Adversity Quotient
Turning Obstacles into Opportunities
by Dr. Paul G. Stoltz

Now more than ever there is an urgent need for people to become full contributors from cradle to grave. But what is it that determines our ability to make a difference throughout our lives? Why do some people persist in the face of life's seemingly insurmountable obstacles, while others fall short or even quit? And why do some individuals and organizations thrive on competition, while others simply fall apart?

Drawing from 19 years of research and 10 years of application, top-ranked international speaker Dr. Paul Stoltz provides answers to these fundamental questions in his seminal new book, Adversity Quotient: Turning Obstacles into Opportunities. One of the most talked about books in America today, Adversity Quotient represents a major breakthrough in our understanding of what it takes to succeed by pinpointing and teaching the behaviors and characteristics that differentiate extraordinary people from those who settle for less, or do not participate at all.

What is AQ?

Adversity Quotient, or AQ, takes at least three forms. It is at once a powerful theory, a meaningful measure, and a well-honed set of tools for persevering through challenging times. AQ describes how well we withstand adversity and our ability to surmount it. It predicts who will overcome adversity and who will be crushed. And it predicts who will exceed expectations and who will fall short.

The concept of AQ is also solidly grounded. At dozens of organizations including Deloitte & Touche, Hunt Wesson and ADC Telecommunications, Dr. Stoltz has demonstrated that those organizations with collectively higher AQs enjoy a host of benefits including greater performance, creativity, resilience and vitality than their low AQ counterparts. In doing so, he has also provided organizational leaders with a new way of defining, pinpointing and developing top performers. And he has given them a sustainable path, map and compass for pursuing a culture of perseverance and achievement, and with it a new notion of managing change.

With AQ, you too can learn to create a more resilient, agile and high-performance organization. The fresh information, grounded research and practical tools in Dr. Stoltz's book will show you how.

AQ — A Better Predictor of Success

Without a doubt, some people are more gifted in life than others. Some are born with superior intellects, rare talents, considerable human strength or unlimited financial resources while others are not. Yet despite these blatant advantages, asks Dr. Stoltz, why is it that so many obviously gifted individuals fall short of their
potential while others, with a small fraction of the same resources, rise above their circumstances and exceed all expectations?

We all know that intelligence alone is not enough to ensure success. The world is rife with examples of people with high IQ's who do not fulfill their potential. Perhaps, then, the secret ingredient is Emotional Intelligence, or EQ. A person's EQ reflects their ability to empathize with others, postpone gratification and interact effectively with the world around them. As such, EQ may well play a significant role in determining a person's success. Unfortunately, though, EQ currently exists in the literature as little more than a hypothetical concept. And because it lacks a valid set of measures and a definitive method of learning it, Emotional Intelligence remains, according to Dr. Stoltz, an ineffective predictor of success.

So what's the magic predictor? Well, if you ask Dr. Stoltz, he'll tell you it's AQ. And he makes a pretty convincing argument too. Read on to see why.

The Great Ascent — Redefining Success

"Life," writes Dr. Stoltz, "is like mountain climbing. Fulfillment is achieved by relentless dedication to the ascent, sometimes slow painful step, by slow, painful step." In this vein, Dr. Stoltz defines success as the degree to which one moves forward and upward, progressing in one's lifelong mission, despite all obstacles or other forms of adversity.

According to Dr. Stoltz, we are all born with the core human drive to ascend. "Successful people," he writes, "share the profound urge to strive, to make progress, to achieve their goals and fulfill their dreams." Yet, even though we all share this core human drive to ascend, we do not see society's mountaintops overcrowded with peak achievers and the valleys unpopulated. Dr. Stoltz explains this puzzling phenomenon by examining what happens in three types of people whom we encounter along our journey up the mountain: Quitters, Campers and Climbers. These individuals have different responses to the ascent and, as a result, enjoy varying levels of success in their lives.

Quitters, Campers and Climbers

Quitters, by definition, lead compromised lives. They have abandoned the ascent in favor of what they perceive to be a flatter, easier path. The irony, of course, is that as life wears on, the Quitter suffers a far greater pain than that which they attempted to avoid by not climbing. "Without a doubt," says Dr. Stoltz, "one of the most gut-wrenching moments a person could face is looking back on a life poorly lived. This is the Quitter's fate."

The second group of individuals is Campers. These people go only so far up the mountain and then say, "This is as far as I can go." Weary of the climb, they terminate their ascent and find a smooth, comfortable plateau on which to hide from adversity. And there they choose to sit out their remaining years.
“Like Quitters,” writes Dr. Stoltz, “Campers lead compromised lives. They may have decent jobs with good pay and benefits, but their days of excitement, learning and growth are gone.” For the Camper, life appears easy, except for the gnawing realization that constant change threatens their campground. As a result, Campers become strongly motivated by comfort and fear. They fear losing ground and they constantly seek the comfort of their cozy little campground.

Dr. Stoltz calls the people who are dedicated to the lifelong ascent Climbers. Regardless of background, disadvantages or misfortune, they continue their climb. Climbers, he says, are possibility thinkers, never allowing age, gender, race, physical disability or any other obstacle to get in their way. And, unlike Campers and Quitters, Climbers embrace challenges and they live with a sense of urgency. They are self-motivated, highly driven and strive to get the utmost out of life. Above all, Climbers are catalysts for action; they tend to make things happen.

