

**The Most Important Factor
in Achieving Success**

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Adv¹ersity **Q**uotient

**Turning
Obstacles into
Opportunities**

PAUL G. STOLTZ, PhD

ADVERSITY QUOTIENT



TURNING OBSTACLES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

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PRAISE FOR ADVERSITY QUOTIENT: TURNING OBSTACLES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

"Solid truth, well-packaged. Dr. Stoltz has built a highly usable model that creates significant and sustainable change in people's lives. This is a breakthrough application that provides people a healthy and effective approach to building personal resiliency."

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"Paul Stoltz has written the enduring guidebook for the twenty-first century. In it he provides exceptional wisdom for personal and professional success. I place this book on par with *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*."

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"In an era of uncontrollable, unforecastable change, we at Mott's believe that speed in managing change can give us a sustainable competitive advantage in the marketplace. Paul Stoltz and his AQ theory have allowed us to adopt the position with our managers that "not managing change is considered failure of duty!" Finally this scientific practice process shows us how to help people understand and, more importantly, cope with change and adversity."

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Edwin Russell, President and CEO of Minnesota Power

"It's time to test your AQ—and Paul Stoltz's timely and important book will show you how."

Dr. Eric Soares, Chair, Department of Marketing, California State University, Hayward

"Beyond climbing through adversity, AQ is about how we can live better lives. Full of wisdom, common sense, and insight, this book should be available in the seat back pocket of every airplane today."

Richard J. Leider, Partner, The Inventure Group, Author of *The Power of Purpose* and *Repacking Your Bags*

"The expanding global economy, combined with the "do-more-with-less" thinking in today's right-sized corporations, makes AQ one of the best leadership instruments available to your management team. I recommend the AQ philosophy when you are in search of (and in need of predictors of success for) those who are at their best navigating the rough seas of today's matrix organizations."

R. Todd Rossel, National Director, Human Resources Management Solutions and Services, Deloitte & Touche LLP

"In AQ, Paul Stoltz presents a compelling argument for the need to redefine what it takes to succeed. AQ is both a measure and a philosophy. As a measure it brings together research of cognitive psychology, psychoneuroimmunology, and neurophysiology to form a composite picture of how we approach adversity and why. As a philosophy, AQ represents a way of reframing our lives. AQ is a logic for moving forward, for becoming more than we are, and for taking control of where we are going."

Dr. Gerald Pepper, Professor, Department of Communication, University of Minnesota

"A valuable, much-needed book! A real contribution to the field of leadership and change. The book provides a creative, fresh approach to overcoming adversity through well-grounded, tightly-organized, and current research, as well as inspiring stories and information."

Dr. Margaret Hatcher, Director, Northern Arizona Leadership Institute, Northern Arizona University

"AQ is a must read for anyone interested in raising their own performance potential and should be mandatory reading for all professionals, managers, and all motivators of teams, institutions, and corporations."

R. Martin Kenney, President Emeritus, Notre Dame College,
Canada

"AQ provides a practical, easily learned, and highly effective tool to change self-defeating thought patterns. AQ gave me a sense of perspective and control over what's important to me. My leadership team is better able to work through barriers and move rapidly to solve problems. The result is increased productivity and satisfaction."

Conny Frish, Forest Supervisor, Kaibab National Forest

"Dr. Stoltz's approach addresses the critical element in dealing with the problems of the inner city."

Rod Hohl, CFO, Southwest Leadership Institute

"Dr. Paul G. Stoltz is a "Climber" whose work on raising one's AQ has given me a most valued gift toward achieving my personal and professional goals. I consider Paul Stoltz a leader in his field with a message and a method that really works!"

Daniel S. Dubrava, Regional Manager, Raynor Manufacturing

"This seminal book should be of interest to managers, executives, educators, and scholars. Dr. Stoltz shows us how a person can thrive in spite of the adversity of our ever-changing environment."

Dr. Alfred Raisters, Honorary Consul, Consulate of Latvia

"In a world preoccupied with quick fixes, Paul Stoltz offers paths and pay-offs for facing and surmounting adversity. In AQ, 'turning lemons into lemonade' is not a cliché, but rather a recipe for a rich and rewarding life. Paul's work is a creative application of hard science to the soft science of individual and societal potential."

Joel Hodroff, Founder, Commonweal, Inc.

"Paul Stoltz grabbed my attention and wouldn't let go. You don't read this book; it reads you. You don't pick this book up; it picks you up. AQ is a work of breadth and depth, one of the rare examples of psychological research transformed into practical wisdom."

