

# HR RESILIENCY

## Lessons on Embracing and Adapting

By Symone C. Skrzycki

Sudden change. Fear of the unknown. Adversity.

Disruptions are daunting. But they also can be empowering.

Take it from Kathy Parry, an author and corporate energy expert who delivered the opening keynote at the Indiana Chamber's 55th Annual Human Resources Conference & Expo in April.

Her presentation – “Rubber Band Resilience: How HR Professionals Can Stretch Without Snapping” – drew upon her childhood, career and experiences as a mother (she has four children, one of whom has special needs).

Bright green rubber bands adorned the table centers in the large conference room. But not for long.

“What’s professionally stretching you?” she asks attendees, before instructing them to pick one up and expand it to represent their stress levels.

At her cue, they aim their rubber bands at the ceiling and release them.

“There’s a specific name for what this stretch represents,” Parry confides. “Potential energy. A rubber band that wasn’t stretched wouldn’t have reached the ceiling.”

In much the same way, life crises allow people to stretch. Disruption can be the beginning of greatness.

### Fortitude and flexibility

When Melissa Fronckowiak unexpectedly became unemployed two years ago (due to her employer’s financial woes), she was apprehensive about the future.

“Basically the end of 2017/early 2018 was my crazy, ‘stretched rubber band phase,’ ” she remarks.

A short time later, she started a life-changing job with Markey’s Rental & Staging as an HR generalist. She didn’t have HR experience. But she did possess optimism and the inclination to take a chance.

Her willingness to bend led to a job she thoroughly enjoys.

“I’ve fallen in love with human resources!” she declares. “(I embrace) any opportunity I have to gain that knowledge. This event is my first real chance to network with other people within the industry.”

### ‘Pauses have power’

How do you initially react to a crisis?

According to Parry, that’s the first step in one’s journey to becoming rubber band resilient.

Maybe you’re stoic, dramatic or a “fixer.” On second thought, perhaps you’re optimistic or pessimistic.

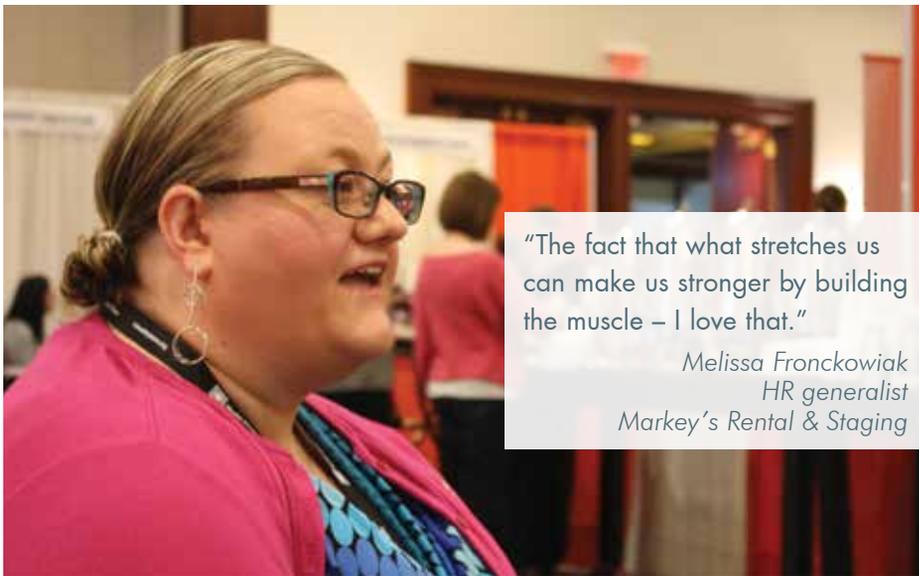
Heather Baumgartner is an HR associate at Bi-County Services. The Bluffton non-profit assists special needs individuals.

“I like the idea of looking at the way people react to stress, sort of figuring out if that is beneficial to your team or not and then making the changes,” she notes.

Eva Hillman, human resources director at the Indiana Minority Health Coalition, is seated at the same table as Baumgartner. She



Rubber band launch: Kathy Parry, keynote speaker at the Indiana Chamber's 55th Annual HR Conference & Expo, engages attendees with a hands-on exercise.



“The fact that what stretches us can make us stronger by building the muscle – I love that.”  
*Melissa Fronckowiak  
 HR generalist  
 Markey’s Rental & Staging*

classifies her typical reactions to disruptions as calm.

“For me, you have to kind of remain calm to determine what to do next,” she reflects. “You also have to listen to whatever the fire is and make sure you figure out the best way to handle it.”

That’s exactly what Parry recommends: Pause prior to taking action.

