

THE FEAR FACTOR

Removing the barriers to success

Why do some people show more courage than others? Why do some have the will and the grit to succeed while others fall at the first hurdle? Courage depends on having a clear vision of what you are aiming for and the motivation to achieve your goal. The difference between those who endure fear and act anyway, and those who don't, lies in the intensity of the desire and the strength of their personal resilience.



I am a great believer in empowerment through endurance in gaining self-belief by doing things that take us well outside our personal comfort zone. Some years ago I took part in a sponsored cycle ride across the Arizona desert in the USA. The terrain was difficult; it was blisteringly hot, dusty and windy. I can still remember the intense heat of the sun burning on my back as I climbed 20-mile hills, ridiculously slowly. I knew I wasn't the fittest or the most experienced cyclist there – but I steeled my nerve to finish the course. I was determined not to show any weakness. I remember thinking, if

I can do this, I can do anything. It was a life-changing experience.

But that memory pales in comparison to watching Eddie Kidd on his mission to complete the London marathon. Known internationally for his skill as a stunt motorcyclist and for his near fatal accident, it is his courage in the face of his debilitating injuries that is breathtaking. Able to walk only ½ mile a day, choosing such an enormous challenge is a triumph of mental preparation over pain and risk.

According to author and Holocaust survivor, Viktor E. Frankl, the people who died in captivity in concentration camps during WWII weren't always the weakest. They were the ones who had lost their will. In extreme circumstances, courage means choosing to live and to continue to keep the greater vision in mind.

“COURAGE MEANS BEING THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS YOU'RE AFRAID”

THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

■ **Fear of feeling uncomfortable.** One of the enemies of courage is being too comfortable. The safer you need to feel, the fewer calculated risks you are likely to take. Very few of the millionaires I know had a privileged upbringing; most had to develop personal resilience from an early age. They built their businesses and learned their trade through trial and error, training and hard graft. They are comfortable feeling uncomfortable – and have become used to coping with feelings of unease or fear.

■ **Fear of criticism and fear of failure.** If no-one ever criticises you, there are two likely reasons: either you are perfect (perhaps unlikely), or else you never take a risk, which means you may be falling short of your true potential. We never know what we are capable of until we try.

Combating fear means learning to develop a tough hide. If you are more focused upon what other people think than on achieving your goal, you may be knocked off course. Even Mother Theresa couldn't please everyone 100 per cent of the time. If she couldn't, who can?

THE WEAPONS OF COURAGE

■ **Resilience.** The strongest weapon of courage is resilience, because to overcome your fear you have to know you will be able to bounce back from any outcome – even when you are at your lowest ebb. Courageous people try, and try again. The more they try, the more resilient they become. Resilience builds confidence through taking action. Over time, you will discover that no matter what happens, you'll be okay; because you know you can deal with it. Some of the greatest business icons, including Walt Disney and Henry Ford, experienced bankruptcy before becoming successful – but that never stopped them having new ideas or starting up another business. Many Olympic medallists too, know all too well what it is like to lose it all and win again. Those who achieve the greatest success often have to overcome immense hurdles.

“THE TIME TO SHINE IS WHEN IT IS DARKEST”

BEAR GRYLLS

■ **A positive attitude.** Courage has its roots in the attitude we choose day to day. How we respond to small difficulties affects how we react to greater adversity. Developing a 'victor' mentality means that when things go wrong, you are more likely to look your fears in the face, and react with, 'All will be well' rather than, 'I'm scared' or 'Poor me'.

■ **Self discipline.** Adopting a disciplined approach to life enables your auto-pilot to take over on those occasions when the going gets tough. Those who develop self-discipline put the needs of the goal ahead of immediate gratification. That means they make constant progress – and it also means they don't stop to question whether they want to do something. If it needs doing they will just get on with it.

■ **Assessing risk.** Courage helps you to take the leap, but you also need to assess the risks associated with what you are doing – and prepare for the consequences. Be realistic – but don't let over-preparation stop you from taking a chance.

■ **Fear.** It is natural to feel uneasy in the face of experiencing something unknown – but adrenaline can be a valuable weapon. It keeps us alert, encourages us to raise our game, and puts us in a frame of mind for fight and survival. If you desire the outcome enough, you will find the courage to look fear in the face in order to achieve success.

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Mind your thoughts and CHANGE YOUR MIND

Why do some people have more self-belief than others? Why do some people 'get on with it', while others prevaricate? Is self-belief innate within us, or is it a skill that can be learned?



