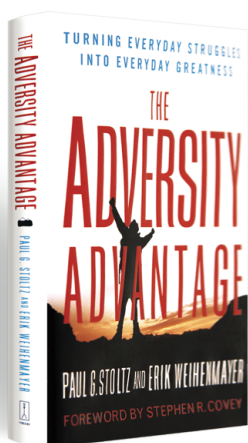




SOUNDVIEW
Executive
Book Summaries®



by Paul G. Stoltz and
Erik Weihenmayer

Turning Everyday Struggles Into Everyday Greatness

THE ADVERSITY ADVANTAGE

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

You might be thinking that any sensible person seeks less adversity, not more. Right? Here's the problem: While you can certainly have an enjoyable life, you cannot reach beyond pleasure to even the most basic level of greatness without a healthy dose of adversity — the very thing most people seek to diminish. Why? Because adversity alone has the unique power to inspire exceptional clarity, purge any vestiges of lethargy, refocus your priorities, hone your character and unleash your most potent forces.

Even minor setbacks provide fertile soil for elevating behavior. If you eliminate adversity, you miss out on life's deepest riches, highest gifts and most powerful lessons. The more adversity you escape, the less you become.

In *The Adversity Advantage*, authors Paul G. Stoltz and Erik Weihenmayer offer proven principles and practical tools that teach you how to use adversity as a force for superior achievement, resilience, agility, innovation, energy and happiness. These two adversity experts have married their dream-team combination of practical science and unmatched experience to develop seven guiding principles to teach you how to transform adversity into your most powerful advantage.

This summary will rewire your core response mechanisms to react optimally to anything that happens the moment it strikes. You will learn to move past avoiding or simply coping with adversity to harness its true power. This summary will also show you how to pinpoint and bolster your adversity strengths in order to bring out your best when you need it most — under pressure.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Where you fit on the Adversity Continuum.
- The key differences between regular strengths and adversity strengths.
- How to engage your CORE to meet everyday and major challenges.
- How to “pack light and pack right” in order to take advantage of the adversities that come your way.
- Why you must devise Signature Systems to help you meet your Summit Challenge.

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE ADVERSITY ADVANTAGE

by Paul G. Stoltz and Erik Weihenmayer

Summit One: Take It On!

Adversity happens. It doesn't play favorites, and it comes in all shapes and sizes. And your natural response might be "Take it away!" rather than "Take it on!"

In enterprise, the greatest inventions and advances are often spawned from or through adversity. It was Apple Computer's dismal market share in personal computers that unleashed the industry-defining iPod. Likewise, it was concern over global warming, oil dependency and fuel costs that triggered the first hybrid automobiles. Worldwide, we see the greatest outpouring of kindness in the face of the worst disasters. Pain, fear, discomfort and injustice are far more powerful motivators than their opposites.

Adversity Defined and Scored

Defining adversity is the first step. Adversity is *personal* and *relative*. It may be useful to categorize adversity into two areas: (1) *inner adversity* (internal, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual states that cause you hardship) and (2) *outer adversity* (things that occur outside you that cause difficulty).

How big is any particular adversity likely to be? The magnitude of adversity you experience is determined by (1) *impact*, its real or imagined, existing or potential severity and (2) *importance*, how much it matters to you.

Have you noticed that you respond to some adversities more effectively than to others? It turns out that taking on the small stuff can actually be tougher than taking on the big stuff. You are constructed, through the flight-fight response, to draw forth previously unknown powers when the big stuff hits.

We humans do not have a similar protective mechanism for bringing out our best in less dramatic conditions. The good news is that you can craft and install a new mechanism by mastering the first Summit and each of the remaining six.

The Adversity Continuum

The Adversity Continuum is designed to help you gain utter clarity on how you interact with adversity. The Adversity Continuum depicts the range of our

approaches to life's tough stuff. It is a steep climb that few complete. As with most mountains, the lower elevations are where you find the crowds. But the higher you go, the better life gets.

At the bottom of the continuum resides one of our most natural and instinctive responses to any adversity — *avoiding it*. And a classic avoidance mechanism is *denial*. While denial has its place and can buy you time, it prevents you from taking adversity on. As a result, the potential benefit that adversity might bring is delayed or even denied to you.

Surviving adversity can be downright arduous. It's not difficult to tell when you are in survival mode as opposed to avoidance mode. In general, avoidance only staves off the inevitable, whereas survival can bring relief. With avoidance you go around; with survival, you go through.

