

Overcoming your fear of failure

Overcoming your fear of failure is the sequel to my earlier post on [fear of failure](#).

Overcoming your fear of failure is not easy, but it can be done, especially if you are determined to take your personal and professional development to the next level. There is no magic pill that will prevent fear of failure. Equally, don't think you should be trying to become fearless. Take the middle ground: Be willing to face, investigate and address your fears.

The first step is to understand when you succumb to the grip of your fear. To know which situations trigger your anxiety and compromise your performance. These may include: job interviews, presenting to senior or large audiences, delivering technical advice where others look to you as the expert, pitching for a significant piece of work. These are all situations where you might feel vulnerable, exposed or uncertain, or where the stakes are high.

If you know what situations provoke your fear of failure, then you can prepare for them in advance. With insight and self-awareness, you can also recognise when you are in such a situation (in the moment) and how to draw on learned strategies to overcome your fear.

Secondly, know of exactly what you are you afraid. For example, being seen to be incompetent, making a mistake, letting others down, being ridiculed, not being taken seriously, not living up to your own self-image, or the image you think others should have of you.

Armed with these insights you will be in a position challenge and overcome your fear of failure. The rest of this post provides ten practical examples and ideas for you to learn and draw upon.

1. Shift your perspective

Who taught you failure was a bad thing? Is this true? Should you not test this belief? Remember, it is not through our successes that you become wise, but through your failures. Look at each failure as a learning experience; as a way to become better, to excel. This is an opportunity to invite feedback and to attempt new approaches and ways of doing things. Practice, practice, practice until you succeed!

Carol Dweck, Harvard psychologist and author of '[Mindset: The new psychology of success](#)', suggests developing a *learning*, rather than a *performance* mindset. Viewed this way, mistakes are a necessary part of the learning process, rather than spurious evidence of your underlying inadequacy or failure.

When we review an event in our minds, we freeze-frame on what we wish we had done better or differently, and completely overlook the overall impression based on all the moments when we did well, as well those where we fell short. We are not judged by a single snapshot. The feature film of our lives contains the good the bad and the ugly, and with very few exceptions the total package adds up to something pretty good.

2. Visualise yourself succeeding

Use your imagination and visualise yourself succeeding by immersing yourself in the details in full technicolour. How does your body feel? What emotions are you experiencing? How are people around you reacting? Dedicate at least 15 minutes to this visualisation. Make it real. Then make it happen. The fundamental process of creative visualisation is to imagine as clearly and realistically as possible what

you want to happen as if it has already happened, thus creating an inner experience of what it would be like to have your desire come true. This is a well-known technique used by sports people; you can adopt it too.

3. Affirmations

An affirmation is like a mantra. It is a positive statement that something is true. Affirmations provide you with encouragement, emotional support, and motivation, especially when used for autosuggestion. They should be a short memorable phrase that you can regularly update or recycle depending on the situation. For example, *"I have done it before, I can do it again"* or *"My happiness is in my own hands"* or *"I am a success"*. Type out your key affirmations and stick them in your car or on your bathroom mirror. Repeat them until they become your reality. Doing this is a way of caring for yourself. It also has a secondary benefit, as Amy Cuddy put it, *"We convince ourselves, and that allows us to convince others"*.

4. Rewrite your story

Challenge and eliminate your old and outdated scripts. Reframe, in other words literally put a new frame on your thinking, i.e. your picture of a past event or fear of a future event. Catch and stop yourself as soon as you start to recall a negative experience or as soon as you start to live out an old script, acknowledge. The address it by simply saying: *"Stop! I am focusing on the past"*. There's no judgement in doing this. Just by recognising it, you have stopped fear of failing in its tracks.

5. Recover from perceived failure

When you do fall short, take action: avoid ruminating; don't replay the video; move on. Remember failure is a temporary experience, it is never permanent. Unpack your perceived failure piece –by–piece so you understand what went wrong. Then work out what you will do differently and better next time. Action is a great healer. It gives you control. But only focus on aspects within your control – Let the rest go.

6. Stay in the now

Most of us get pulled into the past or the future. We regret what we have done (or not done), and worry about what is to come. The past is done, you can't go back. Don't empower the past. It is done and dusted. You can't go back and change what is. The future you can't predict. So why worry about it. You can only influence the future by what you do in the present. What you do in the now predicts what will happen in the future

7. Hold internal dialogue with yourself

Your thought patterns are like a running commentary in your head. Your internal dialogue is what you say to yourself about yourself. Listen to the voice in your head. Stop to observe your thoughts. Be the silent witness, the observer watching you. But, do not judge yourself. To do so is to invite the voice in your head to enter via the back door. Endlessly focusing on and repeating negative thought patterns, especially those about yourself is wasted energy. It wears you down, weakens your resolve, makes you more susceptible to anxiety. Resolve to stop it.

8. Face your self-doubt

Own your fear. Bring the feelings to the surface and into focus so you can deal with them. Be willing to address your fear by making it conscious and being aware of its presence. In this way, you disempower your doubts as they can't lurk in the shadows of your mind.

9. Recall your successes

When you are down it is easier to remember the bad, rather than the good. I suggest you make a list of all your distant and recent achievements. Savour each experience as you write it down. Feel the emotions you felt at the time of your success. Internalise the feeling and make it part of who you are – and who you wish to become. Draw on the positivity of the experience when you feel your confidence slipping.

10. Use your body language

Your posture influences your thinking and feeling. Stand tall and hold your head up high. This will release a surge of cortisol that reduces anxiety, enhances your mood, and builds your self-confidence.

Close: Overcoming your fear of failure

You are not alone. Fear of failure is an integral part of being human. It is something everyone has to face at one time or another. You can re-program the way you react to your fears, thoughts, and worries. It is not fear that stops you from going after your dreams, but what you decide to do because of those fears. The alternative is giving up, which I am sure you agree, isn't the option you prefer.

If you want the life of your dreams, make failure and dealing with failure part of your life. The more you fail the more you succeed.

'There is no failure. Only feedback'

Robert Allen

More on fear of failure from my blog

- ✓ [Challenge your mental models](#)
- ✓ [Never good enough](#)
- ✓ [The inner game](#)