

CHALLENGE V

BREAKING THROUGH THE FEARS

I feel like I am finally moving through these fears. I am arriving at “the other side.” The fear of money, fear of the unknown and all these other fears are finally going away. I am facing them and working through them one at a time.

Fear is one of the main challenges to break through while becoming an entrepreneur. The night before I was to facilitate my first corporate planning session, I was filled with fear. While I had worked with this client on several consulting projects, this project was new. My excitement about being contracted and being given the opportunity to facilitate this planning session had turned into fear. I began to question myself and the questions came faster than I could keep up with: Can I really do this? Do I even know what I am doing?

I was challenged by “what if” scenarios such as, “What if I can’t do this?” “What if something goes wrong?” I wanted to turn around, turn back. It seemed as if every fear I ever had returned one night to challenge me. As the night went on, I came to the conclusion that I was going to do my best and that I was there to share my expertise.

When I awoke in the morning, I felt calm. The serenity actually surprised me. I felt as if a storm passed through me. I couldn’t believe all the fears were gone. I said a prayer in the morning, asked for guidance and went to the planning session. None of my fears materialized and the results of the session were even better than either my client or I anticipated.

Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.

Confucius

What Are You Afraid Of?

I can't believe how much fear I had to work through to get here. Lots of fear! Fear of running out of money, fear of failure, what ifs, out-of-control fears and thoughts. I feel like I've worked through these fears—cleaned out those “closets” per se—and prepared myself for the next step.

I was more frightened than ever before as I transitioned into entrepreneurship. I was stuck in fear. I couldn't deny it and I didn't know how to deal with it. My fears seemed so real, so big and so unsurpassable. They kept me in my present circumstance—in a job that I didn't want to be in. I remember feeling and saying that this transition into entrepreneurship was more difficult than anything I ever experienced in my life, including getting a divorce, which I had experienced a few years prior. I was shocked, really, that my fear was so great and equally shocked that with all the books out there about starting a business, none of them addressed what I was going through emotionally.

I experienced my greatest fear at the most difficult time—when I made the decision to quit my job but had to still work there while saving the money I'd need to begin my entrepreneurial journey. Though I had not yet told anyone I was planning to leave, I knew I was leaving.

I needed a new approach to deal with my fear. One day while sitting in my meditation area and feeling scary feelings, I decided to make a list of my fears. I took a hard look at my fears, particularly as they pertained to transitioning into entrepreneurship. I started by simply writing at the top of the page, “What am I afraid of?” I listed my fears. One-by-one they were revealed; they were on paper now so I couldn't deny them anymore.

What I discovered from putting my fears in writing was that fear of not having/making enough money, which I thought was my No. 1 fear, was actually not what I was most afraid of.

My No. 1 fear was actually the fear of the unknown—not knowing what was going to happen when I left my job. The security and comfort of bringing home a regular paycheck was so familiar and comfortable that the thought of not having a paycheck was nearly inconceivable.

Once I knew that the fear of the unknown was my biggest challenge, I began to talk about it with people who supported me in my journey into entrepreneurship. Laura, a woman I admired and who was successful making this transition into entrepreneurship, listened to my fears and offered her experience and support. I began to change my attitude toward the unknown by accepting it as part of the journey. I began to see the unknown as a positive aspect of my life rather than something to be feared.

The second fear on my list was one that embarrassed me—it was the fear of being or going crazy. How could I talk to someone about that? I wanted to deny this fear, but denying it wasn't going to work, I knew that. So I was willing, once again, to talk about and challenge this fear with my supportive friends. This fear was very challenging to confront. Sometimes I thought the idea of starting my own business might just be a crazy idea. I questioned myself, “Was I crazy for even thinking about leaving a good job and starting a business? Was I crazy for thinking about going into business for myself while raising two children on my own?” I was just going to have to find out.

The problem with this fear was that I wasn't sure if it was true or not. I felt depressed much of

the time staying in a job I didn't want. Here I was wondering why I was depressed and why my emotions were erratic when I was not being true to myself. I realized that I spent more than 40 hours a week doing something I didn't want to do, but pretending that I did and telling myself that I must like this job because I was good at it. By confronting this fear, I came to the conclusion that the only reason I was still working at that job was to get a paycheck, and that was not a good enough reason anymore.

Those were my two biggest fears—the fear of the unknown and the fear of going or being crazy. Surprisingly, money was third. I challenged this fear by saving money before leaving my job. I set a goal to save the equivalent of six months living expenses and set a date upon which I would leave my job. I circled the date in my calendar and drew stars and balloons to signify my freedom.

Being afraid wasn't going to be enough to hold me back anymore. The experience of dealing with my fears was greatly lessened by listing and then challenging each one. This process helped me break through my fears and continue moving toward entrepreneurship.

The exercise below helped me break down each fear and essentially dissolve it. I got to see each fear for what it was. Fear was no longer something to be afraid of but rather an opportunity to become a stronger person, to get to know myself better and to accomplish what I knew I could accomplish.

What are you afraid of? Make a list. Do not judge your fears, just write them down.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Now, look over the list and prioritize your fears. Continue with the following exercise for the fears that scare you the most.

1. What scares you the most? Why does it scare you? I needed to write about the fear of going crazy. I wasn't sure I would be OK once I made the transition into entrepreneurship. Why was I afraid of going crazy? What did going crazy mean to me? Could I make this transition into entrepreneurship while feeling that I might go crazy? I actually wrote about it a lot. You may find the need, once you begin to acknowledge and write about your fears, that you need to write about them more than just through this exercise. Use your journal to write even more. Write down what fear scares you the most and describe why it scares you.

2. How can you lessen this fear? The fear of running out of money was a big one for me. It had me believing that I would end up homeless or living on the streets. I needed to write in my journal and talk with my supportive friends to get to the root of this fear. I got to the root of this fear by asking myself, "How could I lessen this fear?" I decided that having six months of living expenses saved before leaving my job would lessen my fear, and it worked.

3. Describe the worst-case scenario with this fear. What is the worst thing that can happen regarding this fear? The worst-case scenario was that I would need to give up my entrepreneurial venture and get another job. While this is a simplified and rational worst-case scenario, it did not

come to me until I went through this entire process.

4. What can you do so that the worst-case scenario does not happen? With my money fear, I decided I could get a part-time job if I got down to two months of savings while still working toward my entrepreneurial venture.

The goal of this process is to create rational solutions for irrational fears. When we break our fears down in this way, our fears are lessened and become manageable. This is the way that I was able to break through my fears and move forward.

I am becoming stronger by working through my fears.

