

Everything I Know About Risk Management I Learned by Teaching Risk Management



By Melanie Lockwood Herman

Executive Director

Resource Type: Risk eNews

Topic: General

“Whenever we want a far-reaching impact, teaching others to teach can be a high-leverage strategy.”

I’ve just finished reading *Effortless* by Greg McKeown. In Chapter 12, “Lift,” I was struck by a subhead that reads, “When You Learn to Teach, You Teach Yourself to Learn.” McKeown goes on to explain that “Teaching others is also an accelerated way to learn. Even thinking we might be called upon to teach can increase our engagement.”

I still remember the first time I led a workshop on risk management. I stood in front of a polite, seated audience in a nondescript meeting room and nervously fumbled my collection of worn overhead transparencies. I silently willed the audience NOT to ask me questions about any of the content, worried that not knowing the answers would cast doubt on my content and credibility.

At the time, I was focused solely on concluding that hour-long workshop without running out of overheads. My reticence gave way to reflection, and I can now pinpoint that moment as the inception of my learning journey. Afterward, I vowed to be better prepared, enthusiastic about sharing my revelations, and eager for audience comments and questions. Today, I eagerly await the portion of my workshops where the audience can ask questions. After all, if I don’t know the answer, I’m gifted with another opportunity to learn!

McKeown’s words were a personal epiphany: everything I know about risk management I learned by preparing to teach and coach others. I savor the lessons and ideas from what I’m reading because I look forward to sharing them with others. For me, the act of sharing a concept or message solidifies it, makes it more easily accessible in my memory, and easier to apply in practice.

Leverage Learning by Teaching

In the “Lift” chapter review, McKeown reminds the reader of the following teaching truths:

- Sharing knowledge is powerful.
- Teach others to teach, and you get exponential impact.
- You craft the right story once, and it can live on for millennia.
- The more we teach, the more we ourselves learn.

Every risk leader should also be a risk *teacher*. If the prospect of teaching doesn't bring you joy, try one of the following pathways to embark on a teaching journey or evolve your confidence as a risk leader/teacher.

It's a Conversation, Not a Class

1. Identify a few (2-3) lessons you've learned about risk-taking and risk management. Describe those lessons in your own words. Or find images that remind you of those lessons.
2. Invite a small group in your organization to gather for a conversation about what risk-taking and risk management mean in your organization. Share your lessons and invite others to react with their perspectives.

How To Do This or How I Built This

Identify something in the risk realm you've learned how to do or something you've created from scratch (or scraps!). Such as: recruit diverse team members of your organization to join a risk committee, present a compelling risk report to an Audit Committee, help a colleague identify or evaluate potential risk mitigation strategies, or update a risk policy to eliminate mixed messages. You get it! Create a "How To Do This" slide deck consisting of 10 slides or less. Use images and short phrases on your slides; avoid complete sentences and never put more than 50 words on a slide. Rehearse delivering your 'how to' presentation. Ready? Invite yourself to a virtual meeting using your preferred video communications tool. Open the meeting and hit record. Deliver your "How To Do This" or "How I Built This" presentation. Watch your presentation and jot down ideas to improve it.

Seize Learning Moments

I serve on a nonprofit board that begins every board gathering with a 'mission moment.' As a group, we reflect on the organization's mission and its relevance in today's world. I love how it sets the tone for the governance work to come. Consider adding a risk learning moment to the beginning of meetings you lead. Dedicate the first 5 minutes to share an idea. Share something you've learned from reading, doing, or a valuable lesson from a near miss or an epic fail. Encourage the team to reflect on how this lesson can inspire changes in your approach to risk management.

Be Bold

Push beyond your comfort zone and make lofty goals to advance your skills as a risk teacher. I challenge you to make a resolution to deliver 12 workshops during the next 12 months. Vow that each session will be a true original and develop the presentation and supporting materials from your own experience as a risk leader. What lessons have you learned that were the most impactful? Share these ideas and concepts; resist the temptation to recycle someone else's content.

As I reflect on the consulting engagements my team leads, two types come to mind:

1. The first is a project where, as consultants, we are expected to do or deliver something. Often, it's in response to a suggestion from a board member that the organization retain a third party to conduct a risk assessment or an ERM review.
2. The second type of project is where the client wants the NRM team to teach them how to evolve their approach to risk management.

Although we dutifully complete the first type, we often worry that our hard work may end up on a shelf. However, with the second type of project, we get excited and relish those learning moments. We can often see the 'ah ha' moments as our clients begin to think about how concepts and techniques can be adapted and utilized in their unique situations. These projects are reciprocal. The organizations we support learn a skill and develop sustainable capabilities that will serve their risk management program for years to come. The NRM team experiences the discipline from a novel perspective, allowing us to appreciate the beauty that results from

a program grounded in adaptability and resilience.

Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your calls and emails about your journey to becoming a risk teacher as well as a risk leader or questions about NRMCC's educational and consulting offerings at 703.777.3504 or Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org.