



Challenge Change as a Great Adventure

JOHN AMATT

Adventure isn't hanging on a rope off the side of a mountain. Adventure is an attitude that we must apply to the day-to-day obstacles of life—facing new challenges, seizing new opportunities, testing our resources against the unknown and, in the process, discovering our own unique potential.

In today's business world, we are climbing a Mount Everest of change—unrelenting change that threatens to overwhelm us with its intensity. But as Alvin Toffler has noted:

**“Change is not merely necessary to life, it is life.
And by the same token, life is adaptation.”**

So how do we meet the challenge of change and adapt? By learning to view change as a great adventure, that's how!

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About
the
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John Amatt is a global adventurer and president of One Step Beyond WorldWide, an international performance systems management consultancy. Since leading Canada's first successful expedition to climb Mount Everest in 1982, he has been a main platform speaker at LAMP and MDRT meetings. In his latest book, *Straight to the Top and Beyond: Nine Keys for Meeting the Challenge of Changing Times*, he uses the metaphor of his own adventures to articulate his "Adventure Attitude"™ strategies for reaching the heights in today's global business environment.

We are living through one of the great transitional periods of human history, where economic, political and social changes are occurring at lightning speed. Events taking place on the opposite side of the earth are influencing our daily lives. We cannot stop this change, nor can we ignore it. But we can increase our ability to manage change effectively and to learn to benefit from the uncertainty that change creates.

In these rapidly changing times, the metaphor of adventure offers the perfect vehicle for articulating a strategy that can turn this uncertainty to our advantage. By definition, an adventure is a journey with an uncertain outcome, and adventurers are people who actively seek out difficulty in order to stretch their potential against the unknown. Today, like it or not, the pace of change is forcing us to rediscover the adventurous spirit of our ancestors, as we move from the known world of our previous achievements to the unknown world of future opportunity.

It will take courage, resourcefulness and endurance to meet this challenge; the courage to try, to commit and to take more risks; the resourcefulness to be innovative in finding new ways of doing old things; and the endurance to keep going when everything around us seems to be falling apart. But more than anything, it will be necessary to shake off the limiting bonds of complacency that dominate the lives of so many in modern society.

In fact, the adventure of life is only to be found by those who strive to go one step beyond their previous experiences in search of new challenges. Children do this as a matter of course, but as adults we must constantly force ourselves to remain dissatisfied with the secure world we have created through our previous efforts.

Instead, we should actively seek out difficult challenges and ask ourselves what we can learn from the struggle. In adopting this philosophy, we will have to take risks, but risks that have been carefully controlled through adequate preparation and analysis; risks for which the resulting consequences have been carefully considered, acknowledged and personally accepted.

It is this approach that forms the roots of my "Adventure Attitude"™ philosophy, a new paradigm that offers an intriguing approach to happiness, fulfillment and success in the new millennium. All too often, we see change as a threat—as something to be feared. We are so consumed with the need for certainty and predictability that we fail to accept that change is the only real constant in our lives. As a result, we often don't seek out the opportunities that only change can create until we are forced to do so by some external influence beyond our control, be it economic crisis, political realignment or personal tragedy.

Clearly, attitude is the key to success in changing times. We can have all the education, all the knowledge, all the experience in the world, but if we carry the wrong attitude in our minds, we are doomed to failure. The academic world agrees! A recent study of successful people by the Carnegie Institute concluded that 85 percent of success could be attributed solely to mental attitude. In short, it's not what you go through in life that makes you what you are, it's how you react to the world you're going through that's important.

Following are the nine keys of the "Adventure Attitude"™:

- A - Adaptability**
- D - Desire and Determination**
- V - Vision and Values**
- E - Experience**
- N - Natural Curiosity**
- T - Teamwork and Trust**
- U - Unlimited Optimism**
- R - Risk-Ability**
- E - Exceptional Performance**

Looking at these basic principles, it becomes obvious that fulfillment in life is really quite simple. There are no magic pills that guarantee instant success. Achievement is just the constant process of striving to go one step beyond your previous experience, consistently applying a set of clearly defined principles, day by day over a long period of time.

Adaptability

When Pat Morrow became the second of my Canadian team to reach the summit of Everest, he achieved a goal that was only part of his ultimate dream to become the first person in the world to stand on the highest mountain in each of the seven continents. Everest for Morrow was just the highest mountain in Asia!

As one of the world's finest adventure photographers, Morrow's other objective that day was to take pictures from the highest point on earth. But on the summit, the temperature was so cold that the battery could not operate the camera, forcing him to manually adjust the settings to ensure his film was correctly exposed to the light. On a single lens reflex camera, these settings are called f-stops, and they range all the way from f-1.4 to f-32. By taking multiple shots of the same scene, each one with a different exposure setting, Morrow knew he would get one photograph, and only one, that was perfectly exposed to the light at the top of the world.

Many people have since asked Morrow his secret. How does he take such great pictures? His answer is is intriguing. With considerable understatement he says: "f-8 ... and be there! That's how you take great photos."

There's a more important meaning in this phrase. Every day in a changing world we must "f-8" our minds to expose them correctly to the world in which we operate, but we must also "... be there!" to meet the challenges. The way we operated in the past will not work in the future. Metaphorically, "f-8 ... and be there!" is all about continuous improvement, the complete rejection of complacency, and the vital importance of maintaining positive dissatisfaction in seeking ways to adapt in the face of rapid change.

