

# Find out if you're a **CLIMBER** a camper or a quitter

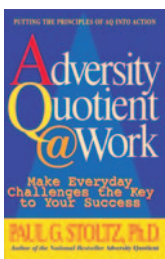
By MICHELE HIMMELBERG  
The Orange County Register

You are overlooked for a promotion. Do you quickly devise a strategy so you'll be recognized next time, or do you decide to do nothing because it's your manager's fault?

No matter how high your IQ (your brains), or how strong your EQ (capacity to manage your emotions), you might just snivel and blame your boss if you have low AQ.

"AQ" is your adversity quotient, your ability to endure setbacks and keep believing that you can improve a lousy situation. It's the basis of 20 years of scientific study by consultant Paul Stoltz, who defines AQ as "the measurable, precise and unconscious way you respond to adversity."

Stoltz explains AQ's power in the workplace in his second book on the topic: "Adversity Quotient



@Work; Make Everyday Challenges Key to Your Success" (Morrow, \$26).

When that promotion slips away, some people will fall apart, some will give up and others will create a plan to snag it next time. Stoltz, an avid mountain climber, classifies the three types of workers as quitters, campers and climbers. His research shows that 80 percent of today's workers are campers, those who have settled for a safe, shady spot on their career path. (See who you are in

the accompanying chart.)

Your AQ is as much a part of your hardwiring as your skeletal system, but it can be improved, Stoltz says.

Managers at places such as Marriott, FedEx and Qualcomm say AQ training has enhanced their work culture. At Deloitte & Touche, executives say that employees with higher AQ are more resilient, and they're promoted sooner.

With that kind of testimony, Stoltz tends to oversell AQ as a predictor of success. But if you buy into the concept, the book offers plenty of self-assessment tools and strategies to help you cope with the abundant challenges in the workplace. Stoltz talked about AQ's value at work.

**Q. In 1999, workers told you they confront 23 adverse events a day, everything from a broken copier to a company stock plunge. Five years earlier, it was only 13 adverse events per day. Is work that much messier now?**

**A.** I think that number is conservative given what we've seen the last six months. For women it's slightly higher, too. What's interesting is that the nature of adversity has changed; it's everything from small annoyances to major setbacks. When we were kids, my parents faced war, the Depression - big, defined adversities to rally around. Now the adversities are not major, but they're like a big cloud of mosquitoes that

It's all about your 'adversity quotient' -- and it helps determine how you deal with setbacks.

aggravate and wear you down. It requires special skills to manage those.

**Q. How do you spot quitters, campers and climbers in the workplace?**

**A.** Quitters are the loudest whiners; they're the quickest to find reasons why something can't work. They're the most disillusioned; more of an energy drain than a contributor. Sometimes they're bitter and resentful. They retired 20 years ago, but never told anyone. There may be stories of how great they once were, but something has taken its toll, and now they define themselves as victims. They get sympathy and resentment.

Campers have worked very hard and strived for decades. They might say they've been aiming for this spot all their lives, and now they can finally just camp. A vast majority of us become campers, and many managers end up as campground leaders. Somewhere, the toll became so great they stopped climbing, and they sacrifice a lot of dreams of success. The good news is that inside every camper is a climber.

To thrive in our new economy, you have to hire and grow climbers. They retain a sense of relentlessness over life. They have purpose and passion in what they do, and they're keeping that alive, regardless of their job or spot in life. Climbers inspire us; they can see potential.

**Q. What causes someone to start climbing?**

**A.** People begin to realize if they stay where they are, they'll lose out on some of life's highest opportunities and rewards. A lot of them feel like it's time to get out on the rope; when you climb in the Grand Tetons at Level 2, there may be no trail, but that's where the exciting stuff happens.

**Q. You talk about AQ as a technology we can plug into our lives. How does it work?**

**A.** Think of a computer and what's required of it as we load more and more onto it. If you have a moderately capable operating system, of course it slows down and will crash. Most of us have a moderate AQ as our operating system. So the object is not to gain more software, but to upgrade the human operating system so everything you do is easier ... It can affect not only your sales ability and problem solving; the effect might be on your health and relationships at home. It helps a person overall, with their resilience and optimism.

**Q. Hiring and retention are key issues at many companies. Can AQ training help in those areas?**

**A.** Definitely. When companies say they're losing people, you have to ask, 'Are you losing campers or climbers?' The true cost of replacing people is extraordinary. So there's a great financial payoff to hire and develop people with high AQ ... Companies inadvertently reward campers. You want to keep your climbers; they're the ones who will thrive amid all the mergers and change.

**Q. Is AQ just a glorified name for good attitude?**

**A.** Attitude is superficial; it's like painting a car red to make it go faster. It's really about getting under the hood to make changes. Someone who deals with life's setbacks is someone who'll have a good attitude - not the other way around. ... A core competence in the soft, new economy will be the ability to respond optimally to whatever happens, the moment it strikes. Imagine what the world would be like if we could improve that. Paul Stoltz is president of PEAK Learning Inc., a consulting and research firm.

**RESPONDING TO ADVERSITY**

How can you monitor adversity quotient? Let's sit in on a bad-news meeting to find out.

First, the team learns that its project needs major revisions; next, the meeting strays off course and runs way long.

Using the "CORE" principles, here's how to identify who's apt to crumble and who has trained their inner voice to respond by saying, "Nice try; let's give it another shot."

▶ **Control:** High AQ workers believe they can influence the outcome of the meeting, even as it goes downhill. But those with low AQ believe nothing they do will matter; they give up and count minutes until the meeting ends.

▶ **Ownership:** The high AQ worker holds herself accountable for the outcome of the meeting, regardless of the reason it's going poorly; the low AQ worker sees herself as a helpless victim.

▶ **Reach:** Someone with high AQ will put setbacks in perspective, not letting them ruin the day or the weekend. He resolves to learn from the mistakes. A low AQ worker would extrapolate, turning the single failure into proof that he is worthless and stupid.

▶ **Endurance:** Think of Tom Hanks in the movie "Cast Away"; it's all about faith that the tide will carry something in to improve his situation. High AQ workers know this down time won't last forever; the low AQ worker can see no good ending.

**WHERE DO YOU FIT?**

Workers can be identified as climbers, campers or quitters. Here are some traits of those three, indicating their capacities for challenge and change.

**Climbers will:**

- ▶ Focus on what they can control
- ▶ Be resilient and tenacious
- ▶ Maintain perspective
- ▶ Believe they can positively influence negative or adverse situations

**Campers will:**

- ▶ Let adversity wear them down
- ▶ Resort to blame when tense or tired
- ▶ Group mounting adversities rather than separate them
- ▶ Lose hope and faith when adversity becomes high

**Quitters will:**

- ▶ Give up
- ▶ Blame others and become guarded
- ▶ Blow up even minor difficulties



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