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The Adversity Paradox

An Unconventional Guide to Achieving Uncommon Business Success

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Obstacles and setbacks are inevitable parts of life, especially in today's harsh and volatile economy. How can you use these to build success? The answer lies in firsthand knowledge of the "adversity paradox." Working to overcome humble beginnings, lack of knowledge, unexpected setbacks or any manner of misfortune can be the foundational step in a path to incredible achievement.

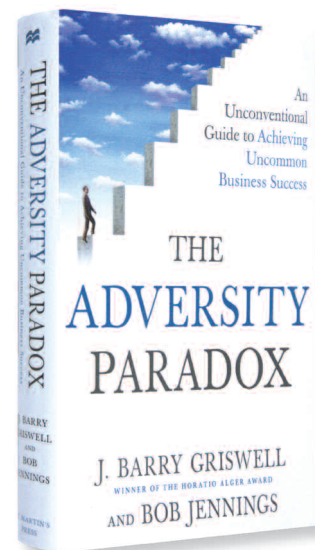
Those who have benefited from the adversity paradox all relate similar experiences. The knowledge they gained from overcoming obstacles played such a crucial role in their success trajectories that they now consider adversity to be an invaluable friend.

While you may not experience the extreme forms of adversity described in *The Adversity Paradox*, it's inevitable that each and every one of us will encounter adversity at some point in our careers. The lessons here are practical and inspirational, and they can be applied at any stage of your career.

J. Barry Griswell and Bob Jennings offer concrete steps that can be taken to increase your own business savvy. Their intent is to embolden you to take action or refocus your determination in your career path. The paths to success are diverse, but *The Adversity Paradox* identifies patterns that anyone can study and learn from.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to take your own business-savvy inventory.
- How to use the skill of introspection to find your level of moral development.
- How to ignite your thirst for knowledge.
- How to have the confidence to do what others see as impossible.
- How to build endurance of character the same way we build physical strength.



by J. Barry Griswell
and Bob Jennings

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE ADVERSITY PARADOX

by J. Barry Griswell and Bob Jennings

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What Is Business Savvy, Anyway?

business savvy: *n.* 1. *proficiency in the realm of business; the unique ability to consistently meet and surpass one's business goals.* **adj.** 1. *those who are proficient in business and consistently achieve outstanding success.*

the adversity paradox: *n.* 1. *the phenomenon of building outstanding success upon the lessons learned in overcoming serious difficulty or misfortune.*

You always have a choice. No matter how terrible the setback, you can make the choice to lie back and let adversity consume you, or you can face the situation head-on and work to make adversity your friend. Befriending adversity means not shying from it, but learning from it.

The business leaders who've benefited from the adversity paradox are the ones who use the diagnostic skill of introspection to conduct honest self-assessments so as to make trajectory adjustments whenever necessary. These folks have found a purpose they're passionate about and have found a way to take the work out of work. They're the employees who nurture a thirst for knowledge that keeps them constantly abreast of the ever-changing world of business.

Given such commendable core competencies and practices, it isn't surprising that those who've learned their lessons the hard way often go on to achieve enormous wealth as a result of their prodigious business savvy. ●

The Individual Human Capital of the Business Savvy

Individual human capital (HC) is an individual's

portfolio of assets in which he or she has invested that can produce future positive outputs. Garry S. Becker, the foremost expert on human capital, states, "Economists regard expenditures on education, training, medical care and so on as investments in human capital. They are called human capital because people cannot be separated from their knowledge, skills, health or values in the way they can be separated from their financial and physical assets."

Business leaders who have benefited from the adversity paradox have tended to build their success upon the same five components: introspection, values behavior, work character, purpose and passion, and thirst for knowledge. This is "the business-savvy framework."

The Individual Human Capital Profile

J. Barry Griswell has successfully put all the components of the business-savvy framework together and built a rags-to-riches kind of success. His industry, associates, competitors, company board, employees and friends see him as a very business-savvy person. To get to this point in his life he has defied all the odds. As a youth his family was poor, his home broken and learning was difficult. As an adult he fought medical issues and the occasional career setback. But he learned early on to persevere despite all the odds, and that ability has facilitated both personal and career success. His comments about each of the individual human capital components are incorporated in the following descriptions.

Introspection: HC Component No. 1. Introspection is the practice of observing one's self — one's personality, strengths and weaknesses, overall performance, motivations, goals, ideas and capabilities — and conducting honest self-assessments.

