



# Keep Calm and Carry On

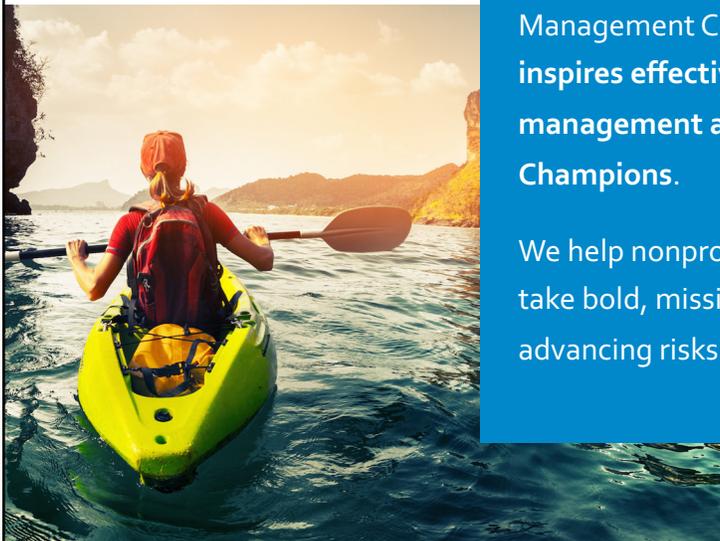
Crisis Communications Tips and Strategies

**Melanie Lockwood Herman**, *Executive Director*  
Nonprofit Risk Management Center  
703.777.3504 | [Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org](mailto:Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org)

Funding and support  
for this webinar was  
provided by



1



The Nonprofit Risk Management Center inspires effective risk management and Risk Champions.

We help nonprofit teams take bold, mission-advancing risks.

2

## Workshop Overview



Resources!



What is Crisis Communications?



Staying on Message During a Crisis



Tips and Takeaways

3

## New for North Carolina Nonprofits!

[www.ncnonprofits.org/  
events/building-  
organizational-  
resilience](http://www.ncnonprofits.org/events/building-organizational-resilience)

### Toolkit for Building Organizational Resilience



4

# Upcoming Webinar!

## May 13 – Resilience and Resumption: What You Need to Know and Do to Get Ready for a New Normal

In the middle of a crisis, returning to “normal” feels far off. And after a mega-disruption such as COVID-19 or a devastating hurricane, many organizations need to envision a ‘new normal,’ as things will not be the way they once were. This webinar offers practical tips for getting ready for your nonprofit’s new normal. Learn what you can do today to create a path to your organization’s future. [Register here.](#)

Funding and support for this webinar series provided by Duke Energy.



5

# Resource on nonprofitrisk.org

**Nonprofit Risk Management Center**  
VOL. 37, NO. 2, SUMMER 2018

## Risk Management ESSENTIALS

Tips, Knowledge and Tools for Nonprofit Organizations

### THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT ISSUE

#### The Future is Now: Preparing for the Unknown Crisis

Preparing for a possible future crisis can feel overwhelming and abstract for many nonprofit leaders. With competing priorities and meeting the needs of stakeholders on a day-to-day basis, taking the time to think through how your nonprofit will respond to a currently non-existent crisis can end up taking a back seat. However, when a crisis hits your organization, your level of preparation can make the difference between bouncing back stronger than ever and quickly being overwhelmed by the sudden rush of urgent demands. Although many leaders and nonprofit board members would rather not consider the myriad ways that a crisis could unfold, the right time to plan for how your organization will manage a crisis is well—hopefully long before you experience one.

Creating a practical and actionable crisis management plan should be a goal for every nonprofit, and especially, organizations can take steps to prepare for a future crisis. Whatever the size or resources of your nonprofit, taking the time to think through some of the goals and constraints of your organization can make this crisis planning process more effective and efficient, and a lot less intimidating. The following essential preparations can serve as a step-by-step approach for preparing to manage a crisis situation.

