

By Jeff “Chief” Urbaniak  
COLUMNIST (www.AdviceChief.com)

Are you handling your fears or are your fears handling you? If you're afraid to take risks or you become mentally or physically paralyzed when encountering what you perceive to be a fearful situation or event, you are probably a prisoner of your fears. Fear can overcome anyone, yet be overcome by anyone as well. Here are some steps to consider if you're having difficulty moving forward because of fear:

1) *Admit your fears.* You can't overcome your fears unless you first recognize they exist. Make a list of what makes you feel fear. If this is difficult to do, it may be because you're not paying attention to your feelings. Start taking notice. When does your heart run for no apparent reason? When are you paralyzed into inaction? When do you display nervous energy for no apparent reason? These kinds of responses may be due to fear.

2) *Discover the source of your fears.* Most people's fears are not based on facts, but rather on feelings. The following acronym applies to fear: **False Expectations Appearing Real.** You have to look beyond the irrational feelings you may possess and discover the expectations that lie beneath them.

When I was in the military, I used to be nervous about conducting jungle patrols in Panama. I learned my fear came from not being afraid of a hostile encounter with drug traffickers, but more so from being bitten by a poisonous snake or spider. I learned to manage that fear by holding a friend's pet snake several times. I didn't like it but the tense feeling I had about snakes subsided in time.

3) *Realize how your fears can limit you.* Suppose you turn down a day of fun at Cedar Point because you can't stomach riding a roller coaster. Then you find out later on how much fun everyone had at Cedar Point's water park, picnic, and magic show. That's when you regret that your fear prevented you from enjoying those other things your friends talked about for days. You missed out because of fear.

There are no guarantees in life. People look for many things to protect

them: burglar alarms, traveler's checks, aspirin, umbrellas, GPS systems, and air bags. But the truth is that life is dangerous, damaging to your health, and will eventually kill you. So you might as well live life to the fullest.

4) *Convert fear into desire.* Mike Tyson's fight manager, Cus D'Amato believed, "The hero and the coward both feel exactly the same fear, only the hero confronts his fear and converts it into fire." Just about every negative emotion we feel can be converted into something positive to help us get further in life.

Afraid of poverty? Convert it to a positive work ethic. Afraid of greediness? Convert it to generosity. Afraid of rejection? Convert it to an ability to connect with people. Afraid of insignificance? Convert it to the service of others.

Roger Babson, founder of Babson College and Webber International University, remarked, "If things go wrong, don't go with them." Instead, make a new way. People can turn their lives around by taking the very thing that once created fear and using the energy to do something positive and worthwhile.

5) *Focus on things you can control.* Many things in life you cannot control. There's no good reason to worry about those things. Writer Harold Stephens observes, "There is a great difference between worry and concern. A worried person sees a problem, and a concerned person solves a problem."

How can you become a problem solver? Focus on the things you can control--mainly your attitude. As you interact with people, you cannot control their actions--no matter how much you might like to. But you can control your attitude. When certain uncontrollable things happen, you can still control your mindset. Remember, what happens to you isn't as important as what happens *in* you. An accommodating and positive attitude is very important to solving any problem.

6) *Give today your attention--not yesterday or tomorrow.* Yesterday and tomorrow seem to clamor for our attention. Yesterday wants us to second-guess past decisions and worry if we did the right thing. But that is wasted energy. And tomorrow can cause us to miss today's opportunities.

Former First Lady Barbara Bush compared the future to a train ride. She said we all board a train at birth. When riding it, we often pass by many beautiful sights, and in some cases, ignoring those sights. We are focused on getting to the station. We believe there is a station where a band is playing and banners are hung and flags are waving, and when we get there that will be life's destination. We don't get to really know anybody on the train. We pace up and down the aisles looking at our watches because we know life has a station for us. And the station changes for us during life--from turning 18 and getting out of high school to a first promotion to getting the kids out of college to looking forward to retirement.

Sooner or later, you realize there is no station and the truth to life is the trip. So read a book, eat more ice cream, go barefoot more often, hug a child, pet a dog, go to a football game, laugh more. The station will come soon enough. Enjoy today because tomorrow may or may not come.

The only place we really have any power is in the present. Do what you can in the here and now--despite your fear--and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are doing everything within your power to reach your potential.

7) *Feed the right emotion and starve the wrong one.* Someone once wrote:

*Two natures beat within my breast,  
The one is foul, the other is blessed,  
The one I love, the other I hate,  
The one I feed will dominate.*

You can't expect your fears to simply disappear. They won't. And if you continually focus on them, entertain them, and give in to them, not only will they not disappear, they will increase. The way to ultimately overcome them is to starve them. Don't give your fears any of your time or energy. Don't feed them with gossip or negative news shows or frightening movies. Anytime you're afraid of doing something, do it anyway.

Now I know this is easier said than done, but by changing your thinking and attitude, you can better manage your feelings and handle your fears.

~ The End ~