"Introspection allows us to look deep within and



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analyze our motives and priorities, and to measure our progress toward goals. Most important, introspection allows us to get an accurate measure of purpose, passion, and commitment to dreams and goals. To truly know oneself can be daunting, but it's essential in order to experience one's personal success."

Our self-understanding needs to be 100 percent accurate. We need an accurate read on our weak areas so we can direct our efforts to focused self-improvement and maintaining an upward success trajectory.

Values Behavior: HC Component 2. Values do not have to be compromised to get ahead. Good values, and behavior that matches those values, are paramount to maintaining a positive trajectory over long periods of time. Compromising values may get someone ahead in the short run but will always bring him or her down in the long run.

"I do not believe for a second that you can be a bad person — a dishonest or cruel person — and have true success ... I firmly believe that honesty and integrity are the foundation for any type of success — honesty with others and, more important, honesty with oneself."

Work Character: HC Component 3. In being business savvy there is no substitute for hard work. "If you buy into the theory that success is about reaching your personal potential, about achieving stretch goals and doing it 'right,' there must be hard work."

Purpose and Passion: HC Component 4. If hard work is critical, then we need to find a way to really enjoy our work so that it's no longer work, but rather something we're passionate about. The trick is to view work as a means to far greater benefits or enjoyment.

"I never forgot how badly we needed insurance after my father died suddenly, and how burdensome it was to be left with so much unexpected debt. What a noble cause it was, I thought, to help families protect themselves if the breadwinner were to die prematurely, to have an income should a disability occur, or to help someone plan for a secure retirement. Was selling life insurance boring? No way. I had a strong and exciting purpose."

Purpose can keep you going in the face of any challenge.

Thirst for Knowledge: HC Component 5. The power of knowledge and lifetime learning is transformative.

"While it took me almost 20 years to catch up, my grades in college eventually became good enough to get an academic scholarship to supplement my athletic scholarship. I even managed to get into graduate school and earn an MBA while loading trucks at night. But, I

learned the power of knowledge and how to acquire it. ... Lifetime learning and an ongoing curiosity have been absolutely essential to my success." ●

The Power of "And Then Some"

Those who choose to make adversity their friend don't enjoy hardships any more than the next person. But there is a world of difference between those who befriend adversity by overcoming it and learning from the experience, and those who give up at the first sign of an obstacle.

Adversity is going to happen, and usually in ways you never could have foreseen. Knowing this, make a choice right now to look at adversity in a new light. Realize that adversity is an ally and that it's here to teach you something of crucial importance.

The Key to Befriending Adversity

You are the agent of change. In other words, the power to act, to positively change your own circumstances, lies with you. No matter how difficult the circumstances, relying on and harnessing the power of "and then some" ensures that you're never helpless in the face of adversity. Because "and then some" is a universal principle, you can apply it to any manner of adversity you encounter.

Have you been laid off? Start with a goal of targeting five companies a day and then find five more, and don't rest until you follow through by contacting the person in charge of hiring or by sending your resume. Are you weak in a particular area, such as public speaking, making cold calls, team leadership or even a software program? Do whatever it takes to gain not only competency, but proficiency in whatever area is holding you back from reaching your potential.

If you're truly meeting your goals and then surpassing them, the amazing results you'll achieve will be an extremely powerful motivational force. Success breeds success. If you habitually use the power of "and then some" to build your human capital, you'll find that the positive results will surpass all your expectations.

And if you're lucky enough not to have experienced full-scale adversity, you can start by applying the power of "and then some" to all the setbacks, obstacles and even daily nuisances that will always arise in business.

To apply the basic principle of "and then some" to everything you do, put in the extra effort above and beyond others at work, and then expand the principle into a full cycle of self-improvement.

Positive thinking is integral to befriendng adversity

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and harnessing the power of “and then some.” Face adversity with a relentlessly positive frame of mind, even if at first it feels artificial or unnatural. Allow no other thought to enter your mind than “I will face this adversity head-on and I will learn from it.” You can either wallow in self-pity and pessimism or you can treat adversity as the clarion call to institute needed change. ●

Just Add Introspection

Most businesses absolutely stink at assisting employee development through formal appraisal processes. It’s a major missed opportunity.

