

Leadership on Trial:
Lessons from The Apprentice

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CHAPTER TWO

LESSON ONE: TAKE RISKS

“Would I do it again? Absolutely!” —Heidi Bressler

With all it took for Heidi to compete on *The Apprentice*, she would do it again in a heartbeat. Heidi takes risks. You cannot succeed in business without taking them. What does this mean? It means that there will always be unknowns involved in business situations. You have to get comfortable with the possibility of loss. If you strive for absolute certainty or safety, you are doomed.

How do you get comfortable with risk? Start by assessing your own tolerance. What level of certainty or safety do you need to have? Here are several questions to consider.

In what areas can you tolerate no risk?

How comfortable are you with uncertainty?

What are you willing to risk in order to succeed?

What support structure do you need in order to risk?

What do you gain by increasing your tolerance for risk?

If you are afraid to risk, what is at the root of your fear?

How can you increase your tolerance for risk?

Risk is inherent in every aspect of *The Apprentice*. Starting with the competition to be selected for the show, candidates must con-

vince producers and casting agents they are smart, aggressive, and better than the rest. In order to stand out, they have to distinguish themselves, sometimes looking very foolish. If they are chosen for the show, they must quit their jobs, for a 1:16 chance that they will succeed among a very talented group of candidates. Then, once the show begins, they must compete for Donald Trump and his staff in front of millions of viewers. As the field of candidates narrows, their skills are on trial and they are in the spotlight. I call this risk! You cannot become “The Apprentice” without embracing a series of risks. That’s the bottom line.

What risks have you taken in your career and place of work? Many? A few? What has resulted from the risks you have taken? How have these experiences shaped your views regarding taking risks? Begin to define what your comfort zone is.

In the final competition of the first season of *The Apprentice*, we had a glimpse of Kwame’s comfort zone as he dealt with Omarosa. Omarosa did not perform or keep Kwame adequately informed on the project. Kwame voiced his frustration with her, but said he could not fire her. Kwame explained that he was used to a work environment where people performed. Later, as Bill was chosen over Kwame as The Apprentice, Donald Trump asked Kwame why he didn’t fire Omarosa. Kwame responded that he didn’t know that was an option. Kwame did not step out of his comfort zone and it hurt him.

Once you know the boundaries of your comfort zone, begin to expand it. How can you do this? By taking risks. Start small, if you like. If you are uncomfortable with promoting yourself, step a bit outside of your comfort zone and tell someone of a success you have. If you are shy about promoting your ideas, speak up in meetings and to your superiors about what you think. As you do this, you will get more comfortable. Your comfort zone will begin to expand.

Then, begin to study risk. Observe people in your workplace. Try to define the elements of their comfort zone.

What level of risk are they comfortable with?

What seems to bring them out of their comfort zone?

Take it a step further and study leaders who have taken risks. (You could even start with Donald Trump, who has taken many risks and won and lost more than a few times!)

Note their qualities.

What motivated them to take the risks they did?

What price did they pay for taking the risks?

What rewards did they reap?

How did they prepare for taking risks?

Were they impetuous or calculating?

As you study risk-takers, which ones appeal most to you? Why?

How can you apply what you learn about them to your own life?

How can their stories help you develop a higher tolerance for risk?

Use their experiences to inform your own risk taking.

Now you have a foundation from which to begin taking risks in your career and workplace. Here are some tips to help you start.

Be Bold

Goethe put it this way: “Whatever you can do or dream, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.” To be bold you are daring, somewhat fearless, you are conspicuous, you stand out, and you are assured and confident. It is the nature of success in the workplace that you must stand out. People have to see you. You must distinguish yourself. This is not always a comfortable thing for people. That’s okay. You can acquire boldness.

Boldness creates wins on *The Apprentice*. In a task involving Trump Taj Mahal Hotel and Casino, the teams were asked to increase the casino’s revenue by creating a game. Bill’s team won that competition by being bold. Bill secured exclusive rights to escort V.I.P. gamblers from their special check-in line to his team’s promotional area. Bill had nerve to think he could negotiate such a deal. It worked.

