

BEAT ADVERSITY
FIND AUTHENTIC PURPOSE
LIVE A BETTER LIFE

THE
POWER
OF

3

"Powerful"
JOHN BUTCHER
CEO of Caribou Coffee

ROBB HILLER

We're each equipped with spiritual gifts to help us navigate adversity. *The Power of 3* is a simple yet powerful framework to create clarity on how you've been uniquely prepared to overcome the obstacles in your life.

JOHN BUTCHER, CEO of Caribou Coffee

Rob Hiller has crafted an amazing story of tenacity, courage, and survival. His harrowing life story is a vivid reminder that, even today, miracles do happen when you least expect them. Adversity never leaves us, he writes, which is so true. We all face our own personal trials and tribulations. God doesn't promise an easy life to any of us. It's how we cope with trials and adversity that define us—how we play the hand we're dealt. The eternal truths Rob discusses about asking, activating, and advocating can help anyone going through a rough patch, from family struggles to business challenges. *The Power of 3* is real, and I predict that if you open your mind and your heart, this book can and will change your life.

PAUL DOUGLAS, WCCO radio show host, meteorologist, and serial entrepreneur

Robb has used a powerful and personal story to share a template for positive change—how to deal with life's inevitable setbacks and make the most of the life that God has given us. *The Power of 3* abounds with practical wisdom and encouragement on becoming a valued mentor, friend, or parent. Anyone in a position of leadership can benefit from this book.

JERRY MATTYS, former CEO of Tactile Medical

So much can be said about Robb Hiller's amazing book, *The Power of 3*. However, one simple but powerfully life-changing word filled my being over and over again: *hope*. We all need it. This book gives it.

TOM LEHMAN, PGA Tour golfer, winner of the British Open, and the only golfer in history to have been awarded the Player of the Year honor on all three PGA Tours

The three fundamental questions of life are *Who am I?*, *Why am I here?*, and *Where am I going?* Robb taps into the Power of 3 resources that bring clarity to these life-giving questions. Your mind will be stretched, your heart enlarged, and your passions ignited when you discover the Power of 3 and apply it to your everyday life and relationships.

DR. JOEL K. JOHNSON, lead pastor of Westwood Community Church

Robb Hiller has written a very helpful and practical guide to being a better leader and a better person. It brings together concepts that might be familiar to readers of Edgar Schein, Carol Dweck, or Chip Heath and translates them into practical approaches that can be immediately applied. I would recommend Robb's book to anyone who is committed to the improvement of their community, organization, family, or themselves.

JAMES HEREFORD, president and CEO of Fairview Health Services

Robb Hiller should not be here. Although a seemingly unsurvivable diagnosis should have claimed his life, he not only survived but thrived. In *The Power of 3*, Robb shares the process he's learned throughout the journey that freed him to embrace the possibility of his life. In reading *The Power of 3*, you'll be liberated to embrace the possibility in your life too.

JOHN O'LEARY, #1 national bestselling author of *On Fire* and *In Awe*

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ROBB HILLER



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CHAPTER 1

Hope Is Here: When Adversity Walks through the Door

Wherever there is no hope in the future, there is no power in the present.

JOHN MAXWELL



“ROBB!” A familiar voice called my name down a grocery store aisle. “I can’t believe you’re here!”

I smiled as Tommy excitedly waved both arms at me. “Well,” I replied, “you can’t believe how glad I am to be here. It’s wonderful to see you.”

For years, Tommy and I had been on-and-off basketball buddies. Now he grabbed me in a very public bear hug. When Tommy and I had last crossed paths six months prior, he’d concluded I didn’t have long to

live. “You were in tough shape then,” he exclaimed. “You look so much better now!”

Our brief exchange reminded me how even our most casual relationships can be profound. Running into Tommy caused gratitude to well up inside me for the progress I had experienced in my battle against cancer, and I felt renewed joy at having a second chance to live.

