

Middle Managers Have Thickest Skin

By Michael Laff

IF YOU'VE EVER LISTENED while an executive spouts another poorly conceived idea and then walked back to your desk without comment, then you probably work for a manager with low resiliency.

According to a recent survey, employees might be better served by bringing their criticisms down one level to a district or regional manager.

Resiliency, in plain terms, measures an employee's ability to accept critical feedback. Unfortunately, many current executives are thin-skinned and choose to tune out criticism or launch a counterattack by accusing the critic of not being a team player.

Emotional intelligence

Wayne Nemeroff, CEO of Cleveland-based PsyMax Solutions, which conducted the survey on management personalities, likens resiliency to emotional intelligence. CEOs scored a 66, which placed them at the bottom of the list in comparison with staff at other levels.

"Over time, what seems to be happening is that managers become insulated from criticism. When somebody does disagree with them, their response is, 'I don't want to hear that' or 'you're being negative,'" he says.

The assessment is based on aggregate data collected from a profile questionnaire completed by 2,000 U.S. employees in various fields. Initially, Nemeroff said he was surprised that CEOs fared so poorly, but after consulting with clients and

peers, he found that many CEOs usually are persuaded by their own views, and subordinates are often too timid to question their business decisions.

Insulation

The real wild card in the equation is middle managers, who registered higher resiliency grades than their peers.

"If middle managers are tough minded, what happens when they move up?" Nemeroff asks. "They get insulated."

Nemeroff suggests that CEOs can break out of their cocoon by opening a dialogue with staff, customers, and vendors through email or other channels to avoid the filter that usually accompanies information that moves up the corporate hierarchy. CEOs should seek out the opinions of others and avoid becoming disconnected.

CEOs should not feel alone because administrative and clerical staff also scored low. Nemeroff said the group includes claims adjusters, call center staff, and high-level executive assistants who, because of the rigid nature of their position or because they are close to the executive level, are often as stubborn as the boss.

Michael Laff is an associate editor of *T+D*; mlaff@astd.org

The BIG Number...

84%

is the "resiliency" rate of district or regional managers.

Tough-minded scores for all employee groups

Employee Group	Score	Resiliency Range
President/CEO/COO	65.5%	Low
Executive	72.6%	Average
District or regional manager	84.1%	Very High
Department or unit manager	78.9%	High
Supervisor or foreman	77.9%	High
Professional and technical	72.6%	Average
Administrative and clerical	72.6%	Average

Source: PsyMax Solutions