



The Adversity Advantage: Turning Everyday Struggles into Everyday Greatness

By Erik Weihenmayer, Paul Stoltz

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The Adversity Advantage: Turning Everyday Struggles into Everyday Greatness By Erik Weihenmayer, Paul Stoltz

From the world's foremost blind athlete and a Harvard Business School lecturer comes an inspiring, seven-step program for converting both mundane and dramatic struggles into the kind of fuel that spur personal and professional greatness.

Adversity is one of the most potent forces in life. It shapes your character, clarifies your priorities, and defines your path. It can also fuel your greatness. Each of us faces a rich assortment of adversities every day, ranging from minor hassles to major setbacks and challenges, even tragedies. Nobody knows this better than blind adventurer Erik Weihenmayer and adversity expert Dr. Paul Stoltz. In this exciting new edition of *The Adversity Advantage*, this dream-team joined forces to offer incredible experiences and practical science to teach you how to turn life challenges into a powerful advantage. Weihenmayer, who is the only blind person to climb Mount Everest and the Seven Summits, shares his struggles on high mountains to turn adversity on its head and do the impossible. Coauthor Stoltz has spent decades decoding the human relationship with adversity and is the creator of the globally acclaimed Adversity Quotient.

Fully revised and updated, this new edition of *The Adversity Advantage* offers lessons from real-life adventure, seemingly insurmountable challenges, and extensive research to help you achieve greatness. This unique book provides an exciting and insightful framework for surpassing obstacles and reaching higher goals. Its seven proven principles will help you harness the adversity in your life and turn it into agility, innovation, energy, and happiness:

- Take it on!
- Summon your strength
- Engage your core
- Pioneer possibilities
- Pack light, pack right
- Suffer well
- Deliver greatness, every day

Let *The Adversity Advantage* inspire you to overcome obstacles, no matter how daunting!

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Editorial Review

Review

"Lloyd James's soft, assured voice makes any challenge seem possible." ---AudioFile

About the Author

Erik Weihenmayer

Erik Weihenmayer is the world's leading blind athlete and the only blind person in history to reach the Seven Summits, including Everest. Erik 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*, which was made into a TV movie, and subject of the award-winning documentary *Farther Than the Eye Can See*. Erik has been featured on the cover of Time and lives with his family in Golden, Colorado.

Paul Stoltz

Paul G. Stoltz, Ph.D., founded and has been the CEO of PEAK Learning since 1987, a global research and consulting firm, and the director of the Global Resilience Project, working with top leaders and organizations worldwide. The originator of the globally acclaimed AQ (Adversity Quotient) method and author of the international bestsellers *The Adversity Quotient* and *Adversity Quotient at Work*, he resides with his family in San Luis Obispo, California.

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INTRODUCTION

What if, as a result of completing this book, you could use any, and I mean *any*, adversity to your advantage? What if you could convert your everyday struggles, big and small, into the kind of fuel that powers you past everyday normality to everyday greatness?

Isn't there something incredibly riveting about the human struggle with adversity? Not only is it the central strand of our story, shared across eras and cultures, but we also read about it in all the great books, are spellbound by it in popular movies, and wrestle with it in our own lives every day. Why adversity?

Maybe it's because within that struggle lies the essential wisdom we all need to become the kind of person we hope to be, or to nurture the kind of team or organization we envision. In fact, after spending the past few years working on this book, I'm convinced that adversity holds the key to achieving everyday greatness in life, business, and society.

We don't have to go looking for adversity. It tends to find us. During the summer between eighth and ninth grades, I began losing the last traces of my sight. I could no longer see enough to walk around by myself, so my brothers and parents had to lead me. I'd reach out for their

shirtsleeves with the terror of a small child being left behind in a department store. I hated what was happening because it represented utter helplessness. Everything I knew was ending. The loss was like a storm descending on me with such force, such viciousness, that I thought I'd be crushed by it.

Late that fall, I was watching a TV show called *That's Incredible*. I could still see a little out of one eye, though I had to crane forward to just a few inches away from the set. Being featured that night was an athlete named Terry Fox. Terry had lost a leg to cancer, and when not yet discharged from the hospital, made a decision to run across Canada from east to west. With my nose pressed up against the screen and with tears pouring down my face, I watched Terry run. The miles took a tremendous toll on his amputated leg and its primitive prosthetic. He hobbled along mile after mile, fighting the pain of blisters and raw skin, often using a pair of crutches to propel his body forward.

What struck me most was the look on his face. It was a look of extreme contradiction: full of exhaustion yet radiant with exaltation. In his thin face was the trace flicker of an intense internal light that burned power into his struggling frame. The image filled my sagging spirit and gave me a feeling of utter courage. Many would have retreated from such hardship, but -- surprisingly -- Terry faced it head-on and literally ran into its midst. It was while staring into Terry's face that I first wondered how we could harness that great storm of adversity swirling around us and use its power to make ourselves stronger and better.

