

Are You Conditioned To Succeed Or Fail?

Taking on new responsibilities, a different role, a bigger project, managing more staff, or starting a new job can be like a double edged sword. On one hand it is exciting and new, yet on the other hand, it can be overwhelming and stressful.

Being able to turn challenges into opportunities, and turn stress and tension into energy and enthusiasm is the foundation to building Pressure Proof leaders and teams that achieve more in high pressure environments.

In 1915, Walter Bradford Cannon coined the term 'fight or flight' to describe an animal's response to threats [1]. Over time, it was noticed that people also have the same 'fight or flight' response, where they would either recoil and avoid, or react and respond, when faced with threats and challenges. This physiological 'fight or flight' reaction is inbuilt into your physiological hardware and becomes an unconscious behavioural habit.

When new leaders are placed under pressure, when teams are given multiple projects, when customer service deals with a series of difficult interactions, they will default back into their most ingrained 'fight or flight' responses.



Many businesses, organisations and schools provide technical and procedural training so that people are able to fulfil their roles, They are, however, often at a loss on how to help them apply these skills when pressure builds and distracts their focus and decision making. It is at this stage when one's most ingrained 'fight or flight' responses surface and take over.

In the workplace, a 'flight' response may surface in procrastination, prioritising easier tasks, avoiding confrontation, or waiting for someone else to resolve an issue. The flight response resembles a retreat from the challenge or threat.

The 'flight' response can also manifest in people waiting for someone to show them the solution, provide the answer, or 'spoon feed' them the steps. Externally, they might be viewed as lazy or incompetent, but they are just stuck in an automated and unconscious 'flight' reaction to pressure that has never been modified.

Alternatively, a 'fight' response may surface in proactive problem solving, taking on responsibility, creating transparent accountability, and breaking down what might feel like an overwhelming task into bite-sized action steps.

The 'fight' response is about immediate and proactive action. Not being afraid to get your hands dirty and do the ground work. To be innovative, creative, and be prepared to risk failure in order to achieve your outcome.

Dr Hans Selye discovered that one's experience of stressful situations differs depending on whether their impulsive responses are positive or negative. [2]

So, before introducing new targets for your teams, before raising your standards of customer connectivity and service, before taking on new projects, before inducting new leaders into their roles, and before you hold the launch meeting, the motivational speech, or the welcome back breakfast, consider how you need your teams to operate when their pressure doubles.

Will your teams default to a 'fight' or 'flight' pattern? When the workload increases, client demands escalate, and changes occur, will they automatically kick in to being proactive and time efficient, or will they default to scattered, rushed and inefficient.

No matter how much technical training you provide, a person's inbuilt pressure response will always drive their personal productivity and leadership style.

REFERENCES

- [1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fight-or-flight_response
- [2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Selye

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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