

The Risk Factor

By Jamie Buckingham

During my senior year in high school a group of women somewhere in the nation started a movement to have all competitive team sports—especially football—removed from public schools. Team sports, they complained, were too traumatic. Children, they argued, should not be led to believe their team could win, then suffer the trauma of losing. They should only play games where everyone wins.

They did not stop to think that there can be no victory where there is no possibility of defeat. Who among us, regardless of how we voted last November, did not hurt for Michael Dukakis as he stood with his family on election night and—in a gracious New England way—conceded defeat. Yet the man who tries, even though he fails, is never a loser.

Those women in the early 1950s were right about one thing: defeat is definitely traumatic. But so is childbirth. And graduation. And marriage. Yet all are part of life. To eliminate them simply because they are risky would mean the cessation of life.

The risk-free life is a victory-free life. It means lifelong surrender to the mediocre. And that is the worst of all defeats.

In politics the risk-free life leads to Marxism—where all risks are removed. In religion it leads to dead institutionalism. The man who is guaranteed against failure will never know the sweet taste of success.

Today's youth are deathly afraid of risk. Yet, in what must be one of history's great ironies, desiring safety, they escape into drugs—which is guaranteed failure and death.

Freedom demands risk. Eliminate the risks of freedom and you establish a slave state. Even then, if the risks of freedom are banned, tyranny takes over. Ask the Poles. The Czechoslovaks. The Cubans.

Today's liberal is constantly crying for justice. But the question is not justice; it is freedom. Most definitions of justice call for the elimination of risk. Capitalists love monopolies which eliminate the risk. But in the process monopolies kill the



Jamie Buckingham
is an award-winning
columnist and popular
conference speaker.

wonderful creativity birthed—as with team sports—through competition.

Politicians work at gerrymandering to control their power positions in government—trying to eliminate the risks of defeat.

I asked a congressman friend of mine what was the first thing a president, senator or congressman thinks of after election. He smiled sadly. “How to be re-elected.”

Once in office the elected official spends all his time building a power base to protect his vested interests. If he can eliminate risk for us by providing us with all kinds of government benefits, we, in turn, will keep him in office.

Those who have the most to lose, however, are those least prone to risks and to bold actions. Take the banks, for instance. Banks do not like risk-takers. In fact, they are constantly asking what the “risk factor” is in a loan. Therefore bankers invest in established success, which means that banks invest in the past—not the future. Visionaries don't have a chance.

I've seen the same thing with publishers. In the past I've tried to get established publishers to innovate in new concepts of communication—such as video materials, compact discs, radio and TV. I met massive resistance.

The bold, enterprising and innovative work that went into the birth of computers came from young outsiders—not from those still working with pen and

paper who lacked the ability to dream and the willingness to risk.

A case in point is the struggle Bob Johnson, chairman of Dominion Network, has had getting people to back his highly innovative idea of television and radio broadcasting through direct broadcast satellites (DBS). Johnson is the only government licensee approved to launch a Christian-owned and -controlled DBS satellite. What he is doing will one day revolutionize TV and radio broadcasting. Imagine having Christian TV without government restraint. This powerful new satellite is scheduled to be launched early this year from XiChang, China. Yet not a single Christian TV or radio network has been willing to even talk about this marvelous concept on the air.

DBS is going to happen. It's the only way Christian programming can afford to stay on the air in the future. But the fear of risk, plus what has become something of a religious pork barrel by established broadcasters—which could mean having to share both control and their financial base with someone else—could keep Johnson and his Dominion satellite earthbound.

The major political and social impact of recent years came from student movements and minority uprisings—from those who had little to lose and hence were ready to lose it. Their causes were far more important to them than any penalties that risks would involve.

Jesus was such a man. So was Martin Luther and John Wycliffe. Martin Luther King was such a man. So is Oral Roberts and Earl Paulk. All risk-takers, courting defeat while taking extraordinary risks.

To dream of a risk-free world is to imagine a creation without hell. But a creation without hell is also a creation without heaven. God has made us to be creatures who are forced to choose between good and evil—which is the greatest of all risks.

The only risk-free world is in the minds of evil or lazy men—for God is a God of great risk. He sent His Son. Even more, He's entrusted the church to us. Those who dream of a risk-free life are, sooner or later, all losers. ■