

FEARS

(@work)

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ON TUTORIAL | *In this tutorial we cover the following topics:*

- ☞ *understanding fears*
- ☞ *accommodating and facing fears*
- ☞ *fears commonly faced @work*
- ☞ *Tips and tricks on coping with fears @work*

Everyone once in a while fears something and/or someone. Some fears are there with us from early age until the day we die, and some are a product of life experiences, even of our own expectations. Some fears change in the course of life. Some we never dare to face, but rather chose to accommodate. Even though connotation of fears is normally negative, fears can in fact help us survive, both in life and at work. Luckily some tips and trick have already been identified to help us cope with common fears. In this Module mostly through exercises we discover the positives and negatives of fears and give an impetus to facing them prudently. Particular attention is being given to fears we have at work and strategies on approaching these.



WHAT IS FEAR?

In order to start off with clear understanding of what a fear is, in a vast body of definitions available, we have chosen the following two reflecting common understanding and use of the term:

An unpleasant emotion caused by the threat of danger, pain, or harm.

Oxford dictionary

A response to a perceived threat that is consciously recognized as a danger.

North American Nursing Diagnosis Association



Question for discussion:

What/whom do you fear? How do you deal with it?

Commonly reported **causative factors** of fears are stated to be a separation from one's support system in a potentially threatening situation:

- ✓ hospitalization,
- ✓ diagnostic test, or treatment;
- ✓ knowledge deficit or unfamiliarity;
 - ✓ language barrier;
 - ✓ sensory impairment; and
 - ✓ phobic stimulus or phobia.

Fear has much to do with anxiety but the two are not synonyms. In fact while fear is having an identifiable stimulus, anxiety is based on non-easily identifiable stimulus. **Common symptoms** of fears include both those physical & emotional in nature. Some often identified symptoms are:

- ♣ Sweaty palms,
 - ♣ Ticks
 - ♣ Trembling
 - ♣ Puls increase
 - ♣ Immobility
 - ♣ Skin rash
 - ♣ Eyes wide open

- ♣ Rapid breathing
- ♣ Screaming
- ♣ Perspiration
- ♣ Dry mouth

Even though people normally associate fears with a negative emotion, **we should acknowledge** that:

- ☞ Experiencing fear not only normal human reaction, but is a rather healthy one! Being a part of normal brain function, a lack of fear may be a sign of serious brain damage.
- ☞ Fear comes in many shades, from mild, e.g. doctor check-up, to paralyzing, e.g. terrorist attack.
- ☞ Fear is not as automatic as commonly deemed! On the contrary it is partly instinct (e.g. pain), partly learned (e.g. being afraid of certain people, places, or situations because of negative associations and past experiences), partly taught (e.g. based on cultural norms/perceptions), and partly imagined (e.g. based on what we imagine could happen).
- ☞ Fear dictates one's actions in either of the following ways, causing us to:
 - a. freeze – e.g. one reads a memo his/her company will be laying off people*
 - b. fight - e.g. one tell his/her boss why one should not be laid off*
 - c. flight – e.g. one starts looking for another job*
 - d. fright – e.g. one takes no action (in long run one often becomes depressed)*

The way one responds to fears makes a lot of difference. Taking no action may thus be a very wrong choice for one's mental hygiene in the future.

As in everything else, fears have the **positives and the negatives** associated with them. The good sides of fears can be sum up to those that actually help us survive.

Contrary to common understanding, fear does not negate courage. It beckons it! It makes one step out of his/her comfort zone and learn new things, it contributes one's creativity.

Fear is intended to keep us safe, which is why we do not get close to hippopotamus for instance. Fear is instructive and hence it is in fact a sign one is changing/growing!

On the bad side some fears create mental blocks in a person. Thus, fears are not bad per se. It is OUR REACTION TO IT IS AN ISSUE causing serious (mental) health problems: i.e. cardiovascular damage, bowel syndrome, brain damage; fatigue, depression, PTSD, etc.

ACCOMMODATING VS. FACING

The very common question in thinking of fears is how to accommodate someone's fear? And why? Here the answer is indeed easy – in doing so, one helps a person to avoid something he or she fears.

***Example:** The boyfriend of a girl with agoraphobia agrees to only spend time with her at her house because venturing out overwhelms her with the fear of panic attacks.*

So, why choose to accommodate someone's fears?

No one wants to force their loved one into situations where he or she will have an emotional breakdown; rather we want to support them! The accommodation approach works in the short term as we accommodate the person's avoidance.

BUT:

Why choose not to accommodate someone's fear?

- **Longer term effect** of deepening and retrenching the person in their life-depleting condition
- **Loving encouragement** to move through the fear is needed for long term positive effects.

How do we go from accommodating to facing (realizing there is no pill solution)?

No one size fits all principle applies as this rather depends on the 3 types of fears dealt with.