Let’s look at some questions you can ask yourself about being bold. They are: Are you ready to be bold? What does it take? How do

you find the courage to go beyond your comfort zone? How do you respond when you fall? And what are the rewards when you win?

Are You Ready to be Bold?

Boldness holds an allure for all of us. The limitations come when we set out to be bold. If you find yourself reticent to step into your boldness, here are a few things you can do: know where you are, be realistic but not restricting, and look at the rewards of being bold.

Know Where You Are

To know where you are, define your starting point. Take an inventory of your current situation. Look at your skills, your background, your location, your network, and your opportunities. This is what you start with. As you go on with your plans, you can use your starting point as a reference for where you are and what you need to pursue a goal. To experiment, pick a goal you have and measure it against your starting point. What is missing? What do you need to do to meet that goal?

What are the rewards of risk-taking?

higher stakes
challenge
growth
winning

Be Realistic, but not Restricting

When it comes to boldness, this is a delicate balance. Restriction and boldness are opposites. But, you don't want your boldness to be foolhardy. Assess where you are against where you want to be. Allow your goals to be bold. The realism is in the planning. On *The Apprentice*, candidates have limited time to complete tasks. They want to be bold and they want to win. But their boldness must fit into the time period. What can they do with what they have? What are the boldest possible moves available to them?

Look at the Rewards of Being Bold

What better way to motivate than to see the rewards that are possible? When you are bold, you can realize your dreams. So, if you have a reticence about being bold, take some time to look at the rewards it can bring. Do some daydreaming. See your dream as realized. How has your life changed? What was available to you then that is not available now? Let these rewards become a motivator for your boldness.

Once you've tried these things, I hope you are ready to be bold. Jump in. Give it a shot.

What Does it Take?

Being bold takes commitment. First, you must focus. Identify what you need to do and stick to it. You must establish strong intent. You will do this no matter what. It is a priority. Boldness takes guts; muster the courage to do it. Humor helps so keep a sense of humor as you risk and learn.

Most of all, boldness requires movement. Take action. There is no substitute. And after you start, keep going. When you reach obstacles push through them. Get the support you need, but, stay in action. Don't stop the movement. Strong influences can deter you but if you stop, you may not resume again. See it through. Give up your excuses and act.

How Do You Find the Courage to Step Beyond Your Comfort Zone?

Courage is really about strength in the face of challenge, doubt, and stress. If you develop strength, you will find the courage to be bold. You must find the source of your strength. It could lie in commitment. Or, it could lie in faith. Or it could lie in endurance or tenacity. Think of times that you have been

How can I overcome fear?

commitment
preparation
knowledge
nurturing

courageous. Where did you pull your strength from? Sometimes you need support to be strong. That's okay. Identify what support you need—a coach, a counselor, a friend, family. Be sure you have that support when you need it.

When I became a coach, I studied presentation skills with an excellent teacher, Jack Barnard. Jack is an actor and taught presentation from that point of view. He took someone like me with no acting skills and threw me into acting exercises. It was very effective. It got me out of my mind and back into the present moment. I could be fully present—mind, body, and spirit. Jack sometimes called himself, “an escort to the edge.” The philosophy behind this was that if he could get people to the edge of their comfort zones, they could expand. By throwing me into the acting exercises, Jack was bringing me way out of my comfort zone. I am persistent. When he got me there I was going to stay. In the third of seven classes, I fell on my face. I froze in the middle of a presentation. But I would not give up. I came back to the fourth class and finished the course successfully. My persistence got me through and gave me courage. When I started the class, I was a bit nervous, but I knew I had to improve my skills. I convinced myself it would be safe. When I got to the edge of my comfort zone, I decided to go on.

Webster's Dictionary defines courage as “mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear or difficulty.” All these adversities could show up as you venture outside your comfort zone. Take some time to develop courage. The lion took the journey in *The Wizard of Oz*. You can too!

How Do You Respond When You Fall?

