

**ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS
TRAINING COLUMN
Mark Breslin, Breslin Strategies, Inc.**

SQUISHED LIKE A BUG

This is a story about the power of perseverance.

It was a hot summer. My teen-age vacation and a time for puppy love. She was fifteen and budding. I was thirteen and scrawny. And out by the pool there she was; Sue Hanson, official babe. Her orange bathing suit called to me. Like a honeybee to a daisy I was drawn. I thought it was love. I was dizzy with anticipation. But I was about to be squashed like a bug and worse, I didn't have a clue.

Edison tried over 100 versions of his light bulb before it worked. Lincoln lost eight elections and had four nervous breakdowns before he became President of the United States. Folks thought Einstein was retarded until about eight years old. It is a fact that greatness is often built upon the wreckage of numerous crash and burn jobs. But relentless perseverance is nearly always the vehicle of deliverance.

I hung around near her cabin like a hound near a supper dish. Stole a hundred glances of her by the pool. Waiting for the perfect opportunity to steal her heart; the Friday night dance. Fueled by unbridled optimism I walked on air. There she was, golden hair and blue eyes. I stammered and stuttered, "W-W-Would you like to dance"? she looked at me like I was an offensive rodent. "No, I don't THINK so," she said with finality. I wobbled away, damaged but not fatally wounded.

To do the perceived impossible, or that which simply takes too much time, trouble, effort, commitment, money, conflict...these are what create the "no, can't, won't, shouldn't" responses so common to us all. Look at rebuilding union market share. Look at adopting new curriculum or methods of instruction. Look at the old school thinking that does not account for just how difficult the road ahead really is. "Tried it before and it won't work now." "Can't do anything about that." "That's just the way it is." These phrases are simply a rationalization of marginal expectations. And because most people prefer to rationalize rather than persevere, attainable goals sometimes appear to be beyond what otherwise might be reasonably achieved. And then again, people hate to try and fail. It's just so embarrassing and messy.

Fifteen minutes later, it was time to try again. Hit the beach against machine gun fire. Climb the mountain in a blizzard. Body-surf the tsunami. Blind to all but my objective and the eighteen year old stud-muffin sitting next to her, I boldly tried again; "Would you like to dance?" She silently gave me the wrinkled "stinky fish" nose ... but her dude had on the knowing smirk. One more try. "Are all the dances reserved for him?" I asked, pointing at the golden boy. Cold and calculated to kill she replied, "No, but NONE OF THEM are reserved for YOU!" They laughed.

Perseverance is about overcoming failure, pain and adversity. Perseverance is about, the NO MATTER WHAT factor; long after everyone else would have given up, you are still in there believing in your cause, in those around you and ultimately in yourself. The road back to dominant market share requires this uniform belief. No more “mailing it in” or “country club” commitment is allowed. Simply put, if you are not a “can-do” then you can’t stay.

I blindly wandered outside that dance hall...death would have been more merciful... Discouraged? Sure. Confidence shaken? You bet. Food for thought? Absolutely. But, a lesson was learned. If you are striving for what you want, failure along the way is a certainty. It will never be as easy as you want it to be. It is always easier to lick our wounds and lie down. But the deliverance from this defeatist mindset is perseverance. Belief and perseverance can truly make you bullet-proof. Not blind to reality, but immune to others eager to chain you to their perceived limits. Perseverance is a key part of long term individual and organizational accomplishment. The final lesson; why not persevere to the extreme, if failure is the only other alternative? There is nothing to lose, but our fear of trying.

Mark Breslin is a trainer and author specializing in labor-management challenges and solutions. He is the author of the recently published Attitudes and Behaviors: Survival of the Fittest curriculum for apprentice training centers. The curriculum is now being used by union training centers, and has been established as standard course programming by other International Unions and apprenticeship programs. Instructional material including books, CDs, workbooks, instructor guides and support media information is available at www.breslin.biz.