



## FACING FEAR AND DEFEATING IT

We all want to succeed. Nobody wants to be unsuccessful. But different things keep us away from the success that we want to achieve. I believe the answer lies within us. One fundamental factor that keeps us from being our best is fear. All of us live with some form of fear, to varying degrees and types. How we handle fear defines who we are. Our attitudes toward fear define how we take risks and how we perceive the world. Fear runs a lot deeper in us than we think. Most of us think that is merely physiological. In fact, fear is so embedded in our subconscious that most of the time we don't even know that is what is driving us. Fear is a basic human instinct. We have developed this instinct to keep us away from danger and keep us safe. Most of the survival mechanisms our bodies relied on thousands of years ago are no longer relevant today, and yet the mechanisms are still there within us. Fear is one of those key mechanisms. We need to consciously overcome it.

For us to succeed in our careers and life, we need to understand what we fear. It comes in all shapes and sizes. One common trait of all forms of fear is that it dampens our movement toward success.

Each of us has a fear profile. We develop this profile as we grow up and experience things in our life. Our attitudes toward fear and risk change with experiences. However, how we react to certain events in our past depends on the individual. For example, 9/11 made certain people more fearful while it made others fearless. One thing is for certain: 9/11 changed all of us. It changed our whole outlook on the evils of terrorism.

People who succeed are not the ones without fear. They also have fears, but they have made the choice to overcome fear. Once you overcome fear, you become confident and realize that there was nothing to fear in the first place.

Fear is a subconscious inhibitor of our movement toward success. The difficulty lies in overcoming a subconscious feeling consciously. To suppress fear is a choice to move against it. This is why I mentioned that the choices we make define us.

Coming back to my original point, if you really think about it, there is no one who does not want to be successful. The need to succeed is within us, and we are all born with it. Yet something keeps us away from it. Some manage to be successful anyway, but most cannot. This is fear. To identify what we fear, we must be truthful to ourselves and search deep within us to understand it.

### What Is Fear?

This is an important question. If we fully understood fear, humanity wouldn't have half the problems it has today. What we know about fear is that it is a basic instinct and it helps us keep away from danger. From a survival perspective, it is an important part of being human; however, this instinct is one of the basic reasons that we cannot achieve our potential and become successful. Very few books about success talk about its core inhibitors. Fear is one of those core inhibitors. It slows us down and keeps us from being our best. In the modern human being, it is actually a flaw. You learned to be fearful before you could even talk, and it is a skill that we all learn extremely fast.

You cannot live in a world without fear, nor is there a pill that you can take to overcome it. There are no techniques to drive your fears away. This is one of the



basic human instincts that has been there from the time we were born. There is only one thing we can do about fear – choose to go against it.

## Forms of Fear

Most of the reasons we give for why we can't be our best are based on a fear. Most forms of fear cannot be easily identified. They all run deep within us and need to be sought within us in order to be identified. Of the many forms of fear, the following are common:

- Fear of change
- Fear of perfection
- Fear of the unknown
- Fear of confrontation

You might think to yourself that you don't have any of these; however, deep down, it's possible you have one of these fears. I've always searched for the reason why I procrastinate. I never thought that it might relate to fear. Recently, I realized that it was in fact due to fear of perfection. Since then, I've been able to overcome procrastination very easily. Only you know whether you are fearful. You need to be truthful to yourself.

Let's look at some of these fears in detail:

- **FEAR OF CHANGE:** This is a common reason why most of us don't adapt well to new changes. It's not what we don't want to change as we get older; rather, we get comfortable with what we know. Learning something new means risking what we know. Learning something new also means putting extra effort into learning. If you have this fear, acknowledge it. Know that your fear of change might turn out to be unfounded, and make the choice to learn something new.
- **FEAR OF PERFECTION:** This is another common form of fear where we don't do anything because we fear that our efforts would not yield a perfect result. It is in fact the fear of making a mistake. We fear that if we are to do anything, we will make a mistake and the end result will not live up to our standards. If you face this fear, you need to understand that you are human. To be human is to be imperfect. Everything in this world has flaws. It is in fact this imperfection that makes society possible. We lean on each other to capitalize on our strengths because we all have weaknesses.

