

## CHAPTER ONE

# *Adversity*

“That which does not kill you will make you stronger,” quoted Friedrich Nietzsche. In principle, it would seem to make sense. The initial reaction is that it does, which is probably what Nietzsche had in mind in the first place. However, if you dig a bit deeper into this, the takeaway should be that it is not the experience or the trauma that makes you stronger, but how you withstood the trauma or adversity that makes you stronger. Simply because you have gone bankrupt does not mean you are stronger or more prepared to deal with adversity. If you have had the experience, successfully dealt with it, and moved on, then you are better equipped to handle future adverse circumstances.

All of us will face some degree of adversity in our lives; this is inevitable. You can't run from it. You can't hide from it. It will find you. You have to deal with it, embrace it as a learning experience, accept responsibility, take action, and move

on. How you deal with adversity could be viewed as the single biggest challenge in your life. The true test of character is not how someone behaves when things are going well, but how one responds when things don't work out, problems occur, and events seem to conspire against you. Adversity will help you grow. It will make you stronger, and as John F. Kennedy said, "Turn scars into stars."

Adversity comes in various forms and is oftentimes financial, emotional, or health related. The event could be limited in scope and duration, or it could cast a wider net and be prolonged. Losing your iPhone is not an adverse event; it is an inconvenience. Being unable to make ongoing payments for your house, apartment, car, or telephone because you have lost your job and are having a hard time finding a new one qualifies as an adverse circumstance. These adverse circumstances are valuable life lessons if we learn from them and do not make the same mistakes again. Some of these circumstances will be environmental and beyond your control, others will be self-inflicted due to poor decisions, lack of oversight, or arrogance. Your character is defined not by what you went through but how you went through it. Successful people do not give up when faced with adversity. They have the resilience, strength of character, and courage to "find a way or make one," as Hannibal famously directed his generals when faced with the daunting task of crossing the Pyrenees, elephants and all.

When faced with adverse circumstances, many of the points in this book come into play. If you are committed to what you are doing, your strong belief and faith in your mission will help you stay the course. If you have conditioned yourself, both

mentally and physically, you are better able to deal with the stress and uncertainty. If your personal life is in order, this provides a further buttress, as negative circumstances in one aspect of your life can spill over into the other.

The sum total of these ups and downs—and here the reference is to the downs—shapes you as an individual and determines your ability to successfully rebound. While it may not seem so at the time, these downs are valuable life lessons. These experiences help develop your resiliency, which is a key trait in being able to effectively deal with adversity. Such experiences also afford the opportunity to develop in ways you may not have been able to otherwise. As you encounter adverse circumstances, keep the following five points in mind:

### **Benefits of Adversity**

1. *Increases Experience:* You need to be tested or challenged in order to learn and grow. Every adverse circumstance is a lesson learned that helps you grow and develop your capacity to deal with future occurrences. If you have never experienced something in your life, it is difficult to know how you will react. Adversity provides you the opportunity to learn from the experience and be better prepared for the next problem you encounter. It also may reveal the character of those around you, as you witness firsthand how they respond.
2. *Presents Challenges:* Adversity will challenge you in new ways, resulting in experiences you otherwise would not have encountered. These challenges help build you

as you strive to make the most of a bad situation and turn things around. Facing these challenges head on, coping with them, and developing a recovery strategy embolden you and give you the confidence to face the next obstacle.

3. *Builds Resiliency:* These experiences develop your capacity to maintain resolve and determination through tough times. Stress and anxiety are twin components affecting everyone when dealing with adversity. Being able to effectively cope with the stressors associated with adversity enables you to cultivate a range of skills, making you stronger, better equipped, and more resilient for future events.
4. *Imparts Perspective:* Times of adversity make us more greatly appreciate when things go smoothly. You will take satisfaction from the fact that you were able to get through it and from the acquired knowledge that adversity is not permanent. You will acknowledge adversity as also a state of mind, which confers a more positive mind-set in the future, knowing you survived once and will do so again.
5. *Improves Planning:* Another benefit to adversity is that you are better prepared for the future. What you have learned about yourself, others around you, and the organization can be the basis for well-developed alternatives and contingency plans that can be expeditiously and confidently executed during the next untoward event.

When adversity strikes, your mind-set is your primary weapon; it starts with you. It is how you react, how you decide to respond, and what you do that determines your ability to overcome the obstacles you face. As you face these inevitable challenges, adhere to the following steps:

### **Dealing with Adversity**

1. *Accept:* The first thing is to accept what has happened; what's done is done. You can't go back and change what has transpired. The past is the past; time travel is not possible. You can learn from this experience, but for now you look for ways to solve the problem. Focus on finding solutions instead of excuses. Accept responsibility instead of casting blame. Face the challenge head-on; view it as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. Move forward, understanding that every problem has a solution.
2. *Understand:* Get the facts. Oftentimes problems are compounded by inaccurate information or misunderstandings. Before any action, ensure you get as complete an understanding as possible of what went wrong and why it went wrong. Making decisions based on bad data will only compound the problem and make it worse. Ask questions instead of making assumptions, drilling down to the basic issues and underlying causes of this predicament. Once you have defined the problem, determine which factors are in your control and which factors are not in your control. Determine what choices

you have and what resources to use, focusing on what you can do versus what you cannot.

