



# HOW TO CHANGE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH FEAR

## AND STOP IT IMPACTING YOUR PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

It is natural to deny or ignore fear, but doing so can create deeper problems. By learning when to listen to fear, we can use it to our advantage rather than be controlled by it, writes psychologist *Dr Amy Silver*.

**W**e all have fears, many of which keep us safe and well. Fear's job is to warn us of danger and avoid risk. It wants us to avoid anything which would cause physical or social pain. But how much does fear interfere with our good choices?

Fear wants to keep us away from discomfort but if we listen to it all the time, does it steer us away from growth or opportunity? Does our fear of rejection, failure, exclusion, being different, having to change, being vulnerable or showing weakness, limit what we could do or who we could be?

As well as limiting us from gains we could make, fear also leads to distress and feelings of anxiety or worry. We may have a fear of missing out, being overlooked, being seen, speaking up, standing up or of being taken advantage of.

### What is fear?

There are biological, evolutionary, and social reasons why our fear is triggered - we are, after all, simple animals. Learning how to override our fear is essential in helping us fulfil our potential. If left unchecked, fear can control everything we do. We become a bystander, commanded by the voice of fear as it triggers biochemical reactions that cause us to fight, flight or play dead.

I think of fear as a guest at our party, and we are the host. We are the ones who should get to decide what to do, not fear. Even if fear is the loudest guest, commanding our choices and movements, we as the host must elevate ourselves into the position of control.



***If we approach our fear with compassion, however, we can change the relationship with it so that we can turn towards it and hear its messages***



### **Is your fear telling you what to do?**

To gain control we must first understand more about our current relationship with fear. When does fear get loud for you? When is it difficult to ignore it? Understanding the way in which our body reacts to our fear voice, what our fear voice says, and how it talks to us, is crucial.

It is easy to be self-critical of our fears, anxieties and worries, or critical of ourselves for having these sensations in the first place. If we are ashamed of our fear, a natural response is to deny or ignore it. When we do, we lose touch with some important self-awareness cues and may end up carrying some new hard emotions such as shame and guilt. If we approach our fear with compassion, however, we can change the relationship with it so that we can turn towards it and hear its messages.

Fear has wonderful things to give us: it gives us the gift of working harder and warning us of failure or rejection. But, we want to learn when to listen to it and when not to. We don't want to be blindly controlled by it.

### **How to get fear under your control**

We want to evaluate what to do in relation to our goals, not our fears. We must learn to evaluate the content so we can hear the message that the guest of fear is giving us without having to take on the drama and catastrophising.

For example, we don't need to listen to stories of the past or future that fear often uses to remind us of the dangers. We want to tune into the 'now' so that we can truly evaluate the action that will serve our goals. We may also want to tune into what other important voices have to say, for example, hope, excitement, joy. We can control how we move our attention around these different voices, rather than listening to fear, using strategies such as writing or finding ways of letting fear travel through rather than getting caught up.



### **Learn when to listen to fear**

Professional success relies on learning when to listen to fear and, more importantly, when not to. Becoming more courageous is easy when we've decided to build a closer relationship with fear. Making sure we are in control of fear is one of the most essential skills we can practice driving our professional success (individually and as a collective). We will be able to make deeper connections, influence decisions, act quicker, create more, opt into - not away from - challenges, be calm and have more fun. We are not our fears, we are the host. **N**



#### **Dr Amy Silver**

*Amy is a psychologist, speaker and author of **The Loudest Guest: How to control and change your relationship with fear** (Major Street Publishing). She is the founder of **The Courage Club**, the place to outgrow your fears.*