Dale Dauten, columnist, nationally syndicated by King Features

FOREWORD

For too many, hopelessness is defined very early in life. Too frequently, what might have been never gets a chance. What determines our ambition over time? What is the unique factor in each of our lives that will determine where we set our sights? And what forces will cause us to move closer or further from their realization? What can we do to alter the outcome? Dr. Stoltz's work helps us to seize control of our destinies, to understand and permanently improve our own ambition and motivation, and to lead a meaningful life.

Now more than ever there is an urgent need to identify, grow, and become full contributors in work and in life. This book provides the long awaited answer to the question, "What does it take to make an extraordinary contribution over a lifetime?" It pinpoints and teaches the behaviors and characteristics that differentiate extraordinary people from those who settle for less, or do not participate at all. No message could be more timely.

Paradox rules the day. On the one hand is the promise of technology to improve our lives. On the other hand is the disheartening societal discord, a growing economic gap between the classes, relentless competition, and largely unmet human needs.

For some of us, technological advances offer improvements. But for many of us, it just doesn't work out that way. Despite the gains in information technology, the burden of striving in modern society and assimilating increasing levels of information has become overwhelming to a large portion of our population. A pervasive sense of hopelessness is too often the result. Old cures fall short.

Adversity Quotient, or AQ, is at once a powerful theory, a meaningful measure, and a honed set of tools for persevering through challenging times. It will provoke you to rethink your current



formula of success. Yet, current challenges require more than new thoughts. Graspable, useable, and effective methods are a must.

What determines your drive to live and contribute purposefully? Consider ambition and volition to be plotted on a bell curve. The implications of where you are on the curve are profound. On the low end are those who show little if any effort. In the middle bulge ride the majority who do enough to get by, but fall short of their full potential. On the high end are the 10 percent of people who pioneer change and advancement for the remaining 90 percent. For the first time, AQ unravels this mystery of human motivation and empowerment, infusing us with the fundamental hope, principles, and methods for a rarefied life and career on the front of the curve.

The thoughtful, systematic improvement process contained in these pages pertains as essentially to organizations as it does to teams, families, communities, and individuals. Each will benefit from the three-point process of discovering, measuring, and improving their individual and collective AQs.

Organizational leaders are given a new way of defining, pinpointing, and developing top performers. They are provided with a sustainable path, map, and compass for pursuing a culture of perseverance and achievement, and with it a new notion of managing change.

Teams are given a refreshing and essential understanding of participation, contribution, and interpersonal dynamics. AQ quickly becomes an integral part of any high-performance team's vocabulary and norms. Through the AQ model and methods, families and communities learn practical approaches for turning hopelessness around while fortifying their members with enduring strategies for greater purpose and fulfillment.

Ultimately, this book is about hope for human (one) and humanity (all). With that hope comes the doing and the ability to *aspire*. I believe this work represents the clearest and most succinctly expressed hope any of us has, individually and collectively, to live more fully, starting today.

DAVID PULATIE
Senior Vice President
Motorola, Inc.

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PART ONE

**THRIVING IN THE
AGE OF ADVERSITY**

CHAPTER



A New View of Success

Deep within humans dwell those slumbering powers; powers that would astonish them, that they never dreamed of possessing; forces that would revolutionize their lives if aroused and put into action.

Orison Marden

It is an area about the size of a garage, a rugged throne of rock and ice jutting nearly six miles up toward the heavens. Above the jet-stream itself and higher than most airliners fly is the pinnacle of Mt. Everest, the mountain of all mountains.

As the place on earth that is closest to the stars, climbers are lured by its magnificence and the sheer challenge. Yet, there are no guarantees. Only one in seven who attempt the summit ever make it. Close to the summit storms blow through at 100 miles per hour pounding their victims with triple-digit wind chills, and zero visibility. Every climber dies a little, fighting a losing battle against cachexia. Above 18,000 feet, cuts never heal, the body depletes, and the air is so dry a cough literally fractures ribs. To climb through such adverse conditions is the ultimate test of a human being.

On Friday, May 10, 1996, 31 climbers from five expeditions reached the summit. Suddenly, a ferocious storm took hold, stranding many of the climbers. Within hours, some of them would live,



others would die. Among them was Doug Hanson, a postal worker from Renton, Washington. When the storm hit, Hanson laid down. It is extremely dangerous to lie down on your descent. Few ever get back up. Some time during that frozen night, Hanson submitted and died.

