

# Don't Leave It to Your Amygdala (and 3 Other Things I Learned at the Risk Summit)



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The number of recommendations in NRMCC's consulting reports doesn't always match the number of risks. That's because one change might mitigate several organizational risks—or one risk might require multiple organizational changes.

That's just one illustration of a lesson I have learned over and over since I entered this field: Risk management is an art, not a science. There are few easy answers. Nuance abounds, and a risk approach that fits one team or organization might be a total miss for another.

It's essential to learn from other risk practitioners—what they've tried, what's worked, what's failed, and what problem still confounds them. Someone else's solution might not solve your issue, but at the very least, ideas will spark. I had the chance to do that kind of learning on July 20 at the second session of [NRMCC's 2022 Virtual Risk Summit](#), which focused on risk management fundamentals. Here are four things I learned.

## **When you're trying to be antiracist, your amygdala is not your friend.**

Diversity, equity, and inclusion expert Sonia Aranza gave a powerful talk about unconscious bias in risk management, full of visual examples that made the audience react, stop, and think. Aranza shared that most of our biases reside in our brain—specifically, in the amygdala, a reactionary little organ focused on survival. One simple action Aranza recommends to counter unconscious bias: When you hear new information or a new idea, pause for three seconds before you speak. That pause calms the amygdala and allows your brain's prefrontal cortex to kick in. Of course, that's just the start. You should also advance your knowledge of diverse people, places, and things, and seek out team members who make you see things differently. Without those perspectives, you'll never be able to see and navigate risk in a volatile and changing world.

## **Your organization's bylaws probably have way too much information in them, and that's a risk.**

"Rewriting bylaws is a nightmare," said Nisha Thakker, Esq., Partner, Tenenbaum Law Group PLLC. Most of what organizations put in their bylaws should be in their policies and procedures instead—the documents that govern how they do their everyday work. When nonprofits overstuff their bylaws, or rewrite them piecemeal, conflicting

provisions often result, Thakker said. To stay on track, Thakker uses organizations' articles of incorporation as a guide when rewriting bylaws.

### **Few great rewards happen without great risks.**

"MasterChef" winner Christine Ha captivated the audience with her talk about taking risk in the kitchen. Ha said she was risk-averse as a child, but has changed over time. She realized the greatest rewards in her career—like winning "MasterChef" and opening two award-winning restaurants—came from the greatest risks she's taken. "If you don't try, the door will always be shut," she said.

### **Everyone on your team is a stakeholder in your risk management approach.**

To get team members sharing ideas and strategies on risk, create a challenge for your team, like a risk roleplaying scenario, said Krystle I. Myers, Esq., Principal Attorney, Myers Law Group. If employees know their input will be valued in an important project, they'll invest more in it. Dr. Beth Boyer Kollas, Vice President of Community Health & Safety at the YMCA of Central Florida, gathers employee reflections on risk incidents and shares them for later discussion. "It's a way for [employees] to understand the importance of those diverse perspectives in a very personal way," she said.

Our 2022 Risk Summit theme is "Food [For](#) Thought," and the July summit left me with plenty to chew on. What have you learned about risk lately that challenged or expanded your thinking? What would you like to learn? The [final session of our Risk Summit on October 13](#) will focus on advanced risk management and enterprise risk management. We hope to see you there.

*Rachel Sams is a Consultant and Staff Writer at the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She aims to take Chef Christine Ha's advice and try more foods outside her comfort zone this year (she recently cooked oat groats for the first time and enjoyed them). Rachel would love to hear about your risk journey at [rachel@nonprofitrisk.org](mailto:rachel@nonprofitrisk.org) or 703.777.3504.*