



Be Bold

RISKS AND REWARDS
OF BETTING ON YOURSELF

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“Without leaps of imagination,
or dreaming, we lose the excitement
of possibilities. Dreaming,
after all, is a form of planning.”

I remember years ago when I came across this quote from Gloria Steinem, I felt as if she gave me permission to dream and to believe in possibilities, even when the dreams were unrealistic and the possibilities were unknown.

When I was 12 years old, my parents, brothers, and I had to flee Pakistan and apply for a political asylum in America. It took five years for us to win our case with the help of Amnesty International, and during those five years we were country-less. We were neither the citizens of America nor could we return to Pakistan. Although that experience and those years were trying and challenging, they never crushed my spirit. In some ways, they made me brave.

I understand today that I have the ability (and confidence) to bounce back from the most challenging of times. I know that I can leave my home, my country, my friends, and my family and still survive, in fact thrive, in a new land. The experience of being a refugee has ironically made me an optimist and a risk taker, and along the way I have learned many lessons—some from successful dreaming and some from failures.

The first independent decision I took in my life was to declare English as a major in college, which probably doesn't sound risky to you, but when you are from a South Asian family and your only family-approved career choices are medicine or engineering, it's a big risk. My family actually called an intervention. They wanted to talk me out of my doomed choice. "What do you do as an English major?" an Aunt asked. I replied, as only a 19 year old could, "You read and write." "Isn't that a hobby?" she asked. The concern was that I would never get a job or make a living.

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Recently I told my family that Berrett-Koehler was publishing my book, *Online Marketing For Busy Authors*, and my mother started to cry. “We’ve never had an author in the family before,” she said. In that moment, feeling my mother’s pride, I felt my hobby of reading and writing has served me well enough.

After college, I did what all English majors do. I got a low paying job in book publishing, where I met John Burke. John and I met for the first time at the end of October of 1991. Six weeks later, we decided to get married. Although it is still the biggest risk of my life, that decision was 23 years ago. I was scared that we would not make it as a couple, but I am very grateful for my husband’s certainty in our possibilities. It felt like a dream to fall head-over-heels and know for certain that you want to spend your life with another person within weeks of meeting them. Thankfully, it has proven to be the best decision of my life. Being bold doesn’t mean things are easy. How we have navigated my Pakistani-Muslim family and his Irish-Catholic family could fill a book.

My dreaming has not been reserved to my personal life. I took a bold risk when I quit a fabulous job as a marketing manager at NYC publishing company Henry Holt to start my own company, FSB Associates. In the 90s, a new world called the World Wide Web was opening up and I wanted to be a part of it. I didn’t know where my decision would take me. Many people told me I was

making a mistake by giving up something certain for something so uncertain. But like always I was dreaming. I knew I wanted to be part of the Internet in some way and I wanted to promote books online. My problem? I didn't know how. No one had done it yet. Luckily my boss at Holt had faith in me and hired me as a consultant before I left the building, which gave me a chance to learn how to promote books on the Internet. I was fortunate to have established industry relationships that led to this new opportunity.

John and I were not done yet, though. The true risk came when 18 months later I recruited him away from his job as a sales director at a publishing house to join me at FSB. With that decision, out went our steady income and paid health insurance. The entrepreneurial road has been rocky for sure, but it has also been long. We started FSB 20 years ago, and have never looked back.

People often tell me that I take a lot of chances, and I keep taking them because they keep paying off. As I swap stories with colleagues and friends, everyone comes away from risk with one similar takeaway: When you push through fear, there is exhilaration on the other side. Worrying about an outcome or feeling a loss of control about a decision is normal. I've discovered that you can't let the fear of uncertainty stop you. Dreaming, as a wise woman said, is a form of planning.

Recently, John and I decided to expand our company and move to San Diego, California to open a second office. Many people told us that we were making a mistake by leaving New York City, the book publishing hub. We also did not know how we would manage our New Jersey office and staff remotely. But this risky decision helped increase our exposure on the west coast. We now have many more clients in San Francisco, Seattle, Los Angeles, and of course, San Diego. Being a bi-coastal company is the new normal and it has taken time to adjust. We still don't know if the move was a mistake, but we are full of excitement for the new possibilities.

The chances I have taken have not always gone as planned or expected. Successful or not, every risk also has the reward of a great learning experience. Change happens to all of us. I've realized that by being bold and pushing through fear, we grow and gain some control over the changes that happen to us. Every change helps us to realize our full potential.

Here are some other lessons I have learned from my bold choices:

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There is time for planning and time for action. I meet so many people who tell me that they have a dream to start their own business, or to move to another country. When I ask, “what steps are you taking towards that dream?” they say they are doing research. In some ways the Internet—with all its information—can be paralyzing. Don’t get caught up in planning. Not everything is going to go smoothly, no matter how much you plan. Sometimes the best research comes from taking action. Make a plan for sure, do your research, and give yourself a deadline so you can stop planning and start acting. We are never fully ready for changes. Taking risks is challenging because it is new, and no amount of research can change that. Don’t wait until you feel comfortable with change to take a risk. Act.

Take the first step. There is never the right time to be bold, there is just right now. You either jump or you stand by hoping and wishing. While entrepreneurship has its perceived risks, so does any job. I’ve learned that staying with what we know is just an illusion of safety. Is there something you are not doing because you think you are not ready? Maybe you worry you won’t be good at it? Try it anyway. I bet you are more ready than you think to step into your light. If you are not good, you can either practice and get better or move on to another option without regret. Just take one step forward. All of us have ideas, big ideas, and overwhelming ideas. Break big ideas down into manageable tasks. Take the first step you can take today. You never know where it may lead. Have faith that the little steps will bring about big things.