3. *Respond:* You want to avoid a knee-jerk reaction while at the same time launch an initial response to the crisis. Focus on what steps you can take in the short-term, however small, to exhibit movement and to show action is being taken. These initial actions will provide reassurance that you are in charge and on top of things. While you may not be completely on top of things at this point—and likely you are not—perception is reality. A strong initial statement setting the right tone will help assuage fear and have a calming effect.
4. *Composure:* As a leader, you want to project a confident and calm demeanor, regardless of the circumstances. If the team sees you are unfazed, they will find comfort in your example. Conversely, if they see you emotional and harried, their imagination will run wild, assuming the worst. Set the tone by reinforcing your commitment and belief in the cause. “Strength and honor” is a phrase made famous by Maximus Decimus Meridius in the movie *Gladiator*. Your mantra should be “strength and confidence.”
5. *Mind-set:* You are defined not by the crisis but by how you deal with it. Your mind-set will play a key role in how things turn out. A confident demeanor and a positive attitude, laced with enthusiasm, are contagious. Exhibit a can-do attitude, focusing on what can be

done, instead of anticipating the worst. Most of those around you will embrace this posture, but not all. Pay close attention to the doom-and-gloomers among the team. Their negativity can have an insidious effect on morale and compromise your mission.

6. *Strengths*: Now is not the time to launch a self-improvement program. Focus on your strengths and what you do best. This also holds true for the team around you. By concentrating on your strengths with the best people, you will realize quicker progress, which boosts morale. You will have to place your faith in your team to see how they perform. Trust your instincts, and trust your team. The added responsibility may have a galvanizing effect as they rise to the occasion.
7. *Seek Help*: What you are going through is not unique. It may be unique to you and those around you, but it has happened before, in some way, shape, or form. If you or anyone else on your team has not had to deal with a crisis of this nature, seeking outside help from someone who has can be a valuable adjunct to your recovery. This individual can give you a different perspective since it is helpful to get a different set of eyes looking at a problem. Do not hesitate to ask for help or view such a request as a sign of weakness. If you do seek outside help, make sure the individual or entity is qualified by checking their credentials and experience. Ensure they have the requisite interpersonal and communication skills essential to fostering open communication.

8. *Values:* When experiencing an adverse event, a compelling factor in effectively dealing with the crisis is unyielding faith and belief in one's purpose. This sense of conviction will provide a bulwark for you and the organization. Do not lose sight of what you are about and why you are doing it. Take every opportunity to emphasize your beliefs and core values, reinforcing your commitment. Now is not the time to take shortcuts or to compromise, as the true test of character is revealed during these turbulent times.
  
9. *Plot a Course:* Once you have all of the facts and have considered the options, develop a plan. Involve as many team members as possible since their participation in putting the plan together equates to greater buy-in. Create a roadmap with objectives and timelines, ensuring that there is clear assignation of responsibility. Communicate the plan to the team, and continually monitor progress, providing support and direction as needed. Understand that it took you a while to get into this situation; the turnaround will take time. Be consequent and deliberate in carrying out this plan, paying special emphasis to the process, since it is a series of steps all properly executed that will enable you to emerge from this crisis. Throughout this process, if certain things do not work, do not be beholden to one approach. Be flexible and willing to make course adjustments. Celebrate the successes—even the small ones—as this energizes the



team and improves morale as they see positive movement and an end in sight.

10. *Team Health*: Some people on the team are not as resilient or emotionally equipped to handle adverse circumstances. Some rise to the occasion, and some crumble; everyone handles adversity and the resultant stressors differently. To the best of your ability, do everything you can to maintain morale by setting the example. At the same time, keep a watchful eye on team members who are showing signs of stress and are not handling the situation very well. Keeping them in the line of fire will only make things worse, so adjustments in personnel assignments may be needed. If this is necessary, it should be done in a way that allows the individual's dignity and self-respect to remain intact. Bear in mind that, when things improve, this individual will continue to contribute, but the current pace is overwhelming for them. This should be handled in a deft manner and, while easier said than done, is the hallmark of an effective leader.

Successful people and organizations will always face adversity, as life is not a continuous cycle of success and not without its problems. When faced with adversity, find the inner strength to be courageous and resilient. Your attitude and mind-set are central to overcoming the obstacle. Bear in mind you have choices, and be fiercely determined to find a way or make one

to get through your current crisis. There are always lessons to be learned. Accept this challenge as a learning opportunity, never give up, and consign yourself to developing understanding and insight so you do not find yourself in this same predicament again. When faced with adverse circumstances, keep the following points in mind:

1. *Accept:* Don't fight the problem—decide it. What is done is done.
2. *Understand:* Get the facts, ensure information is accurate, avoid making assumptions, and ask questions.
3. *Planning and Process:* Develop and implement a strategy, being rational and objective, and paying close attention to the requisite steps and timeline.
4. *Composure:* Project a calm, confident demeanor, with a positive mind-set and attitude.
5. *Learn:* Take heed of why this happened and how you got through it, and vow not to let it happen again.