



DEALING WITH ADVERSITY©

Today, more than ever, most people and companies are facing a great deal of adversity. The credit markets are from up, homes are being foreclosed on, everyone's 401K is now best described as a 101K and we are in what may be a long and deep recession. How you deal with your adversity is going to determine here you will wind up at when the situation we are in stabilizes.

My story of success and adversity began in 1982. I had the good fortune to be one of four co-founders of a company we called Valcom. The company distributed major brand computer products and services through a network of owned locations and dealers. We were very successful.

In 1987 we took Valcom public. We began acquiring companies and in 1991 changed our name to InaCom. By 1998 we were a \$5 billion dollar Fortune 500 company. In 1998 we bought a \$4 billion dollar company for stock and lost board and management control of the company.

By November of 1999, key InaCom management including myself had been fired. We were given "Golden Parachutes". By June of 2000, our company had been bankrupted by bad decisions and ulterior motives. Our "golden parachutes" became worthless along with our stock and options when the Board took the company into Chapter 7 or liquidating bankruptcy.

By November of 2000, a class action lawsuit was filed and the Securities and Exchange Commission began an investigation. I January of 2003, the Securities and Exchange Commission filed a complaint against me. I won the trial in U.S. District Court in September of 2005.

From 2000 to 2003, I was unemployable. I had been involved with a company that went bankrupt and I was facing an S.E.C. lawsuit. I had gone from a key executive in a Fortune 500 company to unemployable. The length of your fall from grace is truly proportionate to the height that you rise. You can only have a spectacular crash if accomplished something.

I had adversity. I learned a lot of valuable lessons from the experience, however.

1. Communications is essential to overcoming adversity.

How you talk to yourself is important. If you tell yourself you failed, you have. If you believe that it was a bad result and you need to come up with an alternative answer to survive and prosper, you will.

2. A fall is not your personal failure; it is merely a result of actions you took

What happened or what you did is far less important than what you do next. Getting up is more important than being knocked down. When real career adversity strikes, the sooner



you take control of the situation and begin moving forward, the sooner the tragedy will become your next triumph.

3. Build a network, starting yesterday, that will be available if career adversity hits.

Networks are far easier to build when you don't need anything than when you need something. Bring people into your network when you can do something for them, not when they can do something for you.

There is no such thing as a bad network connection. During high school, college and the early years of your employment, you will meet a lot of people. Most of the people you meet will not be in a position to do anything for you but they will become the foundation of your network.

Technology makes staying touch and up to date with your network very easy. An email once a quarter to let people know what you are working on is easy. A phone call every six months and a face to face annually provide a good follow up plan. Googling names can also provide information on your contacts that give you an opportunity to send a congratulatory note or a chance to offer assistance. Never pass on a legitimate chance to make a contact.

You never know who the next Bill Gates or Michael Dell is going to be when you are young. If you keep in touch today and offer your help without strings, they are far more likely to help you in your time of adversity.

4. Accept responsibility for what has occurred. Don't blame someone else.

If you blame your current position on someone else, you have admitted that someone else controls your life. Don't give others that control over you. Complaining about what someone did to you will not change the situation and by the way, they probably don't care if you blame them. If they did, they would not have allowed you to get in the position you are in.

The first step in changing where you are at is accepting responsibility for where you are at. Until you "own" the problem, you can't change things.

5. Remember that your spouse and family are going through the adversity to.

We have all heard or read in the Bible about the plagues that befell Job. One day as we were discussing our problems, my wife mentioned Job and pointed out something very key in the story. Job's wife endured each plague along with Job. Through boils, death, loss of property and respect, she persevered right along with Job.



When bad things happen, we have a tendency to focus on ourselves as the main player. We forget that our situation affects the lives of our spouse and our family. Be aware and understanding of what they are facing. They care about you, and they are a very important source of support and motivation as you begin to dig out and move forward.

6. Adjust your lifestyle and spending to fit your current circumstances as fast as you can.

Build a plan and execute a strategy to match your spending to your current circumstances. If you are having a career problem, don't create a bigger problem for yourself by being slow to change your spending habits.

