

PETROS

Resilience for Life

Resilience for Senior Prison Leaders

Managing prisons at the moment probably feels like a Herculean task. You may feel like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders. You possibly feel that in the course of meeting everyone else's needs, you have no idea how to meet your own.

Managing our mind is a way to successfully navigate these and other challenges when the pressure, wherever it's coming from, is pretty much unprecedented.

Pressure is defined as "the demand to perform". We're all under pressure all of the time (pandemic or not), and levels do go up and down. Pressure gets turned into stress by thinking and put very simply, stress is NEVER a good thing. It stops us thinking clearly, makes us miserable and has the potential to jeopardise our health.

To stop pressure turning into stress, we need to manage our minds.

To manage our minds, you need energy and practice. It is doable and well worth the effort!

"You have power over your mind, not outside events. Realise this, and you will find strength." Marcus Aurelius

How to keep a clear head

For you and other senior prison leaders it is important to keep a clear head. In order to do this put your own oxygen mask (or life jacket) on first. It is highly likely you haven't even considered your own needs in recent weeks, months or even years! However, without being well resourced yourself, it is not possible to resource others.



Think about the situation you are currently in, as being like rapids in a river - very fast moving and potentially very hazardous.

The rapids represent an increase in demand to perform, or pressure. To successfully navigate rapids we need a clear head, not a head full of stress.

When our heads are full of, "*What if...*" or, "*If only...*" we can't think clearly.

Your physical energy

Eating, exercising, breathing and sleeping.

When you expend your physical energy, make sure you renew it in all the ways you already know how. For now this renewal needs to be a conscious effort – not something you'll think about later.

Eat regularly and well, expend physical energy to renew it – exercise is actually energising so try not to sit at a desk for too long. For example, walking regularly around your prison is really good for you and for your staff.

Try and get enough sleep. If your struggling, take a look at the resources suggested below.

Don't forget to breathe. That sounds ridiculous, but we take breathing for granted, until we can't do it. We often hold out breathe in times of high demand, so remind yourself occasionally to drop your shoulders and inhale deeply.

Your emotional energy

You are highly likely to be dealing with lots of people's anxiety, frustration, anger, fear, sadness...

Whether you're aware of it or not, this will sap your emotional energy. Try and identify one or two things that re-energise you emotionally and make sure you do them. This may be spending time with friends/loved ones, reading, watching a film – whatever works for you.

While you're doing something that makes you happy, make a conscious effort to recognise how good you feel.

Your mental energy

In such a fast moving and ever changing situation you are probably facing a wealth of contradictory and ever changing advice and you will have to make thousands of decisions daily, juggle opposing opinions from those around you and manage the demands from above and below. This is mentally exhausting.

Regular, short, breaks are essential for refuelling mental energy – air traffic controllers, by law, break every hour and a half. If they don't, the risk of catastrophe increases to an unacceptable level!

Other options for managing mental energy include:

- Playing to your SMT's strengths. For example, if someone excels at verbal comms let them do briefings; if someone is powerfully empathic, let them respond to people in distress. Just because you're the boss, doesn't mean you have to do and know everything.
- Ask advice, none of us have all the answers.
- Create your own recorded audit trail of the decisions you make. Once that's done, don't ruminate about it. Move on.
- Delegate – be clear who you are delegating to and why.
- Defer to expertise rather than seniority. Some of the best skills you need to get your establishment through this may be found in the lower grades – use them.

Your spiritual energy

This refers to your core values – what you do, why you do it and who you are. It is the basis for motivation, perseverance, commitment and direction. It's about what ignites you. Spiritual energy is fuelled by character – the courage to live by your values even if that means sacrifice and hardship. This energy domain is likely to be quite tested at the moment!

Sustaining this type of energy is best achieved with adequate self-care. If you are finding yourself tired “to-the-bone”, knowing that food and sleep won't restore you, the chances are you are depleted in this domain. So, your first step is to revisit the other three domains and put some tips from there into action.

To help conserve or renew your spiritual energy it might be helpful to:

- Revisit your reasons for pursuing your career to this level. Remind yourself about how it felt to get to where you are, what your aspirations have been and how you might fulfil them now.
- Identify your current motivators – what ignites you? How would you like to be perceived as leader? How might you ensure that happens?
- Identify two or three key priorities you have for your establishment and work to those.
- Reflect on any benefits of the current situation and how you might use these to move the prison on and achieve your goals in the longer term.

If you can't find a source of renewal in work right now, look outside, to family, friends or another purpose beyond yourself.

Further help and resources

Read Top Tips for Frontline Staff at www.petros.org.uk/resilience-for-front-line-staff

On Form: The Power of Full Engagement by Jim Loehr & Tony Schwartz. A book about managing energy.

Work Without Stress by Derek Roger and Nick Petrie. Available as a FREE audio book on Audible.

Fast Asleep, Wide Awake by Nerina Ramlakhan

petros.org.uk/blog - short blogs to help you lead a stress-free life, plus, a review/summary of 15 mental health websites full of amazing resources.

PAM Assist - HMPPS's Employee Assistance Programme