



"THIS SMART AND
NO-NONSENSE BOOK
WILL STIMULATE YOU TO
BE A BETTER VERSION OF
WHO YOU ARE."

- Dorie Clark,
Author of *Reinventing You*

THE FEARLESS FACTOR @WORK

*Your essential guide for
unlocking the secrets to a*
FEARLESS Career and Life

JACQUELINE WALES

Excerpt from:

THE FEARLESS FACTOR @ WORK

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PRAISE FOR *THE FEARLESS FACTOR @ WORK*

"Jacqueline Wales has 'fearlessness' in her veins. She is a role model, coach and motivator for many, and a master of change during these uncertain times. I was honored to be asked to contribute to *The Fearless Factor @ Work*, and encourage everyone to take to heart the valuable advice she offers in this very personal yet pragmatic book."

–Bobbie LaPorte, 7x Ironman Triathlete and Leadership Advisor

"Jacqueline Wales has taken a fresh look at what it means to be fearless, build trust, and become more self-aware. This smart and no-nonsense book will stimulate you to be a better version of who you are."

–Dorie Clark, author of *Reinventing You* and executive education faculty, Duke University Fuqua School of Business

"Psychological safety in the workplace starts with two things: self-awareness and the courage to change. In *The Fearless Factor @ Work*, Jacqueline Wales gives readers a priceless roadmap that takes them on a journey to better relationships and greater success."

–Dr. Tasha Eurich, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Insight* and *Bankable Leadership*

"Many of us become paralyzed in making choices that will accelerate our lives and careers because we get stuck in old patterns of thinking. In her new book, Jacqueline Wales has outlined essential steps to overcome these obstacles and develop the 'right' mind for success in all dimensions of life."

–Anne Devereux-Mills, author of *The Parlay Effect* and Founder of Parlay House

"You make it safe to be human!"

–Kathleen Hermann, Retired Educator

"An admitted skeptic, I was never a fan of self-improvement books until I read this one. It is a concise, studied, and pragmatic approach to confronting and overcoming the fear in us that restrains growth and our ability to change—

especially necessary in these uncertain times. This needs to be on every leader's bookshelf."

–Christopher Kertz, Retired SVP, City National Bank

"Having spent a long and productive career enduring poor leadership and doing my best to be a decent one, I related deeply with Jacqueline's observations that effective leaders are 'forged in the steel of experience' rather than born. She defines the fears that hold us back with great clarity, and I half expected FDR to emerge from the book to declare, 'all we have to fear is fear itself.' Readers who take the time to do the deep dive will benefit enormously from her wisdom."

–Woody Shiflett, Blue Ridge Consulting

"We all have fears. What makes this book compelling is that we learn the philosophies and mechanics to help overcome the self-limiting beliefs that make these fears seem real. Jacqueline provokes us to question who we want to be as a person and as a leader, and what a life worth living looks like. Reading *The Fearless Factor @ Work* will encourage you to be a better person and make a positive contribution to the world."

–Charles Bernard, CEO, Criteria for Success

"What a joy it is to read such a clearly written, helpful, inspiring book. Author Jacqueline Wales has divided her book into short chapters so you can dip in and derive value even if you're busy and only have a few minutes to spare. You'll love her relatable stories and actionable insights. Highly recommended."

–Sam Horn, CEO of the Tongue Fu! Training Institute

"Change is not for the faint of heart, says Jacqueline Wales in *The Fearless Factor @ Work*. To change, you must be curious and courageous, and ask many challenging questions to find the answers you are looking for. If you are looking for answers then read this book, but mostly, read it because you want to know what *questions* to ask. Jacqueline Wales offers a valuable and practical roadmap to build a better tomorrow."

–Oleg Kononov, global thought leader, the da Vinci of visionary leadership

A rich narrative of personal stories, and interviews with clients and corporate leaders, Jacqueline Wales has laid out a roadmap to success in a simple and easy to digest format that gets down to the basics of all great leadership. Highly recommended."

–Ben Croft, Chairman and Founder, World Business & Executive Coach Summit (WBECS)

"Fear is such a big part of our lives today. The flow of treacherous risks and threats seems to be accelerating, with something fearful lurking around every corner. Our work life and careers are equally vulnerable. In this environment, Jacqueline Wales' new book couldn't be more timely and valuable. If you want relief from the fears that can suck our energy and attention, her book provides you with insights and actions to take. This book is so needed today!"