If you take risks, you will fall. It won't be all the time, but it will be some of the time. So first, accept now that you will experience some falls and failures. Here is a five-step plan to help you when you fall:

Step One: Pick Yourself Up

When you fall, pick yourself up and brush yourself off. Take care

of any wounds you have. If your pride is hurt, soothe it. If you have caused any damage, repair it. Find your equilibrium to begin again. Give yourself the time you need to do this, but keep moving.

Step Two: Identify the Lessons

Once you are standing again, analyze what has happened. Enumerate the lessons that the fall or failure presents. You may have learned that there were flaws in your strategy. You may have learned something about another person. You may have learned how not to do something—that is valuable too! You may have learned that you do not have a skill that you need. Get back in movement by identifying your lessons learned.

Step Three: Give Yourself a Break

At this point, be good to yourself. Remind yourself that if you take risks, you will fail sometimes. Remind yourself that very successful people fail too. Find a way to nurture and be kind to yourself. Ease the negative effects of the fall. Give yourself a present. It may sound funny since you have fallen, but acknowledge yourself for having the courage to try. Acknowledge yourself for what worked. I'm sure that something did.

Step Four: Learn

This is the critical step. Take the first three steps and put them to use. Learn from what has happened. Take the lessons learned and apply them to your future. What will you do differently next time? What do you need to do to prepare for your next move? Do you need more skills? Do you need to rethink your strategy? Do you need to find new people to work with? Really ingrain these lessons in your head. Learning assures a positive result from your failure or fall.

Step Five: Start Again

Here it is again. Get in movement. It is the only way. Find a new project to focus on. Devise a new plan for the same project to succeed this time. Acquire a skill you need. Begin walking again.

What Are the Rewards When You Win?

When you take a risk and succeed you benefit. It feels good. You are happy. The project has brought you specific rewards. Revel in them. Beyond the project, you will experience other rewards. By winning, you have increased your confidence. You are smarter in knowing what it took to get the project done. You have increased your self-knowledge. You know more about how you work well. You have gained insights for the next time you risk. In every aspect, you are a winner.

Be Smart About it

If you want your risks to pay off, be smart. On *The Apprentice* it is a given that all the players are smart. Their smarts go beyond their innate intelligence, their schooling, and their experience to how they handle challenges. The tasks in the show are challenging. As soon as the teams receive them, they must get started. There isn't much time to read up on or change things. Teams have to take what they have, build a strategy, and get going.

In one task, Donald asked the teams to sell the work of an artist in an evening gallery showing. Donald warned the teams that the worth of art is subjective. It is not a cut and dried task. One team was split regarding which artist to promote. Some of the team had not seen the art. Nick, the project manager knew they had to get started. To some of his teammates chagrin, he made the decision himself. He was smart. They got going and Nick's team won. Nick knew he had to act or the team risked falling behind.

In contrast, the other team picked a complex and controversial artist. Some of the team members were not sure of their choice. They suffered for it. In light of the task—that the winner is the team that makes the most money, they made a poor decision and they lost. Donald said they lost because they did not believe in the product they were selling. Not too smart.

To be a player, you have to develop the smarts to back up your risk taking. Here are some factors in being smart: think, prepare, plan, re-think, and complete.

Think

When you decide to take a risk, make sure your brain is in gear. Be in the moment and at your best. When *The Apprentice* candidates get their assignment from Donald, they are on. They bring everything they have to succeeding. They have a lot at stake. Simply in the nature of risk, you have a lot at stake too. When you embark on a risk, engage your brain first.

Look at the whole picture before you.

What is the nature of your risk—what do you stand to win?

What do you stand to lose?

Who are the players?

What is needed to make the risk pay off?

What can stand in the way of your success?

Get smart about what is before you. Know all you can about your subject.

Yes, like the candidates on *The Apprentice*, you may have limited time. But, you still have to be smart. Find out what you can and make the best decisions possible. Put your full focus on what you need to do to maximize your chances of success.

Consider what can go wrong.

How will you handle it?

What do you need to make this work?