CONTRIBUTED BY PAGE 2

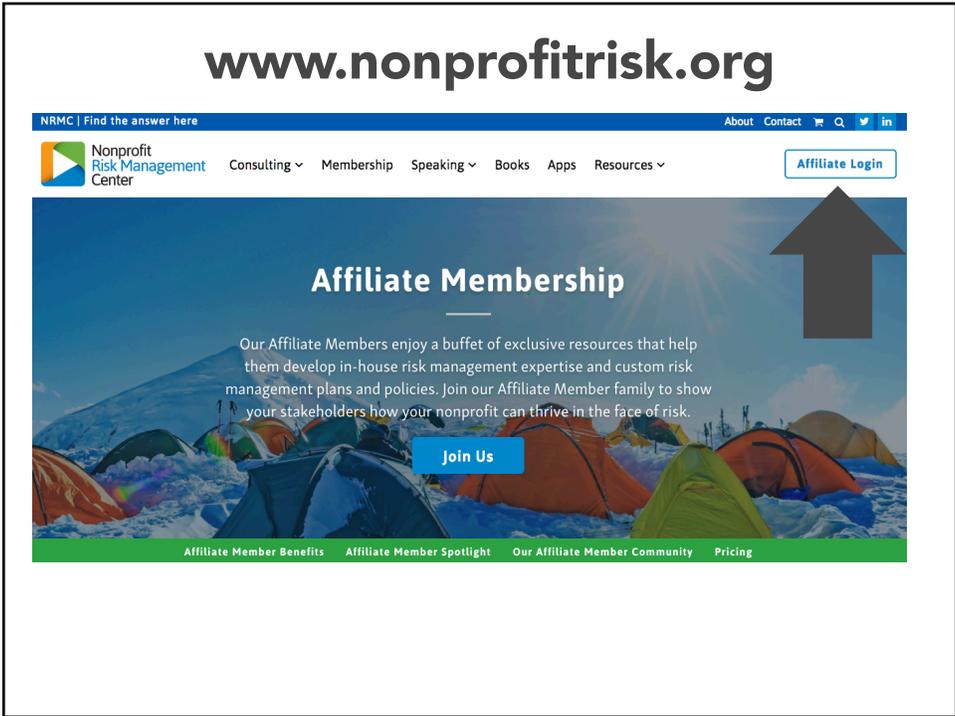
**World-Class Risk Management**  
Order World-Class Risk Management for Nonprofits today!  
evaluating the maturity of risk management is a priority  
your goals include living risk management to the goals and objectives of your nonprofit  
you are a risk leader striving to help others in your nonprofit make risk-aware decisions

Join the authors of World-Class Risk Management for Nonprofits to understand the practices and processes that separate good enough risk practice from mission-defining risk management.

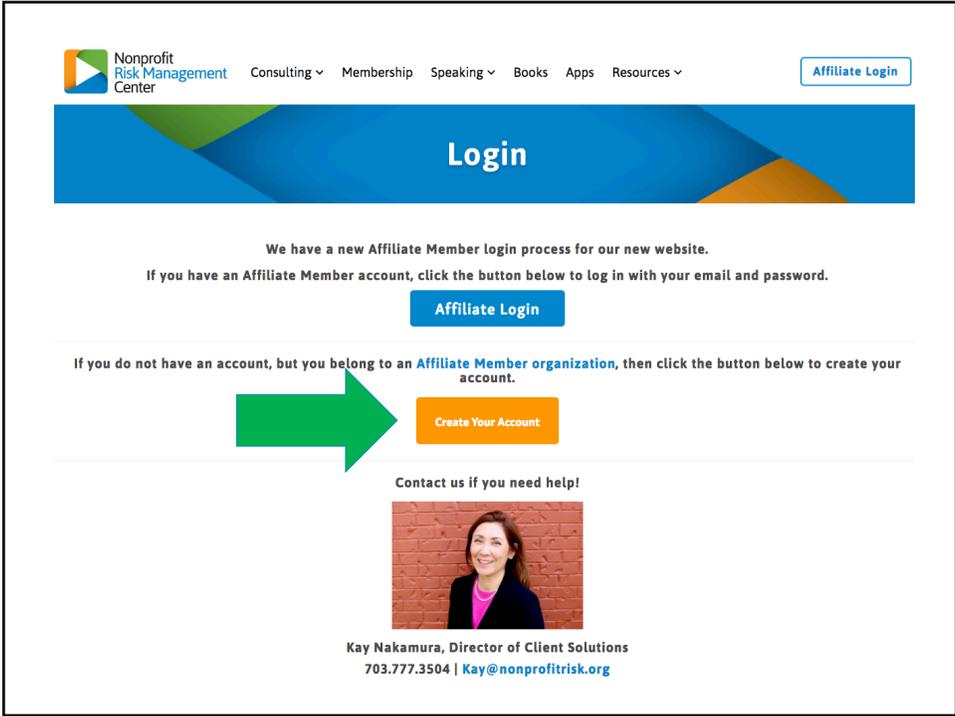
Call 703.277.3564 or visit [nonprofitrisk.org/products/world-class](http://nonprofitrisk.org/products/world-class) to order.