As the founder and CEO of a nationally recognized consulting firm, I had long helped leaders and organizations across the country identify, attract, and develop talent. I am a certified professional behavior analyst, results coach, and talent-assessment expert who has evaluated more than twenty-three thousand individuals—everyone from business-to-business sales staff to senior leaders at Fortune 500 companies. I recently was recognized as one of the top consultants among several thousand of my colleagues and presented with the Bill Bonnstetter Lifetime Achievement Award.

But more than these accomplishments, the greatest validation of my work has been

the transformation I've seen as people have beaten adversity, found their true purpose, and broken through to a better life, at work and at home.

There was power behind my work. Over the years, I had discovered an astonishingly effective method for helping people get unstuck, conquer challenges, and dramatically change.

Yet when adversity struck close to home, that approach—indeed my whole outlook on how to succeed at work and life—was severely challenged.

Adversity Comes Home

Nine months before I ran into Tommy in that grocery store aisle, I awoke to a beautiful, sunny Thursday and was looking forward to exercising at my usual athletic club—a mix of working out inside and walking around the lake. The drive to the club made me smile. After long months of cold and snow, seeing green grass was *thrilling*. Golf season was almost here!

After a few minutes on the treadmill and a little weight lifting, I dropped to the ground and began

performing planks, supporting myself on my elbows and holding my body in a rigid straight-backed pose. Almost immediately, pain jabbed my abdomen, like a hard punch in the stomach. Five minutes later, I tried again, with the same result.

What's going on? I thought.

I made an appointment with my doctor, and after checking me over the next day, he suspected a hernia and referred me for a CT scan. The day after that appointment I was in the tube for the scan and feeling nervous, anxious, and downright fearful. A few hours after my scan, I was swiveling in my desk chair at my home office, enjoying the view of the undeveloped wetland beyond our backyard, when my cell phone rang. It was my doctor. He didn't pause for niceties. "You have a large mass in your abdomen," he said. "It's definitely cancer, some type of lymphoma. We need you to come in for a biopsy."

I leaned back in my chair in shock. I'd known for three years that I had chronic lymphocytic leukemia. With the incurable cancer in its beginning stages, my doctors had chosen to keep an eye on it rather than treat it. Now I was hearing I had a second cancer.

I soon underwent tissue and bone marrow biopsies. The needle looked big enough to go completely through any part of my body. I had neck surgery to remove cancerous lymph nodes, which was followed by a PET scan.

Within a couple of weeks, I was in an oncologist's office, staring at colorful PET images of my insides. They showed a mass of bright red near my esophagus and stomach and throughout my insides.

I knew red wasn't good. The doctor's words went beyond my worst fears.

"You know you have leukemia," he said. "The scan shows you also have two other kinds of cancer." The new unwelcome invaders were diffuse large B-cell lymphoma, an aggressive form of non-Hodgkin lymphoma, and follicular lymphoma, another type of non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

"We'll begin treating the large B-cell right away, as this form is aggressive. We should be able to help you with that," the doctor went on. "As you know, there's no cure for the CL leukemia. And I'm sorry, but there's also no cure for the follicular lymphoma."

On top of the incurable cancer we had been

monitoring, I had not just one new cancer but two. “It looks like I got lucky,” I said wryly. “I got the trifecta.” Three deadly cancers were growing inside me.

As my wife, Pam, and I exchanged glances, tears filled our eyes. How was this even possible?

Your Challenges Large and Small

My experience happened to be acute, but life’s circumstances come to us in all shapes and sizes. They put us on a journey we didn’t choose, want, or expect.

Your own difficulties might be small-scale or far bigger than mine. They might come on suddenly or accumulate over time, one tough break after another. Whatever you face, you know how it feels to reach a point where you think, *This is really hard. I don’t know if I can do it.*

- Maybe you have a lousy boss who sucks the joy out of your days. You can’t help but wonder if you’re on a short list to lose your job.
- Or you have family or friends who have grown distant. It wasn’t that long ago that you felt

close, but now the calls and texts are rare. You're not sure what happened, but you feel alone.

