Adam Lacey: Welcome to this Leading Future Humans audio series from Assemble You and Liggy Webb. My name is Adam, co-founder of Assemble You, the audio learning experts, and in this series, I'm joined by the author of Resilience: How To Cope When Everything Around You Keeps Changing, international speaker and behavioural skills specialist, Liggy Webb.

The original Future Human series focused on a set of human behavioural skills identified by various research, including the World Economic Forum, as skills for the future that will be essential to us in the coming years. In the first series, we explored each of these in-depth and examined why they are important and how we can individually improve at them.

In this second series we're looking at how as leaders we can support developing that same set of skills In the people that we lead, we're excited to dive into each of these topics. As before, this Leading Future Human series is all delivered via audio and designed to be consumed on the go. So Liggy, what are we talking about today?

Liggy Webb: Well, today, Adam, we're going to be talking about leading resilience.

Adam Lacey: A favourite of yours and of mine now. So Liggy, can we start by just defining maybe why this topic is so important and especially why leaders in particular should care about this topic.

Liggy Webb: Well, I know I'm an absolute fan of resilience. I've done a lot of work around this throughout my working career, but I truly believe that resilience is the foundational life skill that we as human beings, every human being, need to be able to embrace and to be able to build on because it's the foundation for us.

The springboard for coping with all the different challenges that life inevitably is going to throw our way. And as leaders, it's so important that we work on our own resilience so that we can ultimately be role models for our teams to be able to aspire to, to follow, to emulate.

Adam Lacey: One question I wanted to ask, actually, before we get going, as well, is what's your view on the importance of personal growth and developing your own resilience versus protecting your team? So I think this is a really interesting one. I've done this before, stepped in and maybe helped someone with something and in hindsight, I've looked back on it and gone, actually, do you know what, would it have been better if they'd have worked that out for themselves rather than me offering that, that level of protection or cover.

Maybe a question for us to get into later in the episode but I wondered if you had any early thoughts on that.

Liggy Webb: Well, I do have some early thoughts and maybe a little bit later on in the episode, I'd like to share a story with you about that because I think this story is a wonderful description of why it isn't always the best thing to jump in when people are struggling. I know exactly what you mean. You see people having challenges and you think, "Oh, I can sort that really quickly," and "I can take the pain away from them. I can take that and sort it out." Actually, I truly believe that the way that we as human beings become resilient is when we experience struggle, when we experience challenges and setbacks.

If we wrap ourselves in cotton wool and always want to have this really easy life, then how are we going to learn how we build our resilience? So I think we do have to be quite mindful of that as leaders.

Adam Lacey: Yeah. So, that balance between protection and letting people work things out for themselves or struggle a bit is super important here.

Liggy Webb: Yeah. I always use the term enjoy resilience because even when you're going through some of those difficulties, you're learning so much about yourself. You're growing and you're getting stronger ultimately.

Adam Lacey: Let's go into our first section for this lesson, which is how do we role model this as a leader. And I think there are both enablers and barriers here. So what should we be doing, is question number one? And question two will be: what shouldn't we be doing as a leader if we want to help others develop this.

Liggy Webb: Okay, first of all, resilience is about healthy recovery from setbacks, from challenges and difficulties. And I think one of the things that we have to remind ourselves, and it's really important that we do this, is that true resilience is not about toughing it out at any cost, but to the detriment of our own well-being.

And I see a lot of leaders doing this. They feel that they need to tough things out. They need to put on this facade that "I'm coping fine," but underneath, they're really not looking after themselves. Perhaps they're reaching out for unhealthy coping mechanisms just to get them through.

So it is so important that as a leader, as a role model, you look after your well-being, you prioritise self-care because you need to look after yourself. You need to fill your own pot to overflowing, and that's probably one of the best things that you can do for other people because if you're burnt out and perhaps behaving in a way that you know isn't particularly kind or compassionate or empathetic because you're so stressed out, that really isn't gonna be helpful.

