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UCF Forum

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9-30-2020

## If You Don't Take a Risk, You'll Never Know Victory or Defeat

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## If You Don't Take a Risk, You'll Never Know Victory or Defeat

By Peter Telep  
UCF Forum columnist  
Wednesday, September 30, 2020

It's quality of life vs. safety, and we're wrestling with that every day now.



These are risky times—all the more reason to be empathetic and kind to each other, writes Peter Telep. (Photo by AJ Jorio at unsplash)

You've heard the idea before: The higher the risk, the greater the reward.

You're familiar with those people in your personal and professional life whom you would call risk-takers, the ones who casually skydive on a Sunday afternoon and post their death-defying pictures on their social media feeds.

You might also know a few people who avoid taking risks in any aspect of their lives, from their financial investments to trying new foods to getting on an airplane. We call them risk averse. My wife calls them smart, since she's one of them.

"You're young," my father told me after I graduated from high school. "You have time. You don't have any family commitments. Take some risks! See the world!"

When he was my age, he joined the Navy. I was a trumpet player and rock guitarist in high school. I had no dreams to become a soldier or even see the world, but I understood what he was saying.

One of my favorite presidents, Theodore Roosevelt, wrote eloquently about taking risks. He said that if you fail, at least you fail "while daring greatly."

While I was junior at Southampton College in New York, I landed a writing job on a television show, packed up my car, drove across the United States, and spent five years living in Los Angeles writing for the film and television industries. I had quit school and taken a risk. My dad was proud. I eventually returned to Florida, earned my degrees at UCF, and became an instructor at UCF with industry experience. The risk paid off.

One of my favorite presidents, Theodore Roosevelt, wrote eloquently about taking risks. He said that if you fail, at least you fail "while daring greatly." If you don't take a risk, you'll never know victory or defeat.

Library bookshelves buckle under the weight of risk-takers who explored the earth, dared to rise up against oppressive governments, and sought the stars (among a billion other goals that at first seemed far too risky). I've always attached equal measures of awe and nobility to people willing to sacrifice everything for a dream. They decided that the risk was worth it.

However, this year nearly all aspects of our lives have become much riskier. Situations that never had any risk attached now set off alarms. Do I send my kids back to face-to-face classes? Do I return to my job and wear my mask? How safe will that be? It's a strange new world for us all. Who thought going to a wedding or a football game or a supermarket would become a high-risk situation with terrible consequences?

Our tolerance for risk is informed by the way we were raised, our personalities, and our current lives (for example, a young mother might avoid skydiving, while her grandmother happily jumps out of a perfectly good airplane).

I consider myself a fairly aggressive risk-taker. I've been an avid road cyclist for over 10 years, braving the treacherous roads of Central Florida. While I've never been struck by a car, I've been grazed, buzzed, spat at, cursed at, and literally run off the road. If it's so

dangerous, why do I keep riding? The adrenaline rush, the fitness, and the joy of being outdoors are worth the danger to life and limb. That's a decision I've made, one with which you may not agree.

That's okay. I think skydivers, people who eat shellfish, and those who ride motorcycles without helmets are all insane for taking those risks; however, who am I to judge? I've never done those things, so I've never experienced the rewards. Risk is a matter of personal choice and perspective. Are we looking at all the pieces that go into a decision so that we can better see the big picture?

Admittedly, risk-takers like me have become experts at dismissing consequences. Don't spoil the fun by mentioning that I might die on my bicycle. I am fully aware of the risks I am taking. I don't need your reminder. But what about my family? Am I being too selfish?

I'm honestly unsure if I'd be a road cyclist were my daughters younger. Now that they are both in their 20s, my choices don't strike quite as hard, but every time I go out, the fear does cross my mind.

It's quality of life vs. safety, and we're wrestling with that every day now. I won't judge you if you decide to eat at a socially distanced restaurant or work out at your local gym, so long as you and those facilities are adhering to the current precautionary guidelines. The problem occurs when your risk infringes on someone else's rights, and that's something we all need to carefully consider.

Make no mistake. These are risky times—all the more reason to be empathetic and kind to each other. As Knights we boldly charge on toward our futures, keenly aware that while greatness requires risk, everyone's tolerance level is different, and that's OK.

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