I found that a Toyota gets you around just as well as a BMW. Eating out once a week instead of five times isn't a big sacrifice but it does matter. Have a drink at home instead of the bar. Booze by the bottle is a lot cheaper than it is by the glass. If things get really tight, sell the house. You can cut your costs by 50% and really not affect your lifestyle dramatically. I've done it and lived it.

Downsize your life to fit the situation you are in, not the one you want to be in. When adversity hits, it always lasts longer than you think it will.

7. Don't isolate yourself.

When adversity strikes, you will blame yourself and feel embarrassed. You will be hesitant to stay visible because you don't want to answer questions about what "really" happened or respond to the question, "How are you doing?"

Keep going to your meetings and stay in touch with the people you worked with. You have nothing to be ashamed of. Don't be defensive or overly apologetic about your situation. When you isolate yourself, you get depressed and almost afraid to see other people. Isolation is not a solution; it is an avoidance mechanism,

The people you are avoiding are the very people that can help you overcome your adversity. In order for them to help you, however, you must remain front of mind with them. You are not their number one priority and if you are invisible you become no priority at all. Don't be pushy but don't let them forget that you are there if something comes along.

8. Force yourself to list five positive things before you consider a negative thing.

Nobody wants to be around someone who sees the downside first in everything. You may think your being realistic but it will come across as pessimistic. Your fear and your desperation will be apparent to people you approach.



Practice being positive. List five positive things that could happen for every situation before you list one negative. The habit will grow on you and you will become more positive in how you present yourself to people.

Your chances of moving forward increase 1000% if you are positive about the situation as opposed to negative.

9. Set goals for the quarter, month week and day, write them down and post them in a prominent area.

Procrastination is the enemy. You will never get out of the rut of career adversity if you don't set goals and measure your progress against them. You measured progress in your career, now is not the time to stop.

Write you goals down and keep them in plain view of yourself and others who may come by. Mark each item as you complete it. While your computer has an excellent task reminder program, your computer is also invisible at times. Put your goals only on the computer and they will soon be ignored.

Having goals gives you something to do. Each goal that you accomplish puts you one step closer to achievement. Achieving a goal also makes you feel successful and success creates a positive, confident individual. See five and six above

10. Be the aggressor; don't wait for things to come to you.

You can wait a long time for the phone to ring or you can call somebody and get something going right now. Which will it be? You will wait a long time if you leave it up to others to come to you with an opportunity or a project.

Get off your behind and go make something happen. That's what you did when you were being successful in your previous life and that is what you must do know to get things moving.

You are the number one priority to yourself and no one else.

11. Take care of yourself by exercising and enjoying life.

Exercise is a great stress reliever. Exercising your muscles will clear your mind of today's troubles and often times give you a quiet moment to evaluate what you are really doing. Inactivity and stress will cause stress on your body and your psyche. Exercise will combat both.

When you have worked up a sweat and completed a rigorous work out, you will feel better about yourself because you accomplished something. The endorphins you generate



will give you more energy. A positive outlook begins with a positive self image. If you look good you feel good.

12. Keep your sense of humor and laugh often.

It has been my experience that the most trying times make the best and funniest stories later in life. If you have remembered your spouse, see two above, good stories become great stories.

Don't take yourself too seriously. If you still have your health you are ahead of the game and have a good chance of turning lemons into lemonade.

There's a story in the heart attack that gave your wife a chance to go to the masters. Thiers humor in seeing the SEC attorney's get shellacked by a Federal District Court judge. There is a funny story in almost everything that will make others laugh. Make sure you are laughing with them. It will make you more fun to be around and you will just flat feel better about life and yourself.

If you can keep these points in mind and not lose perspective or faith in yourself, you can overcome any adversity. Your value and your life are not measured by how many times you get knocked down; they are measured by how many times you get up. Make sure you are always one ahead on getting up.

Dave Guenther is President of BSM Executive Advisors. Dave is an executive advisor, consultant and speaker that has been where you are, where you are going and beyond... Dave co-founded and grew a company from an idea into a \$6 billion dollar Fortune 500 company. Dave used the same principles to help the owners of RTG Medical grow their Company, in less than five years, from a \$3 million dollar revenue company with 39 employees into a Company with revenue over \$30 million dollars and in excess of 250 employees.