Business leaders or managers do have good intentions when implementing appraisal processes. They aim to facilitate honest self-assessment so as to maximize employee potential but, more often than not, their execution destroys the intent of growing the human capital within their organizations.

Many appraisals are based upon subjective one-to-five rating systems for performance issues like quality of work, cooperation and relationships, and problem analysis. They call for one person’s subjective opinion, and if your performance issue doesn’t show up on the form, tough luck.

Then there are the not-so-unusual cases where a change in supervisors produces a large change in a person’s appraisal score — no change in performance, just a change in who’s doing the appraising.

There is no substitute for real introspection, for an honest and critical examination of one’s own thoughts, feelings and motivations, and by extension, one’s strengths and weaknesses. Introspection provides an accurate personal appraisal process that enables one to analyze motives and priorities, and to measure progress and commitments toward goals. The process of introspection allows one to make constant — and accurate — trajectory adjustments.

Critical to successful introspection is that it is conducted with *frequency* and with *accuracy*. Frequent but inaccurate introspection gets one nowhere and can even be self-destructive. Accurate but infrequent introspection just places a person on a low trajectory, as trajectory corrections don’t occur often enough.

Satellites and Mirrors

When we were young we were surrounded by mirrors that told us what we were doing right, what we were doing wrong and what we could do differently. Parents, teachers, test scores, coaches, counselors, sports

The Power Resides in All of Us

Out of high school, Gene Postma gave community college a shot before being lured away by the attractive hourly wages of a construction job. The job became a career and, after 10 years, Gene found himself running a crew and remodeling a building in New York City. The remodel included removing several layers of shingles on a steeply pitched roof. Gene was exasperated with his crew’s slow progress and uneasiness on the roof, so he decided to demonstrate that there was nothing to worry about.

Starting at the roof’s peak, Gene started ripping and tearing when, all of a sudden, one of his toe-holds broke loose, sending him sliding down the steep slope and off the edge into a 25-foot fall. On the way down he shattered his arm on a balcony, and when he landed he incurred compression fractures in his back. The doctors told him he would never be able to swing a hammer or run a trowel again. He was married with a two-year-old son and was unable to continue with his career.

Gene accepted the unexpected turn in his life and went back to school, put in extra effort with the books, and he and his wife both worked throughout his education. He graduated second in his class in less than four years with an engineering degree. He is now president of Western States Fire Protection Company, which has 1,500 employees and more than \$200 million in annual sales. Like so many, Gene had the power of “and then some” before his fall, but adversity put it to work to grow his human capital well beyond that which he’d originally thought himself capable.

successes and failures all gave us rapid feedback. We could get a pretty accurate read on who we were and in what areas we might be able to excel.

As we age, many of our mirrors disappear; some are replaced, but the average person is left with far fewer means to obtain accurate and frequent reflections. Just as the key to the Global Positioning System (GPS) is having multiple satellites and accurate signals at all times, the key to good introspection is having multiple mirrors and accurate reflections at all times. In both cases, one needs to be able to triangulate.

Harvey Mackay, a successful business owner, may demonstrate the value of multiple mirrors best. To this day he relies on what he calls 18 coaches — (for various disciplines) from marathon, writing, and language and speech coaches to a humor coach. He learned the value

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of multiple mirrors early when he bought his struggling company when he was 26. Back then he called each of his mirrors “old grizzly” as his lawyer was 60, his accountant 58, and his banker over 70. His was a professional team, but mirrors need not cost money.

“There are a lot of qualified advisors out there,” Mackay said, “who are just waiting for us to ask them. Try it sometime.” His success has little to do with luck and everything to do with the science of setting up mirrors (satellites) and conducting accurate and frequent introspection (triangulation).

The Mackay approach stands in stark contrast to many in business today. Take the competent businessperson who relies solely on his or her boss as his or her performance and trajectory gauge. As a GPS receiver cannot provide an accurate fix on location with a single satellite, neither can the businessperson conduct accurate introspection with only one mirror.

Mentors of all types are extremely important for increasing both the accuracy and frequency of your introspection. The term “mentor” can apply to any person who is offering you feedback for forward thinking and positive adjustments. The more mentors, the better the triangulation and, more often than not, mentoring is free for the asking. ●

What Does Behavior Have to Do with Values? Everything!

Possessing business savvy isn't just about superior business skills or proficiency in a particular area of business. It's also about having the right values and bringing those values to bear on the way one does business.

