

## What Are You Most Afraid of

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On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not at all afraid and 10 highly afraid, rate your fear of the following:

Death  
Snakes  
Ridicule  
Illness  
Failure  
High places  
Other people  
Mice or rats  
The unknown  
Darkness

If you are like most people, (and like Hong Kong business school students), you will say that you are most afraid of death and snakes and least afraid of darkness and other people.

If you work in business, you probably won't stumble upon snakes very often, so that's one fear you can live with. Death is a universal fear and one that we can neither avoid nor overly dwell on, but it is also isn't a fear, which stops the average businessperson from doing their job.

Instead let's look at what you think you're least afraid of.

"Peoples' number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Now this means that to the average person if you have to go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy." Jerry Seinfeld, American comedian, actor.

It's true. Most people are terrified to stand up in front of a group and make a presentation. Hundreds of thousands of jobs require making presentations, addressing groups both up and down the chain of command, running committee meetings, heading up teams, representing the company in different venues, and explaining to prospective clients why your product is better than a competitors.

Speaking, singing or acting in public are activities most people dread, yet things, which they also would love to be able to do. Ask students to name three things they would love to do but are too embarrassed to do, (a written exercise, which is done anonymously to elicit honest answers) and you usually get some form of the following:

- Sing, act, dance or speak in public.
- Open, honest communication. Tell people what I think, (tell them off, or conversely tell them how much I care for them.

- Dress the way I want, and/or be nude in public.

All three are easy to do when we're alone. When no one is around, even the shyest person can belt out a song or deliver a moving discourse, yet put us in front of an audience and we quickly clam up. Saying what we think is never a problem when we're alone, neither is a lack of clothes. Bring in the neighbors though and boy do we have a problem.

Let's face it. The biggest fear for most people is, OTHER PEOPLE.

Unfortunately business people must deal with other people on a daily basis. Communicating effectively is one of the most valuable assets any business executive can possess. Not having it, on the other hand, can be like an anchor dragging an otherwise competent person into the mud of mediocrity.

### **Fear of other people**

Fear of rejection, ridicule and failure also come from a fear of other people. Whether you know it or not, fear controls much of your thinking and behavior. Many of your fears are hidden, but still exert control over your personal and professional life. Fear of other people is that powerful force that keeps the sales professional from prospecting, cold calling, calling higher in the organization, asking for the order, going for the close, or asking the customer for information so they can offer real solutions.

Fear of other people keeps countless talented candidates from landing the jobs they want. Your resume serves one purpose, to get you an interview. Once you get one the real work begins.

What's the best way to approach a job interview? As with many things in life, you'll do much better if you embrace the interview process itself, rather than focus on the result, the job. To attain significant results in anything from losing weight to speaking a second language, you need to love the process. When you don't have a passion for what you're doing, you don't do it well.

Look at it this way. What is a job interview? It's a chance to talk about you, and people pay psychiatrists big money for the privilege. In a job interview you're getting someone to listen for free. If you adopt that kind of mindset, the job interview becomes something you look forward to, not something you loathe. People who enjoy something emit a sense of self-confidence, which attracts rather than repels.

How can you come to love something you're afraid of? By first understanding that you don't like it because you're afraid. If you conquer your fear, it will become easier to warm up to the process.

You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do.” Eleanor Roosevelt, former First Lady, stateswoman.

Can you go up to people you don't know and talk to them? Can you walk into a room of people you don't know and feel comfortable with them? If you can't, you're going to have a hard time delivering a presentation, for a presentation doesn't mean simply knowing your subject, it means establishing an emotional bond with your audience, and it starts with feeling comfortable with them.

Any time you give a speech or make a presentation, there is an element of trust, a special bond that has to develop between you and the audience. That bond does not depend on what you say but upon what the audience senses about you. Insecurity is something people quickly pick up on, so is sincerity.

If you ever feel inclined to be timid as you are going up to someone, just remind yourself, why should I be frightened, it's just a person, who is obviously more frightened of me than I am of him, or he would have approached me first.

Look at it this way. If everyone suddenly disappeared, and you were given one wish, that wish would be to bring everyone back, wouldn't it? People cannot and do not want to live unrelated to other people. If you cannot live without them, then why should you fear them?

### **Invisible defense shields**

We all live behind invisible defense shields. They're shields, which protect us from potential slights and attacks upon our egos. Some of us have more extensive and elaborate shield systems than others. Keeping them up requires a lot of effort and there are times when we do let them down. When, where and for how long depends on the person we're with and the situation we're in, or perhaps how much we've had to drink. It's fear, which forces us to live behind shields, and it's fear, which stops us from living up to our potentials.

What is the worst thing that can happen if you have to speak in public and don't do it well? The answer, of course, is that you'll feel foolish. Well, what would happen if you didn't feel foolish?

It is said that no one can make you feel inferior without your consent. No one can make you feel foolish without your consent either. That's right, you yourself sit squarely at the controls of your very own problem.

Most people really do want to be the ones in front of the group; it's just that fear vastly outweighs the desire. Actors, models and all those who perform before the public are able to do what you're not able to, which is overcome their embarrassment and their inhibitions. They don't worry about appearing silly.

They know that everyone else is too scared to be silly, and they'd rather be silly than scared. If you think back you will find that anything you've ever done that ultimately was worthwhile, probably initially scared you to half to death.

Conquering your fears is easier than you think, if you have enough motivation. When you face a fear, most of the time you will discover that it was not really such a big threat after all. We fear things in proportion to our ignorance of them. Facing fear costs you no money and takes no special talent. What it does take is commitment and motivation.

To attain something you want, you must be willing to sacrifice something else. In the case of overcoming fear of other people, it is the willingness to sacrifice security, control, and comfort. It means accepting vulnerability.

Managers think the people with whom they work want them to be in utter control, and they do. Occasionally, however, they want just the opposite. They want managers to be themselves, without any façade or pretense or shields. When we show that we're vulnerable, we also show that we're human. It's what most arguments are unconsciously designed to do, get us to reveal that the other person has had an effect on us.

Overcoming the fear of other people means summoning the courage to let go of your image and just be yourself. Most of us spend our entire adult lives trying to be someone else, someone cool, someone knowledgeable, someone in control, someone perfect. People don't want you to be perfect. They want you to be like them, only without their fears. That's right, without the fears. Think about it.