Don't be attached to outcomes. Running my own business certainly has its risks, but I feel more in control of my future today than I did when I worked for someone else. Even during tough times, John and I joke that at least no one can fire us. We can tell ourselves that we are safe and avoid choices that scare us, but when we do, we put something else at risk, like a goal, adventure, a dream or our potential. Staying safe puts the life you want at risk. So direct your sail and see what happens. You'll learn something important no matter what. Try not to be attached to any one outcome. I know how hard that is, but it is also liberating. Sometimes we can't see the true outcome of our actions. Sometimes our thinking is not big enough. Often-times our actions lead to unexpected benefits. Allow for that flexibility. Don't limit yourself by becoming too attached to outcomes. Instead of controlling, try observing. Surrender to the unfolding of the events in your life. Who knows what's behind curtain number two or what's in store with Plan B.

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Your intuition is your compass. Fear of the unknown is probably the most universal fear. We all get it. Fear can be a great compass, a gut check to make sure we are not heading into danger. It's important to figure out a way to know when the danger is real and when it is imagined. Make time to listen to your inner voice. There is no way to take risk without a way to tap into your instincts. There is so much that we already know if we just stop and listen. Our inner voice, our intuition, can be a great compass if we decide to follow. Find your own unique way to get guidance and follow it. Over time I've learned to really tune into my gut and make decisions quickly. We could overthink every decision we make, but hesitating only stalls your amazing future. Welcome the thought of making mistakes. If something doesn't work out, you will do better next time. If it works out, it may be the best decision of your life. If you find yourself sitting on the sidelines, waiting for fear to pass or courage to arrive, realize there is no perfect time. You can do this.

Be smart. Taking a risk doesn't mean you gamble with your future. It means you follow your bliss, but in a way that does not burn bridges. If you leave a job to start a business, make sure you leave on good terms. Often the people around you will be your first clients. Save money if you are not sure about your income prospects. Always check your motivations before taking an action. Do you need/want people to like you, to think you are cool, to think you are a smart person? What is your motivation? Simply notice your motivation. You don't even have to change

it. It will change just from the act of observation. Take smart risks. Don't take risks you can't recover from. I'm not about to climb Mount Everest because I don't want to live with the consequences of that risk should things go wrong. Be smart while you're being bold.

Make friends and influence people. Have you ever heard people saying, "I'm not a people person." They often say it with some pride, but that attitude won't work if you are planning to take risks. When you take risks, you will need help and support from others. So make friends and be generous. Help others long before you need their help. Find a way to share the understanding and wisdom you have. We are all here to learn and teach. We are all part of a chain. None of us gets to the finish line without others. To do anything in life that takes courage, you will need support of others around you; no one is an island. We are interconnected and interdependent. Only by helping each other and being empathetic can we rise together. All our relationships are important for our growth. Appreciate every relationship in your life for what it has taught you. Risk taking is not for isolationists.

Failure will make you stronger. In all my years of business, I've learned that everyone messes up and you should always give second chances. Every great success story comes with its tales of failure along the way. Failure can lead to wisdom or honed expertise. Failure is not final; it's the ultimate learning tool to make you and your business better. It's okay to fail as

long as you recover fast. In 2007, we decided to expand our company. Business was coming in and we saw growth potential. We decided to double in size with a bigger staff and office and clients. Then the recession of 2008 happened and it became apparent that we had expanded at the wrong time. Looking back, I realized I had not checked my motivation, the expansion was tied too closely with my ego. I wanted to have a bigger company, and I convinced myself and John that it was a good idea. It was actually a terrible idea and it took years and emotional and financial toll to recover from that mistake. Nevertheless, my company is still standing and in many ways the work we do today is much better. Our small team is the most cohesive group I have ever worked with and that's because we've endured challenges and failures together as one unit.

Your reputation is your biggest asset. Warren Buffett said, "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it." I could not agree more. Before you take that first step toward a risk, check your reputation. You may not be able to control every person's opinion, but if you have spent time giving rather than taking, more people will have a good opinion of you. Can people trust you? Are you on time? Are you kind? Do you gossip? Do you take responsibility for your actions? Do you pitch in and step up? The way we behave builds trust and reputation. There is no way to succeed for long if people think you are untrustworthy. Trust and respect work in sync. Tough and demanding is totally okay as long as you are fair and professional. So before you start taking risks, make sure you have a good reputation.

Consider what you are trading if you let fear win out over risk. Living bold means you pursue your passion despite setbacks and fears. There is nothing better than living an authentic, flexible, brave, scary, passion-filled life. Create a life where you look forward to every day, and not just weekends and vacations. That life awaits on the other side of risk.

As another wise woman once said:

“Do not stop thinking of life as an adventure. You have no security unless you can live bravely, excitingly, imaginatively, unless you can choose a challenge instead of competence.” – ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Fauzia Burke is the founder and president of FSB Associates, one of the first firms to specialize in digital branding and online publicity for books. Founded in 1995, FSB Associates has successfully launched more than 2,000 online book publicity campaigns. Burke has worked on books by Alan Alda, Sue Grafton, Brian Tracy, Joe Pantoliano, Marina Keegan, Kathy Freston, Deepak Chopra, and many others.

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