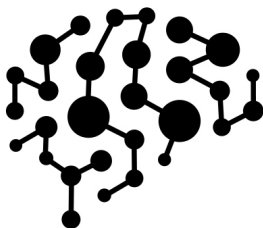


ONE GOLDEN NUGGET



**HOW TO
SURVIVE
AND
THRIVE
VOLUME III**

**JOE FOSTER, FOUNDER OF REEBOK,
RETURNS WITH POWERFUL NEW STORIES OF
RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION, CHANGING THE
WORLD ONE PAGE AT A TIME.**

Joe Foster



ABDULAZIZ AL-ROOMI

HR Leader, Best-Selling Author of *Prevail*, and Executive Coach

Having built a global brand, I can attest to the advice of many other successful entrepreneurs who say, “Never follow the money; follow your passion.” The idea is simple: when you pursue your passion, success — and, inevitably, financial rewards — will follow. Nevertheless, financial success is never guaranteed. That’s why it’s inspiring to hear stories of individuals like Abdulaziz, who take significant risks to achieve their goals — placing integrity, reputation, and professional fulfilment above financial gain.

Abdulaziz, or Aziz as he is more commonly known, has a story that exemplifies resilience, determination, and the courage to forge one’s path. Born in Perth, Scotland, Aziz moved to Kuwait as a baby after his parents divorced. Raised by his extended family, he recalls his childhood as being “spoiled” by an abundance of love and care from his grandparents and parents. This nurturing environment gave Aziz a strong sense of belonging and security, which he has carried with him throughout his life.

Aziz was a social and energetic child with a keen interest in football. However, his asthma often kept him from participating in physical activities with other children. While this limitation sometimes left him feeling isolated, it also sparked a love for reading. Aziz immersed himself in the lives of great leaders, drawing lessons and inspiration from their biographies. Through these stories, he found role models who would guide and influence his future aspirations. Reading about how these leaders navigated challenges gave him hope and provided him with a framework for resilience. Aziz’s upbringing was rich in mentorship, with his father and grandfathers playing key roles in shaping his character and values. When his mother remarried, Aziz gained



not just a stepfather but someone who he considers a “guardian angel and a source of wisdom.” His stepfather’s guidance and encouragement became a pillar of Aziz’s development, helping him to navigate life’s challenges with confidence and clarity. Having multiple male role models at different stages of his life gave Aziz a well-rounded perspective on leadership, relationships, and personal growth.

When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, Aziz’s life dramatically changed. At just nine years old, he witnessed his family’s priorities shift to survival during the seven-month occupation. For Aziz, this period of upheaval was paradoxically liberating. Freed from the protective bubble of his upbringing, he played football with neighbourhood children and formed new friendships. These experiences boosted his confidence and deepened his love for reading.

When Kuwait was liberated the following year, Aziz returned to school resolutely determined to excel. Motivated by a deep desire to contribute to his country’s recovery, he chose to pursue an academic path in the sciences. His accomplishments, both in academics and athletics, quickly earned him recognition. Despite this focus, his passion for philosophy and the humanities endured. Aziz found ways to weave these interests into his studies, particularly by exploring the profound connections between science and human thought.



**“One of the reasons I am
successful is because I do the
boring things more than others.”**



At seventeen, Aziz graduated from high school and set his sights on California, attracted by its vibrant cultural diversity and endless sunshine. There, he pursued a degree in computer science and engineering.

Living in the US as a Muslim and Arab during and after 9/11 was profoundly challenging. Aziz recalls, “In the wake of the attacks, I faced suspicion, fear, and prejudice simply because of my identity. Many people, unable to distinguish between extremists and ordinary Muslims, saw me through a lens of distrust and hostility.” The experience was deeply painful, leaving him feeling “like an outsider in a country I had come to call home.”



Despite the challenges, Aziz found strength in his faith and cultural heritage. He drew solace from the teachings of Islam, which emphasise peace, patience, and resilience. While confronting discrimination, he actively sought to engage with others, share his story, and educate those around him about the true essence of Islam. Whilst the journey was difficult, it deepened his sense of identity and strengthened his resolve to break down barriers, foster understanding, and build bridges between cultures in the face of adversity.

While navigating personal challenges, Aziz was also wrestling with professional choices as a young undergraduate student. Although engineering was a respected and prestigious field, it failed to spark his imagination or

ignite his passion. While his education provided a strong technical foundation, Aziz ultimately discovered his true calling when he encountered the field of human resources during his studies.

This moment of discovery was transformative, setting him on a more suitable career path that prioritised people over systems. Recognising this as his calling, Aziz returned to Kuwait to earn a master's degree in business and management. Despite initial resistance from his family, who questioned his unconventional career choice, Aziz remained steadfast in his decision, knowing that his path lay in people management.

Determined to chart his own course, Aziz secured a role as a leadership development specialist at a petrochemical firm three years after graduation. This position allowed him to merge his passion for human resources with his interest in leadership. Reflecting on this career milestone, he says, "I still feel goosebumps when I remember it because that was happiness for me at that time."

