

Take the Shot

MANAGEMENT CONNECTION

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This summer I had the opportunity to attend an Executive Leadership Forum in Edmonton, Canada. The annual program had come highly recommended by association peers due to its intimate size and compelling content. Several times since the event, I have reviewed my notes and contemplated the key takeaways from the conference.

The one resounding message that keeps jumping off the page for me is summed up best in a quote made famous by Canada's hockey great, Wayne Gretzky: *"You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take."*

The fear of failure is human. And in many organizations, making mistakes is not only frowned

upon, but can also lead to unpleasant or serious consequences. So, how are we to learn and grow if we can't experiment, try new things, and learn from our mistakes? The simple answer is we can't! It's rare indeed for anyone to be able to perfect a skill without determination and practice, and this simple truth certainly applies in the workplace. As leaders we need to embrace this reality and be open to experimentation as well as failure if we want to up our game as well as the success of our teams and organizations.

What are some ways to do this? First, by being humble and admitting you don't know it all. By owning your own

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shortcomings, you create an environment where others feel comfortable not being perfect. Shine a light on things you don't know or want to improve upon by bringing relevant issues up in one-on-one or team meetings with staff. Nurture a culture where experimentation is valued, not frowned upon. You may have heard the catch phrases "fail fast" or "fail forward." In a fail-fast system, any condition likely to trigger failure is flagged, and the operation is stopped so the risk of collapse or disaster is minimized.

In his book *Failing Forward: Turning Mistakes Into Stepping Stones*, John C. Maxwell says, "The essence of man is imperfection. Know that you're going to make mistakes. The fellow who never makes a mistake takes his orders from one who does. Wake up and realize this: Failure is simply a price we pay to achieve success." What are *you* doing to ensure that people feel safe enough to take risks, and potentially fail, without negative repercussions?

Next, provide people with the resources and support to be innovative,

to pursue opportunities, and to explore different approaches to old problems. Stop yourself from saying things like, "We've done that before" and "That will never work here!" Phrases like these kill motivation and may prompt your talent to look for jobs elsewhere. Instead, ask your employees to make a business case for trying new things, forging new partnerships, or investing in additional staff or technology. Expecting timelines, business metrics, and regular updates should not restrict creativity, but will help set boundaries and improve communication.

Finally, make sure to schedule time to monitor progress and evaluate the experiment's success or failure. In most cases, there won't be 100 percent success or failure, but incremental learning opportunities will abound. By sweeping problems or mistakes under the rug, you inhibit the chance to salvage important data that can be utilized to improve a product, service, process, etc. Some organizations and teams have formal programs to ensure that these critical nuggets are not lost, but unfortunately, many are still failing to capitalize on the information to be gleaned

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SHINE A LIGHT ON THINGS YOU DON'T

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when things don't go as planned.

All of this said, taking risks for risk's sake is foolhardy and reckless. Assess the potential for failure before undertaking sweeping changes, and determine whether the risk is worth the possible benefit or reward. This is especially true of risks that have financial implications or changes that could drive valued employees away. Take calculated risks that you judge to be worthwhile.

Many nutrition and foodservice departments are ripe for calculated change. For example, if your organization is facing an employee shortage, brainstorm ways to change your marketing and hiring methods. Think outside the box and experiment with creative approaches to attracting and retaining quality recruits. Explore new, unproven ways to build a solid team of dedicated and motivated employees. Have you tried working with the career office at your local community college? Or how about marketing your openings to motivated seniors? If you provide benefits such as health insurance, older workers who have been downsized or retired early but are eager to work may be a great solution. They

can put their skills and work ethic into action in your department.

My point is, look at the challenges your department is facing—whether it's a shrinking labor pool, improving client satisfaction, trimming costs—and boldly confront these issues. Challenge yourself and your team to come up with unique approaches to problem solving, even at the risk of failure. Praise those who think outside the box, and reward those who initiate positive change. Show your team you are not only open

to new ideas, you celebrate creative thinking.

Are you ready to take the shot? If not, take a closer look at what's holding you, your team, and your organization back. Perhaps you need to start with some conversations with your own leaders or staff about the fear of failure. Share articles on the subject, bring in a guest speaker, or make it a recurring topic at meetings. Culture shifts take time and energy, so don't expect results overnight. But, with some targeted effort, it will become clear that mistakes

are not a bad thing. They are a critical component of improvement and growth.

Let me conclude with another quote from John Maxwell: "The more you do, the more you fail. The more you fail, the more you learn. The more you learn, the better you get." Don't we all want to improve our systems and perform better at our jobs? Taking calculated risks can lead you on a path to improvement in both your work life and your personal life. Go out on a limb now and then. You'll find that the view may be better from there. **E**

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX



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- Perfecting a skill generally requires:
 - Many hours of research
 - Determination and practice
 - A raise in salary
- As leaders, we need to be open to
 - Experimentation and failure
 - Honoring the status quo
 - Retribution for failed practices
- By owning your own shortcomings, you create an environment where
 - You are vulnerable to ridicule
 - Your compensation may be questioned
 - Others feel comfortable not being perfect
- The phrase "fail fast" basically means
 - Immediate dismissal from your position
 - Anything likely to trigger failure is flagged, and the operation is stopped to minimize risk
 - Be the first to give up on new processes
- In his book *Failing Forward*, author John C. Maxwell states, "The essence of man is..."
 - His natural odor
 - Integrity beyond reproach
 - Imperfection
- Leaders should provide people with the _____ and _____ to be innovative.
 - Motivation and finances
 - Resources and support
 - Skills and drive
- When changes are made within the department, effective leaders
 - Monitor progress
 - Evaluate the experiment's success or failure
 - Both A and B

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