

Uncertainty: To lead it or to avoid it. That is the question!

The degree and complexity of uncertainty that top executives face every day has been increasing steadily in the last thirty years, but it's going to get worse before it gets better.

Resilience is fast becoming the most demanded executive skill in leaders worldwide. Simply put, resilient executives can lead organizations and markets through uncertainty. Non resilient leaders just hide behind slides and excel sheets as they try to avoid it. Which would YOU hire?

Increased uncertainty requires resilient executives

As globalization joins economic downturn, financial instability and varying degrees of conflict across geographic regions, top executives are asked to keep a cool head in order to make the right decisions in increasingly complex environments.

Whereas thirty or twenty years ago our leaders had to choose between clearly analyzed and well researched strategic options, today they are forced to bet on alternative scenarios without the necessary information to do so, in record time. Markets are simply a lot less predictable than they used to be.

The decision makers of 2010 are required to lead their organizations through uncertainty into new business opportunities, overcoming their own secret fears, and more significantly, those of their stock holders, executive committees and workforces.

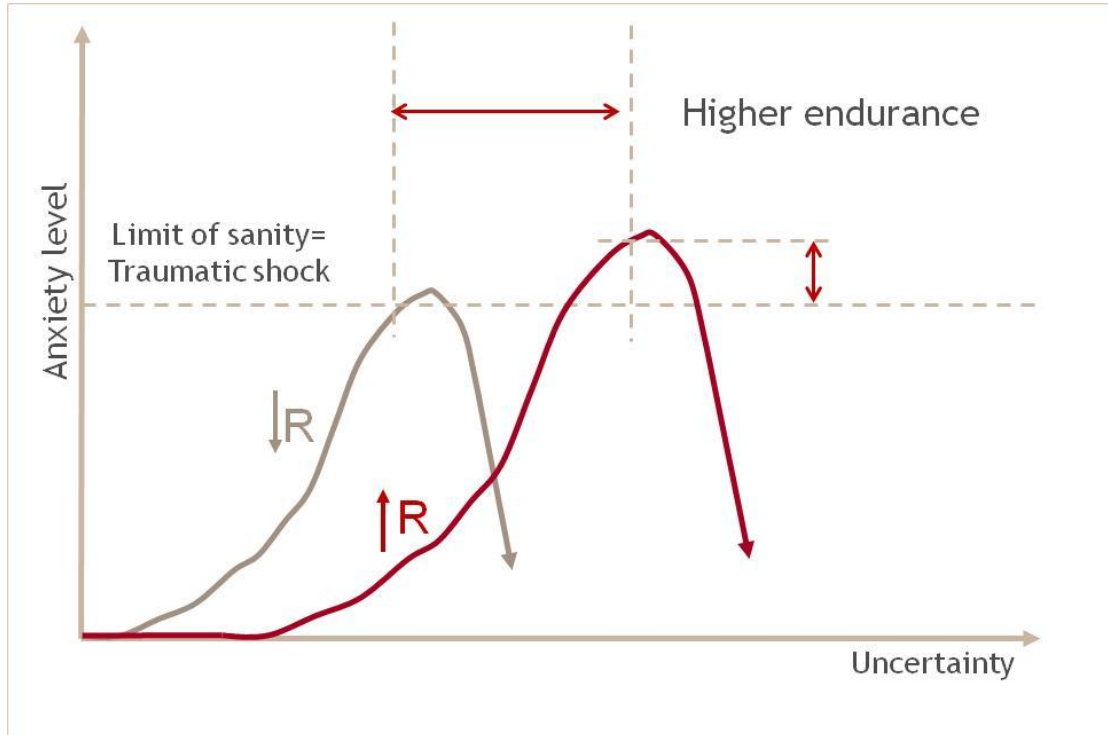
That's why resilience has become the name of the game in many recruiters' minds. Resilient executives have the ability to overcome traumatic situations and face big changes with a smile on their face and a jolt to their step. They worry less, they tolerate higher levels of anxiety, and maintain optimistic attitudes that inspire others to be strong instead of caving in.

More importantly, resilient executives maintain high levels of performance because they don't let stress and anxiety get to their heads. A lot of executives boast about working better under pressure, but the truth is that prolonged stress and high levels of anxiety reduce their ability to think clearly, slow down their execution and increase unproductive conflict. Stress easily translates into fear, anger, demotivation and depression in many cases. Good business for anxiety pill sellers, though...

The following graph shows the anxiety curve of a person with low resilience in grey, versus the anxiety curve of a highly resilient executive in red.