A PUBLICATION OF THE NONPROFIT RISK MANAGEMENT CENTER  
201 South Bay Street, Durham, NC 27701 | 703.277.3564 | [www.nonprofitrisk.org](http://www.nonprofitrisk.org)  
©2018 Nonprofit Risk Management Center

6



7



8

## Ask A RISK HELP Question

Call our team at 703.777.3504 or use the form below to submit a RISK HELP question by email.  
[Click here](#) to review frequently asked RISK HELP questions.

**Resources Menu**

- [Ask A RISK HELP Question](#)
- [RISK HELP FAQs](#)
- [Affiliate Member Directory](#)
- [Webinar Vault](#)
- [Affiliate Member Discounts](#)

**Ask a RISK HELP Question**

First Name \*  Last Name \*

Name of Organization \*

Email \*  Phone Number \*

RISK HELP Question \*

[Submit](#)

**For RISK HELP,  
call us or submit  
a question.**

9



10

## What is a Crisis?

A change—sudden or evolving—that results in an urgent problem that must be addressed immediately.



Source: *Managing Crisis*, Harvard Business Press, Pocket Mentor

11

## What's a crisis?

Surprise + Threat + Short Response Time

- "An organizational crisis is a specific, unexpected, and nonroutine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and simultaneously present an organization with both opportunities for and threats to its high-priority goals."

[https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/37705\\_1.pdf](https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/37705_1.pdf)

12

## What is Crisis Communications?

- “a sub-specialty of the public relations profession....” – Wikipedia
- “...the technologies, systems, and protocols that enable an organization to effectively communicate during an emergency situation.” – Rock Dove Solutions
- “The effort taken by a company to communicate with the public.... when an unexpected event occurs that could have a negative impact on the company’s reputation.” – Business Dictionary

| 93

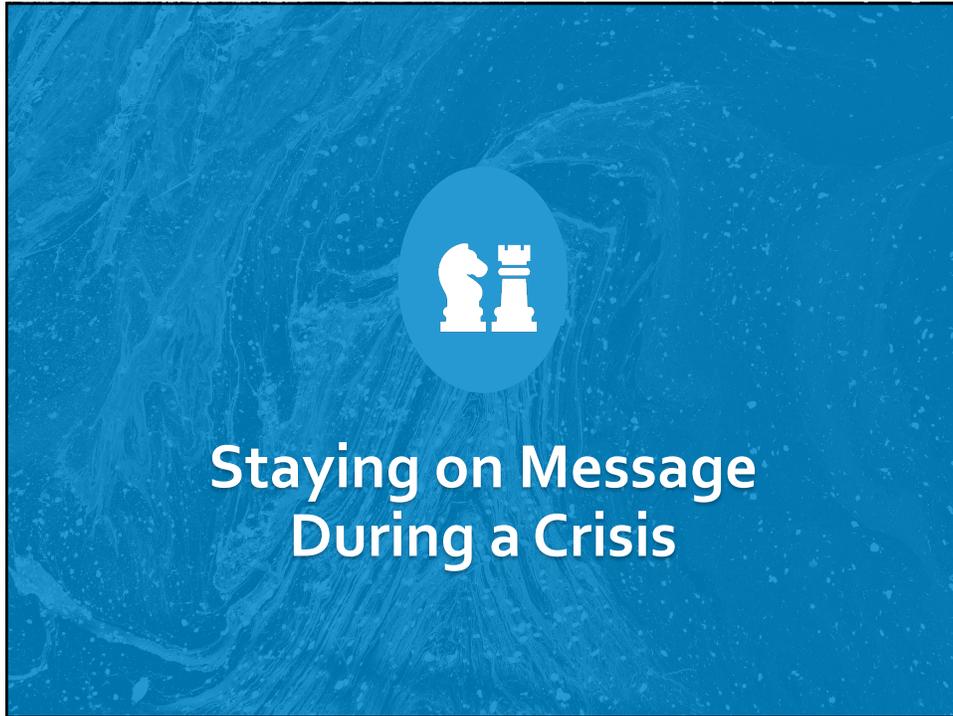
13

## But what about your mission?!

- “Crisis communications is mission-focused messaging and dialog with vital stakeholders during a crisis.”
- “Crisis communications is informing your community with mission-focused messaging, inspiring confidence and comfort in times of crisis.”



