

# Half-Baked Darlings

■ LOU ELLEN HORWITZ, MA

When I was a senior in high school, Michael J. Entrekin was my English Composition teacher. One of the most important lessons I learned from him that year was how to let go of an idea that I loved.

In writing we often come up with something—a phrase, or an idea, or a character, or a plot twist— that we think is pretty clever. We really, really like it, and the more we think about it, the more we like it. Even when we start to tell others about it and they question some of it, we know in our hearts that they are wrong and we are right and they will eventually come around and love it, too. We hang onto it even when everyone is telling us it is no longer important to the story.

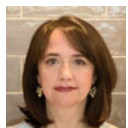
Having the discipline to recognize these, love them dearly, and cut them anyway is one of the requirements to turn good writing into great writing. Mr. Entrekin called this “murdering your darlings,” and though he taught me *how* to do it, he didn’t teach me to like it.

One of the problems with having “darling” ideas in the context of our business operations is that we go deaf not only to criticism but also to implementation snags. The pesky details get in the way of our idea going public and going viral and being recognized as amazing, so we tend to push it through to get past those annoying snags—which is when we get into trouble. A darling idea driving a bulldozer wearing a blindfold is not a healthy scenario for your teammates or your organization’s future.

I hate letting go of an idea that I love—but I’ve learned how to make it easier.

## Picking Up Where We Left Off—and Moving Forward

While COVID-19 derailed everyone for a bit, and isn’t over by any stretch, people are reopening conversations about where urgent care goes from here. What innovations will we keep? What opportunities do we have? What pre-COVID ideas do we need to reactivate? What has happened outside of us that



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requires yet another shift in mindset as we think about the future?

Are you *also* asking what you should stop doing or what ideas you should abandon?

I talked last month about some of our “stop doings”—so this month is about abandoning ideas. I know that doesn’t sound like the kind of inspiration you are hoping for when you read this column. Aren’t I supposed to be a champion for urgent care doing amazing things? Yes, yes I am.

But remember why we murder our darlings. *Because they make the story better.* And they make the story better because it gets more focused. We stop being distracted by our darling idea and start paying attention to our *old* darling ideas that got neglected as soon as we launched them (oops) so they never fully blossomed—or they weren’t that great in the first place and are needlessly siphoning off resources that are keeping us from doing amazing things. Off with their heads!

## Keeping ‘Half-Baked’ Darlings Off the Shelf

We’ve come up with a strategy internally to *prevent* having un-murdered darlings in the first place. It’s not truly easier than murdering them later, however. Our strategy is to share our ideas when they are still half-baked. We put them out there *with our whole team* while they are still awkward and un-adorable. While the details aren’t figured out and the plan is full of holes and the pitfalls are many. While they are vulnerable and weak.

This does not make the idea pitcher look cool, but it sure does keep a darling, but dumb, idea from going public when it should not. And sometimes, it transforms into something really amazing—which wouldn’t have been possible if we’d hung onto it until it was polished and “ready.”

We consider our members part of our inner circle. What we do, we do for you. What we design, we design for you. As we continue on our transformation journey, we want to engage you in looking at some of our half-baked ideas to see what you think. It won’t make us look cool, but it should result in better products and programs and services for you in the end, and that *does* make us look cool.

Thanks, as always, for being part of our present and our future. ■