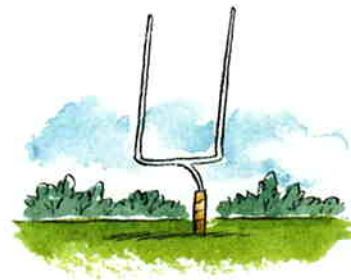




GamePlan Strategic Planning



Risky Business

It's hard to get ahead if you don't take risks, yet easy to make a blunder if you do. A pair of expert risk-takers explain how to find the right balance.

By Jon Wee & Owen Morse

To succeed in athletic administration today, you have to take risks. You need to step out of the norm and try something new to stand out and make your constituents take notice. At the same time, however, you don't want to do something that is unwise. In other words, you need to balance the benefits of taking a risk (the possibility of success) with the negative aspects of a risk (the potential for failure).

Think of risk as a juggling routine. As professional jugglers, every time we throw something in the air, there is a risk we might not catch it. But in order to wow our audiences, we must add new and exciting items to our repertoire. So while it would certainly be safer not to juggle chain saws and flaming torches, we have to take the risk and juggle such items in order to be different and rise to the top of our profession. The same applies to you.

Even though your risk does not involve juggling razor-sharp daggers, it may be

just as dangerous. To minimize the negatives inherent in any risk, consider taking the following steps:

Prepare for the risk: As jugglers, we prepare for risks by practicing new routines. If you're going to try something new, do your homework and make sure your skills are up to par. For example, if you're launching a corporate sponsorship campaign that depends on skilled salespeople making face-to-face visits, but don't have anyone on staff who is great at in-person sales, you're setting yourself up for failure. That's why you need to do a thorough analysis of your department's attributes prior to launching the new initiative.

Preparation can also involve reading books, taking classes, or doing role-playing to hone your skills. Do whatever you must to become an expert in the risk's topic. That way, when you throw that ball in the air, you're prepared to catch it.

Be ready with Plan B: Before you take a risk, it pays to have a few contingency

plans. Detail what negatives could result from the risk. If any of those should happen, what would you do? If you've ever watched a good juggling routine, you'll notice that when the jugglers drop something, they always have a funny line that makes the audience laugh and takes the attention away from the dropped item. Those funny lines usually aren't improvised.

Throw the ball: While preparation is certainly important, be careful not to get stuck in "prep mode." Realize that if you wait until everything seems perfect, chances are you'll never take action.

When jugglers perform a new routine in front of an audience for the first time, they never feel as if they've prepared enough. Even if they take all the basic safety precautions, they're never going to be totally comfortable performing something on stage until after they've done it a few dozen times.

Fortunately, you learn a lot from throwing that first ball. You discover which elements are working and which aren't, and then you can decide what you need to do to minimize the risk. For example, even though you've rehearsed word for word your speech to the booster club about a change in policy, once you're actually in front of the group, your message may need to take a different direction, depending on their reaction. Prepare as well as you can, but realize that things could go differently than you expect.

Jugglers and consultants Jon Wee and Owen Morse, also known as "The Passing Zone," have been awarded five Guinness World

Records for juggling. They have also helped to improve the teamwork, time management, and work-life balance at such corporations as IBM, McDonald's, and Forbes. They can be reached at: www.passingzone.com.





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If you feel yourself getting stuck in "prep mode," assess the situation, and tell yourself that it's impossible to get into a total comfort zone with a new endeavor until you take the plunge. When jugglers have a routine they're nervous about, they often "sandwich" the new material between two other routines that they

For example, if you're launching a new ad campaign for ticket sales, don't ignore the tried-and-true methods for attracting fans. Keep the successful methods going strong while you test out the new idea. If the new campaign flops and your risk doesn't pan out, the traditional methods will still be in place.

than you, so be sure to get their opinion on your progress.

If jugglers are dropping things on stage, they know they have a problem (and so does everyone else). What does a problem look like in your risk scenario? Any risk requires constant analysis during and after the event. Only then can you learn from your risk, fine-tune your process, and reap the full rewards of trying something new.

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Play with fire: The most important thing about risk is simply being willing to take one. If everyone operated solely in their safety zone, there would be no amazing advances in the world. Doing things that are creative, different, and interesting is a lot more fun than playing it safe. And the potential rewards are a lot higher. Doing what's easy is a recipe for mediocrity and boredom.

know are strong. When you take action on your risk, piggyback the new item on something your department does well. Keep your program's strengths in the forefront so that if something doesn't go well with the new initiative, you can always shift the focus back to what you know works.

Constantly analyze your progress: Both during and after your new venture, analyze the situation. What worked? What didn't work? What met your expectations? What surprised you? What would you have done differently? What feedback are outsiders giving you? Outside people often see things very differently

Those who are willing to try something new or difficult are the ones who make a real difference in the world. So be bold. Take that risk you've been thinking about. When you do, you'll be the one who gets noticed—and who reaps the resulting rewards.

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