So I would say that, right at the top of the list, prioritising self care, looking after your well-being is one of the key things that leaders need to be able to do, because being a role model for well-being is living that kind of lifestyle and that's a great demonstration for other people. That's going to be the most inspiring thing that leaders can do.

Adam Lacey: Sends out a really strong signal as well, as a leader, I think, doesn't it? If you've shown that you can prioritise your own well-being, that gives permission explicitly or non-explicitly to the people that are working with you to say, "If my manager's doing this, then I can definitely do this as well" or "If they think this is important, I'm going to emulate this, and this will be the kind of thing that's important to me." And then, you're right on the flip side, the whole toughing it out. And I'm thinking there are certain industries, commercial law, or certain graduate schemes where the expectation is you're working to midnight.

You get dinner bought for you every night, all this kind of stuff that still goes on, maybe less now than 10, 20 years ago, but still definitely goes on in certain industries, where that is encouraged. And it's a badge of honour almost to have not slept for 22 hours and to have done that versus someone who is looking after themselves.

And I think you're saying don't tough it out as a leader, be open about the kind of steps that you're taking.

Liggy Webb: Yeah, absolutely. We need to give people permission to be human and human beings have their limitations. They've got their fragilities. So as a leader, it's being authentic. I think that a really important part of a leader's role is to be a real human being and to be able to demonstrate that it's okay to not be okay sometimes.

So, being human and demonstrating that self-respect. Because that's what well-being is all about. You talk about people burning the midnight oil and really challenging themselves and having very little sleep and all sorts of poor examples of what happens, but that's not sustainable.

We're living in a world where burnout is a huge problem. So leaders, need to make sure that they're running towards that space. They need to be able to demonstrate that they, they do have self respect. I remember years ago, I had a leader, a manager, who was probably my role model manager.

She was absolutely brilliant. But one of the things that she was particularly good at, was establishing boundaries. She was one of the most boundaried people I've ever met. She had the most wonderful way of saying no in the most diplomatic and the most assertive way, no one felt insulted or pushback or anything, but she was just so boundaried.

And I think those personal boundaries are really key.

Adam Lacey: And if you have those personal boundaries, again, you're giving permission to the people working for you to also set those boundaries. So you're role-modelling that behaviour. Let's talk for a second about saying no because actually this is one area we can role model as leaders that passes down really well and can really help with people's resilience.

I think if you're able to say no, you can make time for the more important things. You can make the space that you need to do the right stuff. But there's definitely an art to saying no, like you say, without doing it, without offending people, without putting

people's nose out of joints, without people thinking, "Oh God, you know, they're not someone I want to talk to again or do business with again." or "I'm not going to ask them for a favour again, because they just say no." Have you got any tips for us leaders on how we do say no and how we encourage our people to do it as well?

Liggy Webb: Sometimes it's not necessarily about saying no; it could be saying yes, but it's on my terms. And I think that's one of the key things we need to be aware of because if we are a bit of a people pleaser if we're somebody who likes to demonstrate that they can take on everything, which we see examples of that happening because people are out there and they don't want to show that, for example, that they can't achieve or do things. Very high achievers, I think, sometimes can struggle a bit with saying no. But there are occasions where we are going to say, "Yes, I can potentially help you with that, but I need a bit of time as well to think about what I can do," because we can be very reactive in saying yes to people as well. But also, we have to remember that if we're always saying yes to everybody else, we end up ultimately saying no to ourselves.

And then we can end up feeling quite resentful as well. Now I'm a big, big believer in great leadership, being about delegation. Being a really good delegator is really important and helpful too.

Adam Lacey: Yeah, big time. I think that there's a role that delegation plays in and around resilience. Again, giving permission to your people to delegate stuff also, or to say no, or actually by delegating things to them, giving them opportunities that they otherwise maybe wouldn't have had before and experience and exposure to do things where they can maybe get something wrong, maybe learn from that, maybe build their resilience. And you can see where we're going with this. It's that opportunity. I guess it's doing it in a way that is conscious of what is on the plate of that person and not obviously overloading them as well and giving them the tools to say no to you when they've got too much coming at them as well.

