



Spotlight on Success

Masur: Keep specters of past in past

Premium content from Business First by Mary Ann Masur

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Are you haunted by ghosts from your past?

I'm not talking about spirits, aberrations and orbs. I'm referring to the memories of your failures, big and small, that can be hair-raisingly scary.

Much like ghost sightings, many of these so-called "mistakes" were things that only we could see — or at least they appeared much more ghastly to us than anyone else. As we play them over in our minds they grow ever larger and more frightening. And, if left unchecked, these memories can scare us into a state of inaction.

Here are three strategies you can apply to ensure ghosts from your past don't cheat you out of amazing opportunities.

Ask yourself, "What's the worst that could happen?" In most cases "the worst" is "it might not work out" or "I might not do a good job." If so, then ask yourself these questions: "So what?" or "What's at risk?"

Find the meaning you've assigned to the mistake. In order to make sense of the world around us, our brain continuously is assigning a meaning to everything we see and experience in our lives. On one hand, this habit allows us to categorize information with a sense of order. But on the other hand, it creates emotional connections that we may not even be aware of. We might think, for example, that we're a bad public speaker because a school recital 20 years ago went badly, when in reality what we did as a 10-year-old student has no bearing on today.

Shine a light on the lesson. It's amazing how much scarier shapes and sounds are in the dark, isn't it? But when we muster the courage to reach out from under the blanket and switch on the light, we see that "the witch" sitting in the chair is just a pile of clothes. We can get the same sense of relief – and much more – when we look square in the face of our past mistakes. Often what we discover is that we learned something priceless and that we've been able to put that knowledge and experience to work in our life many times over.