

# Concept

a powerful, intriguing, inspiring, or perhaps odd idea distilled to its essential elements

Everything you've heard about a shark's teeth is true. They're so sharp, I never felt them slicing into my foot, leaving a triple row of gashes. I was sitting on my surfboard off the coast of Florida one morning last summer when I was attacked. Last year, there were only 60 recorded shark attacks in the entire world. And I was one of them. What were the odds? I'm fully recovered, but this was a big surprise.

Think about the last time you were suddenly surprised by something or someone at work—an unexpected turn of events that forced you to change course quickly, reassess strategy, or reevaluate your priorities.

My experience last summer prompted me to reflect on the lessons we can learn from surprises. You might not ever be bitten by a shark, but surprises happen.

**Trust your instincts.** If you're heading to a meeting, presentation, negotiation, whatever and something doesn't seem right, prepare for a surprise. Intuition can be a powerful guide. Right before the shark chomped down on my foot, I had a "bad karma" feeling. Even if a surprise doesn't come one time, you'll be better prepared when one does.

**Keep your wits about you.** Having been surprised, try to keep your cool and quickly assess the situation. Size up the people, environment, cir-

cumstances, and potential impact. Self-doubt and confusion lead to paralysis and vulnerability, or worse. I was out in the ocean with a badly bleeding foot and a hungry, 6-foot shark circling below. It would've been a lousy time to panic.

**Focus your energy.** Energy is fear's antidote. Focus fast on a next step and take action. This isn't "change management"; it's more like crisis intervention on a sliding scale. I focused all of my energy on getting to shore quickly but safely.

**Trust yourself.** Be confident that you can and will do the right thing. Trust your training and ability to respond. Trust your capability. You're good; now's the time to show it. Confidence is contagious and diffuses many situations. I wasn't about to let some Black Tip get the best of me.

**Be lucky.** Let's face it, luck helps. Think of yourself as lucky and you will be. Everyone from the lifeguard to the surgeon told me I was lucky—because it could have been worse.

If being shark-bitten can be lucky, anything's possible!

**Craig R. Taylor**, senior VP of marketing for TalentKeepers in Maitland, Florida, has returned (safely) many times to surf at the same spot he was bitten.

## When the Shark Bites

Lessons You Can Apply in the Shark-Infested Business World.



By Craig R. Taylor