There are things you can do to improve how you think about risk. You can study risk. Learn more about the nature of risk. Study risk-takers. Understand what makes you uncomfortable about risk and work at recognizing and eliminating these things, so that you can think clearly. Then, practice. Think about risks you are considering taking. Identify several ways you can approach each risk. For example, if you are considering changing jobs. Create three scenarios for this change. One would be high risk, possibly quitting your current job immediately without a new one in place. The second would be

medium risk, possibly changing fields. The third would be low risk, staying in your current job, until you have a new job in the same field.

To be smart about risk, make sure you think.

Prepare

It took me quite a few years to learn the value of preparation. I would frequently “wing it” in meetings or starting on projects. I would not do this carelessly though; I knew my field. I knew my strengths and weaknesses. I would read the necessary documentation before a meeting. Most times, it would work. Sometimes it wouldn't. But when it didn't, I seldom saw the cause in lack of preparation. I would attribute problems to a person's agenda or something that surprised me.

When I started my first business, I saw that a deeper level of preparation was possible. My business partner was very successful in her career and I saw that she took her preparation far more seriously than I did. She was expert in environmental regulations. If we were meeting with a client, she would study her regulations again, even though she was expert already, with that particular client's needs or situation in mind. She would think out who would be at the meeting and how each could affect the outcome. She would think in advance of things we could offer, ideas, strategies or the like, to meet the client's needs. Although she was already smart and knew her field well, I began to see that her preparation gave her the extra edge that made her so successful.

When you are taking a risk, it is even more important that you prepare. When you are moving out of your comfort zone, it is sometimes easier to misstep. I have a preparation tool that has worked well for my clients when they are taking a risk or going out of their comfort zone. If they are going to a meeting or beginning a task and have fear or concern about how they will do, we use this tool.

The first element is to identify who they are as they undertake the task. I ask them to list how they want the other parties involved to see them. This could be a statement of their credentials, or strengths. For example, they could say, I am a scientist with sixteen years experience, strong communication skills, and high creativity.

The second element is to identify two or three goals they have for the meeting or task. For example, to show the project group I have what it takes and to be asked to join the project as a manager. The purpose of this preparatory task is really to ground the client in who they are, and what they want to accomplish. Often, clients write down the two elements and read them just before the meeting. It focuses them and builds their confidence.

Never underestimate the advantage preparation gives you in undertaking a risk.

“I’ve been working for this my whole life.”

—Bill Rancic, the first Apprentice

Plan

Planning allows you to organize your actions to your advantage. It aids you in thinking out what is before you. When the candidates on *The Apprentice* receive a task from Donald, the first thing they do is plan. They must. They have to organize their team to work effectively towards the goal. They have to set the steps that will get them where they want to go.

As you undertake a risk, develop a plan. Your plan will aid you in thinking out the nuts and bolts of what you must do, who must be involved, and how you will do it. A plan also helps you develop your strategy for winning. As you determine the nuts and bolts of your plan, you will see your strategy emerge and you can evaluate if it will work or if it needs to be fine-tuned. As you develop your plan, you may choose to use one of the many planning tools available. Two examples are software tools with flow charts to help you lay out your ideas and SWOT analysis where you lay out the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats involved.

In the plan, clearly define your goals. What do you want to accomplish? Be specific regarding your goal and how you will get there. Work out the timing, by developing a timeline for the undertaking from start to finish. Develop measures for success. There is a popu-

lar saying that you manage what you measure. What will be your indicators of success? Measures are developed for every step of the plan. They will allow you to determine if you are on track toward success. With measures you have your plan set—you are ready to begin!

Planning can often be overlooked, but not without peril. Sometimes people are so anxious to get started, they do not want to take the time to plan. Some feel you only learn through action. But, planning helps you avoid missteps that could slow you down. There is nothing that says you cannot plan fast and thoroughly. Make the effort to plan and you actually will be streamlining your project. Can you imagine Donald Trump building a skyscraper without a plan?