You've surely witnessed people applying all sorts of common strategies in an effort to *cope* with the adversity — or get by — in both constructive and destructive ways. Many people get stuck in coping mode because the per-

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Erik Weihenmayer is the world's leading blind athlete and the only blind person in history to reach the Seven Summits, including Everest. Weihenmayer inspires millions of people each year through his climbing expeditions, nonprofit outreach and keynote presentations. He is author of *Touch the Top of the World* and subject of the award-winning documentary *Farther Than the Eye Can See*.

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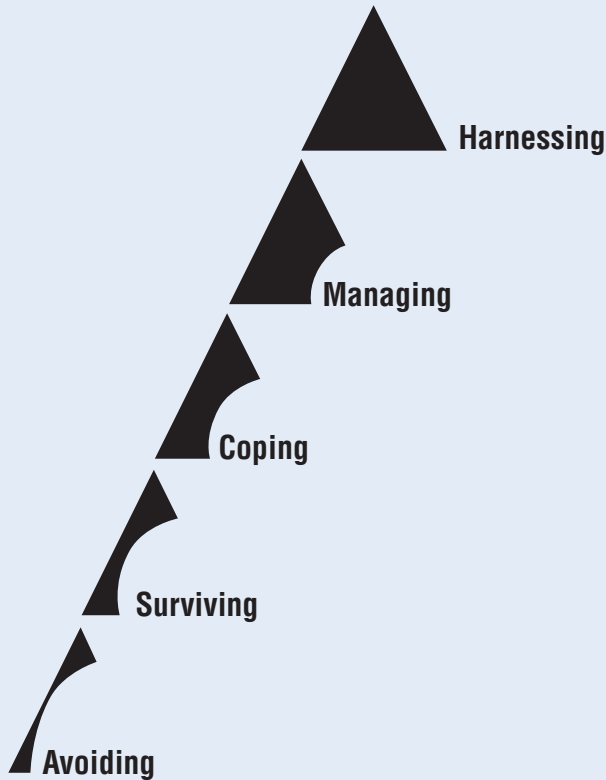
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Summit One: Take It On!

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The Adversity Continuum



ceived impact of the adversity is so great that it takes all they have just to stay even or prevent a downslide.

When you *manage* adversity, you are trying to minimize its downside and its potential impact on other facets of your life or organization. Managing adversity is like operating a moderately effective furnace. It's more productive than coping, surviving or avoiding, but it still has a price. When you work to affect your adversity in some positive way, you are managing it. Done right, proactively managing adversity can be an effective way to keep it in check.

It is only at the level of harnessing adversity that your "furnace" produces more energy than it uses. When you use adversity to elevate yourself and others, or for some tangible gain, that's harnessing adversity.

The truth is that most of us spend time moving between the levels of the continuum. The key is to minimize the time spent in the lower levels and maximize the time spent at the top.

Now that you understand the different levels of the continuum, you can answer these questions: In general, how do you relate to adversity? When it strikes, where on this continuum do you spend most of your time?

Your Adversity Assumption and the Adversity Inventory

Most people's assumptions about adversity run along the lines of "less is more." Overall, "less adversity is better" drives much of our financial planning and many of our choices about how we live. What are your assumptions about adversity?

To get yourself started, write down your two predominant assumptions about adversity. What would the people who see you most and know you best guess your assumptions about adversity to be?

It takes a certain degree of courage to make an inventory of your adversities. But all worthy ascents begin with coming to grips with where you are, so you can move forward and up. To inventory your adversities, go through the following steps:

- **Step One: Categorize your life.** List all the categories of life that matter to you including family, work, friends, community, health, hobbies and others.

- **Step Two: Declare your aspirations.** List your top two or three aspirations for each category of your life. These are things that you have not yet accomplished but that you aspire to achieve in the short or long term.

- **Step Three: Prioritize your pain.** Thoughtfully consider and then list the top two or three adversities that are causing you the most pain or discomfort within each category. Your initial thought may not reveal the true source of pain. Think about the pain beneath the pain and enter *that* on your list.

- **Step Four: Pick your adversities.** Within each category, scrutinize the adversities you listed in Step Three and pick the one that, if you took it on, would unleash the greatest energy in your life.

- **Step Five: Pinpoint your Summit Challenge.** Let's rise above your aspirations to your overarching Summit Challenge. Step Five is to select from your list of aspirations the most compelling thing you've always wanted to do but have not yet done (or completed) for any reason.