Hanson was not alone in facing the harsh conditions of the mountain. Elsewhere on the route to the summit another climber, Beck Weathers lay unconscious in the snow. During the night, a rescue team found Weathers and determined it was impossible to save him. It was too dark, the trail too treacherous, and Weathers was too far gone.

However, a few hours later, Weathers stirred something deep inside himself that saved him from his icy doom and awakened him to his grim situation. According to *Newsweek*, Weathers reported, "I was on my back on the ice. It was colder than anything you can believe. My right glove was gone, my hand looked like it was molded of plastic."

Weathers had every reason to give up. He had taken on the mountain and lost. He lacked supplies, his team, shelter, and any probability of survival. But, confronted with his end, Weathers somehow triggered the inner resolve to take on a mountain bigger than he had ever climbed before. Frozen, exhausted, alone, and barely alive, Weathers would have to somehow move, stand, and navigate the treacherous journey back to Base Camp, a speck in a wilderness of white. A deep sense of purpose spurred him to action. Lying there in the snow, he said, "I could see the faces of my wife and children pretty clearly. I figured I had three or four hours to live, so I started walking." To Weathers, the next few hours seemed like centuries. Knowing rest meant certain death, he somehow kept moving.

It became light and Weathers stumbled upon what looked like a blue rock. Fortunately, it was a tent. His team hauled Weathers inside; his clothes were so stiff with ice they had to cut them away. They put a hot water bottle to his chest and gave him oxygen. No one expected Weathers to survive. Due to the unexpected adversity brought on by the storm, others with greater skill, even world-famous mountaineering guides such as Scott Fischer, would die.

In fact, Weathers' wife had already received a message that her husband had died, only to find out hours later that he had



somehow lived. None had accounted for that element inside Beck Weathers that enabled him to survive against such insurmountable odds while so many others perished. *Would you have survived?*

THE ASCENT—REDEFINING SUCCESS

Life is like mountain climbing. Fulfillment is achieved by relentless dedication to the ascent, sometimes slow, painful step, by slow, painful step.

Scaling the mountain is an indescribable experience, one only fellow climbers can understand and share. Amid the relief, satisfaction, and exhaustion is a sense of joy and peace as rarefied as the mountain air. Only the Climber tastes this sweet success. Those who stay encamped may be justified, as well as warmer and safer, but never will they feel “on purpose,” as alive, as proud and as joyful.

Success can be defined as the degree to which one moves forward and upward, progressing in one’s lifelong mission, despite all obstacles or other forms of *adversity*.

THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION OF HUMAN EFFECTIVENESS

Why do some people persist, while others fall short or even quit? Drawing from scientific research, this book answers the most fundamental question of human and organizational effectiveness. The question takes many forms:

- Why do some organizations thrive on competition, while others are crushed?
- Why does one entrepreneur beat unfathomable odds, while others give up?
- Why do some parents rear children who are good citizens in neighborhoods riddled with violence and drugs?
- Why does an individual beat the odds, overcoming an abusive childhood when most do not?



- Why does one inner-city teacher positively impact students' lives, while the rest of the faculty barely get by?
- Why does one laid-off aerospace manager spring to action and reshape her destiny, while her counterparts fall into fear and depression?
- Why do so many gifted or high IQ people fall far short of their potential?

Every day we see people like Beck Weathers, who, despite seemingly insurmountable odds, somehow keep going. While others are pounded down by an incessant avalanche of change, these individuals are able to consistently rise up and break through, becoming more skilled and empowered as they go. Adversity doesn't create insurmountable barriers. Each hardship is a challenge, each challenge an opportunity, and each opportunity embraced. Change is a welcome part of the journey.

If, like Beck Weathers, you are the kind of person who would fight back and somehow find a way to continue where no possibility of success appears to exist, *this book explains why*. It is a vital resource to fuel even greater success and substantially strengthen you as a leader.

Unfortunately, when faced with life's challenges, *most people stop short* before they have tested their limits and contributed their utmost. If you have stopped short, this book explains why. More importantly, this book explains how to gain the power necessary to permanently improve your ability to climb through adversity.

Some individuals simply quit. If you feel you are in this category, this book is also for you. It will provide you with new insights and tools for strengthening your fortitude and resuming the climb.

It is far more important to know how to deal with the negative than to be "positive."

Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism*

WHAT IS AQ?

This work builds upon the landmark research of dozens of top scholars and more than 500 studies from around the world. Drawing from