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**Q?U?E?S?T?I?O?N?S**

**TO ASK  
YOURSELF  
BEFORE  
RISKING**

**From *Taking Risks*, a Nightingale-Conant  
Program by David Viscott, M.D.**



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**DAVID VISCOTT, M.D.**

**Nightingale  
Conant**

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## INTRODUCTION

**“Real winners are winners before they take risks...while risking...after the risk...when planning for the next risk...and when teaching others to risk.”**

—DAVID VISCOTT, M.D.

It's easy to blame society when you're not as successful as you had hoped. When a friend with no greater native ability, intelligence or education surpasses you, you naturally wonder, “What's at work here?” It's simply this: while you've been playing it safe, your friend has been taking risks.

The more you take risks—rational, well-planned risks—the more success builds upon success. With greater success comes greater confidence. You'll broaden your horizons and become more adept at a wide variety of

pursuits. You'll be more likely to face matters head-on. Procrastination will become a thing of the past. And minor obstacles won't grow into major problems.

Lastly, you'll realize that completing one risk invariably leads to more risking. The stakes aren't always higher, but the excitement and enthusiasm the new risks generate can be. When you reach this level, you know you're going to confine yourself to taking only the right risks, because you've screened your possibilities by asking the right questions.

You see, not all risks are worth taking. And it is often difficult to discern the difference between a good and bad risk. This booklet will help you in two ways: it will assist you in discovering which risks are right for you, and it will help you listen to your "inner voice," a voice vital to successful risking.

## THE STAGES OF RISKING

Every risk is comprised of five stages. Important tasks are accomplished at every stage, and these tasks can only be completed by asking yourself certain questions (and perhaps writing down the answers when dealing with one of those “big” risks). As you become more competent—and more confident—in your risk taking, you’ll instinctively answer these questions at every stage.

The steps:

Step 1: Evaluating the Risk: a time of reflection and honesty

Step 2: Preparing for the Risk: getting the details together

Step 3: Committing to the Risk: gathering momentum

Step 4: The Point of No Return: the risk itself

Step 5: Completing the Risk...and adapting to the results

Here are 40 questions that you should ask yourself during the course of risk taking:

1. What do I want to accomplish...what is my goal?
2. Why do I think this risk is necessary to accomplishing this goal?
3. Are the reasons for taking this risk my own, or has someone else caused me to consider this risk?
4. If I've never taken a similar risk before, why haven't I?
5. What are the consequences if there's an unfavorable outcome to this risk?
6. Is the potential loss greater than the possible gain?



## EVALUATE

7. Who stands to profit (or lose) as a result of this risk?
8. Will I be willing to adapt to the changes that will result from taking this risk?

**9. What do I need to know before taking this risk?**

**10. Who can tell me what I need to know?**

**11. In what time frame does this risk need to be completed?**

**12. Who should I tell about this risk (and why do they need to know)?**

**13. If I tell this person about the risk and he discourages me, will that diminish my confidence or effectiveness?**

## **PREPARE**

**14.** Will the time frame allotted for the risk allow me to put in enough personal energy to successfully complete the risk?