Creating and fostering a culture of integrity and ethical behavior is not only the right thing to do, it's critical to business success. The culture of integrity and ethical behavior must start at the top. Leaders need to set and live out the example for their organizations, and it's all too obvious how one corrupt manager can bring an entire company down.

At the end of the day, the most effective tool anyone has is his or her own behavior, and behavior is always ultimately predicated upon an individual choice.

Kohlbergian Theory

Lawrence Kohlberg was a psychologist and professor at the University of Chicago and Harvard University. His research holds that moral reasoning, which is the basis for ethical behavior, has six identifiable stages.

Stage 1 is simply the rules and punishment trade-off.

Thinkers using Stage 1 moral reasoning believe that there is an external and fixed set of rules, and that there is only one right or wrong answer to every moral dilemma.

In **Stage 2**, individuals lock into a “What's in it for me?” perspective. All behavior comes from serving one's own needs.

Those in **Stage 3** base moral choices on the expectations of others in their proximity, such as family, friends, peers and the community. Likewise in business, an employee bases his or her behavior upon the expectations of superiors, co-workers and subordinates.

Stage 4, however, brings us into all-new territory. Individuals at this stage have expanded their circle of thinking enough to see the society or the business they are in as a whole. The emphasis is on obeying laws or rules, respecting authority and handling one's duties so that the social order, or business rules and processes are maintained.

Stage 5 thinkers want to do what is best for society or for all parties that touch the business. It is crucial for those in a leadership role to reach this level. At Stage 5 one must not only be driven by principle but also understand and balance the interests of everyone.

Few people reach the level of **Stage 6** moral reasoning, but those with prodigious business savvy always strive for it. This is the stage of universal human ethics. Behavior is predicated upon actions and decisions that demonstrate an equal respect for all.

For the long-term growth and health of any business it is crucial to hire ethically sound people and to foster an environment in which employees can develop morally and only the ethically sound are rewarded.

So how does one climb the hierarchy of moral development, advancing from one stage to the next? One advances in moral reasoning by actually encountering a moral dilemma, finding that one's current level of moral reasoning is inadequate and then grappling with that dilemma to the point that one comes to a more comprehensive viewpoint. The more comprehensive our viewpoint, the more robust our moral development and the farther we advance up the hierarchy of moral development.

The Gray Zone

The truth is that the business world is full of moral dilemmas and, even with sound moral reasoning, matters will arise that fall into the so-called Gray Zone, a space rife with adversity. The Gray Zone encompasses not only those dilemmas that do not have a definitive right answer, but also those in which almost all decisions come at the detriment of someone or something else.

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There's no end to the number of Gray Zone issues the businessperson will face, especially those in leadership positions. Gray Zone dilemmas are rarely published, as they're often troubling or embarrassing, but companies routinely face them. ●

Sorry, But There's No Substitute for Hard Work

People with a fully developed work character are qualitatively different from their peers: Their excellent work habits and the success they earn distinguish them from the pack. The idea of work character as used here is rooted in this distinguishing quality and encompasses a person's attitude and ability. People with an outstanding work character habitually work hard, think hard and lead well — and because they're pursuing what they love, they enjoy their work.

Physical Work Ethic

People with a well-developed physical work ethic have the ability and the willingness to put in the requisite hours and effort to do a job to their fullest potential.

The fact is, any of you who are trying to move up the corporate ladder will be required to put in whatever extra hours and effort are necessary in order to distinguish yourself from the pack. If you're not physically up to the task, or if you're operating at half speed, you're going to be at a significant disadvantage from the beginning.

Those in leadership roles may have even more of a responsibility to develop a strong physical work ethic. Good leaders know that their team members will emulate them; it's their job to set the standard for productivity.

Cognitive Work Ethic

A cognitive work ethic is engagement of the mind to learn, solve problems, find opportunities, develop solutions or successfully execute the tasks a job requires.

The need for a fully developed cognitive work ethic for any type of success is growing more pronounced every day.

Over time, unemployment in America has remained relatively unchanged, but much of the work force has been required to move from employing their physical work ethic to their cognitive work ethic to earn a living.

In today's business work, a robust cognitive work ethic is required simply to stay in the game, much less excel.

What Would You Do in the Gray Zone?

