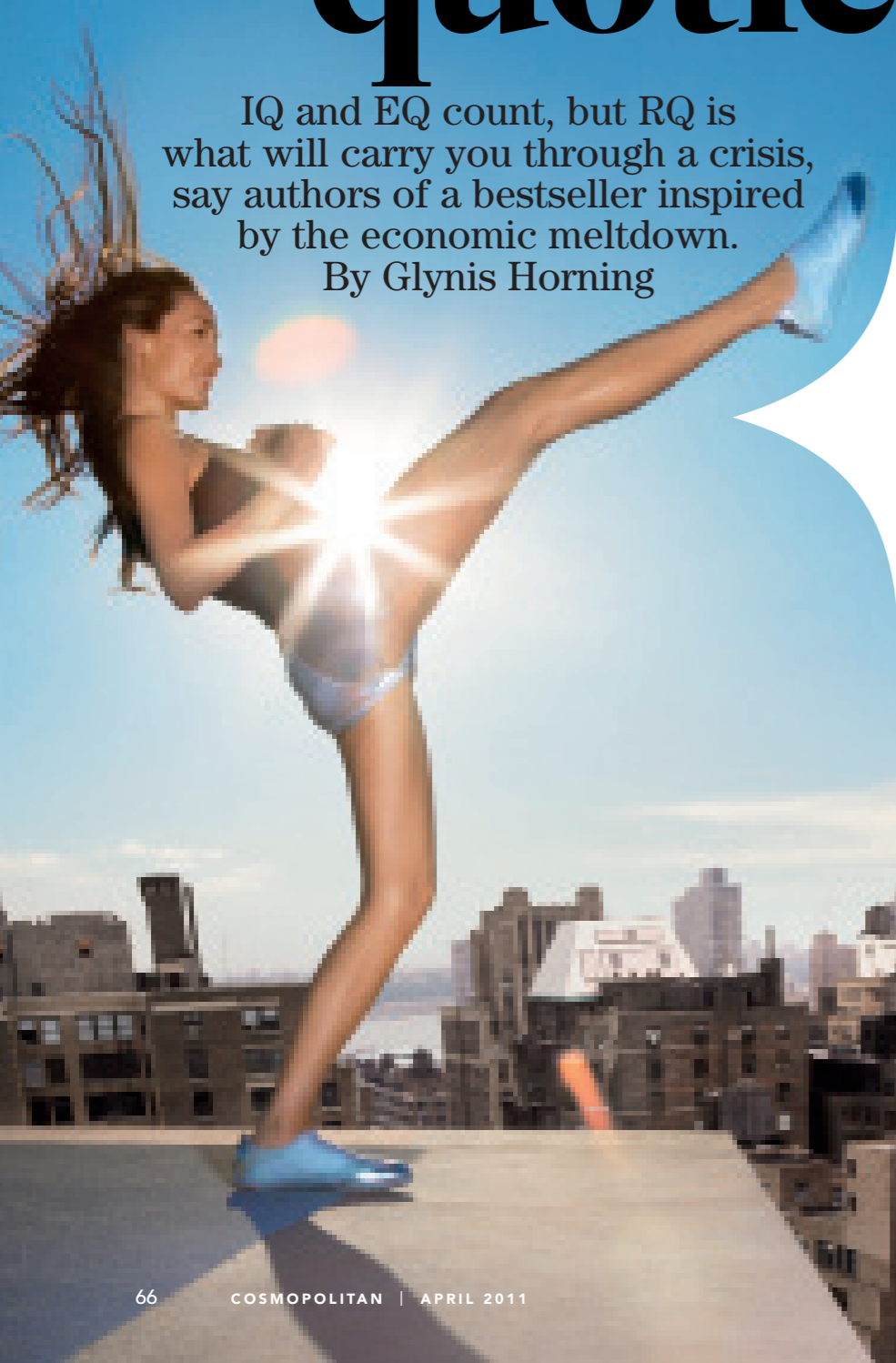


What's your resilience quotient?

IQ and EQ count, but RQ is what will carry you through a crisis, say authors of a bestseller inspired by the economic meltdown.
By Glynis Horning



Those who survive a crisis best are not necessarily the brightest or most emotionally astute. They're the ones with a high RQ or 'resilience quotient', say UK business psychologists Jane Clarke and Dr John Nicholson, authors of the bestseller *Resilience: Bounce Back From Whatever Life Throws At You* (Crimson Publishing).