- **Step Six: Select your Summit Adversity.** The next step is to select the one adversity that (1) you are sure to face as you take on your Summit Challenge, and (2) if harnessed, would offer the greatest potential energy or breakthrough. This is your Summit Adversity. This adversity may be the most daunting, most impossible or most worrisome.

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• **Step Seven: Clear the trail.** You already know what your Summit Adversity is. In order to “clear the trail,” use the following questions to hone your thinking: What are the primary reasons you have *not* optimized that adversity so far? What are your excuses? What are the excuses beneath the excuses? What’s really at the heart of the matter?

Your Take It On Strategy

When you turn into the storm, you are consciously deciding to grab the wheel and enter the weather and *not* wait for a wake-up call that forces you into action. Instead of turning away from your adversity, you turn into it and bring it on so you can devise your Take It On Strategy.

If you know that tough weather is coming, you can drive yourself nuts hoping that it doesn’t hit or worrying about what happens when it does. Or you can gear up, turn into the onslaught and say, “Take it on!” The idea is to do so not just when you are forced but proactively, by choice, because this provides the energy you can harness, the lead you can turn to gold. ■

Summit Two: Summon Your Strengths

In Summit One you learned how to use adversity as fuel. In Summit Two, it’s not just about harnessing the strengths you have. It is also about developing new strengths that you can bring forth in times of adversity to accomplish what you set out to do.

Decide what you want to do, and clarify why you want to do it. Then bring forth and nurture the strengths required to make it happen. Most important, summon the right strengths when adversity strikes and you, as well as the people around you, will win.

Skills, Talents and Strengths

Let’s begin by clarifying three common terms — *skills*, *talents* and *strengths* — in ways that will ultimately help you turn your adversities to better advantage. For our purposes, we define *skills* as those things you’re relatively good at, whether innate or learned. *Talents* are things that you have a natural ability to do well. *Strengths* are a different order of magnitude. Our dictionary defines strength as “an extremely valuable or useful ability, asset or quality.” In other words, strengths are portable qualities that may encompass or be a result of several skills. Skills are therefore a subset of

strengths. Strengths go deep.

Will is one part *determination*, one part *desire*, one part *decisiveness* and one part *effort*. To be strong-willed about something is to put your force of conviction and effort behind it — to want it, focus on it, decide it must be done and then do it.

Will combined with using and developing skills yields strengths. Here is a simple way to think of it: *Skill without will remains still. And will without skill yields nil.*

Adversity Strengths Versus Regular Strengths

Once you think through the Strength Formula — what strengths you need to forge and summon to succeed with your Summit Challenge — you are ready to explore one of the most important issues you will face in any endeavor. This issue is who you are and what you bring out not when times are calm, but when the world is turbulent and adversity rules the day.

Adversity Strengths are what you summon when adversity strikes — those strengths that rise up and shine when you’re under the gun or feeling the pressure, or when a situation goes south. These are the strengths that help you effectively take on each new challenge.

One way to turn adversity to your advantage is to close the gap between your Regular Strengths and your Adversity Strengths. Closing the gap between your Regular Strengths — the qualities you regularly demonstrate under calm, normal conditions — and Adversity Strengths is a powerful step toward turning adversity into an advantage, by helping you bring out more of your best, especially when things go wrong.

A-W-E

If talent and smarts alone aren’t the answer, how do you select a team that will win in the face of adversity? Go for A-W-E.

• **The A Factor: Adversity.** The A Factor has to do with how people perform and what strengths they bring forth while facing adversity. The A Factor is a gauge of how effective, consistent, trustworthy and dependable a person is when the pressure’s on. You can put people into challenging situations, or take note when such situations happen to arise, and gauge their A Factor that way. Obviously, the more realistic the trial, the better the results.

You can put yourself and your team in a much stronger position when the next adversity hits, by (1) gaining utter clarity and being brutally honest about your own A Factor, (2) helping others to shed light on theirs, and (3) working on developing the Adversity Strengths you need.

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Summit Two: Summon Your Strengths

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• **The W Factor: Why.** Practically every book about teams states the importance of having a group of individuals commit to a single, unifying cause. It's simple but very informative to ask a person, "Why do you want to be a part of this team?" Then come back again, "Yes, I understand, but *why*?" You will find that by your fourth or fifth *why*, you get at the real why, the why beneath the why. The intensity and content of the real why give you a gauge of where people score on the W factor.

What's the quickest and best way to get at the W Factor? *Ask.* Ask people why they want to do the thing they want to do. Then ask again, until you get the answer that rings truest.