Liggy Webb: Yes, absolutely.

Adam Lacey: Brilliant. Can we talk about some of the barriers to role modelling this? I mean, is there anything in particular that we've not touched on yet that makes this particularly hard to role model as resilience?

Liggy Webb: A big part of self-resilience is self-efficacy. I work quite a lot with the NHS and when people are referring to patients or belief in themselves, their ability to be able to recover through the recovery process.

And that's self-efficacy. That self-belief is really important. So, as leaders, it's having that strong belief in yourself and your own ability. So, raising our self-awareness, being much, much more self-aware of what our challenges are, what's stressing us, and taking time to be able to look at what's on our plate. What kind of workload have we got, what can I do about reducing some of this if it's becoming overwhelming? So certainly self-awareness and that self-confidence, that self-belief, it's something that we need to work on all the time. As a leader, you are going to have your fragilities and your vulnerabilities and your insecurities and it's about acknowledging those and really

raising our emotional intelligence. That's essentially what self-awareness and self-confidence is about.

Adam Lacey: Yeah. And sometimes things are just too much, aren't they? Like you've said earlier about resilience. At that point, it's not about then just toughing it out.

It's about recognising that, doing something about it, changing the narrative, changing your approach, turning that barrier of too much into kind of a positive thing that others can model.

Let's go on to our next section, which is stories around resilience. And Liggy, there's a story that I wanted to ask you about, and I think this is one that you want to talk about, but stop me if not, and this is about a butterfly.

Liggy Webb: It's about the butterfly because this, I truly believe, is one of the most powerful stories as leaders when it comes to really understanding resilience and being able to demonstrate and nurture a really resilient team.

So I shall share this story with you because this is about a man who many, many years ago, before the days of the internet, finds a butterfly cocoon. And he's never seen the metamorphosis process before, and he's fascinated. But all he's got is a magnifying glass. So he gets hold of the cocoon, he gets the magnifying glass, has a really, really good look.

And what he can actually see is this tiny, tiny hole with this butterfly pushing through and as he looks closer, he can actually see that the expression on the butterfly's face. It's in a lot of pain. Its face is really contorted and he thinks, "Oh my goodness, I need to be really helpful here."

So he gets out a big pair of scissors, gets the cocoon and very carefully chops around this kind of like hole and the hole opens up and the butterfly emerges really easily. No pain, no effort whatsoever. And then it withers away. Because what the man didn't understand about the struggle for the butterfly is that it actually needed to do that.

Because all the time it's pushing through this tiny hole, it's building up and pumping up the sap in its wings to give it the strength and the power to do that to be able to take flight and I think that is so powerful because it's a reminder for us that we need the struggle because all the time that we're struggling we're learning we're growing and for our teams as well there's a danger sometimes when we see them struggling we want to jump in, we want to fix it for them but we're not actually doing them any favors necessarily when we do that because they need to go through that learning process as well. That is such an important part of what human resilience is all about and that's why I said before we need to enjoy resilience because even though there's a struggle there, we will be learning, we will be growing; it is making us more powerful in many, many ways.

Adam Lacey: Yeah, building up your armour, deepening the moat, whatever analogy you want to use, but yeah, I love that butterfly story. Definitely, and I want to also ask

about vulnerability around this section as well. As a leader, how much vulnerability should we be showing versus not showing? I think this is a really interesting one.

I'll tell you why, because this is my story about resilience but I've definitely overshared in the past. When I say overshared, I didn't realise I was oversharing until afterwards, but I've definitely overshared in the past with people who've worked for me and rather than them rising to the challenge or getting pepped up and helping build that resilience, it's done the opposite.

It's actually made them just panic instead, which I think can happen. And any thoughts on that line or that balance between, yes, showing your vulnerability as a leader, and then also still offering some level of protection or holding some stuff back?

Liggy Webb: Yeah, it's so interesting, Adam, that you've just asked this because I've just delivered quite a big leadership resilience programme, and we had a kind of an analysis, shall we say, or a big discussion around how people felt about demonstrating vulnerability.