**EVERYONE
SUFFERS
FROM SELF-
DOUBT
FROM TIME
TO TIME...**

As a coach, a lot of my work focuses on confidence building. My extensive work with senior managers and business leaders over the years has shown me that everyone suffers from self-doubt from time to time – the differences lie in our ability to vocalise our fears and take action to overcome negative beliefs.

Successful people tend to share a positive mindset. They set personal goals and are quick to take action. Whether CEOs, small business owners or entrepreneurs; business leaders have several core traits in common: first, they are decisive and action-orientated; secondly, they set clear, measurable goals; thirdly, even if they don't always know how they are going to achieve their goal, their expectation is that they will find a way.

But even those with self-belief doubt themselves sometimes. Those at the top are expected to be 'ultra' confident, to have all the answers – and they expect that of themselves too, so there are few people (if any) to whom they would choose to speak about their concerns; and that can be dangerously isolating.

Our beliefs develop from a complex mix of our attitudes, values, memories, decisions, internal mind-talk – and the impact of our personal environment. We really are what we think. Without self-belief we are more likely to procrastinate, make poor choices, lack accountability, or

even fall into a state of victim mentality. Those who over-prepare for action or look unrelentingly for the reasons why something may fail, also lack self-belief.

What is the solution? If self-talk is becoming negative, how can we change? The answer is to challenge our fears and take positive action; to overcome any limiting beliefs that are holding us back. Easy to say, but sometimes harder to achieve.

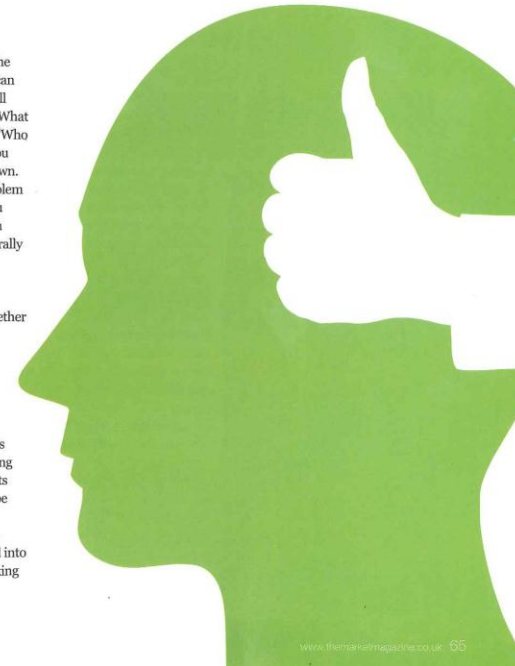
The great news is turning negative thoughts or attitudes into positive ones can be quick and easy. It all depends on the motivation of the individual and their willingness to give the concept a try. Much has been written about 'acting as if' you have already succeeded, or reciting affirmations to help change your state of mind. Sometimes my clients resist those things as they don't feel authentic. However, these two actions are an extremely powerful starting point for change. It's really important to understand that often, when a limiting thought enters our head, nothing has actually changed except our point of focus. We have taken our eye off what we are looking to achieve and instead, have allowed doubt or negative self-talk to creep in. That affects not only our thoughts, but our body language, posture, what we feel, how we view the situation in that moment, the things we say to ourselves – and therefore the outcome as well.

The following are simple coaching techniques to turn negative thoughts into positive beliefs:

- Stop. Take a breath. Adjust your posture. Notice how your stance has changed since a limiting belief appeared. Ask yourself, "How do I want to feel instead of worried/anxious/fearful?" Name your feeling and then stand up, walk around and sit back down in a way that reflects that mindset.
- Change your point of focus - literally. We usually look down when we are unhappy and up when we are more confident.
- Identify your limiting belief (for example, "My business is going to fail"). Then ask yourself, "What's the worst that could happen?" "How can I prevent this happening?" "If it still happens how could I handle it?" "Who could the positive outcomes be?" "Who could I ask for help if I need it?" You will have other questions of your own. In looking at your core fear or problem in the face, and preparing for it you will change the way that your brain perceives the problem and will literally alter your mindset in preparation for action.
- Speak to someone you respect (whether a friend, a colleague, or a qualified coach). By vocalising what is going on, it becomes easier to reframe the outcome.
- Take action. Action is empowering because it brings about change. It is always the main route to overcoming limiting beliefs and unhelpful habits of behaviour. The clearer you can be about what you want and why you want it, the easier it will become to break the achievement of your goal into manageable chunks and start working towards it, one step at a time.