• **The E Factor: Ego.** It turns out that the E Factor can play a big role when adversity strikes. Ego can be what fortifies you with the belief in yourself to dare to take risks, take on the daunting and the impossible, step up when others step back or even forge ahead through some pretty rough weather.

And ego can tie in closely to the W Factor, the why. In general, it takes a reasonable ego to even consider going after the higher whys. There are a few practical ways to get at the E Factor. The direct method is to ask people how good they think they are, overall or at certain skills; how well they rank in certain strengths; and how important they feel their roles are on their current teams. Then compare the answers against the perceptions of others who witness these people firsthand, particularly members of their teams.

This simple approach can lead to some vital insights. When it comes to harnessing life's tough stuff, the term *healthy ego* certainly applies. Look for the E Factor in anyone you bring onto your team. ■

Summit Three: Engage Your CORE

Your CORE is derived from your Adversity Quotient (AQ), which is a measure of how you respond to adversity of all kinds, or — simply put — how you react to the world around you.

We've discovered, with mounting certainty, that when all other factors are held equal, high-AQ people rise to the top. They tend to outperform, outlast, outmaneuver and outdo their low-AQ counterparts in essentially any endeavor. And they tend to be energized by the same challenges that wear others down.

Inside AQ — Know Your CORE

Your CORE — which resides in the center of your AQ — is the one thing you take with you into every battle. CORE is composed of *Control, Ownership, Reach and Endurance*.

• **Control:** The aspect of control that matters most is *influence*. The vital question is this: *When adversity strikes, to what extent do you perceive you can influence whatever happens next?* The lower one's AQ, the less control one perceives. Engage your CORE by asking, "*What facets of this situation or adversity can I potentially influence?*" — as opposed to those you may consider beyond your control. As powerful as Control is in determining your attitude toward adversity, it is when you take *Ownership* that the action unfolds.

• **Ownership:** Ownership is about the energizing tendency to do something, no matter how small, to make things better. Ownership is one of the indisputable fibers of everyday greatness. Question: *When should you do it?* Answer: *When you least feel like stepping up.* It gives you traction and Control. Engage your CORE by asking, "*What can I do to affect this situation or adversity immediately and positively?*" rather than worrying about who caused it or who is responsible for figuring out the ultimate solution.

• **Reach:** Reach influences the burden you carry in life. The better you become at containing difficulties, the lighter you feel. Engage your CORE to limit the scope, size and fallout of your adversities by asking, "*What can I do to minimize or contain the downside of this situation?*" and, "*What can I do to optimize the potential upside of this situation?*" The second question may sound forced or strange. But one of the most compelling discoveries in our AQ research is that the higher your AQ, the more possibilities you perceive and the more upside you see in even the most tragic situations.

• **Endurance:** When adversity strikes, Endurance involves asking, *How long do you predict it will last or endure?* People with higher AQs remain hopeful and optimistic. People with lower AQs tend to see setbacks as long-term, if not permanent. Engage your CORE by asking, "*How can I get through this as quickly as possible?*" Address Endurance head-on by using this question to dispel the assumption that a specific setback must drag on and on.

Building Your CORE

Given the number of adversities that strike each day, you will have plenty of opportunities to practice build-

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Summit Three: Engage Your CORE

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ing and strengthening your CORE. The most practical way to build your CORE is through heightened awareness, with feedback, ideally from multiple sources. One of the best ways is a 360-degree or panoramic perspective. This provides each individual with powerful and helpful feedback, shining a light upon one's blind spots so he or she can grow stronger.

"What's my CORE?" can become your instant pulse check when difficulties strike. So perhaps the simplest, but possibly the most profound, way to build your CORE is to pay keen attention to what thoughts, words, emotions and actions spark inside you the moment you face any kind of adversity.

Employ the CORE Strategy

Begin with your Summit Challenge. Take out some blank paper, and write that challenge down so you can work through the CORE Strategy. The CORE Strategy generates a lot of ideas. But as you come up with ideas, don't discuss, scrutinize or judge them. Only *list* them. The scrutiny comes later. Next, write your answers to each of these questions.

C = Control

- What is everything beyond our control? What things do most people consider as beyond our control?
- Of those things, which ones are absolutely beyond our *influence*?
- Of the things you (or we) could potentially influence in this situation, which two are most important?

O = Ownership

- Where and how can we step up to make the most immediate positive difference in this situation?

R = Reach

- What is the *worst* thing that could happen?
- If we allowed ourselves to think outrageously, what is the *best* thing that could happen?
- What things can we do to minimize the potential *downside* of this situation?
- What things can we do to maximize the potential *upside* of this situation?

