

Popcorn Anyone? Risk in the Movies



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This week we read a wonderful article published by the [American Bar Association](#) about how trial stories are sometimes inspired by movie plots. It caused us to reminisce about a few personal, “ah-ha” moments while watching films on the big screen. Here are a few favorite film quotes, with the risk themes and lessons we associate with each:

Lincoln: *“A compass, I learned when I was surveying, it’ll... it’ll point you True North from where you’re standing, but it’s got no advice about the swamps and deserts and chasms that you’ll encounter along the way. If in pursuit of your destination, you plunge ahead, heedless of obstacles, and achieve nothing more than to sink in a swamp... What’s the use of knowing True North?”* — Abraham Lincoln

Risk Lesson: Lincoln’s observation about a compass is a wonderful reminder that a board that focuses solely on the direction it is headed, with disregard to risk, is needlessly vulnerable to the obstacles that certainly line the path to that vision. Boards must be visionary and strategic, yet remain grounded in seeking to understand and circumvent the challenges that it may be impossible to avoid.

Hitch: *“Life is not the amount of breaths you take. It’s the moments that take your breath away.”* — Hitch

Risk Lesson: This sweet sentiment can be interpreted in so many different ways. One way is as a reminder that the mission of an entity should not be measured by the risks it avoids or by the challenges it skirts, but rather by the risks it embraces to change the lives of human beings and protect the planet on which we all reside. Embrace risk management in order to help your entity take more risk than you avoid.

Along Came Polly: *“It’s not about what happened in the past, or what you think might happen in the future. It’s about the ride... And you know what... when you least expect it... something great might come along. Something better than you even planned for.”* — Irving Feffer

Risk Lesson: Reuben Feffer, an overly anxious risk manager, is given helpful advice from his father Irving. Reuben learns the lesson that you can’t control everything. By relinquishing some control, your narrow perspective might expand, allowing you to take advantage of new opportunities.

Terminator: “I’ll be back.” — The Terminator

Risk Lesson: The Terminator is denied entry into a police station where Sarah Connor is hiding. He tells the police officer he will be back. Moments later, the Terminator drives a car into the police station. The lesson is that the potential for downside risk rarely disappears altogether, no matter how desperately you want it to. There’s always a possibility of an action or event that could ruin your day or impair your mission. Preparation, not wishful thinking, is the key to fortifying an entity’s mission.

Jurassic Park: “John, the kind of control you’re attempting simply is... it’s not possible. If there is one thing the history of evolution has taught us it’s that life will not be contained. Life breaks free, it expands to new territories and crashes through barriers, painfully, maybe even dangerously...” — Dr. Ian Malcom

AND

“You never had control, that’s the illusion! I was overwhelmed by the power of this place. But I made a mistake, too, I didn’t have enough respect for that power and it’s out now.” — Dr. Ellie Sattler

Risk Lesson: John Hammond, the creator of Jurassic Park, implements elaborate controls to keep guests safe, yet one greedy employee brings the whole system crashing down. The lesson is that overconfidence is dangerous, and complex controls sometimes offer you a false sense of security.

The Matrix: “You take the blue pill... the story ends; you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. If you take the red pill, you stay in wonderland a little bit longer; and I show you just how deep this rabbit hole goes.” — Morpheus

Risk Lesson: Neo takes the red pill to depart the Matrix and enter the real world. The lesson is that human beings can’t predict the future. You will never have enough information to guess exactly how risk-taking or risk-avoidance will turn out. Sometimes you have to rely on a gut feeling. Would Neo have taken the red pill if he knew what chaos lay ahead?

Braveheart: “Every man dies. Not every man really lives.” — William Wallace

Risk Lesson: William Wallace refuses to confess to treason for leading the Scots in a war against English rule. Wallace submits to torture and death rather than quitting the fight for freedom. The lesson is that sometimes the biggest risk is worth the payoff. Always be ready to take a risk if it means advancing your mission.

Lion King: “Oh yes, the past can hurt. But from the way I see it, you can either run from it, or... learn from it.” — Rafiki

Risk Lesson: Simba spends years avoiding the repercussions of his tumultuous past, but later learns an important lesson from the wise baboon, Rafiki. Simba then resolves to face his past and take his rightful place as king of Pride Rock. The lesson is that you should never bury risks or past mistakes. Bring the past to light and encourage thoughtful reflection on risk events, near-misses, and other challenges. Facing the past will empower your entity to grow in the future.

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