In one case a leading sales representative got caught falsifying hotel receipts. Your recourse is simple, right? You just fire him. Problem is, he is a top producer, and firing him will hurt the bottom line and the stockholders. He is also well liked, so if he goes, you run the risk of losing some key customers. What's more, he's a friend, a company veteran who's been through thick and thin with you. If you fire him, what are you saying to other employees? That you had an unwritten "one strike and you're out" policy? That you don't value years of loyal and trusted service? But if you don't fire him, are you tacitly telling employees that it's okay to cheat? Now take it a step further: It turns out the employee was falsifying the receipts not for the money but to hide an affair he was having in another city. His behavior, while clearly unethical, hasn't cost the company a dime. So is business now to be concerned with and penalize a person for his conduct outside of work? What would you do in the face of this kind of adversity? How do you find your way through the Gray Zone and arrive at the right decision? In this case, the employee was fired, and the outcome was quite costly; some sales were lost, as were some customers. But in the long run making the extremely difficult decision to fire the employee preserved the company's ethical standards, and it showed employees that management would abide by its principles. The long-term gain exceeded the short-term pain, and again we see the adversity paradox in action.

Skills to Lead

Even with the most highly developed physical and cognitive work ethics, one person can only do so much on his or her own. "Skills to lead," the third part of work character, brings us into more specialized territory. It can uniquely combine any number of skills. It can involve things like effective public speaking, communication, team selection, team building, an ability to motivate others, delegation and having good vision.

"Skills to lead" is an adaptable concept. That is, one's skills to lead will depend on the people one is leading, the business one is in and the corporate culture.

Working Not Just Harder but Better

We can have the best of intentions, but if we have no idea how to start or follow through on them, we're stuck at square one. So here are three proven processes

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that have worked to promote positive change:

1. Motivation/Visualization. If you ask most people what gets them out of bed and to the office every morning, they'll have a quick answer: the paycheck. More dollars might bring you a bit more spending power, a few new things, but those are temporary highs. More money isn't likely to be a permanent motivating factor.

A recent Gallup study found that recognition of one's efforts has the largest impact on worker engagement and performance. Other huge motivating factors include a sense of self-worth, a feeling of accomplishment, the satisfaction of taking part in meaningful work, the sense of being a part of a vibrant and accomplished team, or pursuing a more challenging role with greater responsibility. Maybe your biggest motivating factor is getting out of one job and into another that provides the kind of long-lasting intangible rewards that have been listed.

What you need is something powerful enough, something meaningful enough, that it gets you working and thinking at such a level that you won't rest until you attain your goal.

The most powerful motivating factor of all arrives when you've found a purpose you can pursue with passion and bring to fruition through your career.

2. Adding "And Then Some" to Everything You Do. Apply the power of "and then some" to literally everything you do and you're guaranteed to get positive results. Set your goals higher than what is expected of you and find ways to achieve them.

If you're completing your tasks *and then some*, if you're putting in the extra effort required to distinguish yourself from your peers, there's no way you can't advance. The trick is to make "and then some" a lifelong habit.

The difference between employing *enough to get by* and *and then some* may be hardly visible within a given task or in a day's work, but over a lifetime it can be the largest separator between a life of mediocrity and a life of success.

3. Successful Habits. The third way you can make positive change is about making hard work not just a short-term means to reach a short-term goal, but a lifetime modus operandi.

Whereas forming habits that make you successful may seem like drudgery, once they become habits they are no longer a grind, especially when you start enjoying the rewards of the success you have created with them. ●

Purpose and Passion: You Really Can Take the Work out of Work

Recognizing the importance of the connection between purpose and passion, businesses try to foster corporate statements that help develop and engage employee passion. The business leaders who get their mission statements right are the ones who know how to align purpose and passion.

Wal-Mart's mission is "To give ordinary folk the chance to buy the same thing as rich people." Did this mission statement work? Did they foster and cultivate employee passion? The answer is in the results. So many "ordinary folk" purchased Wal-Mart goods that it's become one of the most profitable businesses in America.

The true measure of a stated business purpose is its ability to get its employees excited and engaged. True purpose, no matter where it is found or how modest it may seem from the outside, is immeasurably powerful. Having the right purpose, the purpose that specifically works for you and your business, is central to creating passion that impacts results.

Passion is the enthusiasm you feel as a result of your purpose. Your purpose generates your passion. Finding passion in your work doesn't mean everything is perfect, but it means you have the ability and vision to see beyond the imperfections.

