



Pivoting and Resilience: What I've Learned Over 30 Years

Joan Burge shares the tools and advice that have helped her build resilience and learn how to pivot

Just when I thought Office Dynamics would celebrate its 30 years throughout 2020 by honoring Assistants, we were told to shut our offices and work from home. Instead of traveling around the country, holding all kinds of live events and workshops for Assistants, we had to cancel every single live event.

I saw everything around me crumbling. 80% of Office Dynamics' business is providing on-site training and coaching to Assistants and executives. The other major training we offer is our Annual Conference for Administrative Excellence – where people show up at a hotel! Well, that surely wasn't going to happen, even though I hung on with all my might and faith believing things would get better by October 2020.

This was hard to accept after putting my entire heart and soul into an industry I loved – an industry that I eat, breathe, and sleep. And hard to accept after having to save my company five times over 30 years due to 9/11, the economic crash, the death of my husband and my own personal major surgeries which put me out of commission for months at a time.

My salvation was that I had lots of experience being resilient, being a warrior, a victor, and knew how to pivot my business. I knew how to be the victim for a short time and become the victor very quickly. I knew how to creatively problem solve, to adapt quickly and to reach out to others. I knew a negative attitude would destroy everything. Yes, I had gotten very good at bouncing back.

My hope for this article is to give you some real tools and advice to build your resiliency and learn how to pivot.

Be like the palm tree

I've lived in Las Vegas since 2000 and I love the palm tree – not only for its beautiful big palms but because the palm



tree represents resiliency. It stands tall in the sky, can bend with the wind... but never breaks.

The palm tree is the epitome of resiliency. It can withstand hurricanes with winds of 100 mph or more. Where other trees would snap under the pressure, the palm tree has deep root systems to handle various types of inclement weather.

The leaves of the palm tree are an emblem of victory! Did you know that palm trees actually benefit from storms? As a result of being beaten down by hurricanes, monsoons or other types of storms, their trunks grow stronger, and they grow taller and more beautiful.

- Can you see yourself being like the palm tree?
- Can you bend and flex when the winds are blowing at work?
- Can you weather the storms of conflict? Or the constant demands on your time?
- Can you picture yourself standing strong against the winds of change?
- When you have a setback or failure, can you grow stronger, taller, more beautiful?

Why you should care

Building resilience is important to your career. There will always be turmoil, upheaval and unwanted change in the workplace or our personal lives, like now.

If you can develop resilience, you will be able to:

- bounce back faster after a setback.
- take daily workplace changes in stride.
- use resources effectively, especially when faced with a problem.
- move in tandem with your executive.
- learn the lessons you need to learn.
- exhibit nimbleness as you adapt to change.
- generate innovative solutions to problems.

What does resilience mean?

Resilience is:

- the ability to bounce back from failure or adversity
- described as toughness
- an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change

What resilience isn't

(February 1, 2020, American Psychological Association)

Being resilient doesn't mean that a person won't experience difficulty or distress. People who have suffered major adversity or trauma in their lives commonly experience emotional pain and stress. In fact, the road to resilience is likely to involve considerable emotional distress.

I can attest to this. Some of my greatest distresses were:

- Being an engaged caregiver during my husband's three-year battle with pancreatic cancer and losing him to the disease. Then learning to be a widow after 34 years of marriage.
- Finding out that I had a massive, rare tumor in my skull on July 4, 2014 that needed to be removed. At the same time, I had bacterial meningitis. I then had to undergo a 10-hour brain surgery, experienced Intensive Care Psychosis for 24 hours, and then had a grand mal

seizure two weeks later. Talk about having to be resilient? Having to be a warrior? (The surgery was successful, as about 95% of the tumor was removed.)

- Finding out one year after my brain surgery that I needed to have open heart surgery for a mitral valve repair. So that was my birthday gift to myself in 2015. It took me six months to fully recover because my chest was opened twice in one week.

While certain factors might make some individuals more resilient than others, resilience isn't necessarily a personality trait that only some people possess. On the contrary, resilience involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that anyone can learn and develop. Like building a muscle, increasing your resilience takes time and intentionality.

1. Keep things in perspective

How you think can play a significant part in how you feel – and how resilient you are when faced with obstacles. Try to identify areas of irrational thinking, such as a tendency to catastrophize difficulties or assume the world is out to get you, and adopt a more balanced and realistic thinking pattern. If you feel overwhelmed by a challenge, remind yourself that what happened to you isn't an indicator of how your future will go, and that you're not helpless. You may not be able to change a highly stressful event, but you can change how you interpret and respond to it.

2. Accept change

Accept that change is a part of life. Certain goals or ideals may no longer be attainable because of adverse situations in your life. Accepting circumstances that

cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

3. Maintain a hopeful outlook

It's hard to be positive when life isn't going your way. An optimistic outlook empowers you to expect that good things will happen to you. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.

4. Learn from your past

By looking back at who or what was helpful in previous times of distress, you may discover how you can respond effectively to new difficult situations. Remind yourself of where you've been able to find strength and ask yourself what you've learned from those experiences.

5. See yourself as the orchestrator of your own fate

This puts you in control of the situation. Psychologists call it an "internal locus of control," meaning you believe that you, and not your circumstances, affect your achievements and your outcomes. Bad stuff happens to good people.

2020 – A year of pivoting

Everyone had to pivot in 2020. I don't think there was one person who didn't have to change something in their life. In fact, most of us had to change many things, from where we worked to how we worked to children attending school from home, wearing face masks, social distancing and how to creatively find toilet paper!

Being able to pivot is a good thing, and within it you can find many benefits. Now, after 12 months, I can say, "Aha... here is the good that came out of all that muck last year, all the heartbreak and disappointment." At Office Dynamics, I was able to convert our training courses and lengthy certification courses to live virtual events. We put hundreds of assistants from around the world through our World Class Assistant course and are offering more sessions throughout the year. Our clients who only accessed on-site training are now asking us to teach their Assistants virtually. The list of good news goes on and on.

What skills and attitudes does it take to pivot successfully?

- A willingness to fully let go of what you have known for years
- Courage to step out into the unknown
- Exploring new ways of doing things
- Creatively looking at a "thing" and seeing how it could be different; you stop seeing it the way it is and think about the possibilities of what it could be
- Willingness to take risks
- Accepting failure
- Not giving up because the first idea didn't work
- Being resourceful
- Thinking outside the box
- Stretching way beyond your comfort zone
- Knowing what is truly important and letting the rest go
- Being confident in your abilities to "figure it out" even when you can't see the next step

While we still have a long road ahead of us that is filled with unknowns, 2021 is also filled with new opportunities – and fresh starts.



Joan Burge is known as the pioneer of administrative and Executive Assistant training, and a successful entrepreneur who created a unique business niche to help administrative professionals see themselves as professionals so they could excel in business. Joan worked in the administrative profession for 20 years prior to starting her company, Office Dynamics, in 1990. She is an accomplished author, professional speaker, coach and corporate trainer and

has authored 5 groundbreaking books for administrative professionals, including the Amazon bestseller *Who Took My Pen... Again?* Joan has produced more than 350 educational videos for administrative professionals.