

Chapter 8: Fear - You Can't Be a Scaredy Cat

"We invent what we love, and what we fear." - John Irving

Fear is a funny thing. I try to do something on purpose that scares me as often as I can, solely for the purpose of reminding myself how great it feels to overcome a fear. I love being intimate with that sense of freedom. It's energizing. Fear isn't anything other than a bunch of "things" we conjure up in our minds to create an idea of how things will play out. Fear projects us into the future, removes us from the now, and creeps through our brains making us ask a handful of "what if" questions that introduce anxiety and panic. Fear isn't even real. It isn't an apple you can take out of your pocket and bite into. It hasn't happened. When I am fearful, it is my imagination writing how a certain story will end. I often forget I have the power at anytime to change the way to story goes and so do you.

Fear loves your baggage, too, so if there is any possible way for fear to grab hold of negative past experiences and bring it along into the imagined future, it will. (My first marriage didn't work out so I fear this one won't either.) Fear will remind you what happened last time, so you better expect it to happen again. If something didn't turn out well for you in the past, and you develop a belief system based on that experience, fear is right there to claim some energy from that negative experience so it can grow and flourish before you get a chance to think it through and toss it into a headlock.

What The Zipper Taught Me

When I was in about grade seven, the little fair that came to the local mall was a highlight for a few of my "prime" middle school years. My girlfriends and I would put on our Fancy Ass Jeans, sausage curl our hair, layer on the blue eye shadow, and off we would go. My sister always rode the Zipper. I always wanted to but I was so scared of that ride and I have no idea where the fear came from. It didn't matter that she loved it and she rode it over and over again. It didn't even matter that she looked like she was having the time of her life. My fear of that ride and what would happen to me on it was so enormous that common sense couldn't infiltrate it.

I would spend an evening at the fair, watching people get on and off the Zipper. Each time I had a chance to get in line, I backed out. For about three years, I wasted an entire evening of my life doing that, on the brink of tears because I was so frustrated with myself. I brewed for days afterwards, angry that I couldn't just belly up and get on the ride. This mattered to me in a way no one seemed to understand. I am now forty-two and I can remember vividly what it felt to be that afraid, and to be that angry with myself for letting fear take away an opportunity. When my anger surpassed my fear, I promised myself that, no matter what, the following summer I would get on that ride.

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"Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy." - Dale Carnegie

Guess what? I didn't die.

It wasn't even that scary. Life went on and I never wasted my energy thinking about that ride again. But I have used this experience time and time again to remind myself how free I felt to finally conquer that fear. The longer I avoided it, the stronger it became. It wasn't even rational! That was just one ride at the annual fair, imagine what fear can do to your life if you let it grow and take control.

"You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do." – Eleanor Roosevelt

Re-Focus a Fear

This past year, I went to Mexico with my boyfriend. I told Jason I needed to do something that scared me on our trip, after all I was long overdue. Zip-lining was on the fear list. Surfing was, too (because I am afraid of all aquatic life despite having temporarily overcome it to finish two 3.8 kilometer open water swim legs in Lake Okanagan. You know, where the Ogopogo lives? Which by the way means "lake demon").

I am truly afraid of things in the water. Irrational? Absolutely. (Well, sort of because there are things in the water that CAN kill you). I am a strong swimmer but a weed tangled in my feet can send me into a total meltdown. It is totally irrational. Remember, I never claimed I was perfect, and I do still have some fears to face but the main thing is – don't let yourself become frozen with fear, push through it.

"There is no terror in the bang, only in the anticipation of it." - Alfred Hitchcock

We found a zip-line tour nearby and booked an expedition. I remember hanging off the zip-line waiting to go, and I couldn't breathe. The more I thought about the fact I couldn't breathe, the more I couldn't breathe. The lovely guide reminded me I was not scared of heights, just scared of falling. He told me I wouldn't fall, as he pointed to the TWO safety cables. I focused on his lips as he spoke. I could feel my heart in my chest, my breath being squeezed out of my lungs, but I focused on his lips. I watched them move. I wondered if he had a little shot of filler in the top one. I wondered if he knew I was using his lips as a distraction. Did he feel dirty? Ha! I listened to how quiet it was around me and reminded myself how blessed I was to be here to experience this with someone who was special to me (my boyfriend, not the guide).

