

# Finding silver linings in the economic clouds

AMONG THE stories of gloom that have been dominating the news for the past year have been some rays of light – stories about individuals and businesses that appear to be thriving. Those struggling in this economic climate may be tempted to attribute the good fortune of those people to luck, but most people “lucky” enough to have a thriving business have grabbed every opportunity and worked hard. They didn’t sit around bemoaning their fate or believing circumstances were out of their control.

We don’t have to look far to find an example of a business role model who doesn’t let adversity get him down, and continues to see opportunity in the darkest days – jeweller Michael Hill.

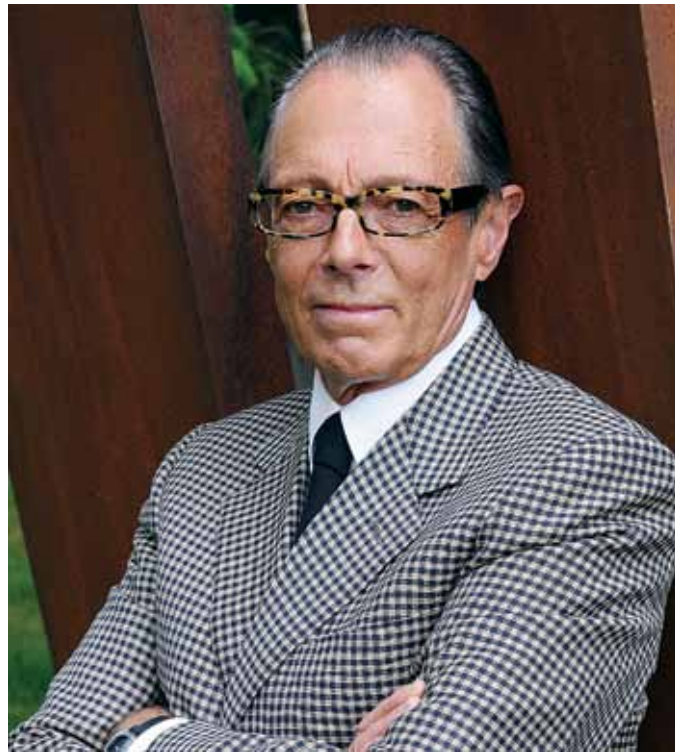
Last year, as part of an expansion strategy, his business took over 17 jewellery shops in the United States. It wasn’t exactly the best time to be selling jewellery in the economy where the global economic crisis began, and he told the New Zealand Herald that on some days in the early months some of the shops got only one or two customers.

But while business was tough, the silver lining was that he never would have been able to buy the chain in better times.

“If we want to become global we do have to do business in possibly the hardest place there is to do business, and the States really is that,” he told the Herald. The recession had given him the opportunity he was looking for.

Michael Hill’s jewellery chain is built on his ability to see opportunity in circumstances that could overwhelm many others.

In his book, *Toughen Up*, Hill relates how the destruction by fire of his



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– Michael Hill, Jeweller

under-insured family home and most of the family’s uninsured possessions was the turning point in his life. As he and his wife Christine stood helplessly watching the fire turn their dream home to ashes, he stated his resolve to live differently.

The seeming catastrophe was Hill’s opportunity to start again with a new script, to leave the family business with its limited potential and to strike out on his own.

Just the idea of doing something like that frightens most of us. And Hill was much the same: “I was terrified of leaving my comfort zone,” he writes. But he also writes about the “transformative power of hardship”, and how he will be eternally grateful for the experience.

What Hill shows us is the ability we all have to take charge of our own thoughts and emotions (our attitude), and either use them to pursue goals,

### Three tips for maximising your positive attitude:

1. Focus on what you can do. Michael Hill writes about how the jewellery chain “bungled and blundered repeatedly” when it expanded into Australia. But it persisted, learning from mistakes and acting on what was possible.
2. Remind yourself that your attitude is your choice – then exercise that choice.
3. Constantly remind yourself and your team that the present circumstances are temporary.

or ignore them if they get in the way. Most of us are content with the received wisdom that you can’t do anything about your attitude, or anyone else’s for that matter.

But that idea is completely wrong. Science shows us that we have much more control over our own attitude than most of us realise.

Being a whining complaining victim of circumstances is easy.

But now is the right time to take charge of your own thoughts and emotions and put real effort into searching for the upside of any circumstance. Hardships give us the opportunity to see things differently, to make radical changes and act in ways that ensure you, your people, and your enterprise will flourish. **BT**

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