1. Fear of loss - this type of fear is closely related to sticking to something or someone we love, are feel safe with – e.g. what if I lose my job? But if one ask oneself what he/she gains from it instead it will bring one closer to facing it and getting some positives from it;
2. Fear of process (e.g. doing something new/differently is hard; but think about the way challenges will make you grow/be fun);
3. Fear of outcome (e.g. what if the grass is not greener after the process? Here again one should aim focusing on the positive effects: *if I quit smoking I will be heathy again!*)

There are 2 commonly used techniques/response when it comes to dealing with fears:

- **Analyzing & understanding**

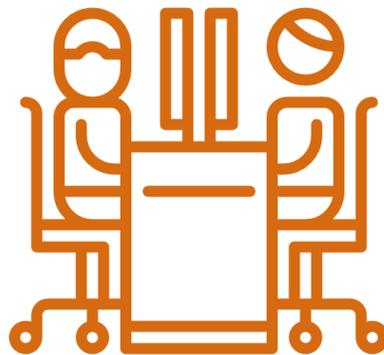
This response technique is based on the self-reflection that is knowing the why fears are there, building competence and confidence in dealing with them, even though fears do not end, and

- **Suppressing & avoiding**

This response technique occurs when one avoids watching scary stuff/going into dark places, etc. suppressing the fear that can be highly unhealthy approach.

Useful **out of the box technique** for overcoming fears is:

- **Facing & embracing** (voluntarily!): frequent exposure (e.g. going to dark places more often), or gradual steps (playing a video game first);



FEARS@WORK & HOW TO APPROACH THEM

Approaching and overcoming fears including those at work is a skill. It is therefore needed to first examine what work related fears are commonly present out there in order to understand them and properly approach them. The 7 common work related fears and how one should be looking at these is presented below.

1. Failure:

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”

Winston Churchill

Remember:

- Everyone can fail and usually fails, a world is not a perfect place!
- Grow & learn from it!
- Managers should: have open communication, assess skillset required for a task, make sure employee is not overloaded

2. Rejection:

"I don't want anyone who doesn't want me."

Oprah Winfrey

Remember:

- Rejection is caused by feeling undervalued/not knowing where one stands; it keeps one silent.
- Managers should: nurture collaborative cultures, welcoming new ideas from all staff members

3. Job loss

Remember:

- It does NOT kill your career!
- Recession happen and go away!
- Most jobs today are temporary!
- Most good managers will want to keep the team going!
- When one door closes another opens! Always and for everyone!

4. Change/uncertainty

Remember:

- Can happen suddenly and swiftly
- Are always stressful to everyone involved
- Change is not necessarily a bad thing! A new, more supportive manager can come to lead
- Managers are to be open communicators, transparent and providing sufficient information

5. Confrontation

Remember:

- Avoiding it is never the answer, and in fact lead to an unpleasant state of passive aggression
- Always confront IDEAS not PEOPLE
- Managers should not call out an employee in front of their peers; also stands for peer2 peer relations

6. Being disliked & isolated

- We are all different people!
- Always be yourself & do your best!
- Everyone cannot like you, otherwise you are doing something wrong!
- Managers should provide team building exercises and collaborative working environment, ensure that all employees are included on important calls or meetings as well as new opportunities

7. Being stuck

- Make plan for near future & get out there in the market!
- Believe in your plan and stick to it!



Task:

Ask participants if they can think of any other fears at work. Analysis these in group discussion – point out on the appropriate approach in overcoming the identified fears through brainstorming. You may also use this time to ask the participants if they can now picture and describe out loud how a fear based work place would look like? How would they picture a healthy work place? Then provide small input on the two.

Fear-based work place is the one in which fear rules over persons, usually CEO driven initiatives, career progress is given to those support the boss and his/her agenda. No real teamwork takes place in this type of work place. Great fluctuation of employees is a common denominator.

Healthy work place is characterized by open minded managers, team leaders who involve their coworkers into all activities including decision making, and will want to keep the team members and invest in their professional development. Open communication and fair collaboration are key features of this type of work place.

PLAY BIG – OVERCOME FEARS @ WORK

Fears one deals with at work are commonly spread across different sectors. Hence some strategic steps on how to approach these fears can be of use. These are as follows:

1. Identify negativity/understand fear

Label negative thoughts when they happen in order to exclude them (negative self-talk puts you down-i.e. feeling nervous before giving presentation). Some fears are simply illogical.

2. Reframe the situation

Change your perception: remind yourself there is a reason why you were chosen to do something for instance – shifting the focus from our fear to what one can contribute to and be proud of will raise morale and chances on success that may balance the fear.

3. Go from best to worst case scenario

Have you found that your best-case scenario is amazing and your worst-case scenario is not actually that bad? This is quite possible and interesting scenario. Nevertheless, expect the middle ground.

4. Some fears must be faced hand on!

Need more knowledge? Go to MBA. Need more skill? Watch YouTube/other available resources that help you tackle the issue.

5. Decide which risk you would rather take

Would you rather not take action or try and fail? Taking no action is always a possibility. But history was not written by those who did nothing.

6. Commit to take small steps

Do the small steps towards your goal, be patient yet consistent – send that email, call the contact person, etc. Step by step approach allow time to think and yet enough action to take place even with the most complex of fears and situations one needs to handle.

7. Let go

In situation we do not have any control over (e.g. one has no power over a decision who is going to be in a board of directors of a foundation), learn to let go! This approach will grant you time and effort to focus on those things you are able to control and influence.

COMMON DOs AND DONTs



Try to act in spite the fear!

- Be conformable in feeling good about your work! Take that compliment and thank the person!
- Be selfish – focus on yourself from time to time!
- Breed!
- Learn to say no!
- Don't avoid!
- Don't negate the good in doing something!

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