



### Risk Taking — “Kiss the Rock”

by Kathie Hightower  
Wordcount: 752

“Kiss the rock!” our instructor yelled at us. “Forget instinct! Lean into that rock or you’ll flip over!”

My husband and I quickly learned that in whitewater kayaking, when you approach a dangerous rock, you have to lean into that danger — lean into the rock. If you do the opposite, you do flip over. Leaning into the danger is the opposite of your natural instinct, but it gets you through and moving forward.

That’s how it is with taking risks. It may go against your natural instinct, but taking risks moves you forward towards your dreams.

I’m a chicken by nature. I spent a good part of my life taking the safe way, avoiding risks. I eventually learned that taking risks gets you to where you want to go. My friend Julianne compares it to a trapeze. “If you don’t let go, you will never fly.” If you keep your foot safely on first base, you’ll never get to second.

I’ve found ways to trick myself into taking risks.

- Schedule it way down the road. Risks don’t seem that big or bad when they are far away. By the time they arrive, it’s too late to back out. I’m committed and have to go through with it. I did this with my first public speaking engagement, with a trek to Nepal, and with a three-hour radio show. Four months out is a good time for me — it makes the risk seem really small.
- Tell everyone you know that you are going to do something. As one person told me, “That way there is no backing out. You have to go through with it to save face.” And many won’t let you forget it. When I kept saying I wanted to try rollerblading, for example, my mother and sister called me on it by buying me rollerblades for my birthday. Then, after they sat in my closet for 5 months unused, my sister came over and made me try them out.
- Take someone along. It’s easier to do something challenging when you do it with a friend. My friend Jan was afraid of getting a mammogram, so she took a friend. The nurse thought it was such a great idea she said they should start a “Have a Mammogram Together” campaign. I talked a friend into doing the three-hour radio show with me. I figured we wouldn’t both be speechless at the same time. I was right. We had a ball!
- Get a group of supporters. There is good reason why there are so many Master Mind groups or Success Teams or whatever you want to call the various support groups that are out there. It gives you a group to share your fears with — and to get courage from. As Barbara Sher says in her book *Teamworks*, “Everyone has more courage for others than they do for themselves.” In a group you help give other people courage to face their fears, and they give you courage in return.
- Don’t let the fear of making a mistake stop you. If we don’t make mistakes, how do we ever learn? As Sophia Loren, says, “Making mistakes is part of the dues one pays for a full life.”
- Start small and build up. You build your courage along the way. When I first started writing for publication, I started with a low threat publication. I asked the editor of a club that I belonged to if I could write a regular column for the newsletter. As I saw more of my articles in print and got some good response, it gave me the courage to send out query letters to larger publications. It’s like mountain climbing. You don’t start with Mt. Everest. You start by climbing smaller peaks to develop your skills and your courage.
- Flex your risk-taking muscle with even smaller things. I heard Kate Brand, author of *Risk Taking for Chickens*, suggest this in a seminar. Purposefully look for daily opportunities to flex that muscle. Order a new food on a menu, take a different route to work, talk to a stranger, listen to a new kind of music. With each mini-risk, you build your ability to take on larger ones.

Kate used a quote that stuck with me: “You don’t want to tiptoe through life just to reach death at the end.” You’ve probably heard of the number of older people who have said, “It’s not the things I did that I regret — it’s the things I didn’t do.”

No tiptoeing for me — I’d rather kiss the rock!  
©Kathie Hightower, 1998