Re-Think

Now you have started your project; it is underway. As you progress, look back at your plan on at least a weekly basis. Chart your progress on your measures with everyone involved in the project. If you are doing a project on your own, check them yourself. Get trusted colleagues to give you their thoughts on places where you are stuck or not meeting your measures.

It is important to re-think your plan and strategy as you move along. Conditions inevitably change. Surprises arise. Blind adherence to a plan does not serve you. Your plan must be a living, flexible document. You must be adaptable.

Donald Trump may have the best idea for a residential development. Assume he has an excellent plan, outlining every step along the way. One thing he has planned for is approval by the New York City Planning Commission. He knows how the process works and has planned for each step involved. However, community opposition arises to the project in an area that Donald's team did not anticipate. Here is a place where the team will re-think the plan, so that they can move forward towards success. Re-thinking and reorienting allows you to reach your goals whatever happens. You may end up revising your goals, but you have to plan within the context of the real world.

Sometimes, the blows to your project can seem fatal. At that

point, you may see the writing on the wall. Okay, that's life, but you see it and now can decide how to proceed. When Donald gave the candidates a task of managing one shift of a pedicab company, we saw this in action. The team that brought in the most money for an eight-hour shift would win. The Protégé team came up with incentive and pre-paid card programs. Versacorp decided to sell advertising on the back of the pedicabs. At one point in the day, the Protégé team saw one of Versacorp's pedicabs with advertising on the back. They were stunned. Troy said, "We were looking up the ass of a dead dog with fleas!" In the end Versacorp beat Protégé almost ten times over.

Let's hope you do not encounter many fatal blows like this one. But when you do make the best of it. More often, you will encounter situations that require fine-tuning. If your team and you are looking regularly at your plan and charting your progress against your measures, you will have time to adjust your plan and proceed.

As you risk, don't forget the importance of your plan. It is your navigator through calm and stormy weather, and charts your course to success.

Complete

This seems obvious, yes? But, it amazes me how often it is overlooked or given short shrift. On *The Apprentice*, completion is built in. At the end of each task, the two teams go to the boardroom and meet Donald and his team. The progress of each team is given. The winner is identified. Then, the losing team must have a separate meeting with Donald in the boardroom, as the winning team enjoys their prize. In this meeting, Donald and his team review the project and why the team lost. They ask for the team members' views and demand accountability.

You clearly mark the beginning of a project. Now mark the end. It is not just for the sake of doing it. Completion is about fulfillment and bringing to a final state. You do not want to leave loose ends. You want to learn all you can. You want to be done and to move freely to your next project. If you do not complete, any number of things can

happen. You can find something boomerang back to you long after the project is over. You can forget an obligation you did not fulfill in the project or something left undone. You can leave the project without its lessons learned.

Build completion into your plan. Whether you succeed or fail, you must complete. You can even add a debrief. Look at what happened.

What lessons do you learn from it?

What did you do well?

What did you do poorly?

What did/didn't you anticipate?

How will you do things differently in the future?

At the end of your project, tie it up in a very nice bow of analysis, all tasks complete, all good things rewarded, and all that needs it corrected. Then you walk away free.

Completion is your closing. Make it as important as every other step in your plan.

Aim High

Andre Godin said, "The quality of our expectations determines the quality of our actions." What are the expectations of the candidates for *The Apprentice*? From the beginning of the casting calls, every single candidate is aiming high. In my research for this book, I came across a web site prepared by Marty Kotis, an applicant for the second season of *The Apprentice*. The site address was www.realapprentice.com. On the site, Marty made a pitch to be chosen as a candidate. He even had a link to an e-mail, which visitors could send to support his bid! I call that aiming high.

If you are going to take risks, why not go for the best? Aiming high is a trait of true leaders. Donald Trump's father made millions developing real estate in the outlying boroughs of New York City. Donald aimed even higher—he set his sights on Manhattan, the heart of the city. Yes, aiming high increases the positives and negatives of the risks. But, aiming high is not an invitation to be foolhardy. It is an

invitation to believe that you can go for the best.

