

Don't Fret Failure



By Melanie Lockwood Herman

Executive Director

Resource Type: Risk eNews

Topic: General

“Most people are afraid of failure. They have been taught to be afraid of it.” – Bruce Mau

When you reflect on the past year, if you recall triumphs as well as failures, you're not alone. Everyone miscalculates and misfires from time to time. Some people feel it's only proper to dwell in positivity. But the opportunity to learn from failure is well worth the weight of woe.

The [Museum of Failure](#) is located in Helsingborg, a small town on the Southern-Eastern coast of Sweden. The Museum's exhibits are failed innovations, from Apple's Newton to Bic pens designed for women and Harley-Davidson perfume. Museum of Failure curator Samuel West explains that “Innovation requires failure.” According to West, he was inspired to create the Museum after feeling frustrated by success stories that followed “the same format, the same narrative.” (Source: interview on The Rejected Podcast.) West's thesis for his PhD. in organizational psychology focused on how playful work environments support creativity.

To read more about the connection between failure and evolving risk practice, check out the following articles from our RISK eNews archives:

- [Succeeding at Failure](#)
- [Fear, Failure and What's Next](#)
- [Inquiring Minds Want to Know](#)
- [Why Your Workplace Needs More Sinners, Fewer Saints](#)

Fear of failure isn't the exclusive domain of the companies whose failed products are featured in the Museum of Failure. During numerous [risk engagements](#) for NRMCC, I've witnessed the fear of imperfection among leaders in many nonprofit organizations. Some leaders fear the increasing scrutiny their organizations face as the public's demand for accountability and transparency intensifies. Those who fear stakeholder scrutiny may obsess about the risk of a scandal cracking the hard shell of organizational credibility. Denying that there may be problems under the shiny mission statement may cause insiders to bury information rather than make necessary changes.

In contrast, it's always gratifying to meet a nonprofit executive who welcomes the rigor of a [risk assessment](#), opening up their organizations to a review that might disclose cracks in an organization's structure or management processes. Diagnosing poorly managed risks is the first step to making the organization all that it can be.

Melanie Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your comments about learning from failure, and your questions about NRMC services at 703.777.3504 or Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org.