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Stop Playing It Safe and Start Taking Positive Risks

Are you hiding behind business as usual? It's time to stop!

By Libby Gill

A young woman once called me to discuss her “fear of success,” which she saw as the stumbling block keeping her from starting the photography business she’d fantasized about for years. “What’s the basis of this fear?” I asked her, wondering aloud if she had a problem with money, power, or the ability to help others.

Turns out she didn’t have a fear of success at all. She had a fear of people critiquing her work. As long as she kept her photos to herself, she didn’t have to worry about anyone passing judgment on her talent or technical skill. But if she took the risk of sharing her photographs with potential clients or agents, she faced possible rejection. Of course, withholding her work also meant she was destined to have a hobby instead of a career.

“What’s the worst that can happen?” I challenged her. “If you take center stage, people will applaud or throw tomatoes. Assuming they respond at all, that is, since most people are far less interested in us than we are in ourselves. Either way, you get a step closer to your goal.” To her credit, she agreed. Today, she’s got a thriving portrait photography business.

Kathy H. an author from Florida wrote me, raising a similar issue. She asked:

"How do successful people handle the criticism that comes with being in the limelight? Promoting our businesses and creative projects through the various media opportunities available to us today - Internet blogs, TV and radio – exposes us to the negative side of becoming known. Can you give us some tips for getting out of our comfort zones and into these unfriendly waters?"

Successful people may worry about being criticized, Kathy, but they don’t let it stop them from taking risks. That’s what makes them successful. They refuse to get stuck in maintenance mode, doing the same old thing day after day, and instead take the necessary risks to propel them forward.

If you're more comfortable playing it safe than taking positive risks, consider the following:

1. Have a personal definition of success. Break your definition down into measurable action goals and monitor your progress along the way. When you can measure your success, other people's criticisms don't have nearly the sting.
2. Assess the downside of each risk. You could get a negative reaction or review, you might fail to land an account or job, or someone might even take a personal dislike to you or your work. Consider the worst possible scenario and the likelihood of it happening. Do you really expect that you will completely humiliate yourself and your entire family, get run out of town and be forced to start life anew on a foreign continent?
3. Now look at the upside. What might you gain if you take the risk of getting your work out there? More clients or accounts? A promotion or increase in revenues? Fun and adventure? Doesn't the possible upside significantly outweigh the downside?
4. Toughen up. If you've defined success and you're moving toward it one calculated step at a time, do you really care if not everyone falls in love with you along the way?

*Libby Gill is an executive coach, leadership expert, and international speaker. She is the former head of communications and PR for Sony, Universal, and Turner Broadcasting. Author of award-winning **You Unstuck: Mastering the New Rules of Risk-taking in Work and Life**. Her new book, **Hope IS a Strategy: Leading Through Change, Challenge, and Chaos** will be published in Spring 2018. You can learn more about Libby's work at www.LibbyGill.com or take her career assessment at <http://www.YourCareerQuiz.com>.*

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