–Andrew Neitlich, Founder, Center for Executive Coaching

I know and love Jacqueline Wales and when she says change is not for the faint of heart, she knows what she's talking about. She has lived the experiences in this book and understands intimately the challenges. Jacqueline is a brave strong wise woman, and I believe her advice is very needed in today's world.

–Lee Milteer, Author of *Success Is an Inside Job*

BE FEARLESS

*Hope and fear cannot occupy the same space.
Invite one to stay.*

–Maya Angelou

FEAR IS THE BACKGROUND noise of many people's lives. Fear is a constant din that keeps you hypervigilant, always on the lookout for trouble, dealing with limitations that define your life. By identifying the fears holding you back and learning how you can overcome them, you can create the life you desire.

Fear in the Workplace

We live in a world where governance is distrusted. Many organizations struggle with employee disengagement, lack of trust, and confusion over roles and regulations. As I write this book, a global pandemic threatens the stability of our world.

We live in a VUCA world: Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. Many companies struggle with unpredictability and a sense of not knowing what's going to happen next. With the rise of new technologies, the complexity of our world has only increased.

Every day employees are expected to do more with less. Employees are asked to change gears at a moment's notice and to adjust to frequent managerial changes. They experience both physical and mental fatigue and may feel their efforts are futile, which gives rise to cynicism and a feeling of helplessness, leading to avoidance and absenteeism and general disconnection from work. This in turn often leads to confusion and burnout, the number-one cause of employee dissatisfaction in today's workplace.

Is it any wonder that fear is prevalent in organizations?

ACCORDING TO STUDIES done by the EI Leadership Institute, the three fundamental needs of every human being are the **need to belong**, the **need for empowerment** and the **need for meaning**. These factors are critical to performing at our best, as they keep us connected to people and the work we do in a meaningful way.

Unfortunately, many employees do not feel connected or empowered and struggle with finding meaning in the work they do. Given that we spend 60% or more of our days at work, this lack of connection and meaning is a huge disconnect in the workplace. Many feel they are simply a cog in the wheel, and lack of engagement between team members becomes the norm.

The numbers speak for themselves. According to a Gallup survey in 2019, 34% of the workforce was actively engaged. 53% were not engaged, meaning they came to work, did the minimum, and were ready to jump ship if a better offer came their way. 13% were totally disengaged, an improvement from 2016 when this number was 16% (so there is hope)!

These figures present an often-untapped opportunity for companies to increase performance and profitability: helping to provide belonging, empowerment, and meaning for employees. Strategically engaging workers in growth and development programs must be a priority in order for a company to thrive. When companies truly believe that employees are their best assets, then employee care and support are given high priority.

Fear Is Optional

*Fear is an extraordinary motivating force
because it sets us a challenge to change something
that's not working.*

–Jacqueline Wales, *The Fearless Factor*

Fear is a physical and psychological response built into our DNA. The fight-or-flight syndrome is situated in the primitive part of our brain known as the amygdala and is an instinctive response to feelings of threat, real or imagined.

The amygdala does not distinguish between real and imagined threats. When triggered, it causes a reaction that leads to fight or flight. This is the point where we decide if we should stand our ground or run.

When your amygdala is activated, you make up stories to validate how you are feeling: anxious, stressed, confused, uncertain, etc. You can run, hide, defend, deny, blame, or control; or you can look fear square in the face and ask, *What's that about? Why am I having this reaction?* To do this takes courage. That's how "Feel the fear and do it anyway" works!

As our prefrontal cortex, the executive brain, develops, we begin to question, taking a more analytical approach to make sense of perceived threats. We discover that most of our fears are based in imagination.

I have facilitated dozens of 360° assessments for clients that are designed to evaluate behavior in individuals and organizations. These scientific tools analyze specific behaviors that help individuals and organizations make measurable improvements at work, and in their personal lives. During the course of this work, I have realized that fear is a core issue for many in the workplace. Fear shows up in behaviors that limit performance and undermine potential success.

Fear operates below the surface and keeps you from living and working at your highest level of engagement.

When you consider the number of people who are not engaged (53%) in the workplace, you find that many of these fear-induced behaviors work against individual self-interest, undermine many aspects of the individual's existence, and negatively impact organizations.