The L.E.A.D. Sequence

“The good news,” according to Dr. Stoltz, “is that Quitters and Campers are not predestined to see the peak of the mountain from afar.” With a little help, he says, they can be brought back and their core drive to ascend re-ignited. This is because, unlike genetic traits, an individual’s AQ is learned. So, if you fall into the Quitter or Camper category, it is possible to re-wire your brain for success, and Dr. Stoltz is just the man to show you how.

According to Dr. Stoltz, research shows that the more we consciously repeat a constructive thought or action, the deeper, faster and more automatic it becomes. Unfortunately, though, our usual responses to adversity normally go unquestioned. And, because they are habitual and subconscious, we may be totally unaware of them and thus unable to change. As a solution to this problem, Dr. Stoltz has developed and tested a new technique called the "L.E.A.D. Sequence", which is designed to help people become more aware of their destructive responses to life’s events. The technique involves four simple steps, each of which is introduced below:

L = Listen to Your Response to Adversity

Once you acknowledge the powerful role even minor adversity plays in your life, you can become more aware of the quality and nature of your response. As Dr. Mark Nuwer, Head of Neurophysiology at UCLA explains in Dr. Stoltz’s book, “The intensity of an experience can influence the speed of your learning.” For example, when you touch a hot stove, the pain creates an instant alarm response in the brain. That alarm signals your cerebral cortex — the conscious region of the brain — to make you aware of your choice. So the next time you’re in the vicinity of a hot stove, you are likely to be keenly aware and avoid it.

The same is true for adversity. Having a low AQ, writes Dr. Stoltz, is like touching a hot stove. You can only get burned! But by being keenly aware of when adversity strikes, you can instigate instant change in how you handle the moment.
E = Establish Accountability

The importance of the second step in the L.E.A.D. sequence, "E= Establish Accountability", comes down to a single question: How likely are you to take action to resolve a situation for which you accept blame but feel no ownership? For example, if you blame yourself for, but don't own any part of a financial downturn in your company, how likely are you to throw your energy and any extra hours behind finding a solution? The answer: "Not very likely!" Yet some modicum of ownership is essential for you to learn from or solve any problem, as well as recover from any adversity, regardless of its size.

According to Dr. Stoltz, accepting appropriate blame and taking ownership of some portion of the outcome strengthens your integrity and credibility. This requires honestly exploring what, if any, role you played in causing the adversity and then taking on personal responsibility for action. It's a critical step in the full development of your AQ.

A = Analyze the Evidence

Analyzing the evidence involves a simple questioning process in which you examine, dispute and eventually derail the destructive aspects of your response. This means not assuming the worst until it is proven to be so. For instance, if you went to the doctor with a headache, would you assume it was a brain tumor before you saw the results of your test? Of course you wouldn't, for the simple reason that it doesn't pay to assume the worst until evidence supports it.

"It can be so tempting," writes Dr. Stoltz, "to play the victim and surrender control. But this is simply quitting and I know of no decision more tragic than to quit."

D = Do Something

Many self-improvement programs begin by instructing you to take action. Taking action is dynamic, powerful and sexy. However, according to Dr. Stoltz, the problem with trying to immediately resolve adversity with action is that, quite often, the person hit by the adversity isn't ready for action. Which is why the L.E.A.D. Sequence is such a valuable tool for helping you respond to adversity as constructively as possible when you are ready. The first three steps in the Sequence clear the mental space and fill the emotional fuel tanks required to consider, focus upon and finally take meaningful action.

The Climbing Organization

According to Dr. Stoltz, AQ applies to teams and organizations in much the same way it does to individuals. As with individuals, each organization has its mountain to ascend. Its mountain, of course, is defined by its purpose or mission — its reason for being. Individuals often confuse the ends with the means, frequently assuming financial gain is the goal, when, in reality it is only the reward of a
purposeful ascent. Organizations, says Dr. Stoltz, often suffer from the same confusion.

So if your organization’s purpose is only to make money, then it makes no difference what you do or how you do it. But if you truly want to get the deepest commitment from a group of people, there must be a higher, enduring purpose toward which they can commonly strive. Hence the urgent need to nurture high AQ behavior and grow a high AQ culture in your organization and, in the process, unleash the full potential of your people.

Fortunately, Dr. Stoltz’s book can guide you through this essential task. By employing his L.E.A.D. Sequence, you will be able to help your organization to move forward and upward toward its purpose. In so doing, you will also improve your company’s performance, productivity, creativity, and ability to embrace change.

**Conclusion**

Every day we see people whom, despite seemingly insurmountable odds somehow succeed. 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 for them. Each hardship is a challenge and each challenge is an opportunity, and each opportunity is embraced.

Unfortunately though, when faced with life’s challenges, too many people stop short before they have tested their limits and contributed their utmost. If you have stopped short *Adversity Quotient* explains why, and more importantly, it shows you how to gain the power necessary to permanently improve your ability to climb through adversity.