- Perhaps you're struggling in your marriage. You've tried to convince your spouse to get counseling, but you're not sure yourself whether it will do any good.
- Or your kid is rebelling like a bull out of a barn. You're doing your best, but nothing works. You feel like you're losing your child.
- Maybe you're just getting started in your career. You've learned a lot in your studies, but you wonder how to move forward in real life. How do you pull everything together?
- Or you're in business, and sales are plummeting. Your team isn't getting it done, and nothing you try gets the results you need. You fear the company will dry up and blow away.
- Perhaps your faith is faltering. When you talk to God, the heavens feel like a cement ceiling. You're not happy with the state of your life, and you just don't know what to do.

Each of us could be struck by any of these problems and a million more. We begin to say, “This is bothering me. It has festered for a long time, and I still don’t know how to address it. I don’t have the strength to go on.” We feel helpless—or at least really frustrated.

Setbacks are inevitable. We all experience them.

But I want to show you a method to help you move forward. It consists of easy-to-understand steps for life, which I discovered long ago and have successfully used with thousands of people in business and beyond, and it’s the method I employed when faced with three deadly cancers. I call it the “Power of 3.”

You can learn this method quickly—and put it into practice *immediately*. Through any adversity, the Power of 3 can transform your life, whether your frustrations are day-to-day annoyances or far more serious issues.

While I’ve coached people in these truths for many years, I felt a final nudge to put this message in book

form when I spoke at my college reunion. After my talk, an old friend who led an esteemed orthopedic surgery practice said, “Robb, I can’t tell you how much it meant to me to hear how you used the Power of 3 to make it through your cancer treatments. You need to share this with others.”

Dr. Tom is known for his gruff, driven personality. Seeing him wipe away tears surprised me. “Thanks so much for your encouragement,” I said. “Are those tears because my message was so bad?”

Dr. Tom laughed and reiterated that this message could help anyone. He planned to use it himself. His words were an unexpected confirmation to start writing.

I promised myself this wouldn’t be just another business book, a few good tips wrapped in far too many words. Failure has been a great teacher to me over the years, and I have experienced it many times. But when I discovered the principles captured in the Power of 3, they guided and transformed my life. More important, they will make all the difference for you. This isn’t a book to read and then put on a shelf.

It conveys practical wisdom and life-giving encouragement that I hope you'll come back to again and again.

Out of the Ditch

When I was in my forties, I was looking for a fresh start in my career. For years I had led a telecommunications company as the CEO, but one of my greatest passions was helping people, and I wanted to try consulting work. I worked with a friend for close to a year before launching my own consulting business, Performance SolutionsMN.

Initially, I focused on guiding companies in sales growth, leadership training, and strategic planning. I was also introduced to Target Training International, an Arizona-based organization that provided science-based personal-assessment tools. The more I delved into the world of assessments, the more I realized their potential for pinpointing trouble spots in company practices and relationships and for identifying potential solutions.

By combining these new tools with my own analysis, I began helping firms evaluate and hire candidates and place the right people in the right jobs. My clients

observed dramatic improvements, which pleased them and excited me. They used words like *empowering* and *inspiring* to describe my impact. They were also thrilled with the upward growth in their profit margins.

As my consulting business grew and I worked with more clients, repeatable principles began to jump out to me as consistently effective.

For example, there was the fiery software company chairman who insisted his sales team was hiding low sales and poor performance behind complaints about the software itself. To calm him down, I asked a pair of simple questions: “In an ideal situation, how would you want your customers to respond to your software? What might they say that would indicate you’re on track?”

Shifting the chairman’s perspective from blaming his staff for poor sales to the goal of having satisfied customers quickly calmed him down. I began to see that asking the right questions could make a powerful difference in changing attitudes and eliciting vital information.

Another time, I was hired to help Eyal, the young director of operations for a medical device company,

reorganize his department and cut costs. A survey of the staff also identified communication issues. Eyal was relatively inexperienced and younger than most of his team, so we faced a significant challenge. I soon discovered, however, that Eyal's talents more than made up for his inexperience.

