

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



200 Is There a Downside to Having a Plan B?

All my life I've heard that it's fine to go for what you want. Give it your all, but always have a backup plan — a plan B. Now, there is growing opinion which says that might not be such a good idea. We'll talk about it, next, on The Extra Point.

Plan B, backup plan, having a way to go if the road you want to travel suddenly becomes a road block. Like I said, I've heard it forever. My mom believed in it and practiced it. Life is uncertain and it seems like good, sound advice. What could possibly be wrong with it?

You want to get into a certain college but you also apply to one or more others, just in case you're not accepted. You want to work for one company more than any other and you apply there, but you also put your paperwork in at others, just in case. "Don't put all your eggs in one basket," right?

Just so you know, there is scientific support for this approach. Cognitive psychologists at NYU and the University of Chicago have confirmed that having a backup plan can eliminate some psychological discomfort associated with uncertainty, and help us feel better about our future. See, I knew it, it's all good. Having a plan B is the way to go. Mom was right.

Not so fast. It's not all good news on the plan B business. There is also science on why it's not always the way to go.

A backup plan can make us less excited about our main plan. Researchers say that having a fallback path, or even thinking through one, might actually make us less motivated to go after our primary goal — and this can end up hurting our performance.

How so? Neuroscientist Benedicte Babayan, a researcher at Harvard University, says we now

see the alternate plan as being attractive, maybe almost as attractive as our plan A...so "I guess I'd be okay with either one. Yeah, either way this goes, I'm cool with it."

What may happen then is we lose some of our motivation to go after the main goal with everything we've got. You've probably seen movies which showed early settlers burning boats or bridges behind them, so everybody knew there would be no going back. Going forward was the only way to survive. Boats and bridges gave people an out if things got tough. They could compromise with their circumstances. It wasn't as good as what they initially decided they wanted, but they would settle for it.

A plan B can soften the blow of failure, but we have to acknowledge that fear of failure can also be a strong driving force — to push us to stay with it, to struggle longer, to give it just a little more. Making plan B could unintentionally remove that powerful incentive.

We're all different and we all handle pressure in our own way. People do lose out on their plan A. It does happen. If it happened to you would you be devastated or paralyzed if you didn't have a plan B? No? You wouldn't like it but you'd be okay? If so, maybe you don't need a plan B. Maybe you can focus on one goal and one only, and put everything behind it. The key here? Know yourself and then plan accordingly.

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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