

# Got Adversity Quotient?

## How to Win in the Game of Life

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*Opening Convocation, August 24, 2023*

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Congratulations, and welcome aboard Class of 2027! It is my utmost honor to be speaking to you today. I want to express my gratitude to the Accounting, Business, and Economics Division (ABE), my elite colleagues, my students/advisees, and my nominators. I am aware that some of you are from the local area while others might travel from other cities, states, or even countries, realizing how far you have traveled physically, and inspiring to get here – Juniata College. I bet you wonder how far you will go from here on this very first day of the college year. Where will this journey take you and what will you be facing?

You might have heard about IQ, Intelligence Quotient, or EQ, Emotional Quotient. What about AQ otherwise known as the Adversity Quotient? An article published in the journal *Heliyon* defines AQ as “one factor that affects a person's success since it correlates positively with a person's performance. A person who has a high adversity quotient will also have high performance.”<sup>1</sup> AQ is a person's ability to manage difficulties and transform obstacles into opportunities.

Look at your role models. Can anyone imagine the suffering the late Stephen Hawking and Steve Jobs endured? They have broadened the horizon of learning about outer space and harnessed technology, respectively, breaking barriers that no one had done before despite their deteriorating health. Remember the late Kobe Bryant and his famous habit of waking up at four in the morning to begin his practice routine?<sup>2</sup> Getting up that early meant that he would have more hours in the day to get closer to his best potential. To become the famous K-Pop group that BTS is known for today, they had to compete with thousands of trainees for years before they officially grouped and performed. What if Christopher Columbus settled for the very first attempt in discovering the new continent?

I have some numbers that are the milestones in my life: 7,633; 6,805; 520.6; and 6. The first number comes from my alma mater, Central South University, being **7,633** miles away at Changsha, Hunan Province, China. I studied English and International Trade, including French as a second foreign language. Every month, we had oral and written exams. The competition in the one class was fierce. If a

student failed two exams, they received an academic warning. Reflecting on my time there, I found that there were many other difficulties and obstacles I faced.

In response, I had a strict routine that I followed. I woke up at six a.m. to listen to the English channels on the radio and read the news written in English. Afterwards, I would grab a quick breakfast before dashing to the classroom at eight a.m. to secure my seat in the front row. I would always ask my professors a lot of questions in class or during their office hours. After a long day of classes, we used to take five per day, I would go to the library to work on my homework. That usually included reading textbooks, looking over other materials, and finishing up by taking a mock quiz from six to ten p.m. It is worth mentioning that listening to songs and watching movies in English definitely improved my listening and comprehension greatly. I also attended English Corner every week where I would practice my English with international students. I remember that we had around sixty students my freshman year and only a dozen of us graduated successfully. I then unlocked my next level in the game of life post-graduation.

I got my first internship at the International Data Company in Beijing, the capital city of China, **6,805** miles away. It is the affiliated company of the International Data Group, based in Boston, Massachusetts. All of the interns needed to make 100 cold calls per day. The best intern would be offered a full-time job. My fellow interns graduated from number one universities in China and my school ranked top twenty best universities at that time. Some of them doubted my capability to complete the task as a non-local female intern. They told me that I did not belong there and was not qualified to compete with them. Instead of arguing with them or quitting the internship, I continued to fight. I took training classes in sales, drafted scripts to practice calling clients, and rehearsed my script with my friends and supervisors for feedback all to improve my performance. I started as a rookie who did not know what to say, dialing numbers with a shivering hand, to the best intern of the summer. By the way, if you do not know what a cold call is, take my Marketing Management class and you will find out!

I received my master's degree in marketing and a Ph.D. degree in International Business and Marketing from Southern New Hampshire University located **520.6** miles away. I was the only non-English speaker in the Marketing Department that year. I lived in the library and used almost all the professors' office hours. I worked three campus jobs to hone my English speaking skills, my social skills, and my academic excellence. I even attended a Bible study to improve my language each Sunday.

Believe it or not, I almost quit my Ph.D. program the first week into the semester because it seemed extremely difficult and challenging. It did not help that I was also homesick. Under a huge amount of pressure, I called my parents crying after receiving my first and only B. My parents told me that they would understand and support whatever decision I made since I had already made them very

proud. They believed that I would make the right choice and be able to fight through the adversity and hardship. I wiped away my tears and went back to class, determined that I would nail it, and I did. My classmates, academic advisor, and professors all provided tremendous support and encouragement throughout those years. The president of my alma mater even wrote a letter of recommendation for me after I received my Ph.D. He said that I went the extra mile and worked hard to buff my abilities. In video games, something being buffed means a character's hit points (HP) or attack power (AP) is increased, and I found that my AQ had been increased in the same way. I have my dad to thank for my high level, as he received his master's degree in his 50's. Now you know AQ can be influenced and "inherited"!

