

The Fear Factor

By
Mariette Edwards

Our doubts are triggers and we oft lose the good we could achieve by fearing to attempt.
-William Shakespeare

There are only two things you have to know about fear. It's natural and it never goes away. It is, in fact, a predictable part of anything that challenges the status quo. Sometimes it's us who want to change the way things are and sometimes the way things are changes without any input from us. Either way, fear is going to be a player.

What are you afraid of?

What's your biggest fear? Does the thought of change that affects your income scare you to death? Do you see yourself as homeless, a shopping cart citizen? Does the idea of not being perfect give your stomach a churn? What about standing up for yourself with your boss or co-workers? How about talking to a creditor or telling your parents you're going to be an artist after all? Are you afraid of being found out--that you're an imposter? Perhaps you share mankind's Number One fear--public speaking?

Real vs. imagined

Is what you fear real or imagined? "Nothing is realistic or unrealistic," says Susan Jeffers, Ph.D. in *Feel The Fear And Do It Anyway*, "there is only what we think about any given situation. We create our own reality." That means it's not the fear that is the problem but our response to it. We give our situations whatever meaning they have for us. And we all know how big and bad and terrible we can imagine the outcome.

Fear gets a bad rap

Personally, I think fear has a lot going for it. For instance, here are three ways fear can be your best friend . . .

- When you don't know what you want, fear can point you in the right direction. Just ask yourself what you are most afraid to do with your life and your fear will shout back the answer you're looking for.
- When your back is against the wall, fear can give you a surge that will help you figure out ways to change your situation.
- Intuition often uses fear as its messenger. Responding to that vague sense of uneasiness could save you from something much worse.

But the greatest gift of fear is that it lets you know you're still alive. If you're afraid to do or try something, there's some part of your life that is screaming to be actualized. So how about using that fear to get what you want?

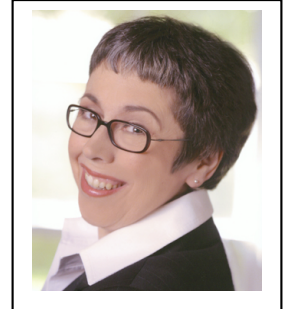
- **Ask yourself, “What would my hero do in this situation?”** I have a client who was terrified of changing jobs. She had quit a great job with an excellent company for some rather unimportant reasons in retrospect. The new job she was so excited about at the time turned out to be awful. Her fear of making another career mistake was paralyzing. I asked her if she had a hero or someone who could do the things she wished she could do. To my complete surprise, she blurted out that she admired and wished she could be like the character, “Eleanor” in “The Practice.” “Eleanor” (played by Emmy winning actress Cameron Manheim) is a plus-size powerhouse lawyer who knows how to stand up for herself. Knowing my client was self-conscious about her own size, “Eleanor” was the perfect choice. From that point forward we looked at how “Eleanor” would play a situation like my client was in. That exercise helped her figure out her own game plan and soon she was re-hired by her former employer.
- **Take one step in the direction of your fear.** Inertia feeds fear. What's the smallest and most obvious first step in the direction you want to head? Whatever it is, stop reading and do it right now!
- **Shift into creative activities.** Fear slips away as you do things you enjoy that completely engage your attention.
- **Reprogram your inner voices.** Get a grip on your own negative self-talk by creating a thought to replace it. Decide in advance what that thought will be. Use the language of your negativity to create the new thought. For example, if your self-talk says there's no way you can do whatever it is, your replacing thought could be, “I am very resourceful. I will find a way.”
- **Challenge your assumptions.** Whatever you think about your situation, you could be wrong.
- **Let go of the outcome.** The only things you control are your attitude, what you think about and how you spend your time. Focus on those and your results will take care of themselves.
- **Breathe.** There is a huge physical component to fear. When we're afraid, we tend to hold our breath. That triggers a whole set of unpleasant physical responses we associate with feeling afraid. Learning proper breathing techniques can instantly relieve those feelings. Yoga breathing exercises are one excellent remedy. Find what works for you.
- **Laugh. Laugh. Laugh.** Laughter puts things in perspective. It's also a great for breathing! Laugh every day.

A final word on fear. Some people suffer from waaaaaaay beyond what might be considered normal fear around everyday events. If you experience the kind of fear that limits your activities and restricts your movements, seek professional help.

Knowledge is power! The only way out of fear is straight through it.

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