14



15

## 3 Categories of Risk Communication

- **Precaution advocacy** ("Watch out!"): alerting people to serious hazards when they are unduly apathetic.
- **Outrage management** ("Calm down!"): reassuring people about minor hazards.
- **Crisis communication** ("We'll get through it together!"): Guiding people through serious hazards when they are appropriately upset (or even in denial).

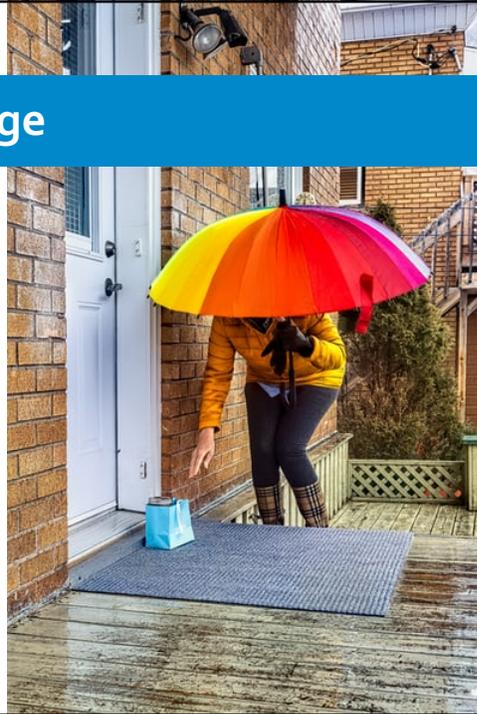
Peter M. Sandman, Ph.D., and Jody Lanard, M.D.

| 36

16

## Simplify the message

1. We Care
2. We're Here
3. This is how you can help



17

## Remember: Who, What, and How

- **Who** needs to hear from you?
- **What** do they need to hear and know? **What** will you say?
- **How** will you reach your audiences?

WHO	Clients	Staff	Donors	General Public + Media
WHAT	Are we open?  What new services are we providing?  What services are on hold?	Is it safe to come to work?  Are you flexible?  Is my job safe?	How can we help?	How is your agency 'answering the call'?
HOW	Many different methods!	Video calls, phone calls, comm. apps	Phone calls and email	Website, phone calls to media, Press releases

18

## Breaking Down 'what' to communicate

### All about the 'event':

- COVID-19: Latest information from government and public health authorities
- Severe Weather: Latest information from the National Weather Service and other credible resources
- What other crisis events can you imagine? Who are the credible sources of information for those types of events?

### All about you:

- Organization specific: what's happening, what you're doing to protect people, how your audience is likely to be impacted by what's happening
- In some cases your response to different crisis events may be similar... You can start crafting these messages now!

| 19

19

## "Questions are the Answer"

- Don't be afraid to ask, "What do you need to feel safe/safer?"

"...And therefore it makes sense to keep reminding yourself to admit and embrace being a little more wrong... Immerse yourself in situations where you feel less right, less comfortable, or less compelled to speak, and your questions will multiply." – Hal Gregersen



| 20

20

## Details, Transparency + Questions

- Provide enough detail to be informative, without getting bogged down with unnecessary minutiae
- Be as transparent as possible: what you know, and how you reached key decisions
- Provide an opportunity to ask questions
- LISTEN to the questions you receive!

| 21

21

## Clarify: Who is our spokesperson?

- The only person(s) authorized to speak on behalf of the organization
- Trained for the role
- May be CEO, but should it be?

If I'm "not it" — am I clear about that?



| 22

22

## “L&D Professionals Can Lead Through the Pandemic”

- **Communication.** Keep communication lines open and communicate regularly, ensuring that everyone is heard and has an opportunity to voice and raise their concerns, especially as more and more people are working remotely.
- **Empathy.** Show empathy to each other and understand other people’s context. Acknowledge their emotions and concerns while also helping to address them.
- **Transparency.** We don’t always have all the answers and that’s ok, so be open and transparent with your people about the situation and show humility by inviting their opinions and suggestions for solutions.

