

You Never Know



By Melanie Lockwood Herman

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I listen to a music-only radio station during my commute to and from NRMC. During a recent ride home, I was struck and inspired by the lyrics of *Around the Corner*, written by Milan Miller and Thomm Jutz, performed by Terry Baucom and the Dukes of Drive.

The song begins with a phrase that could be the prophetic intro or poignant closing line of any nonprofit's *risk playbook*: "You never know what's waiting around the corner." That line captures what nonprofit teams around the globe face, and the 'why' behind the work [our team](#) at NRMC does every day.

The lyric reminded me of the impossible, recent ask of a nonprofit leader: "We want your team to identify the risks none of us have thought of." Hmm. Does that sound like the ideal assignment for an outsider? Perhaps not. Striving to identify, document and sort the risks 'no one' has ever thought of may feel deceptively productive. But who among us knows 'what's waiting around the corner'?

The more productive path is realistic and practical: ponder and identify a short list of potentially disruptive possibilities. Conduct that exercise with humility, not hubris. Remind yourself that your scripted scenarios probably won't unfold the way—or according to the timetable—you imagine.

"You never know what's waiting around the corner

But when you hear the call

You rise to the day, and move along your way

That's the beauty of it all"

Nonprofit teams across our sector in the U.S. and around the world are doing just that. Hearing the call and rising to meet the day. Whatever that day holds. And in advance? Reflecting on the practical, reasonable, affordable steps we can all take to get ready. To be ready for any obstacle to delivering our mission and objectives: the beating heart and circulatory system that make everything else we do possible.

At NRMC, we bear witness to the beauty of the nonprofit sector: the deep commitments, abiding passions, and risk-aware decisions that infuse strength, opportunity, and hope in families and communities. Every day we see

risk management professionals step up and into a stance of thoughtful readiness to engage ‘what’s just around the corner’.

I recently watched an interview of a young musician who seemed to flinch when asked by a journalist about what his music meant. He replied, “That’s not up to me.” I think what I love most about artistic expression is how it makes me feel: untethered and truly free to imagine what it might mean.

*Melanie Lockwood Herman is executive director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. Her new book, **[Possibilities: A Risk Management Guide for Nonprofit Teams](#)** is available in ePub and paperback formats. Her new white paper, **Manage Risk With Intention This Year** is available [here](#). She invites you to listen to a beautiful performance of Around the Corner [here](#) and welcomes your questions and the opportunity to connect—about any possibility—facing your organization at Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org or 703-777-3504.*