



# Move to the Front:

*A Strategy for Becoming a Stronger Self*

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**fei** workforce  
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# Move to the Front:

## A Strategy for Becoming a Stronger Self

Consider this: You wake up late on a Monday morning, and then your car has a flat tire on the way to work. Later, you discover the leftover chicken tikka masala you were going to eat for lunch sits forgotten on the kitchen counter. At three o'clock, when you need to give a big presentation to a prospective client, you receive an email to reschedule—for next month. When you finally get home for the evening (later than normal), your significant other asks the inevitable: "How was your day?"

And you will respond: "It was bad."

But what if you were told there are no bad days? That there are simply unfortunate events—flat tires, forgotten lunches, cancelled meetings—and that the difference between "good" and "bad" is your personal resilience? Would you believe it?

Events that cause negative emotional responses are going to happen and are often beyond our control. FEI has built a framework based on how our brains influence our reactions, especially in response to the "bad" events in our lives, with the goal of helping employees overcome adverse experiences, prioritize happiness and ultimately guiding them to their best selves.

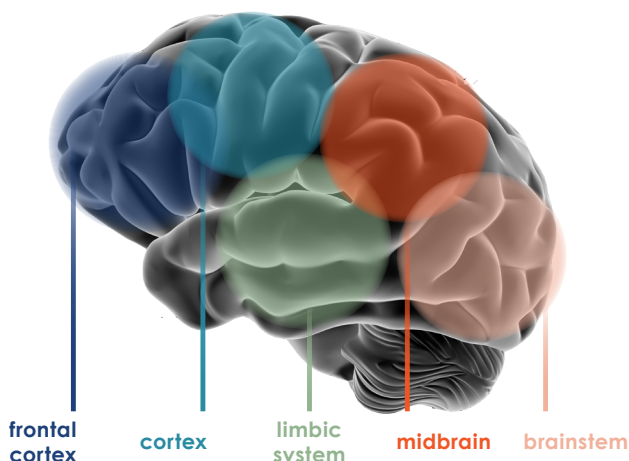
It sounds idealistic, but it can be done. We just have to **move to the front**.

*Moving to the front helps employees overcome adverse experiences, prioritize happiness and reach their best selves.*

### What is Moving to the Front?

When we talk about moving to the front, we're referencing the different parts of the brain. The back of the brain, where the brainstem is, stores biological imperatives focused on the survival of self and body (think fight or flight responses). The back of the brain is reactive. As we *move to the front*—in this case, the frontal cortex—we move from base reactions to sophisticated, rational thought.

**abstract** calm    **concrete** arousal    **emotional** alarm    **reactive** fear    **reflex** terror



There are parts of the brain in-between, of course, and they inform our reactions as well.

Moving forward from the **brainstem**, we have the **midbrain** (which also fuels our reactive impulses); the **limbic system**, housing our emotional core; the **cortex**; and finally, the **frontal cortex**. Radically complex, our brains constantly assess situations while the different parts vie for control over the best response.

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*We are capable of transforming negative experiences into strength and happiness.*

However, we as human beings can assert control over our instincts, emotions and reactions, and this is where moving to the front draws its influence. It takes time and commitment, as well as a knowledge of resilience practices, but we're completely capable of taking negative experiences—our bad days—and transforming them into positions of strength and happiness.

### The Role of Stress

One of the biggest contributors to the “bad day” narrative is stress. In fact, surveys show we're currently experiencing higher levels of stress due to unique factors like the outcome of the 2016 presidential election and fluctuating uncertainty surrounding health care.<sup>1</sup> Stress contributes to an estimated \$300 billion in health care costs for employers.<sup>2</sup> The role of stress in well-being, both for organizations and their employees, cannot be ignored.

We're all familiar with common signs of stress: Long hours at work, unhealthy habits, a general feeling of being overwhelmed, etc. Unmitigated stress can lead to fatigue, irregular behaviors, and a disinterest in the activities and hobbies we once enjoyed, among other influential outcomes. How our minds and bodies deal with stress depends on even more nuanced criteria, ranging from learned responses and past experiences to our very DNA.

Yet, recent studies also have begun documenting the benefits of stress when constructively applied in our lives. Stress can be emotionally draining and physically tiring, yes, but it can also drive productivity, bolster accomplishment and instill a sense of engagement.

Displaying an extraordinary ability for stimulating different parts of the brain, stress exercises the mind's dexterity when navigating behavioral responses to various situations. We learn how to react in specific circumstances based on previous experiences, the stress we felt and the actions we took in response.



*Stress can also drive productivity, bolster accomplishment and instill engagement.*

<sup>1</sup> 2017. Aon Hewitt: 54% of employees report having higher stress levels. *HR Dive*. Retrieved from <http://www.hrdive.com/news/aon-hewitt-54-of-employees-report-having-higher-stress-levels/439665/>

<sup>2</sup> 2016. Here's why workplace stress is costing employers \$300 billion a year. *Business Insider*. Retrieved from <http://www.businessinsider.com/how-stress-at-work-is-costing-employers-300-billion-a-year-2016-6>

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If a stranger approaches us in a parking lot late at night, our brains will instruct us to prepare for fight or flight until we have a sense of the situation (“*This is potentially dangerous. Who is this person?*”). If, however, a new co-worker walks up to our desk in the middle of the day, our understanding of the environment and additional cues will trigger our brains to reconsider reacting in an instinctual way (“*This is okay. This person must have a question or need something.*”).

