

Are 'Success Experts' Telling the Truth About Taking Big Risks?

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We've all heard it: that timeless story about the hugely successful person who dropped out of school or quit their job before making it big.

We love that story. It tickles our greatest fantasies and frustrations, for it is the perfect promise that all we need to do to get rid of our problems today is run away from them and start anew. Whether or not we will actually follow through with that escape, knowing that "huge risks" always lead to "huge rewards" is deeply comforting, because we are naturally attracted to shortcuts and quick solutions to highly complex problems.

The good news is few of us would actually take advice like that and run with it. Even if we do take it, we will more than likely come back to some form of safety sooner than we expect. This is what the road towards attainment is like: permanent confusion. We rarely know what to do next, or which path will get us there quicker. We often stand baffled in the face of forks in the road, not able to fully commit to a specific strategy for getting what we want.

Are we supposed to take a major risk or play it safe until our conditions improve? Which one will get us where we want to go? Which one is a dead end, a trap we must avoid at all costs? How much longer should we be careful? When is it a good time to finally do what we've always wanted to do?

You'll hear many strategies, quotes and frameworks addressing this very question. There are advocates for risk and advocates for trepidation. One philosopher will say "go for it" and the other will say "be patient and things will come", mimicking both voices in your head.

If you want the answer to this debate I can give it to you now: **the debate itself is absolutely meaningless**. In our drive to see the world in perfect binaries (right and wrong, good and bad, smart and stupid), we are blind to the thousands of options that that can bring us both at the same time.

In our mind, there are only two paths. In our reality, there are about a hundred billion trillion paths. This is how it usually is with the human mind and this beautiful universe of ours.

Before looking at the other billion trillion, let's look at the third obvious path we often ignore: **you can always do both simultaneously**. You can be cautious while taking

big risks. You can take big risks while preventing as much catastrophe as possible. You can build companies while having full-time jobs. You can write novels while taking care of your children. You can make a steady income while experimenting with pie in the sky investments.

There are always more possibilities than the anecdotes we hear would have us believe. It is never one or the other. It can always be both, if we allow ourselves to think that way.

Getting caught up in forks in the road like that (the ones that make us feel like we can't take another step forward before we decide) are neat tricks of evasion we sometimes use when we're afraid of where continued execution will lead us.

It's not that hard for us to lie to ourselves, and we lie to ourselves when we think life takes place in terms of linear recipes, step by step instructions, or adherence to any one philosophy that someone who made it to the top of the mountain we want to climb on is spouting from the summit.

From now on, whenever you sense yourself stuck in a moment where you're having to decide between caution and risk, remember these three principles and start looking at your issue from a different angle.

Here they are: balance, skepticism, and perpetual movement.

BALANCE: because extremes will always backfire.

Leaving your job when you've failed to learn the skills that will allow you to become independent is not the soundest way to gain independence. Remaining in the perpetual climb for safety in a career you know is wrong for you because there is always another level to reach (another title, more money, and more prestige) is just as dangerous.

Both represent needless extremes. They are impulsive choices made by a mind convinced that one cannot live without the other.

You choose balance when you don't have a plan, when you don't have the tools, or when you don't have the network required for success. You use safety as a tool for building a foundation, never forgetting its temporary nature and your plans for leaving it behind when you're ready.

You see caution as a path that can give you just as many opportunities as all-out risk. Because that is what caution is.

You always know there will be a day when you will walk away from it all, armed with all you need to take a calculated and meticulously planned risk. When the time finally arrives, you do it. You won't talk yourself out of it. You won't decide to wait another year. You won't drop the dreams you had because you pretend you don't want them after all.

It is neither all or nothing. Neither risk nor risk-averse.

There is a time for everything, and you must decide where you currently find yourself and what you need in order to get to the next level. That is the problem of frameworks and “philosophies”.

No approach is always effective. It's all a question of timing.

SKEPTICISM: because life never has clear answers, and the dogmatic mind always misses opportunities.

Stick to one philosophy or one way of doing things, and eventually you will be wrong.

When your mind is so made up you refuse to consider any alternatives, you have to take a hard look in the mirror and figure out why you're being so inflexible.

Why is this working for you? What have you done wrong in this strategy that works so well? What do you still need to learn? Is there anything you can do to fix this approach you're married to?

What about the one you refuse to take on? What the hell is so wrong with it?

You have to be contrarian with yourself. You have to sit yourself down and try your best to talk yourself into the choice you are aching to avoid.

You have to question your opinions - especially those that have become unquestionable without any evidence or explanation.

True skepticism is separating yourself from your own impulses, and learning from how they've already influenced you (for better or worse).

Some of us who are risk averse always talk ourselves out of change. Some of us who are risk loving always want to run away when rough challenges knock on our door.

Notice the patterns. Notice the binaries that shouldn't be there. Force yourself to look deeply at the opposite of whatever it is that you want to do.

PERPETUAL MOVEMENT: because change on its own doesn't bring progress.

Don't ever mistake caution with inaction. Wherever you are, you need to be doing something to move forward. If your thinking even closely resembles:

“I need to wait until things change in order to advance”

You are doing it wrong.

It doesn't matter what the specifics of your situation are, if you don't do something to bring your dreams into reality every day - they will never come.

If your progress stalls you must reignite it yourself, regardless of how limiting your current circumstances are. If you don't have the time or the money you need to be doing something to find them. If you don't have the skills you need to get them. If you don't have the team you need to find it. If you don't have the time you need to make it.

Once you've done everything you can to advance on your dreams from where you are, you can take a look at any changes that could support them even more.

If you move for the sake of moving, if you change your life because you think change will change you, if you continue to look for the conditions that will eventually nurture you into action and execution - you will miss the dozens of opportunities that are sitting right under your nose.

Every situation is helping you in some way. Wherever you are, you have access to something that is going to help you bring your dreams into reality. Focusing on what's missing is blinding you to what is right there in front of you.

Initiative doesn't come based on your environment. Initiative must be built from within, out of a relentless drive to refuse to be a slave to your circumstances. No change will make you more organized, ambitious, or hard working. Those qualities come from within, and you have every ability to bring them out right where you stand.

It doesn't matter how stuck you feel, you can always keep yourself in forward motion.

The more you move, the faster you will go over time. Eventually (likely faster than you expect), you will reach a point where you will be ready to take a big risk, and win.

As you can see, these three principles are far more important than the endless debate of "risk vs. caution". Success is not just about being brave and dropping it all. Balance out your strategies, be skeptical of your deeply ingrained dogmas, and keep yourself in forward motion.

Any plan that incorporates all three will eventually lead to your desired destination.