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HUMAN RESOURCES

How the tough get going

In these demanding times talent development has a powerful tool at its disposal, says Judith Krichefski

In uncertain times when learning and development budgets are being cut, fostering a culture of talent management has become as vital in the NHS as it is in the corporate world.

High performing people are in demand across the marketplace and organisations are striving to maintain peak performance. This demands individuals with a “can do” attitude who are not fazed at the first obstacle or hurdle.

How can managers make sure they identify, develop and retain those people with the talent and capabilities required at all levels and that they demonstrate the link between interventions and results?

Mental toughness is a concept that can help meet this challenge as it is directly related to performance, behaviour, wellbeing and aspirations.

Mental toughness is defined as “the capacity for an individual to deal effectively with stressors, pressures and challenges and perform to the best of their

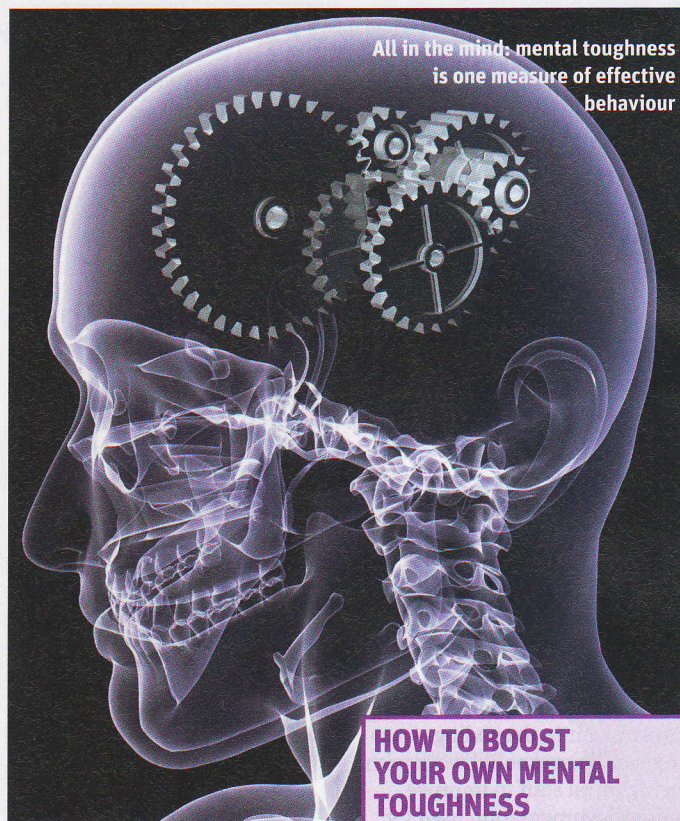
abilities irrespective of the circumstances in which they find themselves”. This is vital for future leaders in the NHS.

So how do you measure this quality? This personal resilience is assessed through a questionnaire which provides an occupational measure of an individual’s mental toughness.

Challenge, commitment, control (emotion and life) and confidence (abilities and interpersonal) are all measured, with breakdowns for all four components.

From this questionnaire several reports are generated:

- An individual development report provides feedback to the individual together with suggestions for action on their development.
- A coaching report provides the manager/coach with a narrative about the person’s leadership style and offers suggestions.
- An assessor report can be used for selection or to probe individual scores more effectively.



All in the mind: mental toughness is one measure of effective behaviour

HOW TO BOOST YOUR OWN MENTAL TOUGHNESS

Positive thinking

- Reframing: start noticing that voice in the head that tries to sabotage success and replace it with self talk such as “I can do this well”, “if I practice I will get better”.
- Stop thinking negatively: thwack yourself with an elastic band every time you think negatively.

Attention control

- When carrying out important and valuable work, seek to do it in an environment free from interruption – and free from the prospect of interruption. Research has shown that each time you are interrupted and have to stop what you are doing you lose up to 30 per cent of the mental work you have completed up until then.
- Controlled distraction: focus on something positive to take you away from thinking about other things, for example pets, music, picture, candle or light.

Visualisation

- Visualise in detail how something will go if it goes well.

Goal setting

- Practice breaking things down into small workable chunks.

- A distance travelled report shows where there has been a change in behaviour. It is most often used to assess the impact of a planned and delivered intervention such as training, coaching or mentoring.
- An organisational development report indicates trends or patterns within the organisation. ● *Judith Krichefski is a mental toughness specialist at Zenon Consulting. To read her first article on mental toughness visit www.hsj.co.uk*

CASE STUDY: A LOCAL RESTRUCTURING PROGRAMME

Mental toughness scores formed the basis of a new talent management programme after the restructure of a primary care trust and local authority. When implementation of the planned strategy was not as successful as anticipated, 97 managers completed the mental

toughness questionnaire. This identified barriers to change and opened the way for a successful new approach. Surprisingly, the middle management were shown to have higher scores than the senior management. This is unusual as major studies have linked management

seniority and mental toughness. The organisation was then able to address the conflict in the teams and a new approach to talent management took into account the culture of the organisation. A development centre was designed using simpler, more effective

interventions – including mental toughness coaching – and senior managers developed clearer understanding of their role and the behaviour required. Measures of performance, motivation and mental toughness increased throughout the organisation.