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I stopped focusing on the fear I had and started focusing on other things. It took a few minutes before I interrupted my fear cycle. I then reminded myself I wouldn't fall and even if I did, I wouldn't likely remember it. Either way, I was going to push off the cliff and jump into my fear. I leaned in hard and my feet left the earth. My squeals filled the valley and I was flying.

Can't Focus on Two Things

When you fear something, best to get yourself something other than that fear to focus on, even if it is random item like a tour guide's lips. Why? Simply put, it is pretty hard to focus on two things at once, especially if they are asking you to feel two different emotions or require two very different things of you (gratitude versus fear). It is kind of that "rub your tummy pat your head" trick that I could never do. If I focused on patting my head I was a good patter. If I focused on rubbing my belly, the patting went to hell in a hand basket. Fast.

True focus can only go to one thing at one time, pick your poison, baby, because if you do not, Fear has a way of picking it for you. And that just sucks.

I was surfing the Web one day and I came across Matthew Child's TED Talk, "Hang in there! 9 life lessons from rock climbing."

[\(http://blog.ted.com/2009/04/17/hang_in_there_9/\)](http://blog.ted.com/2009/04/17/hang_in_there_9/)

Matthew struck a chord with me when he explained, "fear really sucks because you are not focusing on what you are *doing* but instead you are focusing on the *consequences of failing* at what you are doing." (Um, yeah, like I am going to fall from the zip-line cable.)

Understanding the role that focus plays in the state of fear really hit home because it makes sense to me on a personal level. When I am swimming in open water for a triathlon, I am focused entirely on that swim and I have no fear. (Between you and me, I think my odds of survival go up when there are more possible victims in the water with me.) If I am trying to do an open water training swim and I am not really that focused on the workout, I have energy to give to a fear and I feed it by focusing on it. The more I feed it, the more panic-stricken I become. Focus instead on what you want, not the fear. Feed the dream. It's mind over matter.

Common Fears That Keep You Stuck

Fear can keep you stuck but you can move through it, over it, around it if you take back some control by breaking fear down. Common fears that keep people stuck include fear of embarrassment or looking bad, abandonment, being hurt, failure, and a big one is fear that if people get to know the "real you" they will no longer like you (which makes the entire be real chapter even more important). A variation of that is a fear that once you discover who you are as you move towards fulfilling your purpose, people you care about will dislike the "real" you, will complain that you have changed, that things are not the same and hold you

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responsible for changing a relationship that was once “so good” (in their books, not necessarily yours).

You can also fear being powerful. You can fear standing out. You can fear not being good enough, fast enough, tall enough, thin enough, rich enough, funny enough or smart enough. Do you ever feel like you are not enough?

Anyone who has seen a relationship end might be left asking, “Why wasn’t I enough?” I urge you to consider that you were enough, you have always been enough, and perhaps your ex-partner just needed something different not something more or something better. Ever seen two amazing people struggle to make a relationship work? Just because they were both amazing, doesn’t mean they were meant to be.

Every one of us is enough just as we are and we become more powerful as we learn how to be true to our own needs. We dilute ourselves when we do not follow our purpose. You have to have faith in yourself to take risks and embrace fear, and if you fail, that failure might be releasing you from one thing to move you closer to something else that is magnitudes of bliss beyond what you were originally trying to achieve. Fear can fuel you or it can burn you. Again, the choice is yours.

Fear, in any form, keeps you perched on the mountain of life’s zip-lining adventures, hanging there, frozen. It is up to you take back control and put that fear into its place! **What we focus on expands.** Knowing this, if you focus on a fear, you make it bigger and more powerful. Focusing on your fears can become a habitual way of thinking (seriously, with neural pathways that encourage more and more of it) and that kind of thinking isn’t going to take you where you want to go.