Desire and Determination

When Columbus set out from Europe in 1492, he had no idea where he was going. He was just heading west toward an uncertain future, but he went anyway. In a similar way, we don't know exactly where we will be tomorrow, next year or in the new millennium. But we must go anyway! Columbus wrote, "I plow ahead no matter how the winds might lash me." This is simple advice that we too must follow as we struggle with the winds of change in modern life.

When forced to confront fear, a lot of people step back. Those who step forward will move forward.

Vision and Values

Vision is a sense of direction, not a tangible end point. Vision is the ability to look to the past and learn from it; to look at the present and be attuned to it; and to look to the future and be prepared for it. Vision is what separates great achievers from the also-rans. It is also the distinguishing characteristic of great leaders.

In 1993, the respected forecasting group, Institute for the Future, predicted that global leaders for the next century would need to be "perceptually acute, but willing to postpone judgments, sometimes indefinitely." This suggests that the pace of change will be so rapid that we will be unable to afford the luxury of coming to a firm conclusion about what is taking place around us, because by the time we reach that point, the facts on which we acted will already have changed. In such an unpredictable world, it is the visionary and the adventurous who will aspire to success.

Experience

We will have many experiences in our lives, some good, some bad. In fact, life is one long process of accumulating experiences, one after another. But what type of experiences should we be seeking? Easy, comfortable ones where the outcome is certain, or difficult, unpredictable experiences where we are forced to struggle to achieve success?

I believe that we only grow when we are struggling against adversity and when the outcome of our efforts is in doubt. Certainly, most of my memorable experiences are from when I was following the advice of the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, who wrote, "The secret of knowing the most fertile experiences and greatest joys in life is to live dangerously."

But we must also learn the lessons from the struggle. My colleague, Sharon Wood, who in 1986 became the first North American woman to climb Everest, agrees. When asked how she made it to the top, she often replies, "I discovered it wasn't a matter of physical strength, but a matter of psychological strength. The conquest lay within my own mind to penetrate those barriers of self-imposed limitations and get through to that good stuff, the stuff called potential, 90 percent of which we rarely use."

Natural Curiosity

By nature, humans are curious. Curiosity drives all great progress in life. Think of the children around you. They're out there every day, pushing their limits, learning more about the world and their place in it. The last thing they are thinking about is security.

As adults, however, we enter into a different arena.

We start careers, we take out mortgages, and we enter into relationships. Without thinking, we start to seek out predictability and security. And we begin to fall into the trap of



complacency.

So how do we strive to cultivate our curiosity? By completely rejecting complacency. By continually seeking out new challenges. By consistently applying the principle of positive dissatisfaction in everything we do, and by becoming an adventurer in the new world of discovery represented by the 21st century.

Teamwork and Trust

If there is one principle in the "Adventure Attitude"™ that is best defined by the Everest experience, it is teamwork. Simply stated, it is teamwork that puts you on top of the world. When one person reaches the summit, the entire team climbs the mountain.

But just as important, no team can operate effectively without trust. And trust only grows in teams of people who are forced to struggle through adversity together. Effective teams respect the contribution that each person brings to the effort, recognizing that when we use the strengths of some to offset the limitations of others, the entire team becomes stronger as a result.

Unlimited Optimism

Have you ever seen a successful pessimist? I doubt it! Pessimism is negative, and pessimistic people exude negative energy. They look for the worst in every situation and usually find it, because our minds have a wonderful ability to create the outcomes of our lives that we desire.

After the two accidents on our Everest climb, in which four people died in

two days, it would have been very easy to give up, to seek something or somebody to blame. But at the same time, we knew that we had not caused the accidents. We had simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was this acceptance and the learning that followed that sub-



sequently took us to the top.

Nowadays, whenever something is happening that I cannot control, I say to myself, "This is happening. I cannot change the fact that this is happening. So what can I learn from the struggle?" I always come out of each situation stronger than I went in.

Risk-Ability

When we take risks in life and try something that we have never done before, it is natural that we should feel some anxiety and fear. I think this is just nature's way of focusing all our mental and physical resources on the task at hand. So when you feel fear, it's vital to confront it directly. Because when you move toward fear it recedes; when you

run away from fear, it grows in your mind.

We can all recall sleepless nights at home, tossing and turning in bed, our mind a turmoil of anxiety, worrying about some problem we have to face the next day. And I'm sure we can also remember getting up in the morning, confronting the challenge, and discovering that the reality of the event was not as bad as our imagination had conjured. When forced to confront fear, a lot of people step back. Those who step forward will move forward.

Exceptional Performance

I think the founder of *Forbes* magazine, B.C. Forbes, said it best: "Nobody can fight their way to the top, and stay at the top, without exercising the fullest measure of grit, courage, determination and resolution. Everybody who gets anywhere does so because they are firmly resolved to progress in this world and then have enough stick-to-itiveness to transform their resolution into reality. Without resolution, nobody can win any worthwhile place among their fellow men."

Equally important is the quest for lifelong learning. Eric Hoffer once noted, "In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists."

You either change, or you stagnate. You either leap forward, or you fall backward. You cannot stay where you are today! ■

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