Bobbie LaPorte, Executive Coach and 7x Ironman Triathlete:

As a coach and consultant, I work with companies that are under extreme external criticism. Internally, people are fearful of taking risks because their jobs are on the line. These individuals fear taking risks, demonstrating confidence or making bold moves, which is the opposite of how they should be functioning and, conversely, exactly what the company needs at this point. Few leaders are fearless enough to say, "Let's try this. What is the worst thing that can happen if it doesn't work?" Leaders often don't realize that the worst thing that can happen is that nothing happens.

The lack of confidence to take risks is exacerbated by the pace of change and the impact of that pace across our workplaces. We now see that disrupting markets is not solely the focus of high technology; disruption is happening across all industries and in organizations of all sizes and stages. Nearly every business confronts increasing competition to stay relevant, from start-ups to mature organizations that are transforming and reinventing themselves every day. Stakeholders from every corner—investors, clients, employees, community members and others—have a broader vision of the role of corporations in today's environment, and are heightening their demands. It seems everyone wants

more of our leaders. That pressure, combined with an environment of uncertainty, can feel overwhelming, even for the most resilient amongst us.

People who are fearless, who have confidence in themselves and have a vision of where they want to go, need to stand up for their teams. They need to say to their teams, "There is no question that we are going through a really tough time and we have no idea of what this is going to look like. I don't have all the answers, but I do know that there are things we can build on. Here are the strengths of the organization, its successes and values. How do we build on that, while we're changing the structure of the company and telling the whole story?" Leaders have to be fearless to do that. Unfortunately, fearlessness is not ingrained in most organizations.

Fear Is Imagination Based

*We are more often frightened than hurt;
and we suffer more from imagination than reality.*

–Seneca

For the average person, fear is mostly imagination based. Unless there is something physically threatening or you have empirical evidence, fear is a feeling, an emotional response to uncertainty.

Fear is not the same as anxiety. You may be anxious because you are afraid of something that may or may not happen. The thought of losing your job or your relationship makes you anxious. Anxiety is caused by the uncertainty of not knowing what will happen. Real

fear is more spontaneous. When you are held up at gunpoint, that's pretty real.

Fear is insidious. It warps your mind, perverts your actions, and leads you down a path that may be fictitious.

We are battered by fear every day in the news, and these stories justify our uncertainties. We fear terrorists, we fear disease, we fear being murdered by some random crackpot, we fear banks we once trusted, we fear investments we made that will leave us broke if they go under, and we fear climate change. There are so many fears in this world we live in, but how many of them really affect you personally on a daily basis? Some of these fears are real, but this constant barrage of negative news is not good for our health. It feeds our uncertainties and imagination. Ultimately, the news feeds on fear.

There are five universal fears:

- Loss
- Abandonment
- Rejection
- Success/Failure
- Shame

Phobias, insecurities, anxieties, worries and inaction stem from these five powerful and life-threatening fears. The only fear that is not included here is death, because it's final. For many, it's our greatest fear.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross wrote in *On Death & Dying* that the fear of death is driven by the realization that we

won't matter anymore. We will lose our identity. This is the part most people fear: that we are no longer relevant.

Our fears also originate from the stories we tell ourselves about not having enough to live on, not having the right level of success, not having the right relationship, not having _____ (fill in the blank), and so much more...forever, ever, and ever!

What stories do you tell yourself that hinder your growth, or that stop you from taking the actions you know will lead you forward? Consider: What are the top three things you are fearful about?

If these fears were real...

- What would happen?
- How would you feel?
- What resources would you call upon to help you through it?
- What new direction would you take?
- What about this fear really matters to you?
- What would you do differently if you had no fear?

The five universal fears above are both real and based in imagination. You will probably experience them all at some time in your life. They may lead to hurt, disappointment, or change. The bottom line: *None of these five fears will kill you.* They may make you uncomfortable, and you might have to make serious adjustments. There are always solutions, even if you don't like them.

Remember, the only guarantee in life is change. We live in uncertainty every single day, and we have no guarantees that today will end on a happy note. You can swing from elation to anger in a heartbeat when rubbed the wrong way. Life is not guaranteed, but you can guarantee that if it's not life threatening, you can find a way to move beyond the fears that hold you back from being your best version of yourself.

Living every day as if it were your last is the essence and meaning of embracing life. It's about being present for whatever is going on at any given time. It's about allowing the past to *inform where* you are today, as opposed to *ruling who* you are today. Living every day in the present gives you hope for the future while your feet are firmly planted in today.

Courage to Change

Change is inevitable. Growth is optional.

