

When opportunity knocks, what do you do?

When you or your people are presented with an opportunity to grow, a certain degree of risk is always involved. It may be a risk of time or money or a risk of stepping out of a comfort zone. At that moment, they have two options: step out in faith or be paralyzed by fear and refuse to move at all. The key to preventing paralysis is lowering the bar of risk and providing your people with opportunities to become involved at a *crawl* level. Once they have been successful at the crawl level, which builds their faith, then you can ask for a *walk* commitment and later a *run* commitment. Unfortunately, very often churches place the entry bar too high and ask immediately for a *run*. Doing so almost ensures your people will be paralyzed by fear and refuse your request. The risk level is just too high. If you lower the bar and ask for a crawl commitment, you have reduced the risk and increased the likelihood of getting a positive response.

[INSERT ILLUSTRATION RISK/FEAR CHART WITH WORDS FILLED IN]

In 1 Samuel 17 we see a wonderful example of the opportunity-risk or fear-faith cycle played out in the life of David. His first opportunity was shepherding sheep. David was quite young, so perhaps he was a little fearful of such responsibility. He accepted the risk, however, and it built his faith. His next opportunity came in the form of a bear. He took the risk, killed the bear, and his faith continued to grow. David must have realized that whenever he stepped out of his comfort zone in faith, God guided and protected him. The risk level continued to increase, and next David was faced with a lion. He took the risk, killed the lion, and his faith grew. Then one day he came face-to-face with Goliath, the mighty giant. You already know how that story ends, but tell me, how do you think it might have ended if Goliath was David's *first* opportunity for risk? Would he have stepped forward in faith, or would he have turned and run for the hills? He was able to face the seemingly impossible task of slaying Goliath with a handful of rocks because he had already walked through what we at Saddleback call the crawl, walk, run stages.

Everybody has a threshold of pain or risk they are willing to accept. Their response to a new challenge or opportunity is going to be determined by the degree of risk and their degree of faith. If your people's degree of faith does not match the degree of risk, they are going to avoid the opportunity for growth. On the other hand, if you lower the risk, you will provide opportunities for their faith to grow. Then at the next opportunity, not only will they be more likely to take a risk, but they will be able to move up to a new level of risk.

One of the things we discovered was that asking people to become small group *leaders* was just too big a risk. Before that we had asked for lay pastors—an even bigger risk. Eventually, instead of asking for small group leaders or lay pastors, we asked for H.O.S.T.s. A

H.O.S.T. is someone who has a *Heart* for people and is willing to *Open* their place to their group, *Serve* a snack, and *Turn* on the DVD. When we asked people if they could host a group in their home, they were very willing. If we had asked those same people to *lead* a small group, most likely they would have said no, even though the responsibilities are the same. The H.O.S.T. strategy is described in more detail in chapters 12 and 13 of the book *Small Groups With Purpose*.

Because David was faithful in stepping out over and over again, ultimately God gave him the opportunity for which he was born. It is found in Psalms 78:72, which is the benchmark of our small group ministry: "He cared for them with a true heart and led them with skillful hands" (NLT). God moved David from shepherding sheep to shepherding the nation of Israel based on two qualifications: a true heart and a skill. He developed those qualities by taking David through the crawl, walk, run phases. As David's faith was built, his skill was also built, and he was able to take increasing risks. This is a foolproof system if you develop it intentionally and provide opportunities at every level.