Here are some questions to consider as you set your sights high.

Can you find a good reason not to aim high?

What holds you back from aiming high?

What do you gain by aiming high?

What do you lose by not aiming high?

Give some thought to these questions. Your answers can set you on the path to aiming high. If your answers are negative, do what you need to convert them to positive.

By aiming high, you are believing in yourself. You are telling the world that you matter. Not only will it make a difference in your life, but I bet it will inspire those around you to do the same. Here are some things to consider as you plan to aim high: want the very best, no limits, walk the path step-by-step, and realize that life goes up and down

“I like thinking big. I always have. To me it’s very simple: if you’re going to be thinking anyway, you might as well think big.”

—Donald Trump, *The Art of the Deal*

Want the Very Best

What are your dreams and aspirations? What do you really want in life? That’s the start. Have you allowed yourself to dream? Begin now. Take some time just to dream. Picture the life that will bring you happiness and fulfillment. When Donald Trump describes the style of his buildings, he speaks of his own tastes for bronze and marble and how he loves expansive views. He has built his wants, as well as those of his customers, into his designs. It works. Donald’s buildings are hot commodities in New York City.

In my work, I have learned that I need to spend time daydreaming. The process of visualizing and imagining a good life helps you get in touch with what you want. It gives you a sense of how you will feel when you have it. It helps you define what is best for you. Try doing

some daydreaming. Dream of the things in life: your family life, your career, your friendships, your fun and recreation, and even your philanthropy.

What do you gain by thinking small? Do you have an answer to this question that satisfies you? When you think small, what feeling is this based on? My guess is you will find a diminishment or lack of confidence at the bottom of it. Believing you deserve the very best is not easy for everyone. But, you do deserve the best and the only way to get it is to go for it. Let go of any thinking that does not support your getting the best.

Want the best for others too. That is also a trait of true leaders. Wanting the best for others will make your scope bigger. People will want to follow your leadership. They will see your genuine desire for their betterment. They will support you and work harder for you.

Wanting the very best sets your sights high. It makes all things possible. It stretches you to your highest good. It uses all you have to give. It creates a feeling of contagious optimism. It radiates out to those around you.

So, as you consider aiming high, go for the very best. If you are going to risk at all, why not do it best?

No Limits

As you aim high, I suggest you allow no limits as you begin. Sure, limits will show up along the way. But, if you set limitations in your foundation, it will be very hard to let them go.

I am sure every candidate on *The Apprentice* is going for the top spot. They put their all into being chosen. Can you imagine a candidate saying I will go for number two? I don't think so. There is a limitation. In reality they know that only one is chosen. But this limitation, if accepted, would defeat them. They believe they can do it. They set out with no limits.

What do you need to start out with no limits? Here are some ideas.

Confidence. Believe that you can do it. Believe that your skills, opportunity, help from others, and good fortune will all come together in your favor.

Open Eyes. Begin with your eyes open. Accept the reality of the situation. For example, if you are going for a spot on *The Apprentice* see that there are hundreds of thousands there with you as you start.

Hope. Hope plays here. *Webster's* defines hope as “desire accompanied by expectation or belief in fulfillment.”

A Sense of Possibility. This is a feeling that, no matter the outcome, you are on an adventure. All things are possible and great things may come.

Commitment. This is essential. Nothing is achieved—particularly great things—without commitment.

So, as you set out, allow no limits. Have a good time with it. Picture yourself achieving your goal and the wonderful things that come with it!

Walk the Path Step-by-Step

You have to start somewhere. It is in action that dreams are realized. What is your first step? Identify it and take it. There is tremendous power in your first step.

As your project progresses, take it step-by-step. You cannot avoid this. You may skip a few steps along the way, but most of the steps must be taken to get where you want to go. In the very first task of *The Apprentice*, Donald asked the candidates to sell lemonade. No one was going to win, unless they came together with their team. They were dependent on each other. Once their teams were together they had steps to take to find a location, gather materials, get out there to sell, actually sell, and have a strategy to win. Each step had to be taken and right away. They only had one chance.

