How to avoid feeling undermined by other people’s negativity

Reflection allowed me to analyse an unpleasant workplace experience and boost my resilience to cope with similar situations.

My working day began with a video conference – me in one city and others in another. I was early, so after setting up my laptop and organising my paperwork I dialled in, only to find I couldn’t connect.

An email popped up saying the meeting had been cancelled just five minutes earlier, so I closed down my equipment and returned to my office with the intention of phoning the chairperson.

Logging on to my desktop computer, I found an email headed: ‘meeting NOW’. Before I had a chance to call anyone, my phone was ringing. On answering, I was met with: ‘Where are you, we’ve lost time, why didn’t you phone me?’

Making my way back downstairs to the video conference room I was a little irritated by the blame being directed at me for not being on time.

I tried to rationalise
My explanation seemed to fall on deaf ears, and it was frustrating not being heard. My inner self was telling me this was not my stress but rather the inappropriate behaviour of another, but I still felt deflated.

I kept fairly quiet during the rushed and rather negative meeting – I heard what I needed to action and remained at a distance from the attempted collaboration.

On reflection, I wondered if my resilience had been weakened. Why was I discouraged and put off by this meeting? Had I behaved well under the circumstances? What were the contributing factors to the rotten start to the day?

I had prepared for the meeting and was on time, so was unhappy about the way I was feeling, as though I was being perceived as not good enough for the job.

My opportunity to reflect
The following weekend brought a sunny Saturday morning. This gave me the opportunity to sit outside and read a CPD article in the evidence and practice section of Nursing Standard – Developing resilience: the role of nurses, healthcare teams and organisations.

A colleague had shown me the article in response to an action plan we were working on, and we had both attended a one-hour resilience workshop the day before.

‘I reminded myself of what I consider to be the protective elements of reflection... I could untangle what had happened’

In the article, author Caroline Barratt, lecturer in the school of health and human sciences at the University of Essex, argues that ‘while the psychological characteristics of an individual contribute to their resilience, it is also influenced by various external and environmental factors’.

She continues: ‘For example, if a challenging issue occurs, the financial, social and physical resources that an individual possesses to cope with it will affect how resilient they are and how quickly they can recover.’

I considered the determinants of health at play in my life, including the financial, social and physical resources within my grasp.

I reminded myself of what I consider to be the protective elements of reflection – I could look mindfully at the details and untangle what had happened, learn from my errors and uphold what was good about how I had reacted.

I found ‘Time out 3’ (see box overleaf) particularly helpful in my reflective release. I realised I had finished the working day having actioned all the points I needed to from the meeting. I then stepped away from the computer and all related tasks and worked on a different issue, where I could review, plan, and construct something worthwhile and positive.
The Nursing and Midwifery Council Code says we should ‘deal with differences of professional opinion with colleagues by discussion and informed debate, respecting their views and opinions and behaving in a professional way at all times’. It also says we should ‘use all complaints as a form of feedback and an opportunity for reflection and learning to improve practice’.

**Taking responsibility**

Although no complaints were voiced, the tone of the meeting was powered by stress, initially not my own. I realised the transfer of stress is something I need to be mindful in preventing. I am responsible for my own actions, regardless of circumstances.

My resilience will be tested by the resilience of others, and letting go of someone else’s stress is important if I am to see a situation clearly and have something positive to offer.

In her article about developing effective nurse leadership skills, Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust deputy director of nursing Denise Major says the behaviour of an individual team member can have a significant ripple effect that influences the mood of the team.

The author reminds us to ‘reflect on how you may come across to others – what are your stress points and when do you feel most confident?’.

Although I cannot control the behaviour of others, I can become more self-aware and develop my own professional competence and confidence.

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**The activities that nurture you, and those that deplete**

*Extract adapted from Caroline Barratt’s article on developing resilience:*

**Time out 3**

Sit in a quiet space. Using a notepad, list the activities you engage in in your life that you find nurturing in the left column and those you find depleting in the right column. Do this quickly, without thinking too much or censoring yourself.

Take time to reflect on the two lists. Is there anything that surprises you? Are there actions you could take to increase the time you spend on nurturing activities, or to reduce the time you spend on depleting activities?

Note that it is unlikely you will be able to remove all depleting activities from your life; the purpose of this exercise is to enable you to identify the balance you have between these two types of activities.

*Read the full article at rcni.com/developing-resilience*