In this role, Aziz was responsible for leadership assessments, succession planning, coaching, and cultural transformation projects. He credits his grandmothers' wisdom and emotional intelligence for shaping his approach to leadership. "I was very close to both my grandmothers, and I witnessed their wisdom in how they solved problems and demonstrated higher emotional intelligence. You could feel this soft power taking charge," he explains. Observing their ability to navigate conflicts with grace and empathy deeply influenced his leadership philosophy, which is built on fostering trust and understanding.



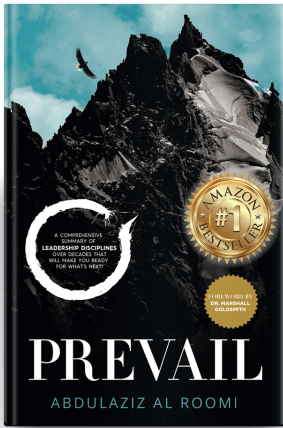
**"Heroes may be memorable,
but leaders shape our lives."**

Despite his success, Aziz made a bold decision to leave his secure job and join a mega retail store in search of greater exposure and opportunities. However, the decision proved challenging, as the new role came with cultural differences, lower pay, and, eventually, redundancy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflecting on this period, Aziz acknowledges the risks he took but emphasises that adversity often paves the way for growth. Although the experience was challenging, it taught him valuable lessons about adaptability, resilience, and the importance of aligning career decisions with personal values.

Transforming this challenge into an opportunity, Aziz decided to launch his own company, realising his dream of becoming a full-time independent consultant. Having experienced the transformative power of guidance and mentorship in both academics and athletics, Aziz was always inspired to help others push beyond their limits, build confidence, and uncover their own strengths — coaching was a perfect fit.

As a coach, Aziz describes himself as a “sparring partner,” challenging clients to grow through self-awareness. He believes coaching is a self-perpetuating process in which people eventually gain the tools to coach themselves. Inspired by Dale Carnegie’s principles, Aziz incorporates motivational techniques into his training, emphasising the power of a simple smile and the importance of appealing to noble





motives. Smiling, as Aziz explains, is a reflection of wisdom and good intentions. He considers it a key tool for leaders who want to create positive connections and foster trust within their teams.

Aziz's approach to leadership is deeply linked to cultural sensitivity. Based in the Middle East, he navigates the region's collectivist mindset, which contrasts with the individualism prevalent in Western societies. He highlights the emotional nuances of leadership in this context, where decisions can impact not just individuals but their families and reputations. This awareness has enabled Aziz to make a significant impact as a leadership consultant working on a global scale.

Alongside his coaching career, Aziz took on the role of Assistant General Manager in Human Resources at Boubyan Bank Group, driven by his passion for integrating HR and leadership theories into practical applications.

His individualised approach ensures that each leader he trains is equipped with the skills to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics. This sensitivity to cultural context is reflected in the bank's talent management strategy. From consultations to leadership assessments, Aziz ensures that his stakeholders receive personalised solutions that align with their unique challenges and goals.

Aziz's training philosophy also centres on storytelling. He believes that the best trainers influence their audience by presenting new perspectives and fostering self-awareness.



**“There’s something even more important
than passion: fulfilment.”**



“Although we’re teaching technical stuff, the essence of the training is helping people to see things differently, respect one another, and embrace change,” he explains.

On a personal level, Aziz finds coaching extremely gratifying. The opportunity to nurture resilience, teamwork, and discipline in others fuels his dedication to the profession, and witnessing their success is something he considers profoundly rewarding. Aziz describes the experience as humbling and fulfilling, enriched by the exchange of ideas, overcoming challenges, and building genuine trust — a journey marked by personal and shared growth. Driven by this vision, Aziz fostered a learning culture within the bank and across Kuwait.

Today, he is also a published author and TEDx speaker, the first Kuwaiti member of the *Harvard Business Review* Advisory Council, and the first Arab to join the Forbes Coaches Council. Each of these accomplishments reflects his unwavering commitment to growth and his passion for inspiring others.

In his book *Prevail*, Aziz explores leadership as a lifelong pursuit that begins with mindset. He highlights the importance of prioritising projects that align with one's vision and goals. As a “human resources guru,” he is passionate about mentoring and supporting others, saying, “I’m here to help anyone seeking employment or needing an endorsement, as long as it’s genuine and sincere.” As he looks to the future, Aziz envisions a world where leadership is defined by authenticity, empathy, and a commitment to positive change. His journey is a powerful reminder that true success lies not in wealth or status but in the impact one has on others. Moving forward, Aziz continues to pave the way for future leaders, inspiring others to adopt a growth mindset.



**“When you have leaders, you
have a better world.”**



**“Leadership has to change by being
more democratic and more real.”**



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AND
THRIVE







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