



HUMAN CAPITAL

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Fear Less

The thing that goes bump in the night may be your head hitting the wall that you've put between yourself and opportunity.

I RECENTLY VISITED TEMPLE UNIVERSITY AS PART OF THE COUNCIL'S FAME UNIVERSITY Ambassador Program and had the pleasure of hearing A. Peter Prinsen, The Graham Company's vice president and general counsel, talking to young RMI students about the world of insurance

brokerage. The students were engaged, listening to tales of insurance claims ranging from hostage negotiations to helicopter accidents to rock-throwing orangutans. One student asked Prinsen what piece of advice he would give those interested in brokerage careers. "Be fearless," Prinsen replied. I think no better advice could be given.

The ability to be fearless is important in any career. It becomes even more important as we mature, lest we fall into a comfortable prefer-

ence for the status quo. Consider the negative effect that the fear of

change, the fear of conflict and the fear of vulnerability have on growth and innovation. Learn that the thing that goes bump in the night may just be your head hitting the wall that you've erected between yourself and opportunity.

Fear of Change. It was Anne Morrow Lindbergh who said, "There is no sin punished more implacably by nature than the sin of resistance to change." For Lindbergh, an aviator, author, environmentalist and wife of Charles Lindbergh, the "same old, same old" held little appeal. She viewed a resistance to change as a barrier to achieving excellence.

If your organization's culture is

more comfortable with the way things have been rather than the way they could be, then hear this: There is nothing to fear but fear itself (thanks, FDR). Ask yourself: "What are we scared of?" Identifying perceived risks is the first step to overcoming them.

Take, for example, an organizational change that many firms still struggle with: whether to offer flex time. The data are clear. Flex time increases productivity, employee engagement and retention—and it's low cost. So why don't we all offer it? Many managers fear they will lose control of tightly monitored employees. They fear the employees will take advantage of their independence or work fewer hours or pad their timesheets.

Research tells us these fears are unfounded. Now, without fear, investigate the many positive benefits of making this change. **Fear of Conflict.** Most human beings prefer to avoid conflict. But when fear of conflict is so pronounced that it holds you or your organization back, it's time to overcome the fear to move forward. Don't kid yourself into thinking that avoiding conflict makes it go away. An unresolved conflict just goes underground to fester, then resurfaces as seemingly unrelated behavioral problems.

The first step in conflict resolution is to ask, "What am I getting out of avoiding this conflict?" For example, if one of your trusted managers is focusing on what she likes to do instead of doing what the organization needs her to do, why not talk privately with her about her performance? Maybe you so value the employee that you don't want to

employees respond when you stay calm, objective and firm. And when you're tired, give yourself a break and tackle it tomorrow. But don't put it off too long, or it'll tackle you later.

Fear of vulnerability is the mother lode of all fears in the workplace. The more we value our job, our power or our reputation—and thus fear losing them—the more we feel vulnerable. This fear leads to other fears, which can lead to counterproductive behavior. Ask yourself: How many hours do I lose trying to do it all myself because I don't trust others? How many times have I witnessed someone belittle someone else simply to appear dominant? And how many times have I withheld my opinion when it differs radically from the group's consensus?

When you feel vulnerable or you sense vulnerability in someone else, ask yourself: What's the worst thing that could happen? Then do a reality check.

I'll bet the consequences you so dread are out of proportion. Tippy-toe in if you feel vulnerable—no need to make a big splash. Trust someone to take over a small project, find your personal power without taking it from someone else and speak up in a diplomatic way when confronted with groupthink.

We all struggle with fear—of commitment, of failure, of job loss. The only way to get over our fears is to confront them head-on and repeatedly. Do the very thing that scares you the most. After several repetitions that don't lead to the end of your world as you know it, your anxiety will be a thing of the past. Leave it there and step fearlessly into the future.

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"de-motivate" her. Maybe you're just tired and can't take it on right now.

Whatever the reason, by avoiding the conflict, you're in fact creating more conflict. Employees rarely get de-motivated by coaching. Just the opposite is true. Argumentative

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