

Becoming a Proactive Leader

Many of us continue to overlook the fact that progress comes only when chances are taken.

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The knowledge era's new leaders, many of whom are immigrants and women, are managing change by conceiving innovative organizations and novel ways to attract and motivate employees.

They are learning to be proactive instead of reactive, and to appreciate the full importance of relationships and alliances.

They also have a healthy aptitude for risk and perseverance, and know how to gain strength from setbacks and failure.

Life's Batting Average

Baseball's greatest hitter grew up near my neighborhood in San Diego. When Ted Williams slugged for the Boston Red Sox, my father and I kept a record of his daily batting average. And when I played Little League ball, my dad told me not to worry about striking out. In Williams' finest year, dad reminded me, the champion failed at the plate about 60 percent of the time.

Football's greatest quarterbacks complete only six out of ten passes. The best basketball players make only half their shots. Even with satellite mapping and expert geologists, leading oil companies make strikes in only one out of ten wells. Actors and actresses auditioning for roles are turned down twenty-nine in thirty times. And stock market winners make money on only two out of five of their investments.

**Since failure is a given in life,
success takes more than
leadership beliefs and solid
behavioral patterns. It also takes
an appropriate response to the
inevitable, including an effective
combination of risk-taking and
perseverance.**

I meet many individuals who are seeking security at all costs, and avoiding risk whenever and wherever possible. Knowing that certain changes would make success much more likely for them, they nevertheless take the path of least resistance: no change. For the temporary, often illusory comfort of staying as they are, they pay the terrible price of a life not truly lived.

Parable of the Cautious Man

*There was a very cautious man,
who never laughed or cried.
He never risked, he never lost,
he never won nor tried.
And when he one day passed away,
his insurance was denied,
For since he never really lived,
they claimed he never died.*

**In other words, missed
opportunities are the curse of
potential.**

Just after the Great Depression, Americans, perhaps understandably at the time, took many steps intended to minimize risk. The government guaranteed much of our savings. Citizens bought billions of dollars worth of insurance. We sought lifetime employment and our unions fought for guaranteed annual cost-of-living increases to protect us from inflation.

This security-blanket mentality has continued in recent decades as executives awarded themselves giant golden parachutes in case a merger or takeover took their plum jobs.

These measures had many benefits, but the drawbacks have also been heavy, even if less obvious. In our eagerness to avoid risk, we forgot its positive aspects. Many of us continue to overlook the fact that progress comes only when chances are taken. And the security we sought and continue to seek often produces boredom, mediocrity, apathy and reduced opportunity.

We still hear much about security, especially from federal and state politicians. But total security is a myth except, perhaps, for those six feet underground in the cemetery. We may indeed ask our government for guaranteed benefits. But we must be aware that when a structure starts with a *floor*, walls and ceilings will follow. And herein lies a paradoxical proverb:

You must risk in order to gain security, but you must never seek security.

When security becomes a major goal in life – when fulfillment and joy are reduced to merely holding on, sustaining the status quo – the risk remains heavy. It is then a risk of losing the prospects of real advancement, of not being able to ride the wave of change today and tomorrow. Had the founders of Yahoo, Amazon.com and America Online been concerned with immediate profits and return on investment, we would not be enjoying those Internet services today, each of which has a greater market capitalization than IBM or General Motors.



Denis Waitley is one of America's most respected and beloved authors, keynote lecturers and productivity consultants on high performance human achievement. He has inspired, informed, challenged and entertained audiences for over 25 years from the boardrooms of multi-national corporations to the control rooms of NASA's space program. Denis has

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With over 10 million audio programs sold in 14 languages, Denis Waitley's CD album, *The Psychology of Winning*, is still the all-time best selling program on self-mastery. To order this Best-Seller or his newest release, *The Platinum Collection* and to subscribe to the free Denis Waitley Weekly E-zine visit his website here: www.DenisWaitley.com