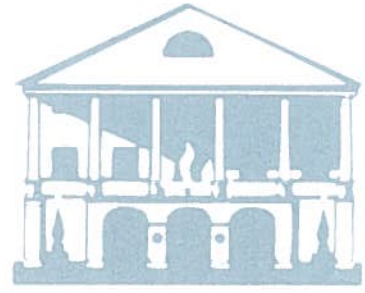


# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Newsletter of the Federal Executive Institute Alumni Association

November-December 2013, Number 395



## GUEST COLUMN

### Leadership and Resilience in Times of Change<sup>1</sup>

by Irma McClaurin, PhD, Senior Faculty, Federal Executive Institute



Dr. Irma McClaurin

*Editor's Note: We are pleased to have a guest column from FEI Senior Faculty Member Irma McClaurin. She gave a very informative presentation on resilient leaders at FEIAA's November 6 Wine'd Down Wednesday at the National Press Club.*

*Resilience is all about being able to overcome the unexpected. Sustainability is about survival. The goal of resilience is to thrive. —Jamais Cascio<sup>2</sup>*

Examples of resilient leaders are sprinkled throughout

our history. We need only reflect on the resilience of President Abraham Lincoln who, less than seven months after the death of his favorite son, made a decision (the Emancipation Proclamation) that changed the course of American history. There was no time for him to grieve his personal loss or remove himself from the public arena. His country was divided and he needed to display resilience in order to secure its future.

Franklin D. Roosevelt also comes to mind as a resilient leader. He remains the only president to serve with a highly visible disability. His resilience was on public display when he resumed his political career after being stricken with polio; he would serve three presidential terms and be elected to a fourth despite his handicap and shepherd a disillusioned nation through the Great Depression. In his battle toward recovery, FDR insisted on surrounding himself with positive people to match his own positive attitude, and he demonstrated "stubborn faith." More than that, he set in motion a national public concern for people with disabilities when he championed the Warm Springs therapeutic center; he later personally endowed it as the Warm Springs Foundation, today known as the March of Dimes.

Resilient, resiliency, resilient leadership have become common mantras in today's professional leadership

world. What is a resilient leader, and why do we need one today? The answer to the last question should be obvious to any Federal employee. Over the past four months, we have witnessed sequestration, furloughs, budget deficits, leadership changes, grueling and drawn out confirmation hearings for political appointees, retirements, and the like. A tsunami of changes has swept the Federal landscape, and one does not need a crystal ball to predict that this is just the beginning of a culture of change, and not the end.

#### What's in our Future and Who Will Lead Us?

*There is no problem that doesn't have some underlying need for more optimism, stamina, resilience and collaboration. —Jane McGonigal<sup>3</sup>*

Even global leaders acknowledge that change is upon us and here to stay—as if it ever left. The theme for the 2013 World Economic Forum was "Resilient Dynamism," and some say we now live in a "VUCA" world—one shaped increasingly by "volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity."<sup>4</sup>

To help organizations weather this VUCA storm, coaching guru Doug Silbee begins the second chapter of his book, *Presence-Based Coaching*,<sup>5</sup> with this powerful state-

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ment: "The world *needs* leaders who are resilient, optimistic, resourceful, authentic, and committed."

So, how do we find them? Are resilient leaders born or developed? Are people "naturally" resilient or are they "nurtured" to be resilient? The ability to bounce back from adversity and innovate, to use that moment when the world appears to be crashing inward as an opportunity to create, lies somewhere in between. It requires personal awareness or emotional intelligence, a positive and proactive attitude, the ability to be comfortable in the midst of ambiguity and uncertainty, flexibility and adaptability, and a commitment to nurturing one's own emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.<sup>6</sup>

We all have elements of resilience wired into our DNA. That's how humans have survived and thrived as a species. But sometimes we forget the most basic ones when faced with disruptions, adversity, uncertainty, and unpredictability. Spending some time strengthening those resilience

muscles is well worth the investment, and for leaders, it is an organizational imperative. In the end, it's a win-win situation for you and the organizations you lead.

As Silbee reminds us, we NEED more resilient leaders to cope with and innovate within the challenges of the global world in which we live and work today and in the future. ■

Bass, 2008, p. 37. <http://www.dougsilbee.com/pdf/pbc-ch-2.pdf>; retrieved 11/12/13 (emphasis added).

<sup>6</sup> Derived from Schambaugh, Rebecca. *Leadership Secrets of Hillary Clinton*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010; and Patterson, Jerry L., Goens, George A., and Reed, Diane E. *Resilient Leadership for Turbulent Times: A Guide to Thriving in the Face of Adversity*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.

<sup>1</sup> Derived from "Lead Different: Leadership and Resilience in Times of Change," presented to the Federal Executive Institute Alumni Association, November 6, 2013, National Press Club, Washington, DC.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/resilience.html#70mM42qMFv010gc.99>; retrieved 11/12/13.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/janemcgoni560550.html>; retrieved 11/12/13.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/authors/writing/calls.htm?id=4535>; retrieved 11/12/13.

<sup>5</sup> Silbee, Doug. *Presence-Based Coaching: Cultivating Self-Generative Leaders Through Mind, Body and Heart*. San Francisco: Jossey



**Right:** Dr. McClaurin addressing FEIAA members at the November Wine'd Down event. **Below:** FEIAA members at November Wine'd Down Wednesday at the National Press Club.



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**FEIAA Annual Holiday Luncheon**

Mark your calendars now for the FEIAA Annual Holiday Luncheon, to be held on Thursday, December 5, at the National Press Club. Dr. Matthew Stafford, FEI Dean of Faculty, will be joining us to share remarks about the future of FEI. He will also be sharing a very special Christmas story.