[www.harvardbusiness.org/ld-professionals-can-lead-through-the-pandemic/](http://www.harvardbusiness.org/ld-professionals-can-lead-through-the-pandemic/)

| 23

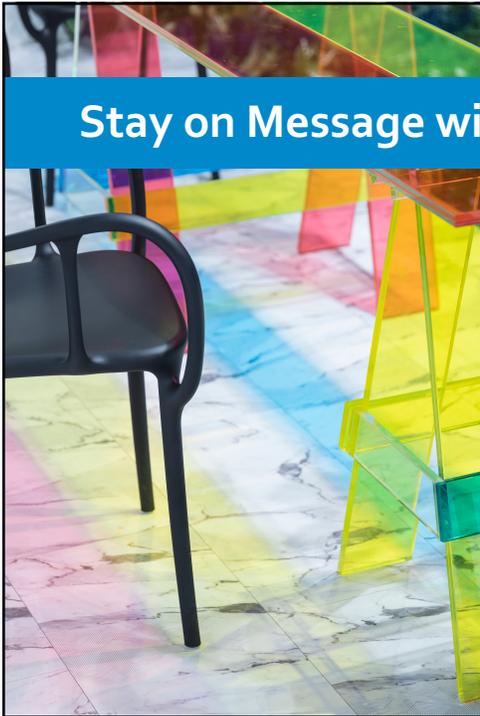
23

## In the Spotlight

- **If you don’t know, say so**
  - if possible/feasible, find out
- **Be sincere and compassionate**
  - not just when your stakeholders have been hurt...
- **Accommodate reasonable requests**
  - e.g. time, location of interview
- **Admit when a mistake has been made; it’s the first step in re-establishing credibility**

| 24

24

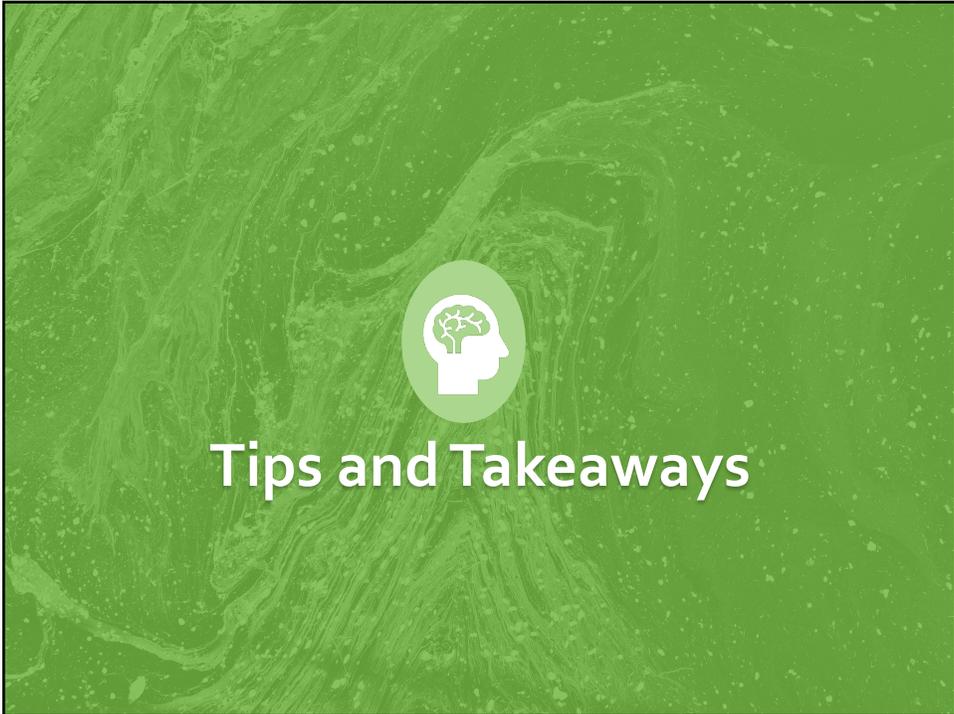


## Stay on Message with the 5 C's

1. Care
2. Commitment
3. Consistency
4. Coherence
5. Clarity

1 95

25



## Tips and Takeaways

26

## Nancy Koehn, HBS

- “Your job, as a leader today, is to provide both **brutal honesty** — a clear accounting of the challenges your locality, company, non-profit, or team faces — and **credible hope** that collectively you and your people have the resources needed to meet the threats you face each day: determination, solidarity, strength, shared purpose, humanity, kindness, and resilience. Recognize that most of your employees are anxious about their health, their finances, and, in many cases, their jobs. Explain that you understand how scary things feel, but that you can work together to weather this storm.”