With my encouragement, he used his natural optimism, genuine personality, and conflict-resolution skills to inspire the team to catch his vision for the department. Eyal also shifted the responsibilities of his staff to better utilize their abilities. The outcome was a much more cohesive and effective team, as well as cost savings that reached \$1 million within a year. Those impressive improvements were the result of Eyal activating his natural gifts, then putting people in positions that allowed them to embrace their own talents.

Yet another example involved Dave, a major account leader at a publicly held company. I was invited to help after members of Dave's team and other managers at the firm complained about his communication methods, including his abrupt leadership style. I interviewed several colleagues about Dave's leadership, relationship, and communication skills. He and

I then reviewed the results and made a series of goals for him that included developing a more empathetic approach to coworkers and leading more by influence than by making demands.

I had Dave select six work colleagues to give him supportive, honest, and timely feedback on his progress over the next four months. They started regularly stopping Dave after meetings or poking their heads in his office door to offer quick comments. That feedback gave Dave the encouragement and direction he needed. His communication skills improved rapidly, his team was much happier, and the company's CEO saw a real turnaround. At the end of the year, Dave was promoted to one of the company's key director roles. This time, I marveled at the amazing difference inviting advocates could make by simply offering supportive guidance.

As the years passed, I saw these kinds of dramatic results again and again.

Something magical happened when people asked solution-oriented questions, discovered and activated their natural talents, and invited the people who knew them best to make a difference in their lives. This was the Power of 3 at work.

The Power of 3

The real test of everything I'd learned, however, arrived with my cancer diagnosis. When the initial scan pointed to cancer, I indulged in a few hours of gloom and doom. The news was overwhelming. I shed some quiet tears as I began thinking through the possibility of dying, leaving Pam and the kids, and not getting to accomplish some dreams I still had. I soon understood I needed help meeting this challenge, and over time, my confidence grew. *I can do this*, I told myself. *With God and people on my side, I can beat this cancer.* Because I am a man of faith, the obvious steps were to turn to God, Pam, friends, and a host of medical personnel with lifesaving knowledge when I needed problem-solving, engagement, and encouragement.

The more I pondered all this, the more I understood that the strategies I'd used for two decades to help people turn around their businesses or personal lives were making all the difference for me.

Suddenly, as the saying goes, the shoe was on the other foot. It was my turn to apply the principles I'd passed on to others.

If I was going to overcome this deadly enemy of cancer and beat this adversity, it would take far more than luck and good medicine, as two of the cancers had no cure. No, the combination of these three action principles I had been using with my clients were the key to my needed miracle. The strength of the triangle is founded on the truths I call the “Power of 3”:

- *Ask* the right questions.
- *Activate* my God-given gifts.
- Invite *advocates* into my life.



Within hours of my diagnosis, I began putting the principles that had been effective in my consulting work into practice. They shifted my perspective from overwhelmed to overcoming.

First, I needed to *ask the right questions*. I realized I needed to stop wondering, *Why me?* and instead ask, *What can I do right now that would be a positive step?* On occasion, that big *Why?* question crept back into my mind, like when I was flat in bed, immobilized by the nausea that can accompany chemotherapy. Or when my whole body ached from the cancer deep within my bones. Or when I was completely fatigued by the disease and drugs doing battle inside me. I found frequent reason to keep replacing unproductive questions with helpful ones.

Second, I needed to *activate my God-given gifts*. I knew that to beat an enemy as formidable as cancer, I would need to tap into my unique gifts. *Who am I?* I thought. *What personal strengths can I bring to this challenge?* I decided my natural optimism would be an important tool for generating positive self-talk and avoiding a downward spiral. I also knew I could make

use of my competitive spirit, setting a goal of being healthy enough to attend my son's wedding.