E = Endurance

- What do we *want* life to look like on the other side of this adversity?

- What else can we do to get there as quickly and completely as possible?

Understanding, building and engaging your CORE will equip you with the capacity to perform your own brand of alchemy. Your CORE determines how much you benefit, how soon you benefit, and how much you do or don't suffer unnecessarily in between, even in the most extreme circumstances. ■

Summit Four: Pioneer Possibilities

In Summit Four you will learn to pioneer possibilities in your work and life. The first step you need to take to pioneer possibilities is to pick a worthy goal, such as your Summit Challenge. Once you or your organization has decided what to accomplish, the next question is how you are going to do it. Pioneering possibilities may mean that you need to invent new ways of doing something. These customized solutions are your Signature Systems.

What are the common characteristics of Signature Systems that you can replicate with your challenges and goals? Pioneers carry good PROPS:

1. **Portable.** Most Signature Systems can be taken from place to place.
2. **Replicable** or **Repeatable** or both. They can be readily rebuilt, reused or repeated.
3. **Original.** They tend to be clever and unique.
4. **Personal.** They fit and are adapted to you — your unique style and needs.
5. **Simple.** They require a minimum of steps, hassles and resources.

Most ingenious Signature Systems are as much a result of tenacity and relentlessness as they are of brilliance. The rough systems you and your team devise will take a lot of relentless work to become smooth, elegant, dependable and perfect. ■

Summit Five: Pack Light, Pack Right

It's tough to climb a mountain if you pack too much or if you pack incorrectly. Likewise, it's tough to be agile and effective at harnessing numerous adversities each day if you're weighed down by all the competing priorities vying for your focus. When you're constantly drained by sheer weight, it's nearly impossible to move toward being great. In taking on Summit Five, you will both reassess and repack your *stuff, time, work* and *self*, shedding

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Summary: THE ADVERSITY ADVANTAGE

Summit Five: Pack Light, Pack Right

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unnecessary burdens that may be sapping your strength or slowing you or your organization down. Summit Five will culminate with you completing your own Adversity Advantage Packing List, re-equipping yourself to optimize the three A's — *alchemy*, *agility* and *adversity*. In Summit Five you will also learn the defining difference between net worth and Life Worth — the enduring source of happiness.

Stuff

Check your own packing — what you currently carry through life. How much of what you own and what you do is really critical? Ultimately, do the things you pack into your life weigh you down or lift you up?

Proper packing takes clarity and discipline, especially in the face of adversity. Most people are weighed down considerably by the wrong stuff. Packed wrong, more can be less. More stuff leads to more complexity, which leads to less time, less peace of mind and less capacity to take on more important challenges.

Time

Time is about how you use your day and spend your life. People who harness adversity have a positive urgency coursing through their veins. Fueled by their latest challenge, they are anxious for the high-octane buzz the next worthy challenge delivers when they take it on, take it in, and convert it into life-enriching lessons and

experiences.

How do you load up your time with Life Worth? Take on worthy pursuits, build in worthy challenges, and you will increase your overall Life Worth.

Work

Work is an excellent opportunity to hone your newly acquired adversity skills. Most jobs entail adversity, but they are also a major potential source of Life Worth — an opportunity to demonstrate everyday greatness. Your approach may mirror and will probably influence the way you live your life outside work.

Done wrong, work can be a big drain on Life Worth and energy. Done right, work can be among the most enriching facets of your life. There are two main ways to pack your work life lighter and better. One is to infuse your current pursuit with Life Worth; the other is to pick a pursuit that is inherently rich in Life Worth.

Self

Even if you pack your life light and right — with the stuff, obligations and work that enhance Life Worth, it is still you who has to take on the terrain. Agility, alchemy and adversity demand your best. You have to treat yourself like a world-class athlete so that you can give your best to everyone else. Life is short. Optimize your Life Worth. ■

Summit Six: Suffer Well

In business, suffering well means putting up with political backbiting, naysayers, long hours, rejection, uncertainty, constraints on resources, downturns and drudgery in the name of a higher cause or a worthy breakthrough. To suffer is to *endure something painful*. And, as with adversity, the more something matters to you, the more painful it may be. Suffering is also relative and is sometimes determined by duration.