In your planning, identify all necessary steps, what you need for each, and who will take them. Look at each step as a building block.

Complete each step well. Identify any additional steps that become necessary and take them. Eliminate any frivolous steps that do not lead to success. Do not allow yourself to detour, stay on the path.

Taking a project step-by-step is not glamorous; it can get a bit boring. But resign to it. Make it as fun an endeavor as you can. Be up about it and look to each step as a challenge. Keep your sights on the end point—step-by-step you will get there.

“I try never to leave myself too exposed.”

—Donald Trump, *The Art of the Deal*

Realize That Life Goes Up and Down

With all this said about aiming high and wanting the best, there is another equal truth. Life goes up and down. It just isn't so that you are always on top. Part of aiming high is knowing that there will be lows. It is a natural movement. Minimize the impact of the lows by realizing they will be there. Do not let the lows define you. Master them and rise.

How will you handle the ups and downs as you reach for the top? I suggest a few things. First, accept that they exist and that you will experience them. Second, see the positives in the lows when they come. What can it teach you? What must you improve to reach the top? How have they increased your knowledge and sharpened your skills? Third, start moving up. Identify what you need to do to get going again. Acknowledge the realities of each low, but get in motion again. Set your view again towards the top. You will get there.

Accept Uncertainty

On *The Apprentice*, each candidate sets out within a myriad of unknowns.

Will they be selected for the show?

What is Donald really looking for?

How will they interact with Donald's staff?

Who will their team members be?

Can they handle the spotlight and the competition?

What will it be like to live together?

What tasks will they be given?

Who will get fired?

Who will win?

If candidates get lost in trying to figure out these uncertainties, they will take precious focus and energy away from performing well on the show. They have to move on and deal with what is before them.

Like it or not, life involves uncertainty. As a society we do our best to avoid it, but it is still there. It is an illusion to think you can control every aspect of your life. In the unknown there can be insecurity or fear. But, the unknown also brings adventure and possibility. It is to your benefit to accept uncertainty.

Why does accepting uncertainty matter? By acknowledging that uncertainty exists, you are accepting a truth. If you try to deny its existence, you will spend much effort building a fortress of security that will not work. If you fear the unknown, it begins to control you. You build your life around denying its existence. You seek security and try to avoid change.

Allowing that uncertainty exists is living life within its true meaning. You treasure what you have. You accept that you do not know your future. You do your best to create stability, but you allow for change and the unexpected in your life—you do your best to prepare for it. It may not be an ideal existence, but you are living in the truth of what is.

In accepting uncertainty, you see life as it is and can make your judgments accordingly. As you take a risk, you can acknowledge the presence of uncertainty and do your best to deal with it. You can build strategies to minimize the negative effects of uncertainty. You can build assumptions to make the best decision possible.

To lead well and gain the confidence of those around you, you must know how to handle uncertainty. Now we will discuss some things you can do. They are: get comfortable with the unknown, set your assumptions, find support, and accept its presence.

“The unknown is what is. And to be frightened of it is what sends everybody scurrying around chasing dreams, illusions, war, peace, love, hate, all that. Unknown is what is. Accept that it’s unknown and it’s plain sailing.”

—John Lennon

Get Comfortable With the Unknown

Find a way to enjoy the ride. If the unknown won’t go away, you might as well find a way to deal with it. The unknown can be exciting. In the face of the unknown anything is possible. Ask yourself what can happen now, what might the unknown bring, and what possibilities are now open to me. As a risk-taker, think of the advantages you will have if you are comfortable with the unknown. Think of the stress and anxiety you will be saving yourself from.

Start getting comfortable by examining the presence of the unknown in your life today. Are there unknowns in your work life? What are they? Some examples may be that your company is downsizing and everyone’s future is uncertain, uncertainties may exist in the economy or your market sector that could affect your business, or a parent or child is ill and you may have to devote a serious amount of time to their care. These examples can create stress and anxiety, understandably. In examining unknowns, there can also be exciting situations such as you’ve just been offered a fabulous new job that you will have to prove yourself in, you are beginning to find your passion and are not sure where to go with it, or there’s a possibility of getting a contract for your business that dwarfs what you have gotten so far. Knowing what unknowns exist helps your comfort level with them.

