

Risk Lessons from Soccer's Sidelines



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I spent a big chunk of time recently as a supportive sideline spectator at a soccer tournament with my kids. They play on two different teams, so there were a lot of games and not much downtime. While sidelined, it occurred to me that like the parents of competing soccer players, risk champions spend a lot of time observing, rather than in the middle of the action in their organizations.

One of the challenges of being an observer on the sidelines is that it feels as though you don't have a direct effect on the game. In addition, there are all sorts of things that an observer can sometimes inadvertently do to negatively impact the situation, no matter how well-intentioned your actions may be. Consider the risk tips below to be the most effective champion of the active players in your risk management process.

- **Show your support with silence:** Many enthusiastic parents of soccer players show their support by yelling and cheering from the sidelines. Yet in some cases, vocal outbursts backfire, confusing or distracting team members, or causing undue annoyance to the hardworking coaches and referees. As a risk champion, remember that sometimes the best way to demonstrate your support is being available as a resource, without being overly vocal or controlling. For experienced risk leaders, it may be challenging not to challenge or redirect risk management strategies when you've 'been there' and 'seen that.' But like a patient parent sitting on the sidelines, consider whether it is better to sit back, let the action unfold and trust that the people involved are doing their jobs to the best of their abilities.
- **Remember that practice is a precursor for success:** In youth sports, the lion's share of attention is focused on competitions. After all, how many people want to watch routine drills and practice games? However, it's the preparation during practice times that leads to success when it comes to game time. The best soccer parents do all sorts of things behind the scenes when they aren't relegated to the observer role during a game. As a risk champion, much of your work is behind the scenes, such as helping team members develop contingency plans for risks that may never materialize. Formulating new policies and planning cross-training activities may not be as exciting as serving on a crisis team, but these are incredibly valuable forms of risk service. Successful risk champions recognize that most of their efforts reinforce the infrastructure that enables the nonprofit's mission to prosper.
- **Take the long view:** Over the course of the soccer season, winning more games than you lose is considered a winning season. But a winning team isn't necessarily a team with members who are learning and growing in their roles. A team that loses a lot may have players that are developing skills and perspectives they can apply in future seasons. When you're sidelined as a risk champion, remember to put your support behind developing the individuals and processes that will enable your nonprofit to come out ahead more often than not. Acknowledge that there will be setbacks, mistakes and losses along the way, and resist the temptation to be hyper-critical of these mistakes or losses. Every mistake and

every loss is an opportunity to learn and grow. Nonprofit teams that strive to do everything without making a mistake are probably passing up the opportunity for an even greater reward down the line.

As a soccer parent, there are times when the best thing to do is to be quiet, be supportive, and to realize that success isn't only about winning. Successful risk champions also recognize that there are times to speak up, and times when it's best to sit back, observe the action and be available for support. Risk leaders in nonprofits also know that practice, preparation and learning every day are unbeatable assets on game day.

Resources from NRMCM:

- World-class soccer teams take time and effort to develop. For information about evolving the risk management skills and capabilities of your nonprofit's team, order [World-Class Risk Management for Nonprofits](#), the newest release from the Nonprofit Risk Management Center.
- Effective conflict management is a key tool to managing relationships with everyone on your team. Go [here](#) for some suggestions on how to manage disputes.
- In order to develop, it's important for your team to reflect on the lessons from the situations they encounter. The article [Learning from Experience](#) highlights reasons why it's hard to learn from experience and offers some suggestions on how to do so.

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