

4 STEPS for Finding the Courage to *Conquer Your Fears*

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What if I do this and it doesn't turn out right? What if I screw this up? What if I mess up this sales call? What if I forget what I'm going to say in this big presentation? What if I embrace this new strategy and it doesn't work? What if I make a fool out of myself? What if this new change in the way we are doing things means something bad for me?

What if? Perhaps the scariest question for many people.

They consider the possible negative outcomes. Will they feel stupid? Will they look foolish in front of their peers? Will their boss yell at them? Will they get fired? All of these are unknowns. Unknowns inspire the emotion of fear. Fear paralyzes people.

Everyone experiences fear. It is an innate emotion woven into our DNA that helps us respond to danger and protect ourselves. It is a self-defense mechanism that has evolved over thousands of years to protect the survival of the species.

While fear protected our ancestors and helped them cope with the challenges of a danger laden environment, it doesn't serve near as noble a purpose in modern day society. Far too frequently, fear and the anxiety that tags along with it, just keeps people from taking a risk, trying something new and potentially reaping the benefits of doing so.

Interestingly, as babies, most researchers agree, we are only born with two innate fears. The fear of falling and the fear of loud noises. Babies are not afraid of the water; after all they lived for nine months suspended in amniotic fluid. Nor are they claustrophobic, they actually find comfort in tightly confined spaces as it reminds them of the time when they were safely tucked away in their mother's womb.

The fear of failure. The fear of change. The fear of public speaking. The fear of rejection. The fear of judgment. The fear of ridicule. The fear of dying. And the ever present fear of creepy crawly things (spiders, snakes, bugs and other little critters) that come out in the night. Every one of these anxiety causing, gripping fears we were not born with – we learned to be afraid of these things.

So we all have fears and once ingrained they do not go away. However, we can decidedly influence the degree to which our fears debilitate us. In fact, this is one of the biggest differences between highly successful people and those who struggle in life. People who are the greatest achievers have learned to rule their fears rather than be ruled by their fears.

A young sales rep may stare at the phone for three days, pondering all of the reason why not to pick it up and make an important call to book an appointment with a new prospect. A more aware sales rep will feel the same anxiety, the same sense of apprehension and trepidation, however, they will quickly mentally process these emotions, staring at the phone for three minutes instead of three days. Then they will pick up the phone and make the call.

So the critical question is, how does one move past their fears, overcome their self-doubts and find the courage to take the actions that will ultimately lead to their success?

The good news is, courage is not something that is born to some and not to others. It exists within all of us, we just need to understand how to draw it out. So here are four simple strategies to help you draw upon your limitless well of courage and leverage it to overcome your fears.

1. FOCUS MORE ON WHAT YOU WANT THAN WHAT YOU DON'T WANT

“Success comes from having dreams that are bigger than your fears.”

Terry Litwiller

What we think about most often is what guides our life, it defines who we will become and what we will achieve.

People who rule their fears possess tremendous clarity on what they are looking to accomplish and they think about it frequently. Visualizing what their life will look like, the things they will be able to do, and the opportunities that will open up to them. They know what they want and why they want it, so they willingly pay the dues to get it.

Conversely, people who are ruled by their fears have a lack clarity on what they are trying to achieve and why it is important to them. They are focused on getting through the day rather than the bigger picture of the life they are trying to build. Since they have a limited vision, limited dreams and goals, they aren't motivated by a higher sense of purpose. They see no clear benefit in pushing themselves outside of their comfort zones, so by default, they think about the worst possible outcomes, what happens if it doesn't work out? What hardships will befall them?

So what is your overriding purpose? What is it that you truly want to accomplish? What is it that means something to you? Once you've defined this, visualize what your life will look like once you've achieved it! How will you feel about yourself? How will accomplishing this impact your abilities in the future?

2. BECOME COMFORTABLE WITH BEING UNCOMFORTABLE

“He who is not every day conquering some fear has not learned the secret of life.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essayist, lecturer and poet

Our comfort zones are an imaginary boundary line that exists in the mind. Like all lines, they have two anchoring points. The first anchoring point of our comfort zones will be based upon our current level of

experience. So any time we are looking to do something that we have never done before, we will bump into our comfort zones. We will feel that sense of apprehension and trepidation, we will start to sweat and the emotion of fear will rise up.

The second anchoring point of our comfort zones is based upon our belief in our potential. So any time we are considering doing something that we are uncertain we can be successful at, once again, our comfort zones, fears and anxieties will rise up.

It is important to understand that these are natural human responses. Recognize these feelings, don't deny and hide from them, rather, embrace them. Realize that everything you value most, the things you cherish and are proud of, most likely, all came into being because at one moment in time you gave yourself permission to step outside of your comfort zone. All success, all greatness, happens on the other side of your comfort zones. Get comfortable with the idea of being uncomfortable. When you feel that sense of apprehension rising, in most cases, it is because you are doing something that is going to make you better, stronger and more successful.

3. CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON FAILURE

“Would you like me to give you a formula for success? It's quite simple, really. Double your rate of failure.”

Thomas J. Watson, Founder of IBM

Look at virtually any great success and you will see that it has been built upon a foundation of obstacles and setbacks overcome.

It took Thomas Edison more than 10,000 experiments before he was able to make the first light bulb glow.

It took James Dyson 14 years and 5,127 prototypes before he was able to perfect his revolutionary vacuum cleaner.

Orville and Wilbur Wright built and tested more than 12,000 different wing designs before they perfected the one that actually was capable of lifting an airplane into the sky.

Almost never does someone accomplish anything great on their first try. Yet so many people are gripped by a paralyzing fear of failure. So much so, that they don't even give themselves permission to try.

People who rule their fears are governed by a different mindset. From their perspective it is not about winning or losing, succeeding or failing. Rather, they look at life from a Win or Learn perspective. So when they set out to do something, if they accomplish it, they win. If they don't, they learn something that will help them succeed in the future. The only way they could fail is if they never try or they quit trying – neither of which they are willing to do.

So rather than beating yourself up if something didn't go right, ask yourself, *“What did I learn that is going to help me do it better tomorrow?”*

4. GET TO KNOW YOUR UNKNOWNNS

“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 32nd President of the United States

What lurks in the deep recesses of the dark closet is scary. We don't like things that we can't see, we can't prepare and protect ourselves from them. Thus, we avoid them in an effort to perpetuate our own existence and mental well-being.

However, should we avoid taking any chances, trying new things or taking all risks? Hasn't it been said that *“With risk comes reward?”*

The answer isn't to avoid all of the things that inspire the emotions of fear but rather to be clear with ourselves about what the real danger is. By asking ourselves, 'what is the worst thing that could happen?' Oftentimes we realize the "worst thing" isn't really all that bad. In fact, many times the outcome of allowing our fears to rule us such that we do nothing – creates a far more negative outcome.

So ask yourself, *“If I do this and it doesn't work out exactly the way I would like, how bad is it really going to be?”* Get to know your unknownns. Are they really all that bad?

Nelson Mandela once said,

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us most. We ask ourselves, ‘who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and famous?’ Actually, who are you not to be?”

You have within you, everything you need to master your fears, overcome your doubts and conquer your demons. You have within you the courage to move forward even when you are afraid. You have within you everything you need to be great.

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