

What Do You Fear?

“WE SUFFER MORE FROM IMAGINATION THAN FROM REALITY.”

– Seneca, Roman philosopher

Our imaginary fears can have real consequences. Our fears hold us back. **We are paralyzed by what is not real!** However, most of what we fear will never happen. “I cannot get up and make a presentation. I am afraid I will make a fool of myself.” “I cannot go over to that beautiful lady and introduce myself; I am afraid she would reject me.”

The actual damage from our fear pales compared to the damage we do to ourselves as we blindly try to prevent what we fear.

The primary cause of fear is living in the future. Or, as Seneca says, “Instead of adapting ourselves to prevent circumstances, we send our thoughts too far ahead.” **Projecting our thoughts to the future about something we do not control causes a dangerous amount of worry.**

Epictetus explains: “When I see a man in a state of anxiety (fear), I say, ‘What can this man want?’ How could he still be anxious if he did not want something that was not in his power? For this reason, one who sings to the lyre is not anxious when performing by himself. But, when he enters the theatre, even if he has a very good voice and plays well, he is afraid, for he not only wants to perform well but also win a great name, which is beyond his control.” **And that is how you create fear.**

Fear is the excuse we use for not doing something. Could you get up in front of 200 people and sing? Okay, most of you said no you couldn’t do that because you’d be too afraid. Then, let me rephrase it. For \$9,000,000, tax-free, could you get up in front of 200 people? It doesn’t matter how good you are, all you must do is get up and sing. Could you do that? Suddenly, I see a lot more hands going up.

When you want something that is not under your control, that is when the problem begins. You fear because you want what you think is outside your power. Or it is just not important enough for you to do it.

You are attracted to a person you see as beautiful, but you won’t approach them because of your “fear” of rejection. Would you be willing to risk rejection for \$9,000,000?

You are attracted to the security of a government job with a regular salary. So, you will not take the “risk” of starting your own business. Your desire, security, is not in your power to control.

People do what they are afraid of all the time. Soldiers charge up the mountain under withering fire, knowing that it will kill some of them. They are so scared that some of them will wet their pants. But it does not stop them. A parent will dash into a burning building to rescue their child. **Fear has never stopped anyone from doing what they want to do!**

Birds fly, fish swim, and people feel. How you feel is determined by what you believe and/or think. Your behavior is based on the awareness of what you feel. You can only make decisions based on what you are aware of. You are free to choose both your feelings and your behaviors.

Walking in the woods, you suddenly come upon a bear. Your fear is based on what you believe about bears. Then, you meet the bear’s owner and discover he is an old, toothless pet bear. Your fear goes away as soon as you believe the bear is harmless.

You feel the way you do right now because of the thoughts you are thinking at this moment. David Burns MD 1981

It will do no good to look at the beliefs that are creating your messed-up life if you don’t believe that you are responsible for what you are thinking.

A feeling is a feeling. A feeling by itself is not good or bad. It is the behaviors that you choose that will determine whether your behavior is good or bad.

You are responsible both for your feelings and for your behaviors. The writer Hemingway puts it this way: “Everything is your fault. If you are lucky.” If something is your fault, then you can change it. **The more things are your fault, the luckier you are.** If you are sitting at a red light and somebody rear-ends you, it wasn’t your fault, and you were unlucky.

Fear is your fault. **“If external things pain you, it is not they that disturb you, but your own judgment of them. And it is in your power to wipe out that judgment now.”** Marcus Aurelius 121 A.D.

In industrial psychology, they say that for every mistake you make during your job interview, you will need 10 positives to counteract the one negative. This may also be true for the negative experiences you base your negative self-talk on. One fearful event or failure needs 10 positive behavioral successes to change the fear.

What you need to know:

There are two ways to get rid of fear and change your negative self-talk. **First, you get through fear by doing what you are afraid to do.** This would be a behavioral approach. I had a client who was a pilot of a B-29 during World War II. He told me that he was shot down three different times. He described his parachute training. “The first time I jumped out of a plane, I wet my pants.” The second time, I jumped and didn’t wet my pants! By the 20th jump, I had no fear, just excitement.”

The second way is to change what you think.

There are four ways to change your thinking:

- Using a logical, left-brain approach, you understand that you are choosing to think and can think about anything you want. This works best when a trauma event is not associated with the event.
- By using Role-Play. This is where you emotionally reenact the negative event. This time, you are guided to experience a positive outcome. This technique is often used to get rid of PTSD flashbacks.
- By using visualization and/or hypnosis. This can be used with major loss and grief issues. Visualization is also used to finish conversations with someone who has died. This is also sometimes used to achieve smoking cessation.
- Mutual storytelling is often used with children to empower them after a traumatic event.

The last three are all right-brain interventions and can be used with a CBT approach. You can also combine all four and use a Cognitive-Affective Behavioral Therapy approach, CABT.

There are only three things that you can change: 1) What you think, 2) What you feel, 3) What you do. Everything else is out of your control.

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