“Pauses have power,” Parry asserts. “When you’re faced with a disruption, it’s OK to say, ‘I don’t have an answer right now. I don’t have a reaction. Can you give me a day? Can you give me an hour?’ ”

**Changing perspectives**

Parry contends that the second stage in becoming rubber band resilient revolves around reframing problems – looking at the obstacle in a different way.

Luncheon keynote speaker Andrea Butcher, president of HRD Advisory Group, shares similar themes. Her presentation focuses on HR challenges and conquering feelings of being overwhelmed.

Butcher asks attendees to draw a straight line on a piece of paper, explaining afterward that everyone operates either “above” or “below” the line.

Examples of above-the-line traits are a belief that learning and growing are more valuable than being right. By contrast, those below the line are committed to being right. They assign fault and blame to others.

“You, at your best, is NOT you below the line,” Butcher stresses.

“How can you stay above the line? Reframe challenges and conversations. One strategy is to replace below-the-line questions such as ‘why’, ‘who’ and ‘when’ (they often incite defensiveness) with, ‘Help me understand.’ ‘I’m confused about.’ And ‘I’m struggling with ...’ ”

**Taking control**

Ethan Lee, director of HR with the city of Fishers, has spent 11 years with the government organization. He’s part of an HR team of three serving approximately 500 employees.

When asked what stretches him professionally, he says it’s not daily challenges such as budget matters, recruiting and retaining talent or keeping up with regulations. It’s the “curveballs.”

“I can plan for the other things and know what to expect,” he reflects. “It’s the unexpected (that’s most overwhelming).”

Conversely, HR manager Marsha Nicholas says crises come slowly at Bi-County Services. “It’s not like all of a sudden, you’ve

got a bombshell. A lot of times, we do have time to think about things and figure out what to do.”

Although she acknowledges, “Every now and then, we get a real surprise!”

Re-energizing helps prevent “snapping,” Parry contends. It includes identifying ways to control some aspect of the situation. She describes how her passion for nutrition eased her anxiety when her daughter Joy was diagnosed with a mitochondrial disease (as a toddler) that prevented her body from turning food into energy. Doctors credit a large portion of Joy’s success (she’s 18 years old) to Parry’s nutritional knowledge.

It inspires Baumgartner.

“I liked how she talked about picking the one piece (of an overwhelming stressor) – the nutrition piece – that she could focus on.”

Micaela Hill traveled from Springfield, Missouri, to attend the HR Conference. She’s vice president of human resources at Tomo Drug Testing, which also has locations in Indianapolis and Evansville.

“I love how she talked about being stretched not only professionally, but also being stretched personally,” Hill comments. “That’s huge.”

Butcher stresses in her session that individuals always have 100% control over their mindset and their actions/reactions.

A positive, proactive mindset has guided Fronckowiak’s smooth transition at Markey’s. The organization has locations in eight states.

“Right now, there’s the marijuana laws,” she cites as an example of stressful HR issues. “We have Colorado, which is totally different than some of the others. Working between

Continued on page 61



“Good energy!” declares Micaela Hill of Tomo Drug Testing (left) when describing the opening session of the Chamber conference. Hill, who traveled from Missouri for the event, connects with Bi-County Services’ Marsha Nicholas and Heather Baumgartner.

## HR Resiliency

Continued from page 57



On ways to enhance access to HR resources: “We’re just a family-owned business doing our thing, but trying to take care of our employees. We think there’s a lot more we can offer.”

*Zack Warfield (left), customer service rep manager, PRP*

states and making sure that everything is cohesive, and the fact that we’re growing so quickly is so exciting. Yet it also offers that

opportunity for growth and that opportunity for stretching that Kathy was describing.”

Zack Warfield is a customer service rep

manager at PRP, a printing equipment supplier in Indianapolis.

“We’re a small company and we actually don’t have an HR department. That’s why we’re here (at the HR Conference),” he observes. “Getting our feet wet and seeing where we need to start.”

Currently, Warfield is among staff that handles HR issues. He’s been with the organization for nearly 20 years.

“That’s what we’re trying to determine: Do we really want to get into having a dedicated HR professional? Who might that be? Is it an outside hire? Is it someone we can develop from within?”

“We’re just a family-owned business doing our thing, but trying to take care of our employees. And we think there’s a lot more that we can offer.”

And, like others, potentially stretching to meet challenges and doing what one can to stay above the line.

**RESOURCES:** Kathy Parry, corporate energy expert, at [www.kathyparry.com](http://www.kathyparry.com) | Andrea Butcher, HRD Advisory Group, at [www.hrdadvisorygroup.com](http://www.hrdadvisorygroup.com)

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