Although I was inspired by Terry, I learned early on that inspiration is not enough. If a person embarks on a mountain expedition unprepared and unequipped, the fierce wind, the frigid cold, the steep and technical terrain will do him in every time. Likewise, in order to consistently convert everyday adversity, big and small, into genuine advantage in our lives and enterprises we need some powerful and proven tools. And no one is better qualified to teach us about those tools than the guy I teamed up with to write this book, Dr. Paul Stoltz.

Paul is perhaps best-known for his *Adversity Quotient*, or AQ, theory, which has become the most widely adopted method in the world for measuring and strengthening our capacity to deal with adversity. Decoding the human relationship with adversity has been and continues to be Paul's lifework.

It was through Paul's groundbreaking research that we met. His focus on people who harness life's tough stuff led him to launch the Global Resilience Project, an effort now involving studies in twenty-one countries. His quest was to gain a better understanding of those rare people, like Terry, who don't just deal well with adversity but learn to convert it into fuel, to achieve everyday greatness.

You might remember, from your history textbooks, those medieval alchemists who toiled mysteriously to turn lead into gold. I call the people like Terry, the people Paul has highlighted in his research, modern-day alchemists. I believe that inside each of us is something I can only describe as a light, which has the capacity to feed on adversity, to consume it like fuel. When we tap into that light, every frustration, every setback, every obstacle becomes a source to power our lives forward. The greater the challenge, the brighter the light burns. Through it, we become more focused, more creative, and more driven, and can even learn to transcend our own perceived limitations to bring our lives more meaning.

All of us can be alchemists, taking the lead that life piles on top of us and finding ways to

transform it into gold. I strive to be an alchemist every day. I climbed the Seven Summits -- the tallest peaks on each of the seven continents -- not only because I love to climb but also to shatter people's perceptions of what's possible. And somewhere along the way, I learned more about the advantages of adversity than I ever imagined I would.

There is something inherently compelling about an ascent. I believe that deep inside us, we all strive to move forward and up, to scale new heights. Paul and I have, therefore, organized this book into Seven Summits, based on seven guiding principles that will help you use adversities to your advantage, as a way to infuse some practical greatness into your daily life. I begin each Summit -- each chapter -- with a story from one of the seven actual summits that I climbed. In between, Paul draws from my lessons and his worldwide research to teach you how you can generate power from your everyday struggles, elevating you and everyone you touch.

By "everyone," Erik and I hope you include the people you interact with through your work, your community, your family, and more. This is because the ripple effect -- both positive and negative -- of how you relate to adversity extends out to all whom you influence, including many who are unaware of your impact. That's the potential power of *The Adversity Advantage*, and it's why Erik and I love the word *elevate*. To elevate means to "raise to a higher level or position," or to "raise one's mind or spirit to a more enlightened or exalted level." And when you really come down to it, isn't that what you want to do with your life, what every parent hopes to do for a child, what every leader ultimately wants to do for his or her organization?

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 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 potent lessons. The more adversity you escape, the less you become.

In my first books introducing the Adversity Quotient (AQ), I talk in depth about *Quitters*, *Campers*, and *Climbers* -- the three categories of response to the daunting challenge of leading an ever-elevating life. Quitters simply give up on the ascent -- the pursuit of an enriching life -- and as a result are often embittered. Campers generally work hard, apply themselves, pay their dues, and do what it takes to reach a certain level. Then they plant their tent stakes and settle for their current elevation. Climbers are the rare breed who continue to learn, grow, strive, and improve until their final breath, who look back on life and say these precious words: "I gave it my all." It's no coincidence that Climbers are the people we most admire, are drawn to, and seek to become. One of the major discoveries of my research is that at the heart of the difference between Climbers and Campers or Quitters lies what they do with adversity.

Relentlessly pursuing a life or building an organization rich in purpose can be tough. The weather on the mountain is rough -- and intensifying. That's why Quitters abandon the ascent and Campers hunker down. Only Climbers take on the immensely gratifying challenge of learning, striving, improving, and contributing until their final breath.

According to our poll of more than 150,000 leaders across all industries worldwide, many people quit (5 to 20 percent), most camp (65 to 90 percent), and a rare few climb. In fact, when

leaders are asked, "What percentage of your workforce is camping?" the most common response is "80 percent."

This is a *tragic* loss of potential, at a time when camping is increasingly costly, and the benefits of climbing are particularly rich. But my previous books stopped short of explaining something powerfully distinct about Climbers. I have discovered that the people with the highest AQs don't simply respond more effectively to adversity. Whether they are driving a new business model, forging an exceptional team, or simply finding ways to accelerate their own development, they *use* adversity. And in this process, they unleash tremendous energy and innovation, and gain momentum. This book will teach you how to use your adversities to unleash your personal best.

We learn from those who shatter our notions of what's possible. The extremes of the space program created countless practical products for everyday use back on earth; and in just the same way, through extreme examples of what people can do with adversity we learn practical ways to dramatically improve what we do with our own.

My research led me to Erik Weihenmayer because he is a Climber in the truest sense of the word. He attacks li...

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Lila Dixon:

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