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Illinois Bell Telephone Story

In the 1970s there began to be evidence that prolonged stress increased the overall likelihood of a wide range of physical illnesses, mental disorders, and performance breakdowns. Dr. Maddi at the University of Chicago and his team of researchers was especially interested in studying people who stayed well despite high levels of stress. If they could isolate the characteristics of those who thrived under stress, that would lead to ways to help those who did not thrive, to develop those characteristics.

In 1975 Carl Horn, a Vice President at Illinois Bell Telephone (IBT), paved the way for Dr. Maddi and this team of researchers to begin studying employees from IBT. They began to work with the IBT Medical Department. They followed 430 male and female supervisors, managers, and executives each year through psychological questionnaires, projective tests, interviews, performance observations, and medical examinations.

In 1981 the long anticipated deregulation and divestiture actually hit. IBT downsized from 26,000 employees to just over half that many in one year. Company goals, strategies, job descriptions, and supervisory personnel changed month by month. Nonetheless, Dr. Maddi was able to continue testing the original study group on a yearly basis until 1987. This unique research study yielded remarkable results.

Roughly two-thirds of the employees studied showed significant performance, leadership, and health deficits in the face of the colossal stresses they experienced. There were heart attacks, strokes, obesity, poor performance reviews, demotions, depressions, anxiety states, burnout, substance abuse, divorces, and the like. However, the remaining one-third or so of the employees studied maintained health, happiness, and performance, and actually thrived on the upheavals. For them, the changes provided new opportunities. Despite experiencing as much disruption as their peers, these hardy people rose up in the company, felt renewed enthusiasm, showed little illness, and often even improved family relationships as a side effect of the upward turn!

Those who thrived maintained three key beliefs that helped them to turn adversity to advantage. These powerful beliefs interact together to synergistically motivate coping behaviors that help one to manage change. We call these beliefs the **HardiAttitudes™**.

The **Commitment** attitude led them to strive to be involved in ongoing events, rather than feeling isolated.

The **Control** attitude led them to struggle and try to influence outcomes, rather than lapse into passivity and powerlessness.

The **Challenge** attitude led them to view stressful changes, whether positive or negative, as opportunities for new learning.

- The early 1980s were such trying times for all at IBT that its decision-makers encouraged Dr. Maddi and his team to develop a training program for troubled employees that would build on what the research was showing. We incorporated the Hardiness Institute and IBT became its first client. Through our ground-breaking change management approach, we helped IBT employees to develop key attitudes and resources for turning change to opportunity.

We met for one hour, once a week, for 15 weeks in small groups. Employees took our course voluntarily. We used workbooks and other training materials that emphasized our approach. The results were remarkable. Over the length of the training, trainees decreased in such signs of STRAIN as anxiety, depression, distrust, and blood pressure, while increasing in job satisfaction, morale, and the three Cs of Commitment, Control, and Challenge. These changes persisted after the training

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course was over. As time went on, these trained employees showed such signs of increased hardiness through tolerance for changing circumstances, job advancement, and decreased absenteeism.



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