

How Men and Women Take Risks Differently in Business

How you perceive risk depends on internal factors you've never considered.

BY TED DEVINE EDITED BY DAN BOVA FEB 16, 2017

Share

Subscribe to the Entrepreneur Daily newsletter to get business news, tips and inspiration sent to your inbox

Email

I understand that the data I am submitting will be used to provide me with the above-described products and/or services and communications in connection therewith.
Read our [privacy policy](#) for more information.

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.



Shutterstock

When I first looked at the data from Insureon's [Small Business Outlook 2017](#), I wasn't sure if I liked what I saw. Sure, 82 percent of the more than 1,000 small-business owners we surveyed said they are planning for growth this year. But that means 18 percent aren't -- and that's not all. We also found that 68 percent of those with no plans for business growth are women.

The statistics fly against my understanding of entrepreneurs. Regardless of gender, business owners must learn to be comfortable taking risks -- whether that means launching a new product or hiring an employee. Without risk, there's little chance of growth.

Related: [Tim Ferriss' 7-Step Checklist for Overcoming Fear](#)

My first instinct is to ask, "What's holding women back?" Reading David Sundheim's "[Do Women Take as Many Risks as Men?](#)" has helped me realize I might be asking the wrong question. Also president of [The Sundheim Group](#), he raises the possibility that we tend to think of risk in more straightforward, male-dominated ways. If that's the case, maybe it's time to re-evaluate how we think about risk.

Reframing risk

Sundheim notes plenty of studies that show men are more likely to take risks than women. However, he also writes that the majority of men define risk-taking in physical and financial terms. That's a problem because it may overlook other kinds of risk. Would these fit your definition of risk?

- Jeopardizing your reputation to do what's right
- Refusing to lower your standards
- Valuing career satisfaction over profit

Related: [Despite Bias, Women Entrepreneurs Are an Enormous Economic Force](#)

When you reframe the concept of risk to include these types of actions, women take just as many risks as men. In fact, I see all sorts of women risk-takers in my company. Here are a few examples.

The woman who took the blame. At the monthly sales meeting, one team leader took the blame for something she could have pinned on a member of her team. Her willingness to cop to the mistake, even when it could have hurt her reputation, helped strengthen trust.

The woman who organized a winter-coat drive. One customer-service representative collected winter coats and delivered them directly to homeless people in her neighborhood. It was a lot to take on, but she clearly believed the risk was worth it. While some might've worried whether the workplace is an appropriate place to take a social stance, our team responded enthusiastically. She pushed us out of our comfort zone, and our office is better for it.

The woman who greets every new employee. It might not seem like a big deal, but one employee introduces herself to every new hire. That was much easier to do when we were a company of 20. Now, we number greater than 200. Still, she goes out of her way to welcome everyone -- at their desks, in the kitchen or waiting for the elevator.

valuing risk-takers

The difference in risk-taking between men and women is more than just interesting trivia. It can have a real impact on your bottom line. Think about it this way: People tend to stay where they feel others appreciate their efforts. Recognition makes them happy and leads to increased productivity. Ignore their efforts -- even unintentionally -- and you might see turnover you can't afford.

Related: [Leaving a Long-Term Job Takes Courage, Especially if You're a Woman](#)

Of course, some work is harder to measure than others. A salesperson taking a chance that wins a major client is clearly a line-item win, but how do you evaluate risks that don't directly result in profit (or loss)?

Start by asking better questions. For example, our survey focuses on common external indicators of growth. To pinpoint internal growth indicators, you might look at different factors. Has the employee looked for professional-development opportunities, mentored a new hire or taken on an additional task? Maybe she has offered valuable suggestions or created new systems for accomplishing duties. Any of these rising tides can help boost your business.

Employees extend themselves in many different ways. Acknowledging the full range of risks will help employees and your business flourish together.



Ted Devine
CEO of Insureon

Ted Devine is CEO of Chicago-based [Insureon](#), an online insurance agency for small and micro businesses. Previously, Devine held senior leadership positions at Aon Corp. and spent 12 years as a director of McKinsey & Co.

Want to be an Entrepreneur Leadership Network contributor? [Apply now to join.](#)

EDITOR'S PICK

[Is Your Business Idea Worth Millions?](#) Here's How to [Test It Without Breaking the Bank](#).

• Her [Business Is Solving the \\$12 Billion 'Porch Pirate' Problem](#) — Here's How a [\\$300 Product Can Keep Your Packages Safe](#)

[I Interview Side Hustlers](#) for a Living. These Are the [5 Key Moves They Make to Succeed](#).

• ['Pride of His Hometown': Who Is DeepSeek Founder Liang Wenfeng?](#) [What to Know About the 40-Year Old Billionaire](#).

[5 Telltale Signs You're Working for a Narcissist](#)

• How [This Franchise Grew 70% in 3 Years and Became the Top Choice in Tech](#)

MOST POPULAR

[See all](#)

BUSINESS NEWS

Your Old Apple AirPods Can Soon Act as an Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid, According to the FDA

The new software is compatible with the Apple AirPods Pro and accessible through iOS — for free and now FDA-authorized.



BY SHERIN SHIBU



BUSINESS IDEAS

70 Small Business Ideas to Start in 2025

We put together a list of the best, most profitable small business ideas for entrepreneurs to pursue in 2025.



BY EVE GUMPEL



SIDE HUSTLE

This Stat About Gen Alpha's Side Hustles Might Be Hard to Believe — But It Means Major Purchasing Power. Here's What the Kids Want to Buy.

These young entrepreneurs are already planning for their financial futures.



BY AMANDA BREEN



BUSINESS NEWS

An AI Company With a Popular Writing Tool Tells Candidates They Can't Use It on the Job Application

AI companies are banning AI-generated job applications.




BY SHERIN SHIBU



GROWING A BUSINESS

What Our Digital World Is Missing — and How I Turned It Into \$100 Million After Dropping Out of High School

I went from high school dropout to \$100 million CEO by sticking to one very important learning principle.

 BY JOY GENDUSA



GROWING A BUSINESS

This Charleston Hotspot Found an Inflation Loophole That Helps It Avoid Rising Food Costs — Here's Its Secret

Miller's All Day partners with local farmers to combat rising inflation costs and thrive in Charleston's competitive restaurant scene.

 BY EMILY WASHCOVICK



[Terms of Use](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Cookies Policy](#) [Accessibility Statement](#) [Site Map](#) [Contact Support](#) [Advertise](#) [Cookie Management](#)

Sign up for our free Daily newsletter

We'll be in your inbox every morning Monday-Saturday with all the day's top business news, inspiring stories, best advice and exclusive reporting from Entrepreneur.

Subscribe

I understand that the data I am submitting will be used to provide me with the above-described products and/or services and communications in connection therewith.

Read our [privacy policy](#) for more information.

Copyright © 2025 Entrepreneur Media, LLC All rights reserved. Entrepreneur® and its related marks are registered trademarks of Entrepreneur Media LLC

