

2010 CEO Address to the Community

Community impact is risky business.

While watching the Olympics last month I was giving some thought to what we've accomplished here at the northern Santa Barbara County United Way.

At first I thought these young athletes must be crazy! Consider skiing downhill at 90 mph, jumping into the air from the equivalent of an eight story building, flipping backwards, landing on your feet and continuing down the hill at 90 miles an hour. The truth is Olympic athletes, unlike most of us, live on the edge. Most of the rest of us live in a comfort zone far below what these athletes would ever consider.

However, being at the edge is where real change occurs.

People who live on the edge tend to place themselves in situations that stretch them well past their limitations. These athletes were certainly not born risking their lives. They incrementally increase their level of risk and leave their prior comfort zone in the rearview mirror. However, being on the edge for most of us is unfamiliar and risky.

By staying within our comfort zone we live in the realm of practical. However, when we move toward the edge we pursue what was once thought to be impractical or impossible. Those that live on or near the edge are changing their current comfort zones and in effect, the world around them.

Olympians live their lives near the edge, but no matter the outcome they go through life knowing they went for the gold. Now I'm not suggesting that this 58-year-old United Way executive take up alpine skiing or aerial ski jumping. I am suggesting that we take a step toward the edge to move toward something that we thought previously improbable or impractical.

For years I've described excellence in this way with the acronym CRED

- C. is for caring more than others think is practical
- R. is for risking more than others think is safe
- E. is for expecting more than others think is probable
- D. is for dreaming more than others think is possible.

Today, I am heeding the advice of a colleague, and adding **I B L E** to complete a theme – **CREDIBLE**

- **I. for pursuing the impossible**
- **B. for believing in the power of change**
- **L. for leadership at all levels of the community, AND**
- **E. for everyone has a stake in the outcome**

BY LIVING UNITED, WE ARE ALL MAKING A CREDIBLE DIFFERENCE IN THE FUTURE OF OUR COMMUNITIES!

Because we care at United Way, we took the risk of realigning our organization to impact more lives through early childhood education and asset building strategies that give people the opportunity to have a better life.

Three years ago we launched the financial stability services partnership and today along with our partners, we are working together to provide volunteer income tax assistance and access to asset building strategies. That includes partners from the nonprofit, for-profit, government and the academic sectors. This year we will continue to enhance that effort with financial literacy initiatives.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Guess what is coming next

In 2010 we will address our education goals with the launch of our school readiness campaigns. This includes the Imagination Library -- a program which provides a free book every month for any child age 0 to 5. Later this year we will also introduce Reading Plus- a proven program designed to improve reading skills, comprehension, and test scores of students from the third grade through adulthood. Our goal is to increase the high school graduation rate by improving school readiness and literacy.

You see, your local United Way is a small organization that tries to dream more than others think is possible. Of course, dreams are seldom made a reality without strong support. In closing, I want to thank the Board of Directors, the staff, and the volunteers for your willingness to take the necessary risks, step out of your comfort zone and embrace the vision of a better future. You exemplify what you've often heard me say: "If we all do a little, we will accomplish great things together." Thank you for being Olympic champions for United Way and for our community.

Best Regards,

Eddie Taylor, CEO