

**GROWTH STRATEGIES**

# How to Avoid Self-Sabotage

Your brain wants you to succeed--so get out of the way.

**Scott Halford**

MAY 18, 2009

I once heard a presenter ask a room full of people what they thought about cooking a cheeseburger in their exhaust pipe. The audible disgust was instant. The collective brain in the room immediately shut down any possibility of the idea going any further. Your brain already knows how to help you succeed--so get out of the way.

This particularly cool, but deceptively sabotaging feature of the brain is known as "danger surfing." Way back when life was a matter of survival, each morning our ancestors came out of the cave and were instantly on high alert. They would "surf" the horizon for danger; danger surfing is what saved their lives. We still roam around with that ancient wiring and understanding it will help you to overcome the sabotage danger surfing can create when your organization is coming up with the next big idea.

You'll see danger surfing in your workplace over less obvious dangerous ideas. It happens when someone proposes a new idea and the listener's instinctual reaction is to find all the ways the idea might fail or hurt the individual or organization. So, what do they do? They "save people from themselves" and rip their idea to shreds, or slyly convince them it's not such a good one. Instead of building upon the idea the way inventors, innovators and creative types do, they

find everything and anything wrong with the proposed idea and put up a big stop sign. Sound familiar?

Danger surfing sabotages your success--it gets old to hear your cynical views. Danger surfing stops the idea from progressing as rapidly as it might and often shuts it down completely. Inventions don't typically come to light because of all the things you said no to. While ideas need to be analyzed and critiqued, danger surfing becomes a knee-jerk default and should be consciously overridden to create more successful, creative and positive results.

Your brain knows the business of people, and all of the post-graduate courses on the latest process probably won't teach you what your brain is aching to do for you if you'll just pay attention to it. When you become aware of the cool little devices harbored in the folds of your white and grey matter, you can out-smart your competition.

### Tips to Avoid Danger Surfing

1. **"Yes and..."** Do what improv actors do; play the "yes and." game. Instead of looking for the flaws, be additive to the idea. The next time someone comes to you with an idea, no matter how half-baked, put your "but" out to pasture and expand on the idea. Not only will this be collaborative and lead to more creativity, it will also show you what an attractor behavior is like.
2. **Create and evaluate separately.** The formation of ideas and the evaluation of them are two entirely different brain processes. Let's say you want to start a new venture, so you pull together your best business whiz pals in a meeting to help you with the idea. You'll want to spring for two pizza-and-beer parties. One is to collect every whacked-out idea they can come up with in relation to your idea--no evaluation of the ideas, the

brain will shut down creativity if you do. The second meeting is to evaluate and prioritize. Allow at least a week in between formation and evaluation so the brain can incubate. At the end of the first meeting, ask everyone to be thinking about the best possible combinations of ideas around your venture.

3. **Count to ten.** It takes approximately six seconds from the time a negative emotion is felt (i.e., disgust or disdain) and the dissipation of the hormones that make you want to blurt out a nasty remark. Your mom was right--count to ten before you speak. Let the visceral feelings die down, then speak. And remember to be additive.