

Chapter Nine

Take Risks

If no one ever took risks, Michelangelo would have painted the Sistine floor. - Neil Simon, playwright

You miss 100% of the shots you never take. - Wayne Gretzky

John Blanchard found the beauty of taking risks. Writer, Max Lucado tells John's poignant story. John, checking out a book from a Florida library, found his eyes and soul riveted by penciled notes and observations in the margin. Written by an obviously insightful and lucid mind, John embarked on a mission to find the previous reader. Inscribed in the front of the book was a name, Miss Hollis Maynell.

After a diligent search, John discovered Miss Maynell lived in New York City. Introducing himself in a letter, John invited her to write. The next day he left to for Europe. World War II was desecrating the lives of millions. John began to live for her letters.

For thirteen months they wrote to each other, revealing the contours of their thinking and dreams. John wondered what she looked like and requested a photograph. Miss Maynell refused. She felt that if the relationship truly was destiny what she looked like wouldn't matter.

Surviving the carnage of WWII, John arranged their first meeting - 7:00 PM at the Grand Central Station in New York. "You'll recognize me," she wrote, "by the red rose I'll be wearing on my lapel." At 7:00 p.m. John wearing his soldier's uniform, searched the faces of young women at the station, looking for a rose in a lapel.

A gorgeous young woman, every man's dream, walked toward him. Wearing a pale green suit, she swept past him. "Going my way, sailor?" she whispered a wry smile on her face. John was irresistibly drawn toward her, forgetting for a moment the fact that she wore no rose. Then he saw Hollis Maynell. She was right behind the girl of his dreams.

The woman looked bookish; her graying hair tucked under a frayed hat. She was amply proportioned, her legs thick, her ankles exceeding her shoes. A woman well past 40, she had graying hair tucked under a frayed hat. The woman was unmistakably wearing a prominent rose on her lapel.

The girl in the green suit walked quickly away. John was conflicted. He wanted with all his heart to follow the fragrant dreamy young girl, yet he knew he should honor the woman who had so buoyed his heart through the last year. And there she stood. Her eyes were warm and inviting, and her face was lined with courage. John moved quickly. He held the small worn blue leather copy of the book that was to reveal his identity.

John tossed overboard his hopes for love right then, holding out the book. "I'm Lieutenant John Blanchard, and you must be Miss Maynell. I am so glad you could meet me; may I take you to dinner?"

The older woman's face brightened with a smile. "I don't know what this is about, son," she answered, "but the young lady in the green suit who just went by, she begged me to wear this rose on my coat. And she said if you were to ask me out to dinner, I should go and tell you that she is waiting for you in the big restaurant across the street. She said it was a test!"

Occasionally embedded in great risks are great treasure. John Blanchard found the love of his life, by taking a risk in the face of a disappointment.

When you take risks to love a generation into greatness, you might find yourself approaching someone who doesn't fit your vision of loveliness.

Like John you might end up reaching out to someone who doesn't fit your expectations. Perhaps their culture is foreign to you. Their clothing, music, body art, politics, may not appeal to you. Pursue them anyway. I promise you; life has a way of turning the tables. You might find yourself in a relationship of delight and joy.

Everyone is afraid of rejection. It's a scary thing to approach someone especially someone young. There's almost an unwritten law about the generations staying to themselves. No one expects, especially the young, for you to make contact.

Let People Say Their Own No's

But here's a lifetime secret that will help your very human, Walter Middy fears. Let people say their own no's. It's such an important secret, I want to whisper it to you again, let people say their own no's. We are so busy saying other people's no's, we never give them a chance to say yes.

Recently a friend and I spent a couple of days at the beach after a particularly stressful speaking schedule. My friend is wise and deep, and we were discussing vision.

I had a vision to do some monthly learning parties at my house, and I'd even picked out the couple I'd like to co-host with us. "Have you asked them?" Lynn inquired. "No, I am too afraid they'll say no, and there really is no one else I'd like to do it with." My friend was a busy lawyer, and his family kept a very full schedule.

I'd been trying to work up the courage to ask them for a couple of years. You might laugh at such a silly thing. But your fears are no less real. What if you reach out to embrace someone into greatness and they don't reach back? What if you're left in an embarrassing and awkward place?

Exploit Your Age

I tell audiences all the time. Exploit your age. I love being fifty and being able to call everyone "Honey." I love locking my eyes on a young salesclerk and saying, "God bless you, sweetheart." I love being able to ask hard questions like "So how are you doing with the billions of dollars of sexual temptation my generation is throwing unmercifully at you?"

Do It Afraid

Here is another secret; do it afraid. You may never feel completely confident initiating a friendship, embracing a generation into greatness. Do it afraid. What's the worst that can happen?

Yesterday I took a risk and tapped a young lady on the shoulder. "Hi, Ashton, my name is Fawn, and I never got a chance to tell you what a phenomenal job you did in Fiddler on the Roof."

I expected this beautiful young lady to respond with bored politeness, but to my surprise she lit up. It was months after the production, she'd probably forgotten she even had a significant role, and here was someone complimenting her.

Take risks, smile often, initiate conversations. What's the worse that can happen? My husband years ago had a best friend who loved to say; "What can they do, take away your birthday?"

Ponderings

1. What is the biggest risk I've ever taken?

2. What risk in my life resulted in unexpected joy?
3. In what ways have I become risk adverse?
4. What risk could I take today in embracing a generation into greatness?