

AS HOCKEY LEGEND WAYNE GRETZKY ONCE NOTED, you will always miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take. It's a hockey player's way of saying, "Don't fear taking risks," and it's valuable advice for anyone trying to figure out where to go from here.

Taking a shot—or in my case, a road I had not traveled much before—brought me to California immediately after I graduated from Baylor. The road led me to a variety of places, most recently to Splunk, where we solve technology challenges for companies with large, complex IT infrastructures.

When I left college, I didn't know exactly where this road would lead. However, I felt I needed to break out. I spent the first 20 years of my life growing up in Texas in a safe and

secure "bubble." Baylor exposed me to a larger world and expanded my horizons, but I knew I needed to break out and free myself from the limits and comforts of my surroundings. My most courageous decision was to pack that car and leave the security and comfort of Texas behind. I had to take a shot and try something new. So I headed west.

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LEADERSHIP



PERSPECTIVE

Step Outside Your Comfort Zone

by Godfrey R. Sullivan

A man stands in a hallway, wearing a dark grey business suit, a light-colored shirt, and a striped tie. He is also wearing a white hockey helmet with a metal cage, large black hockey gloves, and white hockey skates. He is holding a silver suitcase in his right hand. The background is a blue-tinted hallway with white walls and pipes.


Here are some of the lessons I have learned along the way that might benefit others:

Travel hungry.

It sharpens your focus. Figurative and literal hunger helps you step out of your comfort zone; knowing where the road goes is not always so important if you are curious about what you see along the way and feed that curiosity. I went from the shelter of family and college life in Waco, Texas, to being a broke young man not knowing exactly what would happen next. My first couple of years out of college, I almost starved trying to find the right thing to do. I vividly remember eating on \$3 a day. But that hunger also fueled my search for innovation. My revelation came in 1980 when I was working at a bank. I saw a spreadsheet that took five minutes to finish a job that took us six days to do at the bank. That really was a life-changing force. I soon left my banking job for Apple Computer. To this day, I am thankful to Apple for inventing its computer and for being a mile away from where I lived in Silicon Valley, which was the epicenter of a revolution.

You cannot mandate innovation.

This is related to traveling hungry. Most people can't summon or enforce innovation. Forward thinkers typically have the vision and guts to look at something differently, to dig deeper for creative answers. Innovation usually happens because there is an intense need or a specific challenge that requires a creative solution.



Thinking and acting creatively requires a certain type of person, one who has that “hunger to solve” encoded in his DNA. In Silicon Valley, we have an outstanding pool of innovators due to the early successes of companies like Apple, HP, Sun and others. Over the past 20 years, this innovation has sustained itself in Silicon Valley largely through venture capital firms. Their investments have attracted some of the best and brightest to this area. If you want to break out, go where the innovators are and join their teams. Hang out with the people who think differently and aren’t afraid to take a chance.

Go for growth.

There are growth industries and shrinking industries. Try to find one in the first category that suits your vision of what you want to do. Growth industries feed the imagination and allow you to take more chances that result in innovation. An expanding environment attracts innovators to your team, offering critical mass—even more opportunity for expansion and creative thought. Growth and innovation go together, and they create an energetic atmosphere. You cannot have fun innovating if the only innovation you practice is the cost cutting that goes hand-in-hand with a shrinking industry. In short, growth fosters innovation.

Mentors really matter.

Look for mentors who speak your language and can help you grow. Two people who were of great importance to me were Bill Campbell, current chairman of the board of Intuit, and Carol Bartz, CEO at Yahoo!. I worked for Bill Campbell at Apple and for Carol Bartz at Autodesk. Both of them helped me grow and challenged me to do more. A mentor who understands what you want, who knows what you need, and who is willing to teach you what he or she knows can shape your life in ways that will benefit you for years to come. Good mentoring is critical for development, along with transferring this knowledge to others over time.

Win with integrity.

This is the business version of the Golden Rule. There are multiple ways to win, but at Splunk, we want to win the right way. This means that our success makes our customers, our employees and our

shareholders happy. If you are fair in business, you will discover a formula that pays off for everyone in the long term. If you are not fair—if you break the rules—you will ultimately pay the price. As proof, we have only to look at the recent conditions on Wall Street, where people tried to win at any cost and defined success as big monetary gain in the short term. At Splunk, we want to be the market share leader—the best—using practices that benefit everyone. This might sound simplistic, but we really need to be mindful of the road we travel versus having a singular focus on the destination.

Breaking out is what really set me free. I took a risk and traveled west. This hunger to grow and learn helped me discover a whole new world, a world of technology filled with pioneering companies and brilliant people who were literally changing the world around me. Surrounded by this passion and innovation, I discovered my calling and was fortunate enough to work with great companies and found talented mentors along the way.

The lessons we learn—and the shots we take—create the successes and failures that determine who we will become. And while not everyone is an innovator, no one can innovate in his chosen field without taking a chance along the way.

Which path will you take?

TECHNOLOGY VETERAN GODFREY R. SULLIVAN is president and CEO of Splunk, an innovative Silicon Valley company that has created large-scale, real-time indexing and search technology that companies use to manage, secure, and audit complex IT infrastructures.

As Sullivan explains it, the name “Splunk” is a shortened version of the word “spelunking,” also known as cave-diving. Splunk goes into muddy holes to find creative solutions for its customers, says Sullivan. The software helps organizations find things in the “deep, dark places.” The 4-year-old company offers customers a free download, and more than 350,000 users have taken advantage of the offer.

Formerly the president and CEO of Hyperion Solutions, Sullivan grew the company from \$500 million in 2001 to revenues of almost \$1 billion in 2007, when Oracle acquired it for \$3.3 billion. Before that, he was CEO of Promptu Corp. He also spent eight years at Autodesk in senior management positions, and 11 years with Apple, where he led business marketing and other operations.

Sullivan holds a BBA from Baylor University and has completed executive programs at Stanford and The Wharton School of Business. He lives in Saratoga, California, along with his wife Suzanne and two daughters, Hayley and Shea. An active family, the Sullivan’s passions include travel, snowboarding and endurance racing on their Arabian horses.