Let’s apply this idea to our introduction: The car has a flat tire. Do you panic, or do you call a tow truck and patiently wait? Someone cancels an important meeting at the last minute. Do you get angry and frustrated, or do you acknowledge that meetings can be rescheduled and adjust your time and assignments accordingly? In most cases, there is an opportunity to move to the front.

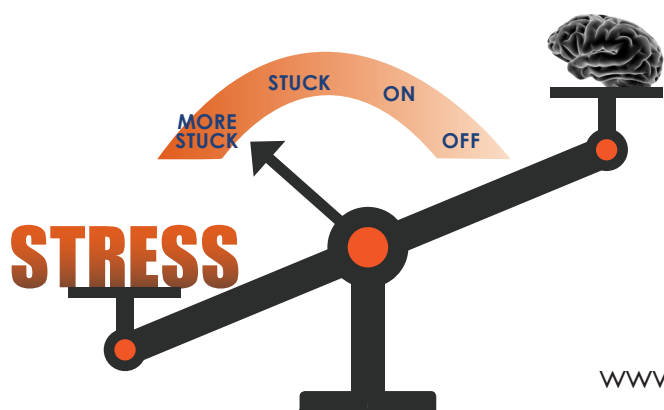
### When Stress Sticks

Problems occur when stress is so persistent we become stuck in harmful behavioral patterns. This can happen for numerous reasons: Financial concerns, relationship problems, falling behind at work—challenges that occur over time and feel constant, even unavoidable. Areas of the brain accustomed to tackling these challenges on an intermittent level are now in overdrive, sticking in place and overwhelming us. The long-term effects of too much stress are well documented, but short-term periods of being “stuck” in a stressful state can be just as damaging.

When stress sticks, it complicates how we react to normal situations. Let’s use the limbic system as an example, the “emotional core” of the brain linked to feelings of alarm. If we feel alarmed over a prolonged period of time—there’s an extended problem with student loan repayments, say, or massive cutbacks at work have everyone on edge—then we’ll eventually begin reacting emotionally to most situations, even those that do not warrant an emotional response. Measured communication is superseded by unnecessary or inappropriate reactions in an attempt to maintain a sense of personal control.

*When stress sticks, it complicates how we react to normal situations.*

Are we saying being stuck in a stressful frame of mind will disrupt every action or intention? No, but the ability to easily weigh responses is compromised and made much more difficult. Settings where we need to be creative, imaginative or abstract—like at work and in our jobs—are stifled by intrusive and otherwise inapplicable thought processes that hinder the ability to reach our best selves.



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It doesn't take years of stress to become stuck, either. Stress operates on a continuum of intensity: While post-traumatic stress disorder is a prime example of psychological injury resulting from drawn out or abnormally heightened experiences, for instance, short bursts of increased anxiety can have immediate effects. In the end, stress is stress and we all handle it differently.

Fortunately, there are ways to recognize when we're stuck and address stress in a healthy, resilient manner. We begin moving to the front.

### The FEI Difference

Our best selves are always within reach. Sometimes we just need a little extra guidance.

At FEI, we've helped manage workplace challenges for over 35 years. As experts on workforce resilience, we ensure our services integrate cutting-edge behavioral science so organizations and their employees can mitigate the effects of stress in the most beneficial way.

We've used the principles of moving to the front to address:

#### Professional training and stress management

#### Managing organizational change

#### Traumatic stress and debriefings (especially with first responders)

#### Critical incident response

#### Peer support systems

#### Conflict mediation

#### Building of trust



*Our best selves are always within reach.  
Sometimes we just need a little extra guidance.*

In addition, FEI collaborates with The Mandt System® to provide train-the-trainer crisis interaction programs. Mandt uses the fundamentals of trauma-informed care and adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, to deliver a fully realized and detailed approach to de-escalation, violence prevention and conflict resolution.

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With **Move to the Front**, FEI is building on our knowledge of employee assistance, organizational best practice, crisis intervention (in partnership with Mandt) and crisis management expertise to deliver customers a replicable, scalable product evaluating an employee's relationship with stress through guided self-assessment.

Move to the Front offers several integrated and related tools such as a workbook summarizing Move to the Front's central concepts, a printed personal inventory and in-depth analysis of the strategies we can use to reset our stress switches. An interactive version of the assessment, supplemented by audio and video discussions, is also available online and provides users with personalized e-books designed to help start their own move to the front.

Incorporating the ever-evolving field of neuroscience into the workplace will pave the way for a future of resilient employees and organizations. Employee assistance programs (EAP), organizational development, workplace violence prevention and crisis management services benefit greatly from a better understanding of employee behaviors as well as how we interact with one another in safe, informed ways. It is our hope that with Move to the Front, employees can better understand the stressors in their lives, develop personal resilience and reach their best selves so as to remain productive and engaged.

*With Move to the Front, employees can understand their stressors, develop resilience and reach their best selves.*

Remember, stress is what we allow it to be. It can be a great detriment to our lives, but it can also be a source of great strength. *How we deal with stressful challenges is at the core of building resilience.*

**That's why we invite you to join FEI as, together, we**

*move*  
to the  
**FRONT**




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# fei workforce resilience



*FEI has a 35-year history in enhancing workforce resiliency by offering a full spectrum of solutions, from EAP and organizational development to workplace violence prevention and crisis management. One of the most successful social enterprises in America, FEI was created by the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities, a national network of social sector organizations working to achieve its vision of healthy and equitable society.*



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