The power of suffering is its ability to *strip* away superficialities, ego and distractions. Actually, STRIP is an acronym because, in short, the factors that make up suffering are:

- **Severity** — the magnitude of the pain.
- **Time** — how long you must endure the pain.
- **Relativity** — how severe your pain is when compared to those around you and your situation is compared to your own past or other hardships.
- **Importance** — how much the thing for which you are suffering matters.
- **Price** — how much you may or will lose as a result of the adversity.

The Adversity Advantage Packing List

The point of this exercise is to focus on something you can do now and as an ongoing process to help you pack light and pack right, so you can optimize your three A's — agility, alchemy and adversity.

Packing light and right is not just about shedding unnecessary weight. Packing is also about strategically adding those things that are most climb-critical.

Stuff: As you think about everything you own, what item or items could you purchase or add that would improve your three A's?

Time: What is a new obligation or something you will add to your schedule to improve your three A's?

Work: What will you add to your work to make it richer in Life Worth?

Self: What will you add to your life to optimize your energy, your outlook and the three A's?

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Summary: THE ADVERSITY ADVANTAGE

Summit Six: Suffer Well

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Together these five factors determine whether or not you suffer and the degree to which you suffer.

The Suffer Well

Because suffering is so personal, it's difficult and perhaps inappropriate to provide one universal manual for how to do it. But there is a tool — the Suffer Well — that can apply in almost any circumstance.

A drinking well is filled with fresh water. You dip your bucket as deeply as necessary to draw forth the water you need. Likewise, the Suffer Well is filled with vital questions that, when answered, will draw forth the knowledge you need to suffer well. You can dip into and draw forth any or all questions, in any sequence, depending on the nature and severity of your suffering.

- How am I going to elevate myself and others, starting now?
- Who is most affected by how I suffer?
- What is my CORE with regard to my suffering?
- Why do I want to suffer well?
- By when will I have said or done something that demonstrates my commitment to suffer well? ■

Summit Seven: Deliver Greatness, Every Day

Everyday greatness is not a generic skill set. It is highly individualized, like personality. This means that you get to deliver everyday greatness in your own authentic way.

But it's important to point out that there is a fundamental difference between *epic greatness* — the “great people of history” whose biographies fill the library shelves — and *everyday greatness* — the kind of greatness that can be gleaned from scaling the seven summits. One is an occasional epic event; the other is much more accessible, more of an ongoing effort and an everyday opportunity.

Besides, the reality is that most people are not striving to be like Gandhi, Nelson Mandela or Sojourner Truth — someone who rises up and does the right thing in the face of immense adversity, changing the course of human history in the process. But we still strive to have our lives matter.

The virtues of everyday greatness — resilience, magnanimity, compassion, fortitude, good will and integrity — are like charity. There are people who deliver them

more readily and generously when life is good than they may when times are tough. This is true of many leaders who are far better at gelling their teams when they are on a roll than when they are slammed against the rocks. But with charity, what speaks more clearly about your character — giving when you have an endless vat to draw from, or giving when you have nothing to give? Likewise, what matters more — elevating others when your mood, the setting and the conditions are just right, or doing so in the heat of battle? If it were easy, we would call it *everyday normality*.

Witnessing Greatness Every Day

So how do you deliver greatness every day? Consider the people you admire the most and how they deliver their own greatness, then consider the following questions:

- Who do you most admire in work? In life?
- What does he or she do or demonstrate that makes him or her great?
- How does that person take it on?
- How does that person summon his or her strengths?
- How does that person engage his or her CORE?
- What possibilities has this person pioneered?
- What tough choices does that person make to pack light or pack right?
- If you have seen that person suffer, does he or she suffer poorly or suffer well?

After you consider all this about the individual you admire, you can then apply these questions to yourself and determine how *you* go about delivering greatness.

Remember, your relationship with adversity is utterly foundational to all you aspire to be and do. No longer will you remain passive or helpless against adversity. You will prove, over and over, that bad things can spawn good. When life beats you down, you will use its forces to rise up, to elevate yourself and those around you. You will convert life's difficulties into pure, endless fuel for delivering your brand of greatness every day. ■



If you liked *The Adversity Advantage*, you'll also like:

1. ***Words That Work* by Dr. Frank Luntz.** According to Dr. Luntz, to effectively obtain the power of communication, you must learn that it's not always what you say, but how you say it.
2. ***The Age of Speed* by Vince Poscente.** In a time-starved era, you need to stop listening to everyone who tells you to slow down and begin paying attention to the rush once and for all.
3. ***Talent Is Never Enough* by John C. Maxwell.** Talent is often misunderstood and overrated. To combat this, Maxwell suggests that people build their strengths and become “talent-plus people.”