



# CHALLENGE



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A Herff Jones IMPACT Resource for Students

## Risk Taking for Personal Growth

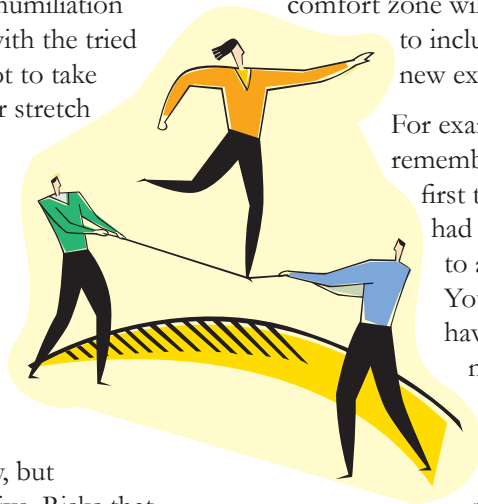
Student leaders risk failure every time you decide to try something new, whether it's running for office, giving a speech, chairing an event, or sponsoring a new activity. Why open yourself up to possible criticism or humiliation rather than sticking with the tried and true? It's safer not to take risks, but if you never stretch your capabilities by rising to meet a challenge, you won't grow.

Not all risks are potentially beneficial. Acts of daring—driving too fast, abusing substances, shoplifting—are risky, but certainly not productive. Risks that are worth taking are ones that help you improve yourself as a person, overcome a problem, enhance your life, or broaden your range of skills or experience.

### Expanding Your Comfort Zone

Risk taking of this sort is productive because it expands your comfort zone. Imagine yourself in a circle comprised of all your experiences. These are the things you know and are comfortable with. At the edge of the circle is the growing edge. When you take a self-improvement risk you break through this edge into the learning zone. The learning zone

isn't as comfortable because it's unknown territory and can feel insecure. If you can tolerate being in the learning zone long enough, you'll eventually learn new skills or gain new knowledge and your comfort zone will expand to include the new experience.



For example, remember the first time you had to speak to a group? You might have felt nervous and you might have practiced what you were going to say a few times. Once you gave the speech and realized that you could survive the experience, the next speech you gave was probably a bit easier to deliver. Thus, a history of positive risk-taking experiences allows you to continue to seek new risks and challenges, giving you opportunity for growth.

Growth comes when you move beyond your comfort zone. Cultivating an attitude of controlled risk taking can help you expand your comfort zone and become a more confident leader.

How does one take a controlled risk? Follow these steps:

**Identify the risk.** What is the risk you want to take? Risks vary from person to person. For some, deciding to run for office, performing in front of a group, giving a speech, or chairing a committee represent risks, while others are comfortable in these situations.

**Weigh the pros and cons.** What are the best and worst possible consequences of taking this risk? Effective risk takers are able to determine the link between risk and opportunity. Does the opportunity to gain a sense of accomplishment and improved self-esteem outweigh the possibility of lost time and energy and potential for embarrassment? While there is a degree of loss in any risk, take only those risks where you can handle the loss.

**Develop a plan.** Determine what you need to do or learn to accomplish the objective. You may want to break it down into smaller steps. For example, if you need to prepare a speech, break it down into the manageable steps of choosing a topic, researching, organizing your ideas, writing the speech, practicing it by yourself, and practicing with an audience of friends or family.

**Identify resources.** Who or what can help you tackle this risk? In the example of giving a speech, resources could include the library, the Internet, an English teacher or

speech coach, friends, family members, or an expert in the topic on which you are speaking.

**Tolerate uncertainty.** Taking risks means daring to try new approaches or ideas with no predictable control over results or consequences. Realize that there will be a certain amount of uncertainty, but that's the way it's supposed to be so plan as best you can and then just go with it.

**Take action.** You've considered the pros and cons and developed a plan. Now carry it out. Have confidence that no matter how it turns out, you will have learned from the experience.

**Evaluate the experience.** How did it go? Were you successful or less than successful? What did you learn from this experience? How would you do it differently next time?

**Accept the results.** Whether the experience was positive or negative, accept the results and move on. It's easy to do that with successes, but it's important to do it with failures as well. Realize that errors of judgment or a less than stellar performance don't mean you're incompetent. More likely they indicate that you need more knowledge, more practice, or more maturity.

Don't dwell too long on the "failure"; rather, congratulate yourself on taking the risk in the first place. Let the experience build your confidence in your ability to accept and confront challenges and realize that the lessons you've learned from this experience will help you in your next risk-taking endeavor.

## Dealing with Failure

So you took a risk, tried something new, and it didn't go as well as you wanted. What can you do to pick up the pieces, learn from the failure, and move on?

**Evaluate what went wrong.** Assess what caused the failure. Was it something you did or failed to do? Was it beyond your control? What could you have done that you didn't do? What should you have avoided doing? Try to learn from your experience so you can apply it next time you are in a similar situation.

**Admit your mistakes.** Although it is difficult to admit that you made a mistake, if you did, own up to it. People who make excuses, blame others, or refuse to accept responsibility for their actions lose the respect of their peers.

**Assess what you can do to improve the situation.** If there's something that could be done to fix things, do it. If not, don't dwell on the things you cannot change.

**Find someone who will support you.** Go to friends and family members, people you know care about you and share what's on your mind. Acknowledge your disappointment and feelings of frustration. Sharing a burden with someone else lightens the load and just talking about it can help.

**Keep your sense of humor.** Try to find the bright side of the situation. Laughing helps relieve tension and helps you keep your perspective.

**Keep things in perspective.** No matter how bad it seems right now, in the scheme of life, how bad is it? Tomorrow, next week, or next year, will this failure even matter or be remembered?

## On Risk Taking...

Taking chances is essential to a rich and rewarding life. —Joseph Ilardo

You don't concentrate on risks. You concentrate on results.

—Chuck Yeager

Remember, if you take risks you may still fail, but if you do not take risks, you will surely fail. The greatest risk of all is to do nothing.

—Roberto Goizeuta

You can't steal second base and still keep your foot on first.

—Frederick Wilcox

Without risks, there is no chance of reward.

—Richard Bangs

Everyone has a "risk muscle." You keep it in shape by trying new things. If you don't, it atrophies. Make a point of using it at least once a day.

—Roger von Oech

"Go for the moon. If you don't get it, you'll still be heading for a star."

—Willis Reed



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