

Uncertainty is My Constant Companion



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My travels during the first half of Summer included a wonderful trip to New England. In addition to missing the oppressive heat wave in the DC area, the trip provided a perfect opportunity to ride my 1964 Norton Electra, which is garaged at the home of an experienced mechanic (I can almost hear the snickering of readers who prefer less finicky motorcycle pedigrees).

As I rode through the beautiful towns of Falmouth and Woods Hole I was able to experience many of the common dangers facing motorcyclists, including: distracted drivers unfamiliar with the area; beach-goers darting across the road to reach the sand and surf; roads in serious need of repair; and random areas of water or sand in my lane of travel. I safely navigated the human and natural obstacles and was able to truly enjoy the ride. Within minutes after I began thinking that the journey couldn't be any more enjoyable, my classic bike stalled. Attempts to re-start the bike were futile.

As I sat and waited for a rescue (my favorite English bike mechanic), I laughed about the timing of my conclusion that all was right with the world. I pondered how circumstances and perspective can change in an instant. But isn't that exactly how things often go in organizational life? Just when your nonprofit's programs and services are running without incident, something happens to remind you that that the only thing for certain is uncertainty.

That continuing, inescapable uncertainty is what makes the discipline of risk management relevant, compelling, and never boring. And it's why leaders of some of the nation's most respected nonprofit organizations are looking at risk management in a whole new light these days. Risk management is finally moving out of the narrow confines of the administrative function and into the wide open spaces of governance, service delivery, partnerships, growth strategies and more. Conversations about risk, risk appetite, and risk management are seeping into board strategic planning sessions and the brainstorming sessions of the resource and business development teams. Leaders are recognizing that risk management isn't something added to one employee's job description: developing risk awareness requires many sets of eyes and ears, and fine-tuning loss control and risk strategy may take a small village.

Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your ideas about any risk management topic, tips on coaxing a stalled motorcycle back to life, and questions about the Center's resources at Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org or 703.777.3504. The Center provides risk management

tools and resources at [www.https://nonprofitrisk.org/](https://nonprofitrisk.org/) and offers [consulting assistance](#) to organizations unwilling to leave their missions to chance.