—John C. Maxwell, author

We have all been wounded. It may have occurred during childhood, from failed relationships, or in toxic situations at work. We carry these wounds deep within our psyche, and we place great emphasis on protecting ourselves from further abuses. In effect, we wall off the hurt parts—which shuts down the potential waiting to be discovered—because we are afraid of getting hurt again.

Identifying the root causes of our hurt means moving past the excuses we tell ourselves to avoid taking more

fearless actions. Opening up old wounds allows us to recognize them for what they are: old history, something that happened in the past that pulls our strings today. The good news is that you can and will heal these wounds and move on to better things, but only if you are courageous enough to face them.

Our dysfunction takes on many guises, many of which create a barrier between you and the success you desire. Read the following list and check any items that sound like your present experience.

- I'm frustrated because I'm stuck in a rut.
- I feel like I'm capable of accomplishing much more.
- I'm not making the kind of money I want in my job or career.
- I'm silently enduring an emotionally empty marriage.
- I feel unchallenged and robotic at work.
- I consistently fail to meet my goals.
- I feel like I'm just going through the motions in life with no clear plan or goal.
- I live in a fantasy world that everything is okay when it isn't.
- I don't take risks in my life because I'm afraid of failure.
- I'm lonely and longing for a relationship.
- I'm suffering a financial burden I can't handle.
- I'm living with constant frustration, guilt, or depression.

- I can't communicate with others well and feel silenced.
- Nobody seems to understand me.

If you checked yes for any of the above questions, this is an opportunity to take a deeper dive to find some answers. Ask yourself:

- What's the worst thing that can happen if I don't change?
- What stories do I tell myself that may not be true?
- What needs to change for things to be different?
- Who do I need to help me change my thinking or behavior?

Being Vulnerable

*People who wade into discomfort and vulnerability
and tell the truth about their stories
are the real badassess.*

—Brené Brown, *Rising Strong*

Brené Brown's TED talk on vulnerability has been viewed more than sixty million times. This is extraordinary, given that people spend a lot of energy hiding their vulnerability. Brown says, "Leadership is not about titles or the corner office. It's about the willingness to step up, put yourself out there, and lean into courage. The world is desperate for braver leaders. It's time for all of us to step up."

I couldn't agree more with this statement. Throughout this book I have laid bare many of my own stories, some of which I'm proud of and others not so much. Being vulnerable is hard, but through my writing and speaking, it's become easier.

When you live in fear, vulnerability is difficult. You are always waiting for the hammer to come down on you. Pretending that everything is all right when it's not is hiding your vulnerability. Being afraid to reveal your true self is concealing the truth of who you are. We have all done things in life of which we are ashamed. Admitting our errors means being vulnerable. It also means being courageous enough to withstand any criticism or reaction that comes our way.

When my children were growing up, I was a very controlling mother. I wanted things done my way, and I was ferocious at times when they pushed back. My patience was limited and my anger was explosive when I let loose. My middle child told me that I owed her another five years in therapy every time she had to deal with my uncontrolled feelings.

I have spent more than ten years in individual therapy, years in couples' therapy, and various times in counseling with my children. I've done so much therapy, it's surprising I didn't become a therapist! It was hard, but I was determined to break through old patterns that not only diminished me but also were detrimental to my children's mental health.

In my book *When the Crow Sings*, I told the story of giving up my first child for adoption. My parents had told me not to come home with a baby. I was supposed to give her up at birth, but was emotionally unstable. I

felt abandoned and vulnerable and desperately wanted someone I could call my own.

For three months, I did my best to be a good mother. One night, she wouldn't stop crying. I nursed her, changed her, walked her, then I blew up. Out of control, I slammed her on the bed. An overwhelming desire to end it all consumed my entire body. Exhausted and alone, I was suddenly aware of all the generations of child abuse that had passed through my family. It was horrifying. I knew if we were both to survive, she would have to be raised by someone else. I realized that I wasn't capable of raising a child by myself. I was not ready to deal with the violence and fear that had shadowed me up to that point. Reaching that difficult decision required strength and courage.

Being vulnerable means owning the messy, out-of-control parts of your life. Humans are fragile beings. We make mistakes. We say the wrong thing. We make bad choices and decisions. When your supervisor or boss tells you that you made a mistake and you retreat into the feeling of shame, the next step is frequently blaming someone or something for your mistake. Instead of hiding or blaming someone else, what would it look like if you were to say, "You know, you're right. I could have done that differently. Next time I'll do better." Accept the failures, and move on.

