

## LESSON 10

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# Confront Your Fears and Grow

*Do the thing you fear and the death of fear is certain.*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

**A**s I sat in the audience listening to motivational speaker Gil Eagles, little did I know that one sentence was about to change my life.

Gil Eagles gave a marvelous presentation that day. He had many valuable things to say. But there was one line — one absolute gem — that stands out. Here's what he said:

*"If you want to be successful, you must be willing to be uncomfortable."*

I'll never forget those words. And Gil was right on the money. To achieve your goals and realize your potential, you must be willing to be *uncomfortable* — to do things that you're afraid to do. That's how you develop your potential!

Sounds so simple, doesn't it? And yet, what do most people do when they face a frightening situation or new activity? They back away from the fear. They don't take

action. I know... because that's what I did for the first 30 years of my life. And I can tell you without hesitation that it's a losing strategy.

Show me a successful person and I'll show you someone who confronts his or her fears and takes action!

### Examining Our Fears

Have *you* ever been afraid or anxious before trying a new or challenging activity? Has that fear ever stopped you from taking action? I'm sure you've been paralyzed by fear at one time or another in your life. I know I have. That's simply part of being human.

Of course, every person has a different fear threshold. What frightens one person to death might have little impact on someone else. For example, to some, speaking in public or starting a new business is scary. Others might be fearful

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*Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood.*

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— Marie Curie

about asking someone for directions... or for a date. Regardless of how trivial or silly you believe your fears may be, this lesson applies to you.

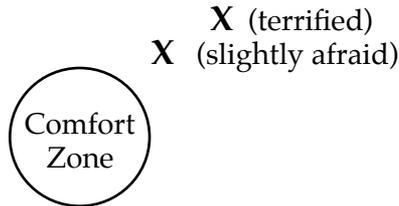
When I talk about fear, I'm *not* referring to physical risks that might injure you or endanger your health, such as diving off cliffs in Acapulco or bungee jumping. I'm scared of those things, too — and I have no plans to do either of them. What I'm talking about here are those challenges that stand in the way of your personal and professional growth. These are the things that scare you — but which you know are necessary if you're going to get what you want in life.

### The Comfort Zone

When you're gripped by fear and anxiety, it's usually because you're stepping out of your *comfort zone*. Let's take some time to discuss this important concept — and how it relates to your success and the development of your potential.

Each of us has a comfort zone, a zone of behavior that

is familiar to us and where we feel comfortable and safe. Think of your comfort zone as the inside of a circle.



The activities and situations that lie inside the circle are non-threatening and familiar. They're routine, part of your everyday life — the things you can do with no sweat. In this category are tasks such as speaking to your friends or co-workers or filling out the daily paperwork at your job.

However, you occasionally face experiences or challenges that are *outside* your comfort zone. These are represented by the "Xs" in the diagram above. The farther the "X" is from the circle, the more afraid you are to participate in that activity.

When faced with something outside your comfort zone, you suddenly feel nervous. Your palms become sweaty and your heart pounds. You begin to wonder,

"Will I be able to handle it?"

"Will others laugh at me?"

"What will my friends and relatives say?"

As you look at the diagram above, what does the "X" represent for you? In other words, what fear is holding you back from reaching the next level of success or fulfillment in your life?

Is it fear of approaching new prospects?

Is it fear about changing careers?

Is it fear about learning new skills?

Is it fear of going back to school?

Is it fear of telling other people what's on your mind?

Is it fear of public speaking?

Whatever that "X" represents for you, just be honest and admit it. My guess is that thousands, if not millions, of

people have the very same fear you have! In fact, let's take a closer look at what most people are afraid of.

### **The Most Common Fears**

During many of my presentations, I distribute index cards to the audience members and ask them to write down, anonymously, the fears that are standing in the way of their professional and personal growth. Then, I collect the cards and read them aloud.

What do you think people write on those index cards? In most audiences, regardless of profession or geographical location, the same answers come up again and again. Here are some of the most common fears they identify:

1. *Public Speaking or Giving Presentations.* In virtually every group, this is the #1 fear. The vast majority of people are terrified about speaking in front of a group of people.
2. *Hearing the word "NO" or having their ideas rejected.* This response is very common among salespeople, especially those who make cold calls.
3. *Changing Jobs or Starting Their Own Business.* Over the years, I've noticed that more and more people are listing this fear. We have a lot of unhappy workers in corporate America today, and they yearn for a more satisfying work environment... but they're afraid to do anything about it!
4. *Telling Managers or Executives "Negative News" (what the managers or executives don't want to hear).* This one is self-explanatory.
5. *Talking to People in Upper Management.* Many entry-level workers and even managers are terrified about speaking to executives in the company. They even hesitate to make "small talk" with the president

or CEO of their organization — for fear they'll say something silly or appear stupid.

6. *Fear of Failure.* Those who won't try something new for fear that it won't work out. (We'll tackle this issue in more depth in Lesson 11.)

