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Taking risks an essential part of personal and professional growth

Taking risks is a fundamental part of life. It pushes us to meaningfully learn, grow and adapt and enables society to progress. Risk poses an interesting paradox over time. In our youth, many of us are willing to take risks of all shapes and sizes, sometimes at potentially significant physical, emotional or financial expense. Some call it naiveté, others call it having little to lose.

Over time, we often experience a marked shift in our relationship with risk and how it fits into our lives. Most people become more risk averse as they get older. This is often attributed to the wisdom one gains over the years and life experiences that come with time.

Many believe that the more successful they become, the more they have to lose and, as a result, they are more mindful of the potential consequences of taking risks. Fear of failure sets in and often quells one's desire to step outside the norm and try something different, whatever it may be.

Fear and risk-taking are closely intertwined. While fear has its place and can effectively protect us from danger, we must also recognize when it lacks foundation and do our best to properly modulate it.

For some, taking risks is just not part of their personality and they are risk averse by nature. Many of us lawyers fall into this category. Those characteristics which make us uniquely qualified to advise clients regarding risk mitigation inevitably push us to perform the same analysis for ourselves and often leads us to steer clear of risk. We cannot help it — it is simply part of our DNA.

We must constantly strive to

effectively balance numerous competing factors in our lives. Risk-taking should be no exception. We need to effectively discern those risks which may be a stretch but are nevertheless worth taking — the calculated risks — and those which are not, and we must govern our actions accordingly.

We should be willing to make mistakes along the way or, to at least, accept that circumstances may not turn out exactly as we wanted. We need to understand that encountering the unexpected does not mean that the venture was not worth it. Ultimately, being successful does not mean we have never failed. Rather, it means having a life rich in texture as a result of myriad experiences which make us grow and enable us to enjoy its many facets without regret.

We also have to welcome the serendipity that manifests itself in our lives and the benefits — and risks — that are often presented as a result. Risk is usually wrapped into those unique opportunities which arise and which we are compelled to pursue.

Life is full of surprises and has potential for great rewards. We just need to see and recognize this, be willing to stretch and step outside our comfort zone and not allow our fear control the situation, or us. We must also understand that on the other side of risk and fear lies the potential for great reward.

Risk has played an important role in my life. Many years ago, I was a college student studying manufacturing. I began pursuing my master's degree in safety engineering and had worked for two summers at Motorola and received an offer for full-time employment upon graduation.

My mother had recently died and

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finances were a significant struggle for my family. I was paying for my own education and was looking forward to graduating from school and beginning my career as an engineer. The plan seemed perfect and much of its perfection was in its predictability — until I was accepted into law school.

My head was saying I should defer starting law school for a

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year, work as an engineer and save money. But my heart and my intuition were telling me something different — that I should delay starting my engineering career, jump into the deep end and start law school.

There were a number of significant risks associated with this option — finances, job prospects and the big unknown of a legal career, as I was the first in my family to go to law school. Ultimately, after much consideration, I decided to go to law school straight out of college. While there were moments I felt truly overwhelmed and feared that I made the wrong decision (or the right one at the wrong time), I now look back more than 20 years later and know that it was the right thing to do and do not regret my decision for a moment.

Since law school, I have been part of a law firm which has taught me much about driving innovation, progress and success. The founders had a vision for the future of the large global firm. They were the architects of its creation and the firm continues to execute on this strategy today.

They understood that risk is inherent in effectively leading an organization through transformative change. However, they were also keenly aware of the significant benefits to the industry and the business world in leading this effort and decided to take that risk. Their foresight and courage have left their indelible print on the legal profession and on each of us.

As we examine our lives, it is important to find role models who help us take those necessary risks along our path to greatness and to help others along in their journeys as well. We must be inspired and inspiring to one another.