Reflecting on my successes in the past six years at Juniata College, I revived the Marketing Program by revising the three original courses, creating three more new courses, and pushing for an MBA course. I also took a group of students overseas, and they did a paid internship for a month. Fun fact, those nine students were from nine different countries, and we jokingly called our group a mini-United Nations. One of them started his JD program at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom and another one is working on her Human Resources Management Ph.D. Degree at the Columbia University in New York. Of course, I wrote a letter of recommendation for their applications for grad schools, jobs, and Ph. D programs. Separate from academia, I have been handling all of the major social media platforms for the Accounting, Business, and Economics Division. I have run two fashion shows at the Chinese Dinner event that is held every year and designed fifty-eight garments in total. My love for fashion inspired me to establish the Fashion Club on campus.

However, one of my most challenging feats was when I organized a short-term study abroad program in Europe. I took a group of students to France and Spain for a Fashion Marketing trip with the Dean of Students, Dr. Matthew Damschroder, this past summer. The preparation and execution of this program was painstaking. To make matters worse, I remember that while I was busy taking pictures of the partner institute at Aix-en-Provence in France in 2018, I accidentally stepped on a pile of dog poop. The locals told me that meant good luck. Coincidentally, when we visited France this summer, I again was too concentrated enjoying the view that I stepped on another pile of dog poop. What a déjà vu! I guess it was good luck after all, especially for this new study abroad program ultimately crossing a five-year span from 2018 to 2023. That wasn't the last obstacle, however. There was endless designing and drafting of the program, negotiations were made, plans were set, but then Covid hit the world. After promoting this program for four years at the Study Abroad Fair during International Education Week, we had to cancel it twice. Yet, we eventually made it! The students added milestones in their game of life.

By the way, I did get to travel back to my hometown this summer and spend quality time with my parents and friends. Nothing can beat the hugs and kisses from your loved ones! Voilà! I am at this

podium speaking to you because I received the Henry H. '57 and Joan Gibbel Award for Teaching Excellence for Junior Faculty. This is an honor I earned after I achieved all of the milestones I've illustrated to you today.

So far, this has been a long game I've slayed to make my road map through the hard mode of life. My point for you is that you need to equip yourself with AQ for the more challenging levels ahead of you, like college. Now, ask yourself, are you going to be a person that brings the best value to the others? Your class? Your family? Your friends? Your team? Your neighbors? Your community? Your work places? Your society? Your nation? Your being? How about we imagine living to your best potential? How do we make it happen? Turn your imagination into action! Well, it's too late if you want to say no because here you are at Juniata College, which is one of the "Best 389 Colleges in the U.S.," according to the *2024 Edition of the Princeton Review*.<sup>3</sup> Other lists include Best in Mid-Atlantic (unranked), #25 for Great Financial Aid, and #6 for Most Accessible Professors.<sup>4</sup> You are now part of this closely knitted community that strives for a better quality of higher education experience. The faculty and staff overcame hardship and challenges to make the ranking happen because you matter to us!

I'm sure you all know the proverb: Rome was not built in a day. Between your best expectations and your best performances, you might face obstacles and challenges from numerous directions over and over again. Most of the time, you are not just competing with others; you are competing with yourself, or the you from yesterday, high school, or junior high. You might say being my best is too hard. Well, you would definitely not want to lose in any of your video games or sports games, would you? I certainly know that in the 2022 NCAA DIII Women's Volleyball National Championship, our Eagles signed up for the hard mode of the game. I had some women's volleyball players as my advisees and students, and I witnessed the extraordinary endeavors they made to ace at their schoolwork, practices, games and internships, or jobs during their season. The common player chooses the standard level while the great player picks the hard mode. How do you walk out of adversity? You need to walk a few more steps and unlock your potential in the next level of the game.

Class of 2027, a new challenge of yours begins today! Congratulations again, and I wish you the best of luck in exploring the uncharted water and drawing your own map of life! Pack up your AQ, ready, set, and Go Eagles!

Thank you!

## NOTES

1. Asrop Safi'i, "The effect of the adversity quotient on student performance, student learning autonomy and student achievement in the COVID-19 pandemic era: evidence from Indonesia," *Heliyon* 7, no. 12 (2021): <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e08510>
2. "Kobe Bryant – Start Earlier," Dr. York, YouTube, accessed July 26, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMqEAlRk-SY>.
3. Robert Franek, et. al, *The Best 389 Colleges, 2024: In-Depth Profiles & Ranking Lists to Help Find the Right College For You* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2023).
4. Robert Franek, *The Best 389 Colleges, 2024: In-Depth Profiles & Ranking Lists to Help Find the Right College For You*.