And quite a few interesting stories were coming out around oversharing, or perhaps overprotection, being over-emotional or getting upset in situations. And it's such an interesting one for debate, isn't it? Because it is so important that we can live within our truth, we can be authentic, that we can bring our whole selves into the workplace.

We also, at the same time, need to be self aware in terms of how we behave or what we open up about or what we demonstrate. And this comes back to emotional intelligence really, doesn't it? Because a big part of emotional intelligence is about emotional regulation. How we manage our emotions appropriately in certain situations.

Because if you had a leader that was, obviously very stressed out and they were spending lots of time venting their frustration or crying or on a continual basis, that's going to completely destabilise the team. However, we also in the same vein, wouldn't want that person to be bottling stuff up and not being honest about their emotions.

I suppose there's an element here around where and when it's appropriate to be able to open up about certain information and if people are oversharing and it's making somebody else feel awkward, then it's raising that self awareness in that social situation.

Adam Lacey: Yeah, I guess you've got to walk that tightrope as a leader, really, haven't you?

Because what you're saying, the things you do, can have a really big unintended impact on some of the people that you're working with, even if your intentions were very pure and you wanted to just share your kind of thoughts and feelings on it. And another one along that vein, interestingly, is a similar kind of thing, just sharing ideas and people taking those as "Oh, we're going to do this now." I think as a founder, that's something you've got to be really careful of because you share an idea and then all of a sudden people think, "Oh, the company's going in this direction." Oh no, that was just

a throwaway thought that I had. It's not a strategic change in direction or anything like that.

So you're right, being able to regulate your emotions. Emotional intelligence is super important in that context.

Liggy Webb: Yeah. And being aware of what is appropriate. There are some environments, even in our personal lives, where it simply isn't appropriate to share certain information or such a level of detail about something, so I think the more emotionally intelligently we can approach those situations, the better.

Adam Lacey: Yeah, big time. Okay. Brilliant. So that's our story section covered. Is there anything more on the butterfly that you wanted to talk about or the lessons we can learn from that? I guess we've covered it, haven't we?

Liggy Webb: Yeah, and just one other kind of little story element to this really, I remember years ago working with some, a manager who had quite a temper, basically. When things went wrong, he really felt the need to be able to vent how he felt, and it was very much, "This is the way I am, and it really helps me to be able to process my stress," but the impact that had on people around him was really detrimental.

And so I think it is so important that we raise that awareness and we are considerate to how we're affecting other people as well. One of the responsibilities that you have when you are a leader is people around you will look to you to be that role model, to be that inspiration. So, whilst we want to be very honest, we want to be very authentic, we also have to appreciate and understand that we have to set an example as well.

Adam Lacey: Okay, Liggy, next question. What can we proactively do to empower, enable, and develop our people to be more resilient?

Liggy Webb: We've talked about the obvious need for role modelling, and that's one of the key things that leaders can do, and that's really powerful. It's also about creating a psychologically safe space for people.

I believe that's very important because what we want to do is to encourage people to use their initiative. We want to encourage people to take personal responsibility, to be able to make really balanced and intelligent choices. But also people are going to mess up from time to time, they're going to make mistakes too, and they're going to have difficult days.

So as a leader, creating that psychologically safe space where people trust that if they do demonstrate their vulnerabilities or if they do make mistakes, it's okay. They're going to get an empathetic and even a compassionate response to that. I think that the psychological safety piece is really important.

The other thing that is really key is encouraging a mindset of curiosity. I know we talk a lot about curiosity, which seems to be threaded through a lot of the podcasts that we do together, but curiosity is an absolute powerhouse when it comes to human

resilience, because one of the most important questions that we can ask ourselves when we're dealing with any kind of adversity is "What can I learn from this situation?"

