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Helping you align your people with your vision



## Risk and Reward: Are We Having Fun Yet?

By Libby Wagner, Founder of Professional Leadership Results

**Let's go back to the Bahamas. In addition to snorkeling in the beautiful coral reefs, which I'd actually done before, I also did something I'd never done—willingly and purposefully got into a tube of rushing water positioned six stories above a shark-filled lagoon, crossed my arms over my chest and shot down the 60-foot Leap of Faith. I did this twice! Then, if that wasn't enough, I went with three other adventurers to the nearly 200-foot long body slide and a 50-foot vertical drop into the Abyss.**

Perhaps you're a veteran water park attendee? Adrenaline junkie? Perhaps not. I like roller coasters as much as the next big kid, but I don't typically make it a practice to create reasons to launch or hurl myself into death-defying feats. I'm going to admit right now that this activity involved a lot of screaming. I'm not necessarily proud of this, but it is what it is. I actually thought that I might, on the second and third time down, behave better—be more reserved. But let's be honest—first, this is not an attractive sport—you're wet, your hair is plastered to your head if you're lucky, and sometimes, your limbs

deserve the word *akimbo*. Second, it was FUN! I couldn't have held in those screams and giggles even if I'd really, really tried. I just gave myself over to it. Later, one of the women with our group said that my screaming caused both laughter and looks of fear on the faces of those waiting to follow me into the Abyss.

I love how they've named these silly things "Leap of Faith" and "The Abyss." I think about how, when we take on the role of a leader, whether it's a company, an agency or a team, it requires a bit of this mindset—you are venturing into the unknown, charting new territory—because we cannot know whether we'll plunge into the cool, blue pool or whether we'll have to emerge from the shark-filled lagoon. And frankly, even if it is a bit scary, why are you doing it if it's never any FUN? If you're always holding yourself tightly wound, lips pursed and teeth clenched, thinking that you'll just get through another day, another quarter, another year until you can retire—what's the fun in that? I mean it—when I'm working with my clients who seem very stressed, over worked and unhappy, I ask them to assess what I call the 85% Rule: if you're not pretty darn happy, excited and thrilled with your work 85% of the time, it's definitely time to take a close look and see what choices you have. This is

completely non-scientific, it's just my rule. 15% of the time, you might have to deal with bad days, annoying people, and tough business times. But if you've been hanging around 60 or 40% for a long period of time—you need an Abyss moment. You need a big belly laugh or a good scream!

### Two things I took away from The Atlantis experience:

**Take risks and have faith in yourself.** The darn waterslide took 14 seconds! Thousands had gone before me—how risky, really, is that? All of my fear, anxiety, stress, worry, etc. was inside my head based on the perceptions I had about the context of my situation. What can you do, right now, that doesn't involve hurtling down a waterslide but feels risky nonetheless? Have you got a great idea that will make your team better, more productive, more effective? Do you need to face that colleague or employee because you should have addressed an issue and now it's feeling too late? (It's never too late to do the right thing!) *What's one thing you can do tomorrow that's a bit out of your comfort zone that can really contribute to your growth as a person or a leader?*

**Have some fun!** I know some of you work in industries that are very serious—lots of risk and lots at stake, and I'm not suggesting that you have fun at the expense of others or that you not take your work or your mission seriously. Laugh at yourself! The funniest part of the waterslide for me was that I could only imagine how silly I looked and how absurd I must have sounded. Self-deprecating humor demonstrates wit, intelligence and a sense of fun. If you don't think you're funny, go find an old picture of yourself with your worst hair-do ever! (Mine's a tie between really huge 80's

hair and a platinum crew cut—yeah, pretty funny.) You probably thought you looked pretty cool, right? One of my favorite sayings is *Never underestimate the value of being self-entertained.* I think I'm hilarious—who cares if anyone else does or not? Sometimes, it's okay to laugh at your mistakes, too. Learn from them, make it right, and move on. Don't take yourself so seriously—I say this to myself as much as I offer it to you—I needed the Leap of Faith as much as the next person!

Well, what are you waiting for? Surely, right now, you're looking a lot better and feeling a lot stronger and smarter than that silly woman shivering at the lip of The Abyss! ❖

<sup>1</sup> This is what the website says: "shark filled lagoon." There really were sharks in the tanks on either side of this crazy slide! If you actually had the wherewithal to glance left or right, you could see the sharks swimming right next to you! [www.atlantis.com](http://www.atlantis.com)

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