The grey curve increases anxiety at a faster pace at growing levels of uncertainty, and reaches the limit of traumatic shock sooner than a resilient

executive does. When he reaches this limit, emotional trauma kicks in, producing an emotional dissociation that rapidly reduces anxiety levels, but often results in post traumatic stress disorders. Ever heard of a nervous breakdown, an anxiety attack or heart failure among executives? Now you know why!

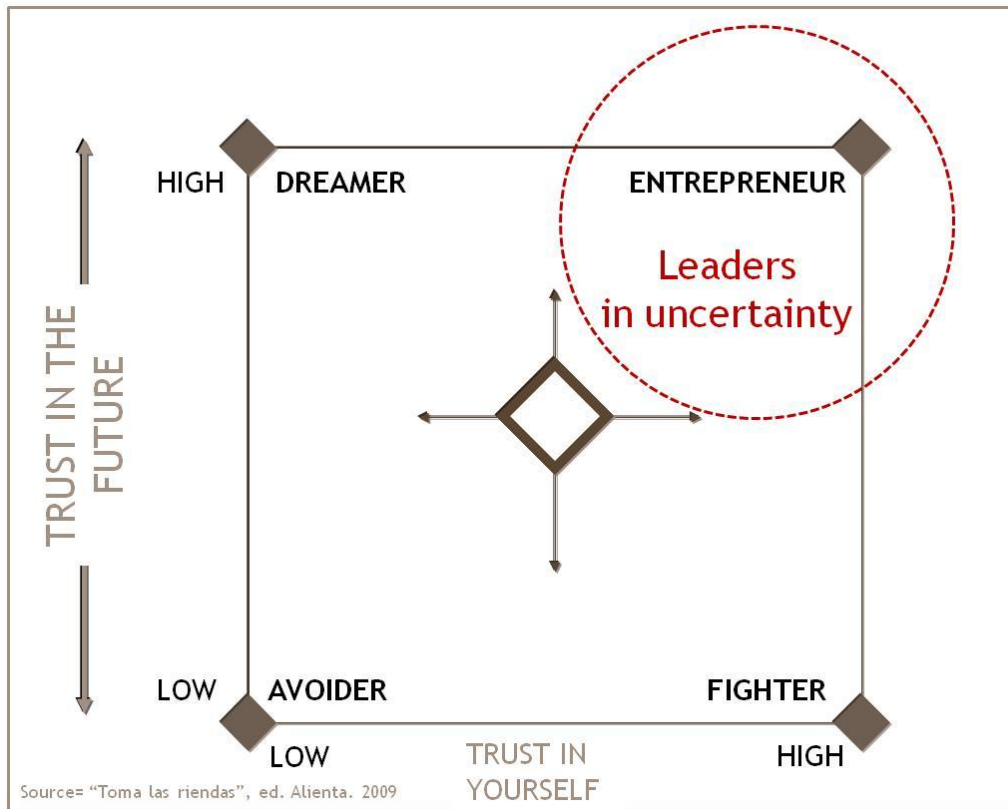


This graph shows how a highly resilient executive will maintain top performance levels in very uncertain environments, and even crisis situations. Because he or she gets less stressed than most people, creative solutions and efficient execution are maintained.

So how do you build resilience?

Resilience is built by developing your trust in yourself, your trust in the future, and your capacity to spread trusting attitudes in the organizations you lead.

This second graph shows how entrepreneurial profiles, those who seek and pursue higher risk avenues in life, have strong trust in themselves and strong trust in the future. Dreamers lack self trust, so they never get round to trying out their grand ideas and desires in the real world. Fighters, on the contrary, have strong trust in themselves but lack trust in the future, developing a lot of frustration and conflict because they fail to convince others of their ideas.



Trust in yourself has to do with defining a strong and realistic concept of yourself, and building confidence and high self esteem, but is also influenced by efficient management of stress and anxiety reduction.

Trust in the future starts with having a clear and accurate vision of the market around you, correctly evaluating your vulnerability as well as your risks. Another two key ingredients are thinking positively and having a strong source of motivation in religious faith, magical thinking or entrepreneurial passion.

When executives become strong on both axes they then need to develop the ability to spread constructive entrepreneurial attitudes across their organizations. Emotional contagion is the channel through which groups of people make each other happy or scared, so leaders of uncertainty become generators or trust in the system when they themselves are an example, and when they make their followers feel optimistic trust about the future and about the company's strengths.

All this explains why being a good leader today is a lot more demanding than it was twenty years ago. You need to develop a better emotional response to high uncertainty situations, and you need to pull your teams through it as well. Start building your resilience now. You're going to need it!