

Overcoming Adversity in Business

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Ben Franklin is purported to have said, “out of adversity comes opportunity.” This statement and similar words of wisdom are encouraging as we face the challenges of life. What is interesting is to watch how different people handle adversity. Why is it that some crumble under the pressure and others rise to the occasion? We now have research that gives us additional insight into this quality of resilience. Dr. Paul G. Stoltz introduced a concept about how well a person is able to cope, handle and withstand adversities, to recover from those adversities and to turn them into opportunities which he called his Adversity Quotient®. His research now spans thirty years and includes studies of over 500,000 individuals. Dr. Stoltz has authored numerous articles and three books on this topic. The AQ® provides a score that let’s you know how resilient you are. Stoltz notes, “resilience is not simply about bouncing back from adversity — it’s your capacity to be strengthened and improved by it.”

Stoltz describes three major classifications of people in terms of their resilience: quitters, campers, and climbers. Quitters surrender at the first sign of trouble and are reluctant to make use of opportunity. As Stoltz says, they “opt out, cop out, back out, and drop out.” Campers are content with their first success and choose not strive for more. They settle for “what is” versus “what could be.” Climbers, in spite of obstacles, continue to climb the success ladder with hopes of reaching the highest place. Climbers are usually described as “persistent, tenacious, and resilient.” The good news from this research is that your Adversity Quotient® can increase, and even though I may be a camper today, I can actually become more of a climber with knowledge and intentionality.

John Dolan has certainly faced adversity and overcome. Dolan grew up in Carthage and joined the Navy where he served for six years. During his time in the Navy, he worked in nuclear electronics on submarines. After he got out of the Navy, he moved to Jackson where he worked in the clothing industry. Dolan met his wife in Jackson, and after they married, they moved back to her hometown of Chalmette, Louisiana. A budding entrepreneur, John started a custom shirt business called Just Shirts in 1998. After growing that business, he opened his own custom tailoring store called J. Dolan Clothiers in 1999. His clothing business was a big success, and in 2005, as John was preparing to go to the national clothing market, Hurricane Katrina altered his life course.

The city of Chalmette, along many other towns, was devastated by Katrina. John lost everything he owned in both his house and business. His business and home had eighteen feet of water coupled with an oil spill from a nearby refinery. John had family in Jackson, and they decided to relocate there to start life over. As a proven entrepreneur, John considered a number of business options before deciding to start a direct mail advertising business. As a small business owner, John had advertised successfully with a similar business in Chalmette. He did not find anyone pursuing a similar business in the metro Jackson market, and so County Connections was born. In 2008, he launched the Rankin County Connection, followed by the Madison County Connection in 2009, and the Hinds County Connection in 2010. All total, he mails out to 86,000 households in the metro market. His mailers go out 6 times per year and include ads, coupons, special discounts, and articles with the goal to connect local buyers with local businesses. The business has doubled in the past year, and Dolan’s current expansion plans include south Rankin County and the Clinton/Byram/Terry markets.

I'm impressed with John's ability to build two totally unrelated businesses from scratch into successful businesses. As I visited with him, I noted that he was a person of focus and tenacity. As he said, "each day I always know that I have to hunt it, kill it, and drag it home each day." This hunting analogy aptly describes an awareness of someone who takes full ownership and responsibility for their success. In Stoltz's classifications, Dolan is certainly a "climber." It would have been easy for John to make excuses or feel like a victim, but instead he stared adversity in the face and pressed ahead.

Katrina caused heartache for so many. While the circumstances are certainly unfortunate, Mississippi has been enriched by the entrepreneurship and leadership of business people like John Dolan who have overcome adversity and re-invested their time, talent, and resources here in Mississippi to rebuild. In life and business, we all will face challenges. The good news is that we actually have the opportunity both individually and as organizations to become more resilient and overcome adversity better.

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