



Overcoming Fear: A Core Skill Of The Corporate Mystic, Authentic Leader, And Those Who Would Be Free

by

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Fear is an essential human emotion that has a bright and dark side. Fears can steer us away from real danger but quite often they don't appear to do anything except limit our lives and drain our energy. These are the sorts of fears that we can choose to rid ourselves of. The first step in this is to know your fear.

Exploring Your Fears:

To explore your fears, try the following exercise. Take some time alone with a piece of paper and a pencil. First relax with your favorite breathing or stretching exercise and then gently suggest to yourself that you are about to take a big step toward greater happiness and freedom. Now begin to list everything you fear. Don't try to understand why you fear these things just list them. If you feel stuck or you find yourself thinking too much about whether you really fear this or that and how much, free-associate a little. Just say to yourself "I fear..." and write down whatever first comes to mind. When your list is complete, take time to announce each of your fears aloud and pay attention to how you feel inside when you do. Does your fear increase or decrease? Do you begin think about the things you fear any differently?

Most people find that by doing this exercise, many fears will begin to fade as soon as you acknowledge them, and they begin to see the thing they fear in a different light. Some fears, on the other hand, will prove stable. Some may be quite reasonable and healthy and you will know these because they make sense. Some may be unproductive, the result of unfortunate learning or trauma. If unsure about whether a fear is healthy or wasteful, ask yourself whether your life would be endangered or enriched if that fear were to disappear. If losing a fear would endanger your life, it's likely a healthy one, but if losing it would enrich your life, it's likely an unnecessary one. After you have completed this exercise, you will have a better sense of the fears you have, which are healthy, which are useless, and which are more illusion than substance. Finally, be sure to take time to thank yourself for facing and acknowledging your fears and for taking a big step toward greater happiness and freedom.

Slaying the Beast

Fear is something each of us face throughout our lives. When it signals the approach of a real and present danger, it can help steer us away from emotional or physical harm. At the same time, if the signal is false, if it is a conditioned reaction to something from our past or is the results of a misperception, fear can result in avoidance, aggression, or other ineffective reactions. At its worse, fear can become a crippling barrier that weaken our spirits and consumes our lives.

Even our irrational fears can teach us much about ourselves and our growing edges and there are means of turning them into allies in our personal growth. Here, however, we explore a technique that has proven to be useful in helping people overcome irrational or unproductive fear directly.

Can you relate to this scene? You're in the hall at work and you see your boss coming out of the elevator. You've heard she's angry with you about something, and your heart suddenly starts pounding. You quickly turn your back to her and look for an office to dash into.

The first thing to keep in mind about fear is this: As threatening as it may feel, fear is only another emotion and we have a choice of acting on it or not. There is a strong tendency to act and think fearfully when we feel fear. Unfortunately, acting and thinking in fearful ways, even biting one's nails, pacing, or imagining unpleasant outcomes, will feed fear. The more we act fearful, the more fearful we feel; the more fearful we feel, the more we tend to think and act fearfully...and so on. This is an emotion-behavior feedback loop that sustains fear and in extreme cases leads to anxiety or panic attacks. The solution? There are two: 1. Be "Mindful" of your reaction, detaching from it and observing it without acting on it, and 2. Act assertively. Let look more closely at the latter as it is more easily mastered.

Acting assertively, confronting the feared object or task head on, even with a little aggression, tends to reduce fear. The reason? The feeling of fear is incompatible with assertive and aggressive behavior. When we act assertively, we break the fear-behavior loop, we tend to feel empowered, and we think resolutely. Now, keep in mind that it is far better to react assertively to fear as soon as possible, else the flames of fear can become increasingly difficult to put out. So the trick is to recognize your fear and act quickly.

Recognizing the first signs of fear, how your body reacts to it, enables you to act quickly and stamp out the flames with a counterattack of assertiveness. Whether it's a racing heart, a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach, or a ringing in your ears, don't go in the defensive at the first signs of fear, go on the offensive...immediately. That usually means doing exactly what you're most inclined to avoid doing. If you can launch your counterattack at the first signs of fear you'll likely overcome it before it knows what hit it. Here, a little NLP can be helpful by providing you with a **power shot**.

You can create a power shot by associating memories of personal effectiveness with distinct, physical and verbal stimuli. First, sit back and recall times when you've acted assertively, effectively, or otherwise felt great about yourself and your ability to handle tough situations. When you have a clear memory of how you felt then, create a distinct physical and verbal association with this. For example: pressing the tips of the left thumb and ring finger together and silently shouting "Game On!" With repeated pairings of the positive feelings of competence and power with this distinct physical-verbal, the trigger can be used to help conjure the feelings when needed.

So how could the office worker use this technique to deal with the angry boss? When he sees the boss in the hall and feels his heart race as a first sign of anxiety, he looks her straight in the eye, fires his personal power shot, walks up to her, and says, "Good, morning. I heard you wanted to speak to me."

Keep in mind that the above technique is designed to help people overcome irrational or unproductive fear. It shouldn't be used to reduce fears that are keeping you from harm's way. With a little experimentation, practice, and self-compassion, it can be highly effective for most people. Don't expect immediate, revolutionary results, though these do sometimes manifest. Success feeds success and if you start with smaller fears first and progress through more substantial ones, you can change you life.

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