That's courage speaking. That's being a badass!

Courage Is a Verb

At some point in our lives we have all wished we had the courage...to do something different.

–Cindy Solomon, author, leadership consultant

Courage is the antidote to fear. It provides the strength you need to ask someone to stop doing something because you don't like the outcome, or when you need to step up and make a presentation, and find a voice that can be heard above the noise. Courage is the strength to know when your best intentions have gone awry and you must face the consequences. Courage is when you feel the fear and push through the feeling to get to the other side of the discomfort.

We love stories of courage and dream that we are capable of similar actions. Most of us are not aware of what we are capable of until we are tested, and are willing to take on the challenge.

I recently attended a conference where I heard many stories of courage. The story that resonated most was from Melissa Arnot, who reached the summit of Mount Everest six times, once without oxygen, a feat that only 200 of more than 7,001 Everest climbers have accomplished. She is one of only seven to successfully summit and descend.

Melissa was unsure if she succeeded because she was crazy, or if it was her drive to accomplish the impossible; she admits it was probably a bit of both. A teammate said of her, "The mental fortitude that this kind of thing requires, very few people possess. It took enormous courage because she didn't know if she could do it."

Most of us would never consider taking on such an arduous task, but it can sometimes feel like you're climbing a steep mountain when you are going through change. I've hiked up many mountains throughout my

life and equate change with these experiences. It takes a great deal of effort, but the views are spectacular when you get to the top, knowing that very few people will make the journey.

Bobbie LaPorte, Executive Coach and 7x Ironman Triathlete:

When the company I worked for was sold in 2002, many people encouraged me to go out on my own. I was initially afraid to listen to them as I had always worked for large companies like IBM, GE, and Kaiser. Suddenly I was faced with: How do I make money? I've never done this before. I am not an entrepreneur. I don't know how to do this. There were many sleepless nights wondering, Where can I find clients? How do I get started? It was a super scary time.

What I learned was that it can be very liberating to be on your own. It gives you lots of freedom and flexibility, but to do it well, I had to figure out what value I could contribute and what made me different. What was my place in the conversation, and who would I serve? I had to answer these questions before I gave my notice, because realistically, it was going to be a while before my business became successful.

I am a future-forward thinker, always looking down the road because I know if the work I have now goes away, I need to have something else. That is a healthy fear. It is motivating, and helps you build your business the right way while you're actually delivering service. My fearlessness comes from my accomplishments, which buttress me when I question myself. I also learned from Ironman

training and racing experience how to manage myself through ups and downs; how to embrace the uncertainty of race day; and how to create conditions for success down the road. That training helps me to celebrate my successes and not go into reverse when things are not working out. I can be fearless, knowing I can do this, because I've done these other things. I've demonstrated to myself that I have the capacity to succeed.

When you refuse to step up with courage because you're fearful of losing something you believe to be valuable, or fear being rejected, humiliated, or failing at something that matters to you, you are effectively denying your strength and talent.

Fail Your Way to Success

*Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter.
Try again. Fail again.*

–Samuel Beckett

I frequently ask clients: What is your greatest fear? Their chief response: the fear of failure. We are a society of overachievers and for many, failure is not an option. We learn early in life that failure brings humiliation. We must succeed no matter what. You may have been shamed because you didn't measure up to your schoolteachers' or your parents' expectations. In your job, you are told that failure is not an option. You must produce the right results every time.

In relationships, to fail means you have failed as an individual. You're not good enough, or you didn't try

hard enough. When I divorced my first husband, my mother said it must have been something I did! She stayed in her marriage for more than thirty-two years, until her death. It was a relationship that should have been over before it began. My mother told me not to dream because I would be disappointed. She knew failures and she knew heartbreak, and she didn't want the same for me. I wrote about her journey and the journeys of other women of my family in *When the Crow Sings*, a story of failures and eventual success.

We stop ourselves from grabbing the golden ring of success because we don't know if we can reach it. We play from the sidelines, watching others take risks, and wish we could do that. We stop ourselves before we've even had a chance to find out how far we can go. We are ALL afraid of failing in some capacity.

Here's the truth. It's not our failures that limit who we are, but the *belief that our failures define us*. The secret to failing better is this: We are all failing our way to success!

