

Identifying Obstacles to Empowerment

Fear as the main enemy and main direction

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Fear and anxiety can keep you from developing your potential. However, the good news is that fear reframed as excitement and passion can give your life direction and get you going towards living a more fulfilling life.

Try this! Check those you agree with or that you agree with somewhat:

1. You feel helpless and vulnerable, inviting others to help and protect you.
2. You need to tell other people what to do even if they don't ask you.
3. You tend to criticize and/or blame others when you don't get what you want.
4. You try to stay away from difficult situations and people.
5. You feel easily bored or burned out when dealing with others.
6. You can't think of a dream or a passion you would like to pursue.
7. You would like to stay home if possible.
8. If something makes you feel anxious, you avoid doing it again.
9. If you make a mistake, you won't try it again.
10. You don't enjoy excitements as you used to.

If you checked most of the above statements you could be reacting with a high level of anxiety. You might avoid changes even though your life isn't as satisfying as you would like it to be. It is possible that you would benefit from taking a good look at how you manage anxiety and how anxiety and fear is affecting your life as a whole.

Obstacles to Empowerment is basically anything that keeps you from being the best you can be. Anything that takes power or life-energy away from you can be considered an obstacle, and anything that keeps you from being in control of your life is hurting you and making you feel weak. If you are not living your dream of a satisfying life and doing what you love to do, there are obstacles you need to consider.

Fear and anxiety are obstacles to empowerment when fear and anxiety keeps you from doing what you love to do. If fear of flying for instance is keeping you from taking trips you really want to take, fear of flying is an obstacle to your empowerment.

Fear of fear itself can develop into a general sense of anxiety, which is considered a main enemy to empowerment. If anxious reactions are the reasons why you don't do things that you otherwise want to do (if you weren't so anxious), fear is definitely having a negative impact on your life.

“When we develop fear of fear itself, we're lost. Certain that we “can't stand” to feel this way, we try hiding out from fear, running from it full speed, or fighting it off with a big stick. Doing any of these things only makes fear grow bigger and

stronger - and makes us feel smaller and weaker. The more you try to make fear go away (an impossible dream), rather than learning to function with it, the worse you feel about yourself. You will let fear stop you from doing what you need to do. You will mistakenly see yourself as a weak and impaired individual, rather than a strong, competent person who happens to have an overactive fear response.”
(From Harriet Lerner’s book: *Fear and Other Uninvited Guests*, p 55.)

Avoiding fearful situations makes you feel helpless. Feeling helpless makes you feel powerless. The lesson here is not to avoid fear as long as you are not in a truly dangerous situation. Instead, learn to deal with situations and events that initially make you anxious. You will rediscover passion and make your world larger.

Fear as a main direction in life

Fear can be a signal or reminder: Fear can be a reminder that there is something you need to pay attention to. Fear can signal you to act – to take flight to avoid a dangerous situation.

Fear can be an inspiration to change. For instance fear of losing a friend or lover can cause you to act to improve your relationships. Fear of losing a job can cause you to improve skills needed for the job.

Learning to live with fear will make you stronger and more capable.

If you are alive, you know anxiety and fear. We cannot remove fear from our lives, but we can learn to manage our fear. **Fear and anxiety can be reframed as excitement.** If you do what you need to do in spite of fear, you will feel in control. You will also get new experiences to help you deal with fear in the future.

Fear can be a direction in life. In the empowerment process taking stock of what you fear can give you direction in your effort. Often what you are afraid of is an essential part of your dream. For instance, if you dream about being an actress, but fear the stage, learning to live with your stage fright, will get you closer to actually living your dream. Or if you fear intimacy because you have gotten hurt so many times by other people, but passionately wish to find a partner, you will have to deal with your fear before you can enjoy an intimate relationship.

What to do:

1. Take stock of fearful / anxiety provoking situations that you try to avoid or always mess up.
2. Observe your style of managing anxiety. Do you over-function (help others when not called for) or under-function (expect help when not necessary)? Do you criticize, blame or gossip? Do you distant yourself from others? These are different styles of managing anxiety.
3. Think of an anxiety-provoking situation, which you think will create personal power and satisfaction if managed.
4. Make a plan to stop avoiding doing what you need / want to do.
5. Break your plan into small easy steps. Make sure you start with the easiest step on your list.
6. Say “What the heck I’ll do it anyway!” when anxiety hits you. Back off to take a break if you need to, but do come back.

7. Learn from mistakes. Mistakes are to be expected. They are learning experiences. Give yourself credit for what you have gained in spite of your mis-take. Get going and take it again.
8. Remember, anxiety does not represent the whole self. Anxiety is a response.
- 9) Know that we live in an anxiety provoking society. A life without anxiety and fear is not possible.
- 10) Ask for help when you need to.

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