Well, are you surprised by any of the fears on this list? Do you have any of them now — or have you had them in the past? The truth is, the overwhelming majority of people experience these fears at some point in their lives.

And if you have some fears that weren't on this list, don't worry about it. You are stronger than any of your fears... and you *can* overcome them!

### **The “Benefit” Of Backing Away From Your Fears**

When confronted with an anxiety-producing event, most people will retreat to avoid the fear and anxiety. That's what I used to do. You see, backing away *does* relieve the fear and anxiety that would have resulted if you followed through with the activity. For instance, if someone asks you to make a presentation within your company, and you decline, you save yourself the sleepless nights you'd have worrying about it... and the nervousness you'd experience in the days leading up to the presentation.

In fact, I've found that's the one and only benefit you get by retreating — a momentary avoidance of anxiety.

Think about it for a moment. Can you list any other benefits that people get when they refuse to confront their fears? I've asked that question of thousands of people, and nobody has been able to come up with any additional benefits. For good reason — there are none!

### **The Price You Pay**

Now, I want you to seriously consider the price you pay when you back away from those fears that are standing in the way of your growth. Here's what happens:

*Your self-esteem is lowered.*

*You feel powerless and frustrated.*

*You sabotage your success.*

*You lead an uneventful, boring life.*

Is this a price worth paying for the short-term avoidance of fear and anxiety? Most of us are indeed willing to pay this dear price, simply to avoid temporary discomfort and possible ridicule from others.

Trust me folks, this is insane! In the long run, retreating is not the best way to handle your problem. You'll never be highly successful or develop your talents to the fullest unless you're willing to confront your fears.

### **My High School Strategy**

When I was in high school, I was pretty shy and didn't feel very good about myself. But I was never rejected when it came to asking someone for a date. If you were looking at me now, you'd probably be thinking, "He's not bad looking, but he's certainly no Tom Cruise."

My strategy was really quite simple. *I never asked anyone out on a date.* You see, I wasn't going to let anyone reject me. And what did I accomplish? I felt horrible about myself. I

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*He who loses wealth  
loses much; he who loses  
a friend loses more;  
but he who loses courage  
loses all.*

— Miguel de Cervantes

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knew that I had "wimped out." I felt powerless, and as you can imagine, I didn't have a full social calendar. I was sabotaging my success!

Because I refused to face my fear, I remained in the background while most of my friends and classmates went out on dates. How do you think that made me feel? *Pretty lousy*, just as you'd expect. In case you're wondering, I did have a few dates during that period of my life, but only when other people arranged them. I wasn't going to allow anyone to say "NO" to me. In reality I was saying "NO" to myself.

Can you see how my strategy of backing away from my fears worked against me? Now it's true that if I had asked some people for a date in high school, a few of them might have said "NO." But you know what? I wouldn't have

died! I could have asked another person... and another... and eventually I would have gotten a "YES."

It wasn't until college that I began to take some "baby steps" to confront this fear of rejection. Little by little, I gained more confidence. And in law school, I had the good fortune to meet Dolores, and we've been married going on 30 years!

### **A New Life**

I'm really no different from you. I have my fears, just as you do. And when I look back at the first 30 years of my life, you know what I see? I see someone who achieved some degree of success as an attorney. But I also see someone who was shy, insecure, scared and self-conscious. Does that sound to you like someone who's a motivational speaker?

What turned my life around... and improved it a million-fold... is that I learned to confront my fears and take action. I realized after years of frustration and disappointments that hiding from my fears wasn't getting me anywhere — and it would *never* get me anywhere.

Of course, I wouldn't have confronted my fears if I hadn't first developed a positive attitude. A "can-do" attitude provided me with the extra push I needed to take action. When you believe you can do something, you have the courage to move forward despite being afraid.

Armed with a great attitude, I decided to become a participant in life and to explore my potential, even though I was scared. From the very beginning, I felt so much better about myself. I had taken control of my life, and all sorts of possibilities opened up for me.

Are you beginning to see the incredible rewards you can receive when you're willing to develop a positive attitude and confront your fears?

### **Reframe The Situation**

If I could give you a way to confront uncomfortable situations without fear or anxiety, you'd be ecstatic and eternally grateful, wouldn't you? Sorry, but there's no such magical

solution. I can't wave a magic wand and take away your fears.

How then can you muster the courage to do those things that you fear, but which are necessary for your success and growth?

The next time you face a scary situation, I suggest you take a different outlook. Most people start thinking, "I won't be able to do this well and other people may laugh at me or reject me." They get hung up about how well they're going to perform. Because of these worries, they decide to retreat. While you should always go in with a positive attitude and prepare beforehand to the extent possible, don't be *overly* concerned with the result.

*Consider yourself an immediate winner when you take the step and do the thing you fear.* That's right. You're a winner just by entering the arena and participating, regardless of the result.

