



**Helping individuals and companies
break out of their comfort zones
to become more successful**

Training | Coaching | Speaking
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What Are You Afraid Of?

If you're like most people on the planet, you have fears. And like many people, you may be afraid of speaking in public. Whether it's a mind-numbing, knee-knocking, stomach-churning fear, or a milder, less invasive, I'd-rather-not-be-doing-this fear, it can get in the way of your professional success and your personal growth.

In my presentation skills classes, I ask participants to identify their fears. Responses include what you might expect - for example, "I'm afraid my mind will go blank" and "I'm afraid I'll lose my place." Next, I ask the crucial question, "And then what will happen?"

The responses always amaze me. When we dig deeply into that fear, what began as "I'm afraid my mind will go blank" or "I'm afraid I'll lose my place" ends up as "and then I'll look stupid in front of my boss, and then I'll get fired, and then I'll lose my house, and then my spouse will leave me, and then the dog will run away."

No wonder you don't want to give that presentation - you fear that your entire life is riding on it! How likely is it that all those terrible things will happen, as a result of this one presentation? Very unlikely!

Yet the fact that someone is worrying about them shows how powerful fear can be and how debilitating. Once you identify it, however, you can subject it to logic (does this fear really make sense?) and probability (what are the odds these awful things will happen?) and start to weaken its power over you.

Franklin Roosevelt said it best in his first Inaugural Address in 1933, when the United States was in the grip of the Great Depression: "So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself - nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." When I worked as an archivist at the Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library, I had the opportunity to hold the actual copy of that speech in my hand and those words have stayed with me.

And everything that we've discussed here about the power of fear is applicable to all aspects of our lives, even beyond public speaking - we all have things that we avoid doing out of fear. These are things that we should and could do, like looking for a better job, taking an exercise class or getting a handle on our finances.

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Think about it - what would you do if you weren't afraid? How is fear paralyzing your efforts to convert retreat into advance?

At one time or another, we all have allowed fear to keep us stuck. For months, I've been putting off asking a business contact for help with a professional association to which I belong. I've made excuses as to why I haven't asked her for help, but the real reason is that I'm afraid that she might say no, that she's unable to help out - and then that will be the end of that possibility, and then I'll be out of options, and then I'll be stuck, and then I'll be a failure.

I didn't realize that my excuses and inaction were just a cover-up for my fears, until someone called me on it (another reason why it's good to have honest people around you who will point out when you're not "walking your talk").

Now that I've identified my fears, I realize that they don't make sense. Realistically, what's the worst thing that could happen? She might say no to my request for help. Could I handle that? Yes. What are the odds that the refusal would lead me to become a failure? Very low. Then I have nothing to fear.

So, I'm off to write her an email! What about you?

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