

Evaluating Obstacles and Risks

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For the past two weeks, my columns have dealt with obstacles to achieving your dreams. Today we continue that theme.

We all have expectations, and we don't like unforeseen or objectionable disruptions. Yet your mind can generate all kinds of potential risks and limitations. These "what if" possibilities may cause you to fear, doubt, worry, or just feel anxious. To protect yourself from what might happen, you may be tempted to forego stepping out in faith, choosing instead the known, the safe, and the predictable.

I think more of us should GO FOR IT! Here's a simple procedure that can build your confidence next time you have your sights set on high expectations.

Having a friend or colleague (or a good coach) who is good at listening and empathizing will help you through these steps the first couple of times you use this process.

First, get clear on the desired outcome of your activity, event, or opportunity. Take a piece of paper and write a positive description of the beneficial outcome in the center of the sheet.

Now, allow your brain to dredge up anything that is of concern to you. Surround the desired outcome with brief descriptions of the many fears and obstacles you've been thinking about. Take as much time as you want to describe the many risks and potential problems. You can come back later and add more concerns if new ones occur to you.

Next, look at every obstacle for its **impact** on the desired outcome. If that barrier were to occur in the worst possible way, would its effect be low, medium, or high? (Use a 1-for-low and 5-for-high rating system.) Be judicious—surely not every threat deserves an "end of the world" 5 rating!

After you've evaluated the impact of each risk and barrier, then rate each one again (using the 1-for-low and 5-for-high rating scale), this time assessing the **probability** of each disaster's likely occurrence. Remember, be judicious—many of the risks and obstacles we imagine never happen!

The next step is to multiply the two numbers for each barrier, obtaining a product ranging from 1 to 25. The higher the number, the more attention you should give to the risk or obstacle.

You'll want to focus your attentions on the three or four most significant limitations. Actions you take to address these concerns will likely lower the impact and probability of the others as well.

Now, give your brain permission to be creative! Generate options for how you might avoid or eliminate these most significant obstacles, how you might reduce or control what you can of each risk, or how you might develop a contingency plan for handling the situations if they do occur.

I've used this technique frequently over past weeks to support clients in their aspirations. Each time we've been able to acknowledge every concern, yet also narrow the field to fewer than 1/3 of the issues that had been nagging and constraining the individual.

This process usually takes less than fifteen minutes, yet brings peace of mind and allows you to focus on what you really can influence to bring about the outcome you desire. After you use it several times, it generates great confidence that you really can handle whatever circumstances might come along.

I thank my friend, Lyn Christian, a colleague and teacher of professional coaches, for sharing this technique with me. It's simple, and it works!