

DON'T BE AFRAID TO INNOVATE

Imagine A Different Way

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An important part of becoming successful is learning how to transform even the most extreme challenges into springboards for future achievements.

With effort, anyone can learn to use troubles to stretch their minds toward brand new possibilities.

Just ask Patricia Thorp, who had to figure out how to walk and remember everyday things after being hit by a car in 1986; or Chris Sullivan, who refused to allow his deafness to derail a brilliant career on Wall Street.

“Brand new ways of solving things cannot happen unless someone is willing to consider the circumstances facing them as a gift,” said Melissa McFarlane, a certified life coach and co-founder of Electric Kites.

A Whole New Life

Thorp was a 30-year-old power player at an international public relations firm when life as she knew it was shattered as she was struck by a car while crossing a busy Miami street. Thorp's body was broken and her brain was badly damaged.

Slowly, Thorp relearned walking, first against walls, then on her own. She came up with new ways to manage daily tasks.

Though Thorp knew her career would never be the same, she forged a fresh path.

On a computer she bought by trading in her windsurfing board, Thorp started Thorp & Company. It's now one of the largest PR firms in the Southeast.

Thorp, 49, still takes copious notes during meetings with clients to help her remember details. And she jots reminders about contacts she's just met on the backs of their business cards to boost her recall. But few can tell she still lives with the effects of a brain injury.

“Never give up,” she said. “There are 100,000 beautiful lives you can have during your time on this planet. Just because one was taken away doesn't mean you can't find another.”

Dare To Be Different

When Sullivan interviewed to be a technical analyst at Merrill Lynch in 1987, one of the first questions he had to answer was how he'd talk to clients and staff. Though deaf since the age of 2, Sullivan's parents had raised him to seek solutions instead of stewing over what he knew he couldn't do.

Though he usually spoke through an interpreter, Sullivan found out that Merrill Lynch had an internal e-mail system.

“I immediately saw that as a way of communicating with other people without having to rely on other colleagues,” Sullivan, 57, said in a recent e-mail interview.

Sullivan, now vice president and manager of Merrill Lynch Special Needs Financial Services, got the job, rose through the ranks, and concentrated on improving the company. He's spearheaded several programs for disabled investors.

If you're facing a personal crisis or limitation, McFarlane suggests using daydreams and futuristic thinking to catalyze your flight out of the ashes.

"It's hard to get to how until you can imagine what," she said.

Amy Alexander