's various HR programs and practices at various conferences around the country, including those for SHRM, IAAPA, WorldatWork, and many other organizations.

Engaging Your Organization

How can you invoke a roar of passion, purpose, and commitment to fulfill your organization's vision and mission? You can do it by buying in to a consciousness of caring, heart-based leadership—putting people first.

Building a resilient organization is not for the faint of heart. It requires courage, passion, and resolve, and you will need a clear roadmap to guide your systematic implementation of programs and resources. The goal is to integrate a mindset, toolset, and skillset that become woven into the DNA of the organization and stands the test of time.

The following chapters will provide you with tools, strategies, and practical ideas to help you build a resilience strategy that has positive long-term impact on your business.

Zoo Print for Success

- 🐾 Examine your organization's level of resilience. Determine whether your employees are resilient enough to cope with the stresses, demands, and changes in your organization while remaining deeply engaged, highly productive, and wildly creative.
- 🐾 Consider building a business case for implementing a resilience strategy. What will be the payoffs?
- 🐾 Begin discussions about the importance of resilience and gain the support of key influencers.

World-Famous Leadership Questions

- 🐾 How resilient are you? Do you have the physical, emotional, and mental strength to bounce back from setbacks and remain calm in times of crisis?
- 🐾 What kinds of behaviors do you demonstrate in difficult times?
- 🐾 What is the potential cost or negative impact on your organization of failing to build adequate resilience?

ROAR LOUDER

If you were to assume full responsibility, what action would you take to build a more resilient team or organization?