The two were steering banks and businesses through the current financial storm when they were struck by the differences in the ways people weathered it. 'We were seeing many traumatised people,' Clarke says. 'But we also had people coming across as philosophical about the situation, taking proactive steps to make sure they were okay.'

She and Nicholson coined the term 'resilience quotient' to describe this ability to bounce back. 'We thought it would be a useful quality to dissect, to see whether it was something that was innate or something that could be developed.'

Thinking has been divided on this to date. World-renowned US psychiatrist and pioneering researcher Dr Frederic Flach, author of *Resilience: The Power To Bounce Back When The Going Gets Tough!* (WW Norton & Company), defined resilience as 'the psychological and biological strengths required to master change successfully' – implying that part of it, at least, is innate. But he concluded that the 'self-preserving, adaptive' capacity is in us all, and that we can learn to use it more effectively.

Like Clarke and Nicholson, Flach studied how people deal with major

setbacks and hardship, and he found that most resilient people share certain personality traits: creativity, self-esteem, tolerance for emotional and physical pain and a capacity to learn. They also have the ability to make and keep friends and to cooperate with others, a willingness to get help, and a willingness to use setbacks as opportunities to heal and grow.

Clarke and Nicholson's major finding builds on this idea that the experience of previous hardships is one of the biggest builders of resilience. A 'significant number' of the business executives they studied reported having endured difficult childhoods with family problems such as alcoholism, domestic violence or death. (See 'Forged in fire'.) Many had a sense of 'being different' from other children. 'They developed a precocious understanding of the diversity of human beings and the need to develop different strategies,' Nicholson says. But he and Clarke concluded – and local life coaches agree – that your resilience quotient can also be consciously grown, by cultivating the following:

1 OPTIMISM

People with resilience see the glass as half-full, Clarke says. They focus on the opportunities change brings, and cultivate excitement around it. This requires a relatively high self-esteem. 'If you give the impression that you never take yourself seriously, why should anyone else do so?' she asks. Learn to take credit for your successes.

'People tend to look for the negative in situations and not to see the good,' says Cape Town executive coach Sunny Stout Rostron, author of *Business Coaching: Wisdom And Practice* (Knowledge Resources Publishing). They often feel good things aren't as real as bad ones – 'and that's simply not true!' Grasp that, and you can gear up your resilience.

2 FREEDOM FROM ANXIETY

Resilience comes from being energised by a crisis instead of allowing yourself to be demoralised and drained by it. The best antidote to worry is taking action, working to move past a problem. Clarke refers to this as 'ritualised ingenuity' – finding solutions when confronted with obstacles.

Forged in fire

A hard childhood can build resilience that brings success in adult life:



CHARLIZE THERON'S father, reportedly abusive when drunk, was eventually shot dead by her mother. Charlize went on to win an Oscar for her portrayal of a serial killer in *Monster*.



KEYSHIA COLE was adopted when she was five years old. After a difficult childhood, she left home at the age of 16 to look for a better future. She found it as an R&B, soul and hip-hop princess.



When she was five years old, **MADONNA** lost her mother to cancer. Her father married

their housekeeper and had more children, leaving Madonna to grow up feeling ignored and angry. This strengthened her resolve to make the world her stage.



SINÉAD O'CONNOR grew up with divorce and abuse. By the age of 15 she had been expelled from school, caught shoplifting and sent to a reform school. Today she's an award-winning singer and outspoken campaigner for various causes.



OPRAH WINFREY famously endured a childhood of poverty, sexual abuse and drugs, going on to become one of the world's most influential media personalities.

'Worrying about what you can't control could lead to more stress,' says Stout Rostron. She advises letting go of anxiety by meditating, exercising, writing a journal or developing an absorbing hobby.

3 TAKING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Blaming others, finding excuses or waiting for someone to rescue you will cost you energy and opportunities, as well as other people's sympathy, respect and patience. Stepping up and accepting your part in a problem is vital if you're to find a way to overcome it. People with high RQ have 'an internal locus of control', says Clarke – they see *themselves*, not outside influences or happenings, as responsible for change. (Those with an 'external locus' are people-pleasers, mostly reactive and negative.)