### **Moving Forward Even When You're Afraid**

For instance, let's assume you're afraid to speak in public, but you confront your fear and do it anyway. The moment you get up and speak before the audience, you're a winner. Your knees may be shaking and your voice may be quivering. That doesn't matter. You faced your fear and accepted the challenge. Congratulations are in order. The likely result is that your self-esteem will be enhanced and you'll feel exhilarated.

On your first attempt, you won't be hailed as the world's finest speaker. So what? Let's face it. You can't expect to be an accomplished speaker during your first presentation. Were you a great tennis player after your first game? Or a great swimmer the first time you entered the water? Developing any skill takes time.

I remember *my* first motivational speech. That was in 1988... and my performance was nothing to write home about! I gave a free talk to a group of real estate salespeople, and let me tell you, I was terrified. I couldn't take my eyes off my notes. Fortunately, the content of my presentation

was very solid and the audience responded well. But I had a long way to go before I could call myself a good speaker.

On the second presentation, I was a little better. And when I had done five or so presentations, I began to rely less and less on my notes... and to develop a stronger connection with the audience. Now, 20 years later, I'm a professional speaker who speaks to thousands of people each year throughout the United States and abroad.

But let's not forget that it all started with a scared guy who gave a very unimpressive talk in 1988.

### **She Followed Her Dream**

I'd like to tell you a story about a woman who knows a lot about breaking out of a comfort zone. Her name is Dottie Burman, and for 32 years Dottie was a high school English teacher in New York. Yet, since the age of 10, she wanted to go into show business. She never gave it serious thought as a career and instead chose the security of teaching, with its regular paycheck and benefits.

While working as a teacher, Dottie began to write songs and perform them. It was just a hobby, but it kept her dream alive. Then, in the late 1980s, Dottie made a decision. She would retire from teaching and pursue a new career as a performer. In the summer of 1988, she submitted her resignation. Then the terror really hit her. She was so scared about venturing into the unknown that she withdrew her resignation and went back to teaching.

But something inside Dottie wouldn't let her dream die. Six months later, in January of 1989, she confronted her fear and retired. At the time, Dottie was in her 50s! In 1992, Dottie developed and performed her own one-woman musical show. The show was based on her fears of leaving a secure teaching job to go into show business!

And in the spring of 1998, Dottie, now in her 60s, released her marvelous CD, *I'm in Love With My Computer*, a

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*The only way to escape  
from the prison of fear  
is action.*

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— Joe Tye

collection of witty, inspirational songs. She also performed these songs in a musical revue in a cabaret in New York City — and continues to present her programs of original songs and stories in theaters and cabarets... as well as for organizations throughout the country.

Dottie will be the first to admit that her career transition has been filled with challenges and setbacks. But has it been worth it? According to Dottie, “I’ve never been happier in my life.”

Bravo, Dottie, for confronting your fears... and inspiring us to follow our dreams!

### Just Do It

Ralph Waldo Emerson offered some simple advice, which, if followed, can transform your life. He said, “*Do the thing you fear and the death of fear is certain.*” I know this advice makes good sense, but some people are just too afraid to act. Remember my prior words about the steep price you pay when you let your fears dominate you.

In the end, running away from your fears is a losing strategy. It will only bring you frustration and unhappiness. I can tell you that from personal experience.

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*Running away from your fears is a losing strategy.*

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— Jeff Keller

There’s nothing wrong with having some fears. Successful people have fears. The difference is that successful people take action and move forward despite being afraid. It’s not always easy, I’ll grant that. But you’ll always feel better about yourself when you face your fears.

In the last 20 years or so, I’ve had the privilege of traveling throughout the United States and abroad... and of speaking with thousands of people. During all this time, I haven’t met one person who confronted his or her fears... took action... and later regretted it. Not a single one! But I’ve met *many* people who tell me how much they regret backing away from their fears — and letting their dreams die.

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As my friend Burke Hedges often says, *“Don’t be one of those who lets his regrets take the place of his dreams.”*

So, stretch yourself. Confront your fears and be willing to expand your comfort zone. The courage muscle can be developed just like any other muscle — with exercise. And when you do an activity outside your comfort zone a few times, you know what happens? That same activity becomes part of your comfort zone!

There’s another bonus when you’re willing to expand your comfort zone. When you push through fear and take action in some areas of your life, you’ll develop confidence in other areas, as well. It’s true! As I became more comfortable as a speaker, I also became a better salesman... a better businessman... a better listener... the list goes on and on.

You can try to dance around it all you want. But you won’t develop your abilities to the fullest unless you’re willing to be uncomfortable. Life doesn’t reward those who refuse to expose themselves to difficulties and challenges. It’s important that you put yourself in a position to win — and that means taking action despite fear.

Confront your fears... and you’re on the way to developing your potential and leading the exciting, fulfilling life you deserve. It’s a decision you’ll never regret!