

## Risk Taking and Disequilibrium

"How good it is to center down!  
To sit quietly and see one's self pass by!  
The streets of our minds seethe with endless traffic;  
Our spirits resound with clashings, with noisy silences,  
While something deep within hungers and thirsts for  
the still moment and the resting lull.  
With full intensity we seek, ere the quiet passes, a  
fresh sense of order in our living;  
A direction, a strong sure purpose that will structure  
our confusion and bring meaning in our chaos."  
*Howard Thurman quoted in Arthur Ashes' book Days of Grace*

"In organizations, we typically struggle against the environment, seeing it as the source of disruption and change. We tend to insulate ourselves from it as long as possible in an effort to preserve the precious stability we have acquired." *Margaret Wheatley*

From Surfing the Edge of Chaos:

*"Equilibrium is the precursor of death. When a living system is in a state of equilibrium, it is less responsive to changes occurring around it. This places it at maximum risk."*

*"In the face of threat, or when galvanized by a compelling opportunity, living things move toward the edge of chaos. This condition evokes higher levels of mutation and experimentation, and fresh new solutions are more likely to be found."*

*"When this excitation takes place, the components of living systems self-organize and new forms and repertoires emerge from the turmoil."*

*"Living systems cannot be directed along a linear path. Unforeseen consequences are inevitable. The challenge is to disturb them in a manner that approximates the desired outcome."*

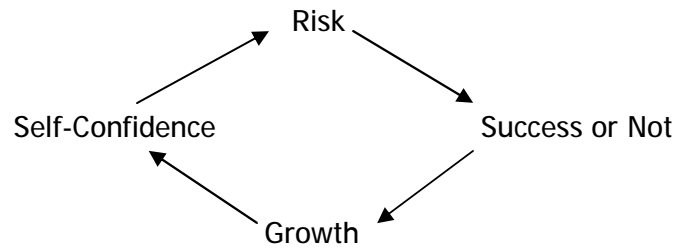
## Risk Taking

"The interval between the decay of the old and formation and establishment of the new, constitutes a period of transition which must always necessarily be one of uncertainty, confusion, error and wild and fierce enthusiasm." *John C. Calhoun*

Moving from the old to the new requires taking some calculated risks, living with the chaos of uncertainty and disequilibrium, and making some errors along the way.

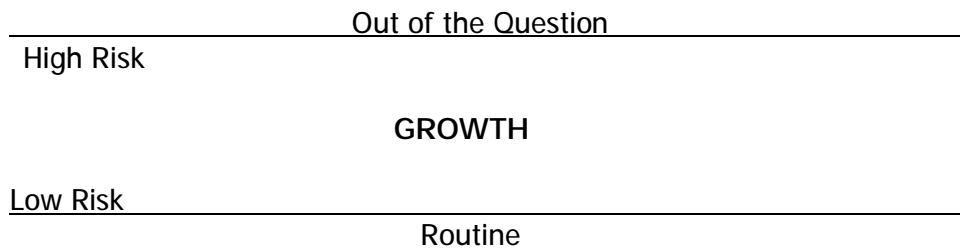
"Yes, risk-taking is inherently failure prone. Otherwise, it would be called sure-thing-taking." *Tim McMahon as quoted in Reader's Digest, April 1995.*

**Risk Taking Cycle:**



The cycle begins with a risk.  
This leads to success or not success (better known as failure).  
In either case there is growth. Successes and failures both lead to growth.  
Growth leads to self-confidence. Now I know more about what works and what doesn't work.  
This makes the next risk a bit easier to take.

**Risk Taking Band:**



In what areas of your personal or organizational life are you living on the edge, taking risks and experiencing growth? In what areas of your life would you like to grow? Why and how? What risks may you need to take in order to move toward the growth you desire?

“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” *Matt. 28: 18-20*

“Listen with feeling and listen with compassion. Listen with values and listen with concern. Listen for the truth of a thing, not for the power of a thing. Obey what makes your heart more human, not necessarily what makes your position more secure. Listen with a critical ear for the sound of the gospel in everything you do.” *Joan Chittister*

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” *Philippians 4: 6-9*