Clay Jones: Take Serendipity and Run With It

Clay Jones is the president and CEO of Rockwell Collins, a company engaged in the design, production and support of communications and aviation electronics worldwide. When asked how he got from zero interest in flying to a career in aviation and becoming a leader of one of the most recognized aerospace companies in the world, he said "serendipity."

He didn't mean simple luck. Rather, the Jones application of serendipity is about encountering the numerous forks in the road of life — most of which are entirely unforeseen and many of which come about through no conscious choice of our own — and then making a conscious choice to pursue a direction with vigor and perseverance.

"You find yourself in certain positions in life where you have to make a decision," Jones said, "and the fact is, each of these decisions has a profound effect on your future direction in life, which is something most of us underappreciate at the time ... each of those decisions builds upon a new direction ... And that," concludes Jones, "is how I eventually found my purpose." ●

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The Transformative Power of a Lifelong Thirst for Knowledge

What is the value of knowledge and education for the business-savvy professional? Business-savvy professionals absolutely thrive on the thirst for knowledge.

Knowledge enables you to:

- Formulate a vision and execute it successfully.
- Think on your feet, and act quickly and judiciously when problems or opportunities arise.
- Switch back and forth from systems to linear thinking, from seeing the big picture to scrutinizing the details.
- Synthesize mountains of data into salient, useful information.
- Inspire your team's confidence in your leadership.
- Select, train and inspire business-savvy teams.
- See your lack of knowledge.

This fifth and final component of human capital alone has worked wonders in people's success trajectories; but added to the full business-savvy framework, it's guaranteed to transform not only your career but your life.

Formal and Informal Learning

We're all familiar with formal learning: It's the learning that takes place within a structured teacher-student relationship. Informal learning then, encompasses the balance of our learning. Much of informal learning results from what we do and experience in daily life.

What is surprising, and terribly sad, is the statistics (about formal learning) for the country at large. The U.S. Census Bureau reveals that one in three Americans drops out of college and, according to the latest government figures, more than 50 percent of college freshmen do not receive a degree within six years.

Over a lifetime, most people spend far more time on and gain far more knowledge from informal learning. But while informal learning is clearly critical to success, without the skills the formal learning environment provides, the informal learner has little chance of accumulating the quantity and quality of knowledge needed to gain business savvy and be successful.

So let's review the benefits of a formal education. We've got job qualifications, increased confidence, a way out of humble beginnings, a way out of a stalled career or life situation, and a statistically better chance

of greater earning power. The most important advantage — no matter what discipline the business-savvy professional studies — is learning how to learn. If your formal education has taught you how to learn, your path to success will be all the smoother.

Your success is significantly impacted by the foundation of knowledge you have or will possess. If you haven't already found a thirst for knowledge, it's not too late. Enroll in a class, subscribe to a new journal, read as much as possible, and keenly observe successful people and emulate them. You never know when something will ignite your thirst for knowledge. ●

Using the Adversity Paradox to Triumph Over Unexpected Trajectory Changes

Even though the business savvy are recognized for their ability to see around corners, no one can predict the future with 100 percent certainty. The good news is that most adversities or career catastrophes leave a person's human capital substantially intact. Trajectories may be shaken by the unpredictable, but they can be re-established — sometimes with far superior results.

Practicing the Paradox

So often, the most powerful catalyst for change lies in the place we'd least expect or want to find it, in adverse circumstances. Failure has a way of making us take stock of our careers and our lives — our progress toward dreams and goals, our strengths and weaknesses, our motivation and our daily work habits — in a way that success does not. It can also force us to take quick, decisive action without benefit of the usual safety nets, which can often reveal inner resources and abilities we wouldn't have otherwise known we possessed. At the very least, overcoming difficult circumstances always causes growth and the development of your human capital. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

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

1. ***What Got You Here Won't Get You There* by Marshall Goldsmith.** In the corporate world, few will ever reach the top. Goldsmith details 20 habits that may be holding you back.
2. ***Success Built to Last* by Jerry Porras, Stewart Emery and Mark Thompson.** Discover what successful people have in common and use their simple practices to transform your company, career and your life.
3. ***Never Eat Alone* by Keith Ferrazzi with Tahl Raz.** Here's a proven mind-set and skill-set to establish a community of colleagues, mentors and super-connectors who can help you achieve your goals.