**15.** What current activities need to be set aside so I can go ahead with this risk?

**16.** Have I named my particular fears connected to taking this risk and decided to act in spite of them?

**17.** Am I ready for the risk to become a public matter?

**18.** Have I made appropriate preparations for this risk?

**19.** What would happen if, after all my preparations, I didn't risk now?

**20.** Is it already too late to turn back?

**21.** Is there still something I need to know before I go further?

**22.** Am I tuned in and listening to my instincts...my "inner voice"?

## COMMIT

23. Will taking this risk ever be any easier than right now?

24. Am I ready?

## THE POINT OF NO RETURN

25. Do I accept the fact that there's no turning back?

26. Can I deal with the feeling that I might lose everything as a result of this risk?

27. Do I accept the fact that while taking the risk, I should not be seeking last-minute advice or assistance?

28. Have I accepted the doubts I have about myself now so they won't make me panic during the risk?

29. Am I ready to tap my personal courage and give this risk everything?

## THE POINT OF NO RETURN

**30.** Am I prepared to deal with the fright and panic this risk might cause in other people?

**31.** Is my focus on doing the work the risk demands and not on the accolades of a successful completion?

**32.** Do I believe that my best personal effort is enough to successfully complete this risk?

33. Is the risk over?

34. Am I moving in the right direction?

35. What details need to be attended to at this point?

36. Am I willing to contain my “joy of completing” so I can remain alert and ready for any potential setbacks?

37. Can I complete the task at hand in spite of the comments and reactions of others at this point?



## **COMPLETE AND ADAPT**

**38.** Can I successfully “leave the old” and start adjusting to the results of taking this risk?

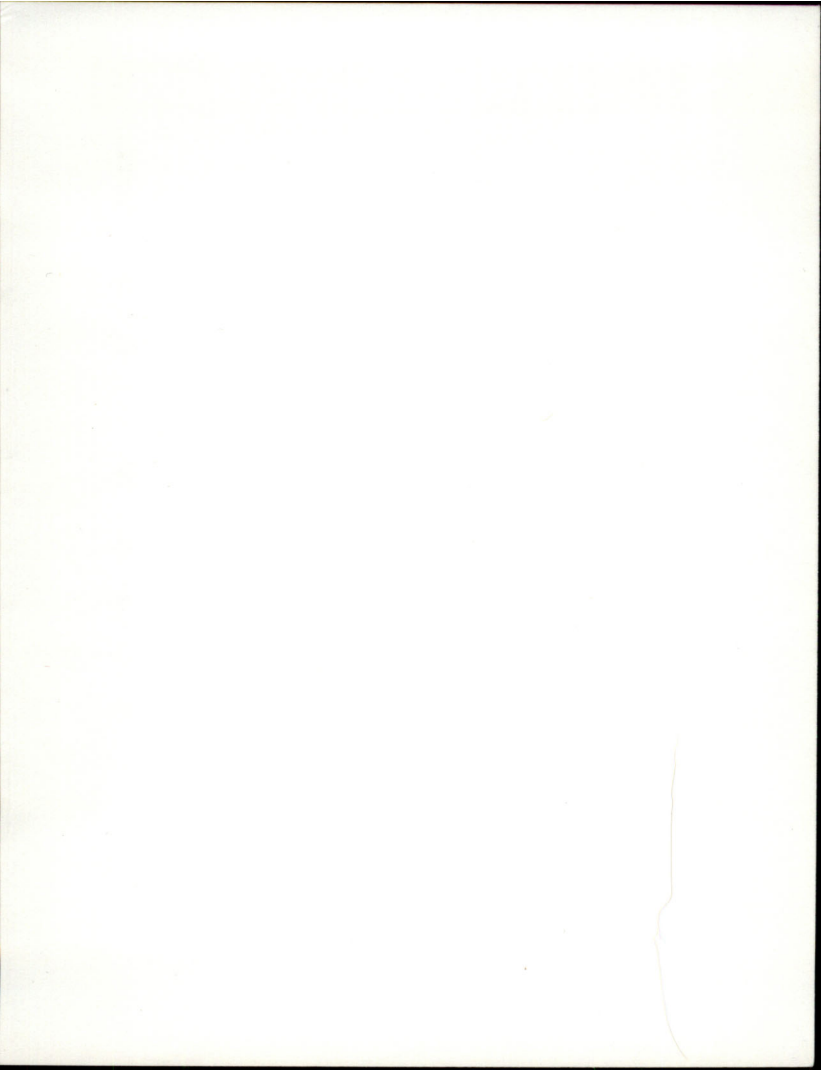
**39.** If the results of this risk are unfavorable, what have I learned to help me in my next risk?

**40.** Am I ready to take on the challenge—and pleasure—of the new risks that will now need to be taken?

Dr. Viscott enjoys recalling a backstage visit with actor Jack Lemmon, a man *The New Book of People* calls “one of the highest-powered dramatic talents of his generation.”

Yet, after this particular evening’s stunning theatrics, Jack had no idea of how the performance went. He needed reassurance. Dr. Viscott reflects that this seeming lack of confidence was perhaps a result of the actor being so caught up in the moment of his performance—his risk. Indeed, while Lemmon may not have given the performance of his life, he had given the best performance of which he was capable at that moment.

While we can’t always depend on others to rate the success of our risking, the lesson here is clear: When we risk, we shouldn’t concentrate too much on the outcome. Concentrating on the risk is the important thing...giving all that we can at the moment of the risk. There’ll be time for reflection later.



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