'The world is constantly throwing up unexpected challenges – if you expect differently, you're setting yourself up for stress, depression and a sense of victimhood, which makes it harder to bounce back,' says Durban psychologist Jabulisiwe Thabethe. Accept reality and take responsibility for dealing with it in so far as it affects you.

4 OPENNESS AND ADAPTABILITY

Being open to opportunities, solutions, advice and help, and being adaptable and flexible, are key to resilience, survival and success, says Clarke.

'You can't control everything life throws at you but you can control the way you react to it,' says Stout Rostron. 'Nothing beats talking out setbacks with others,' adds Thabethe. Just be sure they're supportive. Women's greater ease with this may be reflected in a study last year by management-consulting company Accenture, which found that women are 'slightly more' resilient than men when it comes to overcoming challenges and turning them into opportunities.

5 POSITIVE, ACTIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING

Key to developing your natural powers of resilience is to change how you make decisions: by cutting out procrastination and 'reframing' things more positively. ▶

Psyche

'For example, if you wake up thinking "I can't cope; there's too much to do", that will affect your ability to cope,' says Clarke. 'A resilient person would say, "I can cope, I've done this before."'

Ask a life coach or psychologist to help guide you if need be, suggests Stout Rostron. And if the worst should actually happen, rally your optimism – who knows what opportunities wait ahead? Above all, keep reminding yourself that, as Thabethe puts it: 'A setback makes you stronger if you open yourself to learning from it!' ✂

Resilience sappers

The worst mistakes you can make in any crisis, say UK business psychologists Jane Clarke and Dr John Nicholson, are:

- 1 TO TAKE IT PERSONALLY:** 'Why is this happening to me?'
 - 2 TO CATASTROPHISE THE PROBLEM:** 'This is a disaster; I'll never find another man/job!'
 - 3 TO WALK AWAY FROM THE CHALLENGE, DEFEATED:** 'There's nothing more I can do.'
- With approaches such as these, crises can spiral into depression or other mental illnesses.

Resilience boosters

The best steps you can take are:

- 1 TO LOOK AFTER YOUR HEALTH:** eat sensibly, exercise and watch your alcohol consumption.
- 2 TO FOCUS ON THE PRESENT** and take action to deal with this, instead of brooding over the past (once you've analysed it for lessons) or worrying about the future (once you've decided what you want to do). If you're retrenched, learn a new skill or volunteer – it will improve your CV and smooth your way back to work. If you've broken up with your man, explore being single, pursue your personal passions and stay open to the excitement of new opportunities.
- 3 TO BREAK PROBLEMS INTO SMALLER STEPS,** taking them on one by one.

WHAT IS YOUR RQ?

Rate your resilience by calculating your Nicholson McBride Resilience Quotient. See which statements you agree with on a 1-to-5 scale, circling 1 if you strongly disagree, through to 5 if you strongly agree.

| | | Strongly disagree | | | | | Strongly agree |
|----|---|-------------------|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| 1 | In a difficult situation, my thoughts immediately turn to what can be done to put things right. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 2 | I influence what I can, rather than worrying about what I can't influence. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 3 | I don't take criticism personally. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 4 | I generally manage to keep things in perspective. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 5 | I am calm in a crisis. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 6 | I am good at finding solutions to new problems. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 7 | I wouldn't describe myself as an anxious person. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 8 | I try to control events, rather than being a victim of my circumstances. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 9 | I don't tend to avoid conflict. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 10 | I trust my intuition. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 11 | I manage my stress levels well. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 12 | I feel confident and secure in my position. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |

SCORING

Between 0 and 32

A developing level of resilience

Your score indicates that while you may not always feel at the mercy of events, you would benefit from developing aspects of your behaviour that would increase your personal resilience. This might include changing your response to setbacks.

Between 33 and 35

An established level of resilience

Your score indicates that although you may occasionally have tough days when you can't make things go your way, you rarely feel ready to give up. You may need to develop more of a sense of perspective on setbacks.

Between 36 and 38

A strong level of resilience

Your above-average score indicates you're pretty good at rolling with the punches, whoever is throwing them, and that you have an impressive track record of turning setbacks into opportunities. You seem to have a healthy sense of perspective.

39 and higher

An exceptional level of resilience

Your score indicates that you are very resilient most of the time and rarely fail to bounce back – whatever life throws at you. You believe that you are unusually adept at 'making your own luck', although you may need to check from time to time that others appreciate your approach.

For a more detailed analysis, visit www.testyourrq.com.