

Quitter, camper, climber: Which one are you?

By JENNIFER MARAGONI

You got stuck in traffic. Your child came down with the flu. You missed an important meeting. Or, perhaps, you got laid off.

From the moment your alarm clock goes off in the morning until you drift off to sleep at night, you'll face about 23 adversities, ranging from petty annoyances to major setbacks. That's up from an average of 13 five years ago and just seven 10 years ago, according to Paul Stoltz, president and CEO of Peak Learning Inc., a San Luis Obispo-based corporate consulting firm.

"Welcome to the realities of the entrepreneurial, high-velocity new economy. Each day demands greater speed, capacity and capabilities," Stoltz writes in his book, "Adversity Quotient @Work," released last fall.

Everyone faces adversity. The difference is how people handle it, he says.

Someone with a high Adversity Quotient -- a term coined by Stoltz a decade ago -- thrives despite adversity. A person with a low AQ is the first to burn out.

"About 20 years ago I began looking at why some people thrive in the same conditions that beat other people up," Stoltz says. "I realized it all boiled down to how people respond to adversity."


We are all "hardwired" to react differently to adversity, Stoltz explains. But, unlike IQ, it's possible to improve your AQ.

Simply recognizing how you respond to adversity is the first step in improving your AQ, which can range from a low of 40 to a high of 200. The international average is 147.5, which is considered moderate.


Stoltz divides the work place into three groups: High-AQ "climbers" seek challenge, low-AQ "quitters" flee from it and moderate-AQ "campers" — which make up about 80 percent of the work force — are "content, fat and happy, stuck in the status quo."

"AQ is the missing factor in success, both for employees and managers," says Beverly Kaye, a career development consultant and co-author of "Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay."


"It's one of those things every manager knows, but can't put their finger on."



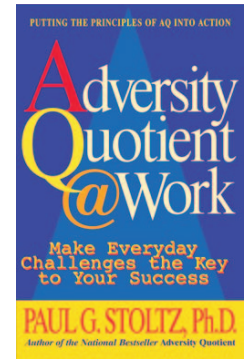
Quitters
 Typically have lower scores and a limited capacity for challenge and change. Quitters tend to: Blame others
 Become Overwhelmed
 Allow adversity to endure longer than necessary



Campers
 Typically have moderate AQ scores and some capacity for challenge and change. Campers tend to: Let adversity wear them down
 Resort to blame when tense or tired
 Lose hope and faith when adversity is high



Climbers
 Typically have high AQ scores and a tremendous capacity for challenge and change. Climbers tend to: Be resilient and tenacious
 Focus on solutions over blame
 Be trusting and agile



Stoltz and Kaye agree AQ can aid in recruiting and retaining top performers, but don't advise turning away otherwise qualified candidates because they receive a moderate or low AQ score. Although Stoltz says it's "cheaper, easier and ideal to hire high-AQ people," he adds that companies could hire a lower-AQ employee and then help him improve his score.

Stoltz boasts about 100 corporate clients, ranging from startups to Fortune 500 companies. One of his clients is San Jose-based Cypress Semiconductor Corp., which introduced the AQ principles in a mentoring program and is now rolling out the course companywide.

The course consists of an intensive one-day seminar, followed by 90 days of Internet-based training.

"People are able to see how adversity affects them in ways they have never recognized before," says Darryl Carson, director of sales at Cypress, who took the course. "It really gave me insight into how I manage myself and people around me."

Another believer in AQ is Tom Kosnik, a professor in the Stanford Technology Ventures Program, an entrepreneurship center within the engineering school. Kosnik has his graduate students complete the AQ evaluation to learn more about themselves.

"What the Adversity Quotient does is help you learn what you taught yourself and what your parents taught you to do when the shit hits the fan," he says.

Kosnik plans to follow his students over time to find out if a high AQ score is a predictor of entrepreneurship, something he suspects may be true.

"From my experience, AQ seems to be a very good indicator of resilience and optimism in the face of adversity," he says.

But even Stoltz admits there are some potential drawbacks to having a high AQ, particularly in how one relates to others. People with high AQs tend to be "relentless optimists" who minimize problems, which can make lower-AQ individuals think they aren't taking a situation seriously, he says.

And, he adds, they can drive others nuts with their inability to quit or re-route even when a situation warrants it.

Simply understanding why people react differently to adversity can go a long way toward resolving these difficulties, he says.

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