Having that curious mindset is going to be so helpful because it will move people away from feeling fearful or anxious, and it will focus them on all those possibilities. And the other thing in terms of nurturing really resilient teams is to contribute and really encourage a culture where people are optimistic, where they show up with a solution focused on a positive mindset, because it is about, "Okay, we've got problems, we've got difficulties, but what's the opportunity through that?" So when we can help people to be able to reframe some of those negatives into something more positive, then that's definitely going to help people to be much more resilient.

Adam Lacey: I love that. Yeah. Rewarding learning and growth rather than punishing mistakes. It's just super, super important.

Another one I would add to that actually, specifically around resilience, is challenging people. And I don't mean this in a challenging for the sake of challenging, but giving detailed and specific feedback and being open and honest about that. So I think there's a lot less value in telling someone, "Oh yeah, no, great work," encouraging them for the sake of encouraging when actually you're not that happy with the work, and you're saving face to just be kind and not embarrass anybody. I think there's a lot to be said for just being super honest about where they've done well and actually where things need to improve and get better and what the gaps are and then offering appropriate support to help bridge those gaps because you risk actually doing the opposite of building resilience by telling people they're doing great when maybe they're not.

Liggy Webb: Yeah. And do you know what? Feedback is the food of progress, isn't it? Sometimes, it doesn't taste very nice and it's not always necessarily delivered very well, but it can be very helpful and very useful.

And as a leader, we have a responsibility to be honest with people. It's about having those honest, healthy conversations, because this is about helping people to be able to explore, to be able to tap into their personal potential. And if you're always saying to people, "Yeah, great job, yeah, that's really good," that isn't really encouraging and developing. We're not always going to get things right. And we need people sometimes to be able to point that out to us, to demonstrate what our blind spot is. I personally think feedback is really powerful, very powerful. Somebody once said, and I can't for the life of me remember who, but it wasn't me, but somebody else said, "Feedback is the breakfast of champions", and I think that's a really great one.

Adam Lacey: Brilliant. Sounds like some kind of weird Kellogg's commercial.

"Feedback is a breakfast of champions." I love it. One other one I wanted to touch on as well that I think is super important is support and empathy. So resilience occurs at these inflexion points in life when things are tough. And as a leader, recognising when that's going on in your team, when maybe they're having a particularly tough time for whatever reason, and then offering the correct support, empathy, compassion, all that kind of stuff, at that point of need, super important to helping them A) get through it,

and also develop healthy resilience instead of just letting them tough it out and "see what happens in the end" type approach.

Liggy Webb: Yeah. And that's about knowing your team. It's so important that you understand each individual in your team because that's how we can build the team to get things done.

So knowing your team and understanding each individual, really important.

Adam Lacey: So Liggy, what are your personal top three tips for any leader, hoping to develop resilience in the teams that they lead?

Liggy Webb: So, Adam, here are my top three tips. Number one, be a role model and lead by example. That is so powerful. Number two, ensure that people are not toughing it out at any cost and support a culture of well-being by encouraging people actively encouraging people to prioritise self-care.

And finally, top tip number three is empower your people rather than trying to fix them. So Adam, over to you. What are your top three tips?

Adam Lacey: I love that last one, especially, empower, don't fix. I think that's a really nice mantra to remember every time your team is faced with a challenge or you yourself are faced with a conundrum, like "How much do I go in and fix this, or can I instead empower them to do it themselves and go for the latter?" Cool. So my top three are number one: reward learning over punishing mistakes, as we were just talking about. Number two: find the balance between challenge and support, so that was the butterfly story effectively; how do we make sure that we are providing the right support but also allowing people to solve some of these challenges themselves so not doing everything for you? That's very similar to empower, don't fix. We're similar on that one. And my third one is vulnerability. I know we talked about it in this episode, but I think it's super important as a leader, especially these days, because if you're able to, in the right way, be vulnerable, show that vulnerability that opens up the doors for others to follow suit.

And I think adding to that vulnerability is taking care of yourself and all the rest of it, and you're then able to role model appropriately. That's everything we have time for in this episode. Thank you so much for listening to this Leading Future Humans series. We hope you'll join us for another one soon.