Third, I needed to *invite advocates into my life*. I knew my own strength wouldn't be enough, and I needed other people if I was going to survive. I invited faith, family, and friends to come alongside me. In particular, I leaned on Pam as my rock. When she began researching lymphoma online, I allowed myself to feel encouraged as she learned more about what we were facing and how to combat it. And I made plans to relate my news to friends to enlist their support.

I also understood that this challenge would demand greater help than even my wife and others could give. I got on my knees and prayed, *Lord, help me. I feel totally humbled. I can't do this without you. Take me into your arms and show me how to get through this*. Talking to God renewed my sense of strength and peace.

Even as I absorbed the news of a horrific diagnosis, I realized I was uniquely positioned to get out of the ditch. I had knowledge and tools to get back on the highway.

It felt like a revelation to see how each of these three principles worked in business and in my life. Equally eye-opening was how the *combination* of this triangle of points working together had such an impact on me and so many others.

Strength in Triangles

Picture a triangle, each of the three points equally vital to the whole and each connected to and strengthened by the others. It's no coincidence that the triangle is known as the strongest and most stable geometric shape. Engineers have long relied on the triangle in designing structures of every kind. The ancient pyramids, which have stood for thousands of years, were based on the shape of a triangle. The reason is simple: any added force is evenly distributed among each of the three sides.

Triangles make it possible for bridges to bear tremendous amounts of weight and safely transport us across water, a canyon, or a ravine. The three points of a triangle, strengthened by their connecting sides, work together to resist the otherwise devastating effects of earthquakes, wind, and floods. Triangular



floor joists hold our houses together, and triangular trusses form a secure roof over our heads. Triangles are vital to our lives because they give us strength and shelter when we need it. The crazy thing is we don't usually see the importance of triangles, as they are somewhat out of sight—even though they can support our burdens when we experience challenges or problems.

This foundational power of three independent-yet-connected elements extends beyond the physical world. The Bible shows the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit connected in a supremely powerful holy alliance. And the number three is said to represent

perfection or completion and figures prominently throughout Scripture.

The amazing connection and strength we find in the physical and spiritual realms is also reflected in the Power of 3 triangle. It can be summarized in three words: *ask*, *activate*, and *advocate*.

This was my long and winding path of discovering, testing, and living out the Power of 3 in every part of life.

My Promise to You

Wherever you are and whatever you face right now, the Power of 3 promises to provide clarity for decision making and confidence in the face of crisis. It's a unique, individualized, and comprehensive method for getting unstuck. It quickly pinpoints the areas holding you back and shows you the steps to take to move forward. It can transform the way you approach life.

This book provides a step-by-step guide to this practical and proven method that will help anyone, at any time, navigate the many trials of life.

In the chapters that follow, I'll explain more

about how you can put the Power of 3 to work in your life. Whether you're battling illness, developing your career, or navigating difficulties large or small, you'll get all the *what* and *how* you need to know. You'll gain an understanding of each part of the Power of 3 as well as important practical "power points" to help you quickly apply what you learn.

When you employ all three points of the Power of 3—*ask*, *activate*, and *advocate*—they reinforce each other, increasing their effect exponentially and moving you from overwhelmed to overcoming. In the end, as you live in the triangle, hope will light your path to success in every way. You'll know you can confidently face tomorrow, whatever it brings!

Practicing the Power of 3

At the end of each chapter of *The Power of 3*, I'll ask you a few questions to stir your thoughts *or provide a short summary for easy reflection and focus*. Find a place to write your answers where you won't lose track of what you're thinking and feeling along the way.

1. What trial are you going through today? Or what difficulties is a loved one facing?
2. What circumstance have you encountered that caused you to lose hope? How did you move forward? In what ways does that situation still make you feel stuck?
3. If you could wave a wand and make some part of your life better, what would it be? What does that new life look like?
4. Who can come along on this Power of 3 journey with you, so you can talk about it and encourage each other?

Free assessment: To see where you rank in the Power of 3 and how these principles might help you grow, I invite you to visit my website at RobbHiller.com to take the online assessment.