

Learning from Loss: Risk Management Wisdom May Be Close at Hand



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Resource Type: Risk eNews

Topic: General

I have had the opportunity to participate in many programs that showcase “great ideas” emanating from success. In one instance, I served on the selection committee for an awards program that recognizes excellent management techniques. Representatives of the “finalists” for the award share their management innovations in a workshop. The most recent workshop drew leaders from 400 nonprofits! I also try to attend an annual conference sponsored by a large association that showcases “great ideas” in leading organizations. Each year I’ve attended this event I’ve left the conference with a handful of ideas ready to implement at NRMCC, and others I will store away for use at a future date. All of us want to be in the presence of “winners” and soak up their wisdom and insights.

Successful programs—whether in our own nonprofits or others—offer valuable ideas. But there are also ideas hidden in the losses and failures we experience. With regard to great risk management ideas, failure and loss are a potential treasure trove of information that can make our nonprofits stronger, more effective, and ultimately more resistant to avoidable loss in the future.

Learning from loss is one of the themes explored by a former Risk Summit keynote speaker, Tori Murden McClure. Tori’s book, [*A Pearl in the Storm: How I Found My Heart in the Middle of the Ocean*](#), chronicles her two attempts to become the first woman and the first American to row a boat alone across the Atlantic Ocean. When I first began reading her book, I expected that the author would devote many of the pages to her triumphant arrival on the other side. Before long, I found that the opposite was true. The most compelling narrative in the book (which is a page-turner from start to finish!) chronicles Tori’s coping with adversity. She tells fascinating stories about fixing mechanical equipment on which she depends (e.g. the desalinator that removes dissolved solids from salt water in order to produce drinkable water) and chronicles her recovery from a wide variety of capsizes (who knew that there is more than one way to capsize in a rowboat!).

Conquering adversity is not only a valuable source of inspiration and confidence in the moment, but it prepares us with both *knowledge* and *attitudes* to anticipate the next potential loss. In the case of our keynoter, she had no one to blame for her adversity in the middle of the Atlantic... what a refreshing thought! What if nonprofit leaders always took adversity as an opportunity to learn and spent little time, energy, or effort in looking for the party responsible. Tori’s message is an object lesson in how to cope and *learn* from the unanticipated losses we

all experience. Every nonprofit leader can draw inspiration and skills from her compelling story.

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