Over 90% of what we fear never actually happens. By acknowledging the ten per cent possibility and preparing for it in case it happens, it becomes easier to take practical actions towards the successful outcome you desire. By changing your self-belief, you literally change your mind.

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Dress to impress

- What are your clothes saying about you?
- What 3 words would people use to describe your appearance?
- Do the words reflect your brand and your business as well as you?
- Are they the words you want them to use?



It is a truth not universally acknowledged that we judge each other initially not by what we say, but by how we look. How we dress sends a powerful message about our level of competence as well as our self-confidence. During the first minute of meeting someone we analyse every detail of information we receive. We make unconscious judgements about age, background, interests, family, and material worth. We ask, "Is this person like me? Are they different to me?" Some conclusions will be accurate and some will not, but they can be hard to shift.

Imagine the scenario. It is rush hour; commuters are heading towards their trains. A woman is rushing along the platform wearing scuffed shoes with worn down heels; a shirt that is too tight, with gaping buttons; hair

unkempt, nails scruffy; eyebrows frowning, with a bulging briefcase and papers in a supermarket carrier bag. You form an impression – and yet you know nothing about this person other than what you are seeing. A couple of steps behind, walking with relaxed purpose, is a woman wearing polished shoes, a shift dress with a signature necklace and a stylish jacket, hair immaculately in place, nails manicured, with a slim and tidy bag. Both of these individuals could be excellent at their jobs – but the second person conveys a message of confidence and competence because he or she is relaxed and has paid attention to the detail of their appearance.

There is little point in spending hundreds or thousands of pounds on a stylish corporate identity if you look as if you have spent less than £10 on your appearance. Image coaching can have a powerful impact on total business performance. My work is all about making sure that my clients wear clothes in colours that complement their personality, in styles that suit their height and body shape, and are suitable for their work and environment. I want people to feel self-assured on the inside and to look confident and feel authentic on the outside.

Reinforce your personal brand

Style choices are not only for women. Men can show their colours and individuality through their socks, cufflinks, shoes and other accessories. Those who prefer designer brands and subtle styling define themselves by the qualities of the brands they choose to wear. David Beckham epitomises this. Richard Branson is a style natural too. You rarely see him in a business suit. His image is down-to-earth and relaxed. Deceptively casual – always well groomed. At the other extreme is Boris Johnson, whose hair is very much a part of 'brand Boris' but whose scruffy dress sense has undermined his credibility on occasion.

During the months leading to the American election, Barack Obama was filmed on the campaign trail. His

image sense was a revelation. Whether suited and booted at 7am for a formal press call or with shirt sleeves rolled up and jacket off for a relaxed chat to children in a kindergarten, he made sure that his clothes did not get in the way of his message. He remained genuine and authentic. Subtle changes in his dress code said, "This is who I am".

Hillary Clinton's approach was to be perfectly coordinated at all times. Her look was almost a uniform, which enhanced her natural authority but gave little away. Margaret Thatcher bought her clothes in bulk shopping trips from well-known British companies and her take on power dressing became the template for women rising through the political and professional ranks. Condoleezza Rice has a kind of quiet power – "she's just fashion enough to let you know that she's interested but never so overwhelmed by the fashion that you think she's not serious" says Michael Kors. And what about that First Lady Michelle Obama? She says "If I can have a style impact, I want women to feel good about themselves and to have fun with fashion". I couldn't put it better or more effectively!

People may forget names but they will often remember something distinctive about your appearance or what you are wearing. Make sure that they remember you appropriately. I once listened to a man give a speech while wearing a cartoon tie. He was conveying a serious message, but it was hard to take him seriously because there was a mismatch between what he was wearing and what he said. It is important to always make sure that you are wearing the outfit – rather than the outfit wearing you. There is no need to suppress who you are – but dress to suit your environment rather than just yourself, at work.

Be colour conscious

- Red shows confidence and energy – too much is aggressive
- Yellow and orange are positive, happy colours that work in moderation.
- Blue, black and cream are safe neutrals.
- Browns and purples suit everyone
- Too many pastel shades will make you invisible.

First impressions are lasting impressions

Body language, eye contact, facial expressions, personal grooming, and the style of your handshake all send messages. The general rule of thumb is, watch how others behave and match them. Then you can't go far wrong.

The most important rule of all is: "Dress the body you've got – not the one you want."



- Body language – give others space so they don't feel threatened
- Eye contact is important, but some cultures like more than others. Don't stare.
- Good grooming matters. Untidiness suggests that you 'can't be bothered' and will undermine your credibility.
- Smile – you will be noticed.
- Be yourself – focus on other people, listen, breathe and smile.

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