It is easy to get discouraged from taking risks because we are afraid of failure. We forget that if we don't fail, we won't learn. When we make bad choices or create a mess, we feel shame and rejection. It's a human condition to fail, but humiliation in the face of failure is a choice. You pick yourself up and start again. There is no doubt failure causes discomfort, but it is not fatal. You can learn from the experience!

In his book, *Business @ the Speed of Thought*, Bill Gates said, "Once you embrace unpleasant news not as a negative but as evidence of a need for change, you are not defeated by it....you are learning from it."

In America, aggressive, forward-thinking CEOs often tell their direct reports, “If you haven’t failed at least three times today, you’re not trying anything new.” When you avoid failure you also avoid risk, and without risk there can be no innovation or forward movement.

My acronym to reframe RISK: Respect your Intention and Show Kourage. When you take a risk on someone or something, you show courage.

We take risks when we ask for something we want, when we push harder than we think we can, when we stand up for what we believe in. When you refuse to take risks, you are refusing the gifts of experience, of knowledge and the fulfillment of life.

Failure carries a heavy burden in our achievement-focused world. What if you were to see failure as simply choices or decisions that didn’t work? Would that change things for you?

Taking the view that failure is a necessity for learning means that failure is one more step toward success. Risk then should be encouraged, as failure helps you gain valuable lessons upon which to build momentum.

There are several ways to look at failure:

Failure = seeing that you are off course

Failure = realizing you need to learn more

Failure = product testing

Failure = finding out you need help

Failure = exploring your options

Failure = discovering you’ve been misinformed

Failure = experimenting with new ideas

Failure = market research

Failure = prototyping

Fundamentally, failure is simply an expectation or decision that didn't go the way you planned or imagined. The biggest failure is the failure to try!

Success Follows Failure

Many people dream of success. To me success can only be achieved through repeated failure and introspection. In fact, success represents the one percent of your work that results from the ninety-nine percent that is called failure.

—Soichiru Honda, founder of Honda Industries

If every failure is a road to success, how do you measure success? It always comes back to “What did you learn?”

One of the most powerful indicators of long-term success is learning from our mistakes. Richard Branson of the Virgin Group said, “I will work day and night to avoid failure, but if I can't, I'll pick myself up the next day. The most important thing is not to be put off by failure. Be positive and see what you can take from it.” This applies to everyone, anywhere, at all times.

Have you ever made a poor presentation at work? What was your self-talk? *I really blew that one. I didn't prepare properly. I am a terrible presenter. A five-year-old could have done better. I am a failure at this.* Examining these

statements you make about yourself, you may find that your descriptors are colored by someone else's opinion, or perhaps by a kind of warped justification for what you feel.

Everyone feels incapable when starting something new. We all have days when we are tired, worn out, exhausted. We can call ourselves names in the heat of the moment—but that doesn't make them true.

At this moment you have an opportunity to revise your thinking and examine the facts as they really are. Did you prepare improperly? Were you truly a terrible presenter, or were you just nervous? Do you really think a five-year-old could do better? What did you learn from your mistakes that you could do differently next time?

Do you create behaviors that are rooted in your desire to please other people? Are you fearful of speaking up for what you want, need or desire because you are afraid to show vulnerability? Are you fearful of making a final decision because it could be wrong? Fearful of what other people think? Fearful of being chastised? Do you fear being seen as incapable?

Our internal dialogue is preoccupied with not being seen as inadequate, weak, or stupid. Fear is generated by our desire not to be rejected, abandoned, or ridiculed. In short, it's about being vulnerable, and that's hard to be honest about. Consequently, people suffer in silence and exhibit behaviors that try to cover up their vulnerabilities. I call this the "Opera of Behaviors," because these fears frequently are overdramatized.

Fear of Not Being Enough

Many people cling to the notion, “Better the devil I know than the one I don’t,” which would indicate that they like living in hell! Change is a challenge, so we build resistance to it.

If you have ever thought *I’m not worth it. I don’t deserve to be successful*, or you are simply waiting for others to find out that you are not as smart, capable or credible as you seem to be, then you are caught in a classic self-worth issue. It’s one sure way to destroy a life of happiness.

There will always be people who are smarter, quicker, more gifted, etc. The key here is to trust that what you have to offer is enough, and if not, you can evolve and grow. You can acquire the knowledge and skills you need.

IN 1997, I MOVED to Paris with my family and we joined a local Franco/American synagogue. Rabbi Tom Cohen became a good friend, and one day he said, “We need a cantor for the High Holidays.” He had heard me sing and knew I had a good voice and range.

