

Putting Fear in its Place

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to the success of many people is our old friend fear.

Fear? A Friend?

Well, it's a poor friend, it's true. Fear holds us back, stunts our growth, limits our progress, deters our success, disparages our abilities, damages our relationships, and helps us lose our jobs.

In fact, it's just like my ex-wife's mother.

Still, most of us embrace fear as if it were our long-lost friend. We invite it into our lives; we pay attention to everything it says; we listen to every nuance of every word that may come from it. We cater to it, model our self-image according to it, and go out of our way to make it a part of our life.

Sounds like a friend, doesn't it?

For our devotion and love, fear will tear us down, limit our future, and make our life a living hell -- and then, it does its real damage; we learn to feel comfortable with it.

Pretty soon, we invite fear over to our homes. We bring it into our lives. We give in to it. If fear were a person, it'd be lying on our couch, eating Cheetos, with its feet in the air, its socks on the floor and with our spouse on its arm.

Such is fear. It's like a relative who has come to stay -- forever.

Fear damages our success because it makes us believe that we are less than we actually are. It holds us back, because we learn to believe its lies. It makes us think that we aren't worth anything, because we can't even diminish our fears.

Pretty soon, we learn to believe in our fears. Our subconscious mind accepts them as the gospel truth. We start making decisions because of them.

One day, we're a little bit scared of flying -- two years later, we are traveling across country on a bus. The more we give in to our fears, the more paralyzed we become.

Fear is destructive -- so destructive that it sits in the top five reasons why people do not succeed.

And yet here's the kicker -- most fears are totally groundless.

An oft-quoted statistic states that of all the things that people worry about, only 7 percent actually are events that may come true. The other 93 percent are mere shadows -- either lost in the past, far in the future, or never have a chance of developing.

People get so scared of heights that they won't go up in a glass-enclosed elevator; they get so afraid of other people, that they sit in the house all day. Their fears are groundless -- or at the very most, highly exaggerated.

Sure, there are things in this world that we should be cautious about. There are actually dangers that surround us -- but the fears we harbor are usually vastly more dangerous to us than the dangers themselves.

One of the biggest fears that we need to look at in this context, though, is the fear of failure.

Most people who have this fear would deny its very existence, but it's there, nevertheless.

It's most evident in procrastination. People put things off because they are afraid of them -- either they are afraid of not being adequate for the challenge, or they are afraid they will succeed, and not know what to do next.

Pervasive fears like this can only be conquered one way -- by courageously choosing to ignore your fears, and act anyway.

"Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear -- not absence of fear," said Mark Twain, and he was right.

All of us have fears. Many professional speakers still feel a rush of fear when they are about to go up on stage. Firemen are still afraid of burning buildings, even when they choose to run inside to save a person's life. Military people still are afraid of death, even when they choose to confront it.

Courage does not eliminate fear -- it tames it.

Courage kicks fear out of our lives, and helps us restore ourselves to the point where we can conquer our fears, put them behind us, and plan for the future.

Fear limits us -- courage frees us. And we can develop courage by merely choosing our smallest fear, and systematically doing whatever we are afraid of. If we're afraid of interacting with others, join a service club or a church. If we're afraid of public speaking, join a group like Toastmasters International. If we're

afraid of cold calling, then make a game of it. There are techniques that will work on any fear, no matter how much it has taken over our lives -- if we only confront our fears, and use systematic courageous action to put them behind us.

With a bit of effort, we can conquer our fears. We can kick our old "friend" fear out of our daily lives, and retake our lives, remolding them for the better.

Kick fear out of your life. It's stayed too long already.

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