

Mind the Gap



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Readers who have been to a “tube” station in London will instantly recognize the title of today’s essay on risk. Introduced in 1969 on the London Underground, “Mind the Gap” signs were posted to warn riders to exercise care when stepping over the varying-in-size gap that exists between the station platform and the train. The phrase is now used in transit systems worldwide from Singapore to Stockholm.

While waiting for a mechanic to finish routine maintenance on my Mini Cooper this morning I heard a promo for TV coverage of the 2012 Olympic Games. The mention of London reminded me of the simple, but effective “Mind the Gap” signs I’ve seen on my trips across the pond, and led me to ponder the frequent “gaps” that go unnoticed and therefore unattended in risk management programs.

While pondering strategies for increasing the winning percentage (or sustaining the winning streak!) of your risk management program, ask whether the following gaps may be present:

- A gap between the intent of your volunteer policies... and your volunteers’ understanding of those policies.
- A gap between the knowledge required to provide thoughtful fiscal oversight... and the demonstrated fiscal literacy of your current board. *Hint:* if board members don’t ask any questions when the Finance Committee delivers its report, the word “gap” is probably an understatement.
- A gap between your proudly proclaimed commitment to safety... and your track record of injuries, accidents and near misses.
- A gap between the 100% participation target for your staff and volunteer training, and actual attendance at “required” education sessions.
- A gap between your lofty statement expressing a “commitment to transparency” and your willingness to let stakeholders peek behind the organizational curtain of secrecy.
- A gap between your resolution to “adopt best practices in youth protection” and your track record of reaching out for help to implement best-in-class program design, screening, training and supervision.
- A gap between your intent to embrace “enterprise risk management” and the narrow scope of your silo-based, operational risk management program.
- A gap between your statement, that “our most important assets are our people” and staff morale.
- A gap between your avowed “trust in employees” and your inclination to micromanage them.
- A gap between your resolve to “hire the best and the brightest” and your compensation and benefits package.
- A gap between nonprofit sector and risk management industry “best practices” and business as usual.

Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your ideas about any risk management topic, suggestions for simple but clever warning signs, 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.