My response was, “What do I know about Jewish liturgical music?”

He laughed and said, “You can learn!”

I didn’t read music. I didn’t read Hebrew and had no training in cantorial work. All I had was my voice. It was intimidating, and my fear of failure was high. “What music do you want me to learn?” I asked.

He smiled and said, “Go find something that appeals to you.”

Really!

I went to visit my cantor, Chaim Frankel in Pacific Palisades, Los Angeles, and asked for his advice. He handed me a two-CD set of extraordinary music and performances by modern and traditional composers. It included an Oscar-worthy orchestra and choir and the cantor’s amazing voice. It was gorgeous music.

But all I had was my voice. I didn’t have a piano available, so everything would need to be a cappella. Listening to the music, I needed to extrapolate the melodies and forget all the fancy orchestral and choir parts. It was a daunting task, but I loved the music and was determined to make it work.

I listened intensely to the music and prayers on hikes through the Canadian Rockies, on flights to Paris, and in every available waking hour. I worked with a voice teacher in Los Angeles who transcribed the music into my key. I ate, slept and breathed this music for more than three months. By the time I arrived at the podium for the start of the most religious holidays in the Jewish calendar, I was fearful but as prepared as I could be. I sang at these services for more than five years in Paris, and later in Amsterdam. It was some of the finest music I have ever sung.

My singing experience proved one thing: No matter how insecure you are, you can do it if you want it badly enough. I have written books, created music, earned a black belt in karate, and built my career on this same

determination to *feel the fear and do it anyway*, which perfectly describes what taking a risk is all about.

Are You Good Enough?

Will you risk that you are enough? Will you stop questioning your ability to be great, or even good enough? Do you believe in yourself enough to know that whatever you are truly committed to, you can make it happen? There are billions of people on this planet and each of them has something unique to offer. Freeing your mind to embrace uncertainty as you stumble your way to success is a risk...and also a gift of trust. You can do it!

When my clients begin their deep dive into whatever obstacles are holding them back, they frequently discover that the fear of not being good enough is behind many of the patterns of behavior that holds them back from achieving their goals. The need to prove oneself, to be right, to pursue perfection, the need for approval or the inability to make decisions, as well as opposing new ideas before there is an opportunity to explore possibilities, are frequently related to the idea that somehow, they are not worthy; they are not good enough.

In my life, I was told more times than I care to tabulate that I would never amount to much. This message became so ingrained in my psyche that I believed it, and for the first part of my life, I did everything I could to prove that this was right. The child who had dreams, who believed that she could aspire to greater things, lacked the courage to follow those dreams and instead bought wholesale the idea that she was not fit for

achievements beyond what my mother would say, “Don’t get above your station in life.”

This debilitating message was the main narrative for too long, and I found it difficult to change. I did my best to prove I was strong, to prove that I was capable, to prove that I was smart. It resulted in a defiant nature and a lot of anger that was misdirected for a long time. If someone had asked me then if I was good enough, I would have said no. I was not good enough, which is why I worked so hard to prove myself to me.

Clients often struggle with similar limited mindsets. But when we drill down to the core beliefs, the answers can surprise them. They realize that this limited belief is incorrect. They *are* good enough and they know this instinctively. The negative message created obstacles of their own making. Like me, many did not set clear goals for achievement because of the nagging thought that they could not possibly achieve them. Behind all of this is a lack of trust in their own powers to do the right thing.

Also hiding behind this thinking are insecurities: *What if it doesn’t work? What if I can’t do it? What if it’s not the right direction to take?* Setting a vision for your future is about aligning your values and purpose and creating a strong picture of success. None of this will work if you start with a lack of trust in yourself.

To become a confident, fearless person you must integrate all parts of yourself so you no longer feel divided, uncertain and insecure. When you no longer have doubts about who you are and what you can do, you will trust yourself to do the right thing.

Deep Dive

1. What fears are holding me back? Are these fears real or imagined?
2. What would I have done differently, if fear had not interfered?
3. What examples of negative self-talk keep me from taking risks?
4. Where in life do I hide my fear by filling time with busywork, distractions, or pushing the emotion away?
5. What's the worst thing that can happen if I resist change?
6. Finish the phrase: Because of fear, I abandoned my dream of becoming....
7. What would it feel like if I could view fear as the "sharp edge of excitement"?
8. What do I need to help me shift my thinking or behavior?
9. What tangible steps can I take to be more fearless?