Why NOT Take A Risk?

Steven Bucher '21
Computer Science and Engineering

CIOCCA CENTER
FOR INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

I've always hated risk -- regardless of how major or minor the consequences -- I hate it. Early on, my education reinforced my aversion for risk, because as a STEM student, I was not taught much about risk "allowance." I was taught to find exact answers, while understanding and measuring the level of risk being taken. In the real world, risk is not always so quantifiable.

Early in college, I became interested in the startup world and began learning more about the entrepreneurial mindset through courses, real-world experience, and my own startups. Did

> " Did learning more about the entrepreneurial mindset help me learn to love risk? No! "

learning more about the entrepreneurial mindset help me learn to love risk instead of hating it?? No! I am still averse to risk, but coursework and experience have taught me the importance of taking risk and how to grow a tolerance for it.

My risk-tolerance journey has been a slow one. After my freshman year of college, I wanted an internship, but companies weren't hiring freshmen. My friend and I decided to create our own job in the form of an agriculture tech startup project, so we could gain some experience and feel better about using our summer well. We had no idea what we were doing, but we took time to learn about how companies are formed and how to develop a product. Neither of us (with strong agreement from our parents!) had any intention of dropping out of college for our idea, so we had the luxury and flexibility to work on something we were

> " My risk-tolerance journey has been a slow one. "

passionate about with no obvious downside to the pursuit - low-risk and high personal reward. At the end of summer, I presented our idea to a Venture Capital partner as a way to practice and improve my "pitch" in front of a professional. Before I even began the presentation, he asked me if I would

drop out of college for this idea. When I said, "No," I immediately saw the interest leave the partner's face. I realized that rather than low-risk, high reward, it was zero risk and zero external reward. My significant "take-away" was that risk is seen as an expression of commitment, and a willingness to bear it builds credibility.

I have since started teaching myself a greater tolerance for risk. Through the entrepreneurship minor courses and work at startups, I have learned about various risks relevant to different environments and I adjust accordingly. Slowly, but surely, my tolerance for risk grows, understanding the importance of creating backup and pivot plans, as well as gaining a comfort level with uncertainty. Taking risks is unavoidable, and a tolerance for risk is key in the business world. Why not learn to thrive with it?