Those of us in leadership positions thrive on being strong role models and tireless workers. But we’re human, too—and many of us suffer from common mental health issues like depression. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, major depressive disorder is the leading cause of disability in the United States for people aged 15 to 44. In fact, 16 million adults have had a major depressive episode in the last year, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. No question about it: Many of us are bound to be affected.
But it’s tougher to take time off when you’re the boss—and, according to new research, depression is also harder to shake when you’re at the top. A new study from European Neuropsychopharmacology revealed that a high occupational level is associated with a poor response to depression treatment. (For more on the study, check out this Los Angeles Times piece.)

It makes sense: Our jobs are stressful and involve long hours, and chronic stress has been linked to depression. A lot rides on our success and behavior. Plus, while lower-level employees might benefit from a workplace culture that embraces well-being and de-stigmatizes mental health issues, those of us who lead are actually responsible for creating that culture. When you’re mired in depression, it’s hard to have that perspective.

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Just the same, a culture of well-being starts from the top. Much as we know that stress is linked to physical issues like increased heart disease and mortality, we absolutely need to think about how our hard-charging jobs affect our mental health, too.

One way to address the issue is by thinking holistically about how to weave resilience—the ability be adaptive in our thinking and behaviors—into our working lives. I do this in three ways.

**Align your vision with your heart.** When we’re mired in the day-to-day of running a company, it’s hard to remember how we got to that corner office in the first place. But it’s essential to take a step back and contemplate why we’re doing the work. Ask: Why do I show up each day? What feelings do I want to inspire among my staff? What’s my legacy going to be? These are big-picture questions that might seem overwhelming when you’re struggling, but contemplating them will renew your sense of purpose. When you identify your values and align them with your
work, you’re less likely to be derailed and subsequently stressed and deflated by speed-bumps along the way—because you know what you stand for and can contextualize the stress as part of a bigger vision.

**Connect to the power of purpose.** As history shows, those of us who are tethered to a mission greater than ourselves showcase remarkable strength in the face of adversity, from military personnel tirelessly fighting on behalf of a cause to cancer patients who turn to art and writing for creative outlets. Investing in something beyond the minutiae of our daily lives sustains us and sharpens our resilience; little things seem to matter less. Ask yourself: What excites me? What sorts of creative, physical, or spiritual endeavors sustain me? How do I want to help my community? How do I want to influence my family? Connecting to something broader than our work offers a buoyant dose of perspective.

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**Don’t be ashamed to unplug.** It’s common knowledge that Americans are taking less time off than ever. And as the boss, it’s hard to step away. (Believe me, I know.) But it’s necessary. Navigate around those Iceberg beliefs about self-care—deeply held falsehoods that hold us back and ensnare us in destructive patterns. If you tell yourself that only weak people take time off or that the office will fall apart without you, challenge those mantras by asking if they’re true. Do you really consider yourself “weak” for spending time with your family? No. It takes strength to set strong priorities. Is there truly nobody else who could do your job for a few days while you take time away? Of course not. Delegating is a key business skill. Melting those Iceberg beliefs allows us space to truly grow.

Depression is a serious clinical issue that warrants serious treatment. But by embracing these three behaviors, we can increase our resilience and brace ourselves against it. It’s a win-win: We’re prioritizing our own mental health to feel better, and we’re setting an example for our workforce in the process.

*Jan Bruce is CEO and co-founder of meQuilibrium, the digital coaching platform based on the science of resilience.*