27

## Role and Purpose

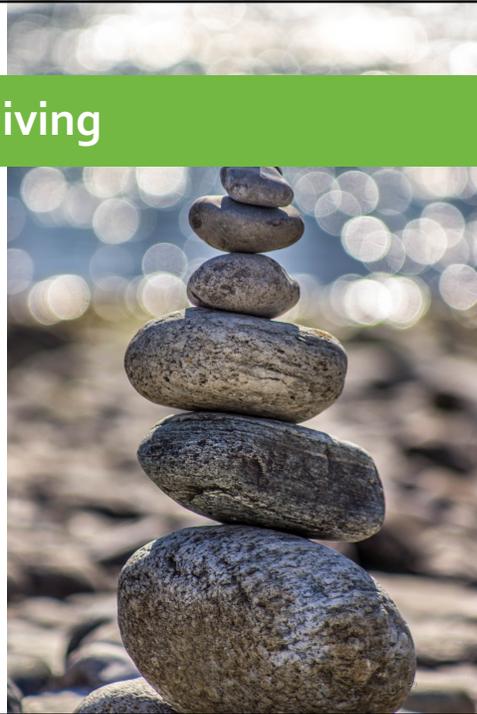
- Give people a role and a purpose



28

## Be patient and forgiving

- Emphasize experimentation and learning



29

## Tend to energy and emotion

- "Crises take a toll on all of us. They are exhausting and can lead to burnout. For many, who lost loved ones, they are devastating. . . .one critical function of leadership during intense turbulence is to *keep your finger on the pulse of your people's energy and emotions and respond as needed.*"

"Real Leaders Are Forged in Crisis," by Nancy Koehn  
<https://hbr.org/2020/04/real-leaders-are-forged-in-crisis>

| 30

30

## Put your own mask on first!

- **Toxic worry:** It's worry going off when it doesn't need to; worry that paralyzes you and leads you to freeze up."



31

## Ethics isn't an option

- "Crises do not build character; they expose the character of the organization. If an organization is unethical before a crisis, those values are likely to be identified during the crisis. Organizations that institute strong, positive value positions, such as openness, honesty, responsibility, accountability, and trustworthiness, with key organizational stakeholders *before a crisis happens* are best able to create renewal following the crisis."

Ethical Crisis Leadership, Sage Publications

[https://uk.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/81215\\_Chapter\\_12\\_Ethical\\_Crisis\\_Leadership.pdf](https://uk.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/81215_Chapter_12_Ethical_Crisis_Leadership.pdf)

| 31

32

## Stay Future Focused and Positive

Learn from your mistakes, be boldly optimistic and emphasize rebuilding, not blame.

- “With every cloud there is a silver lining, and while we find ourselves in an extreme situation, it’s important to try and remain calm and positive and remind ourselves of the good things that have potentially come out of the situation.” - HBR

I 33

33

## Get ready for the 'next time'

Tune up your Crisis Communications Plan!

A crisis communications plan outlines:

- who should speak and who shouldn't
- materials that need to be produced
- who should be involved in the process
- who needs to be in the loop
- the organization's crisis telephone directory with the numbers for reaching critical people 24-7
- messages that can be tweaked to suit the crisis
- key points of contact: stakeholders, media etc.

I 34

34

## Closing: Landing on Your Feet

1. Practice perfection (take nothing for granted)
2. Look before you leap, but know what to look for
3. Forget “no fear”—you need the right kind of fear  
(too much confidence is dangerous!)



Skydiver Cheryl Sterns,  
*Fast Company*, April 2002

| 35

35



# Thank you!

**Melanie Lockwood Herman**

703.777.3504 | [Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org](mailto:Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org)

With deep  
appreciation for the  
generous support of



36