Adopt a philosophy about the unknown that works for you. You may decide on a philosophy that you will accept the unknown, but will do your best to deal effectively within it. Or, you may develop a philosophy that says you will not let fear of the unknown get the better of you. Find your comfort level with the unknown and get on with life.

One thing that may help your comfort level is to acknowledge

what the unknown teaches you. You can use its lessons in decision-making and risk-taking. Bottom line: make the best of it.

Set Your Assumptions

In the face of uncertainty, prepare the best you can. If you are sailing around the world, weather presents great uncertainties. So, you make sure you have extra sails, good navigational instruments, and excellent communication systems. As you face uncertainty, you can improve your situation by developing the assumptions upon which you will proceed. Assumptions are statements that at the present time, appear to be true. In our sailing example, your assumption is that a storm may arise, so you prepare for it.

When I worked at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, my division was responsible for decisions regarding whether to take certain pesticides off the market. Our decisions could have significant environmental and economic impacts. We frequently had to make decisions based on conflicting scientific studies. Two studies looking at the same pesticide would have differing conclusions regarding its health effects. As we prepared our decision documents, a great deal of time was spent in developing our assumptions. These assumptions would lead to our decision. If our decision was challenged, much of the ensuing discussion focused on the assumptions the agency made. I ran a policy unit in the division. One of our major projects was to write a policy paper on how we could make effective decisions in the midst of uncertainty. Our assumptions became the backbone of our decisions when irrefutable facts were not available.

Once you have developed your assumptions, proceed based on them. Adjust accordingly if an assumption is proven false. Develop skill in identifying your assumptions and you will have an effective ally to help you deal with uncertainty.

Find Support

With all my promoting of accepting uncertainty, I do recognize that it is not easy. So, as you proceed get some support. Delving into

the unknown is a hero's journey. You deserve allies and guidance along the way. Here are several things you can do.

Read

Find books about dealing with the unknown. Books about dealing with your fears are appropriate too. Reading will give you guidance along the way.

Friends

Find friends who will support you as you take risks and confront the unknown. This can be personal friends, colleagues, coaches, or professional mentors. Have someone to talk to about how you feel. Accept the guidance of those who have walked the path before you. Value their insights regarding what you are facing.

Spiritual Teachings

There is a spiritual aspect of facing the unknown. Through a religion, a spiritual community, or a spiritual teacher, form your foundation of faith to face the unknown. Or perhaps, support is gained in your faith in yourself. Build that faith.

Nurture

In times of stress or moving out of your comfort zone, increase your self-nurturing. This is essential. Fear or discomfort with the unknown can wear you down. However you nurture yourself, do it more.

Accept its Presence

How do you truly accept that uncertainty exists in your life? It is not an easy task. Here are some ways to begin.

Allow that there are things you do not know.

Accept that these things can affect your life and the lives of those who are dear to you.

Identify what you can do to ease any fear you have around uncertainty.

Resolve to face uncertainty in your life in the best possible way.

By acknowledging that uncertainty exists, you free yourself from fear. At times, you may still be afraid. But, you will be living life in its truth. There is no better choice.

RECAP

Be bold. Allow yourself to step out of your comfort zone.

Be smart about it. Think everything out, prepare, and then jump.

Aim High. Want the very best. Do not let anything limit you.

Accept Uncertainty. Get comfortable with the unknown.

EXERCISES

1. Select a task that is given on *The Apprentice*. Identify the inherent risks in the task. Create three ways to approach the task—high, medium, and low risk. For each approach, identify what you need to make it a win.
2. Pick a candidate on *The Apprentice*. Create an imaginary scenario of how that person found the courage to apply to be on the show.
3. Prepare for a hot air balloon trip around the world. Analyze the risks involved, and how you will handle them.