Fear is an illusion. Your body’s reaction to what you are thinking brings about the feelings we associate with fear. These feelings encourage you to worry about things that have not yet happened in a time and place that has yet to arrive. Fear is also often based on assumptions that the event you fear will give birth to the “worst-ever possible” scenarios. The man you fancy won’t just hate you, he will scream at the top of his lungs what a disgusting person you are and post it all over Facebook to boot! You won’t just screw up that interview, the interviewer will stop mid sentence and ask, “Who the hell are you to come in here and waste my time pretending you are actually qualified to do this job?” And that speech you were asked to give at your best friend’s wedding? Surely you realize that you will stand up there, break out in speaker’s rash, crash with all your jokes, and vomit down the front of your gown only to be tagged in a video of it all posted on a video-sharing website. Sometimes our fear is a tad bit over dramatized.

When we stand up to face a fear that has really had an oppressive impact on us (and often for a long period of time), it is usually a WTF Moment that triggers the

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flight or fight response. We feel cornered like a wild animal, pushed deeply into the dark, and we finally feel like we can't stay there afraid anymore. Essentially, we reach our breaking point.

We come out swinging with one purpose only and that is to win. That's why WTF Moments often provide you with the energy you need to tackle things you thought you couldn't previously. We shift focus to what we can control, not fear. And, it's the things you CAN control that take you where you need to go! You know what that means, buttercup? Yes, once again, it is up to you!

SWIFTKICK TIP: Give Fear The Boot

Fear is a response to what doesn't currently exist for sure, yet. Fear is the anticipation of what might happen. That anticipation can be more detrimental to your well-being than the actual event you fear. Fear sucks the energy out of your tank faster than a hole in a boat. Fear is fed by our decision to feed it. So stop it! Stop feeding your fears. Feed your dreams instead. Change your thoughts and your feelings will follow. Here is a quick five-step process that you can use to "deflate a fear" and regain a sense of power over how you feel about something.

1. Name your fear – don't just say I am scared about this or that. Be specific. You have to be specific because you need to know exactly what to challenge. "I am scared that if I get divorced, I will be left trying to support these two kids alone and I do not have the means to do so." Or, "I am scared I will go to this interview and be humiliated and no one will take me seriously."
2. Ask yourself, what is the WORST thing that could happen if you forged ahead and made your move (in this case, got divorced or went to that interview). "I would be extremely poor and my life would be very hard." "I would crash and burn under pressure in the interview."
3. Ask questions that force you to answer them to remove assumptions. "Would your husband really turn his back on the obligation to the kids?" Yes? OK, then that is the scenario you use moving forward. You wouldn't be able to depend on him financially or emotionally. Is this going to kill you? How can you plan for this?

Or, "Would your husband really turn his back on the obligation to the kids?" No. I am just pissed at him right now and do not like how he is behaving. I think he would help a bit but I am uncertain what that looks like." Ok, so use this scenario to plan moving forward. With some help from him, where does that leave you? Be specific. Research child support laws in your place of residence. Examine options.

Or, what about that interview? Do you really think you are going to blow this interview and be humiliated? If not, stop feeding yourself all that

negativity. Use visualization tactics in the next section to practice the perfect kickass interview. If you are uncertain, how can you best prepare for it? If you fail, what can you learn so the next interview is better? Use each interview as a way to refine your skills.

4. Ask the hard questions. Get the information you need to make informed decisions. Do NOT sit there fretting, start gathering facts – gather as many as you can because they are WAY less scary than assumptions!
5. If my greatest fear came true in this scenario, what would it take for me to recover from it? Is it possible some opportunities I cannot see right now might appear and take me in directions I have never thought of before? (This one is a chewy question because you have no idea what is out there for you and if you change your thinking, you become open to things you do not see right now.)

Think about your original fear, have you deflated it a little bit? Can you sense that fear losing some of its power because you are not wasting valuable energy worrying about “what ifs”? Can you feel the slight shifts because you have been more specific about what exactly it is you fear and then you have called it out and challenged assumptions? Keep at it and you can reduce these fears that have kept you stuck and soon you will be able to step over them with ease!