• **FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN:** Another common fear is that of what we don't know. This is very similar to the fear of change. It is a form of laziness to be comfortable with what we know. It is easy to feel comfortable. We fear that the unknown could not be as good as what we know. We forget that when we learned what we know today, we actually had to overcome the same fear to start off with; otherwise, we wouldn't know what we know. We get comfortable with the little that we know, and we gain comfort. For us to be human is to venture into the unknown. It is people who have ventured into the unknown that made society possible. Every day, we have to go to the unknown. Yes, we will make mistakes. Yet there is a world of possibilities, and we need to explore them. We can't hide behind fear of making a few mistakes.

• **FEAR OF CONFRONTATION:** We become shy and don't want to confront people or difficult situations. Whether introvert or extrovert, all of us have this fear. We fear confrontation because we worry about not being able to say the right things or come across properly. What we don't realize is that the other person whom we're talking to feels the same. Though we all make mistakes in this conversation, most of our conversations do not go badly. In difficult situations, if you prepare well, you could avoid even the few mistakes you might make.

We need to search within ourselves to identify what is keeping us from success; confronting fear is another aspect to work on in cultivating success. It is also important to work on what is slowing you down. There are numerous books out there about time management and effectiveness. These books outline a number of great techniques and principles on being effective and successful. One thing that is not adequately addressed in most of this literature is overcoming your fears. It is great to make lists, prioritize tasks, schedule activities and have all the right tools. But if we are fearful of our tasks and our fear is keeping us away from achieving these tasks, these plans are not going anywhere.

Before we discuss how to overcome fear, let's discuss some of the real-world situations that are caused by fear:



- **Procrastination:** While we procrastinate for a number of reasons, most of the time the real reason behind our procrastination is fear. We can schedule our activities and our time, but in order to execute on these activities, we have to make ourselves stick to these plans, which is the most difficult part. Most of the time, the answer lies not in the system but within ourselves. Given that we know our priorities and we know how to do it, there must be something within ourselves that is keeping us from executing these plans. We need to identify what that is. Once you identify it, it is easy to address.
- **Keeping us from career opportunities:** Again, on your road to success in your career, it makes logical sense for you to go the next level. You might have the right skills, yet you hesitate. It could be that you fear additional responsibility and that you think you might not be able to do a great job. If you are faced with this situation, you need to understand that in every job there is a learning curve and you will learn your new job. If you were forced into that role, you would learn it, so why not give it a chance now?
- **Family issues:** A lot of family issues are also caused by fear; most of the time our primary problem is fear of confrontation: not being able to say what you really have to say because you fear that it will be taken the wrong way. So, we wait until things get out of control. We are then forced to confront the situation. If you can put your fears aside and put all the points on the table with your spouse from the outset, there are many things you can resolve.

Though the solutions to most of our problems are clear and logical, it is our emotional selves that keep us away from these solutions. It is our emotional selves that we need to resolve first before we start resolving a problem or going after a goal. You need to succeed first within yourself before you can succeed with others. You need to win the battle over your emotions.

### Courage and Success

To be successful, we need to be courageous. To be courageous means to overcome our fears. Even in

our simple day-to-day tasks, there is a certain level of courage that is required. The only way to overcome your fear is to move against it. Once you move against it you will realize that, most of the time, your fears are baseless.

Contrary to popular thinking, high performers are not people who have special abilities and skills. They just make correct choices and move against their fears. One common trait that they all have is that they understand their fears, face them, and make the choice to move against them.

In fact, the higher you go up the ladder of success, the less technical you get. You start developing leadership traits. One of the basic leadership traits is having courage. To succeed in your career and your life, you have to be courageous. Courage is simply the choice you make to move against your fear. The higher you go up the corporate ladder, the lonelier it is. You have to take responsibility for your decisions and actions. Sometimes, it means taking responsibility for your mistakes. There are many fears that leaders have, far more than when they started their careers, because they have less of a support system. However, they make the choice to move on in the face of this fear. That is what you call leadership and courage. That is why people look up to them. This ability is a learned ability. You start small, and over time you overcome your fears and become confident. That is why the way you handle fear defines who you are.

### Conclusion

On your road to success, you need to move against your fear. You might not know all the steps to your ultimate goal, but if you choose not to go against your fears, then you will not move forward. Make the choice to move against your fear. Be courageous. You can do anything if you choose to do it. It is your choices that will define you.