

What Keeps You from Being Bold?

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Before you read any further, set the article aside and think about your answer to this question: “What keeps you from pursuing life with boldness?” Please don’t misinterpret the question. I’m not advocating that you become reckless or irresponsible.

Many of us hold back, at least occasionally, from pursuing our dreams with all we have. Why do we do that? Why do YOU do that?

My objective is to raise your awareness of what underlying presumptions influence your behaviors. If you examine them, and you begin to understand the restraints you keep on your enthusiasm for what you can do and accomplish in your life, you might choose differently in the future than you have in the past.

A week ago, I had the privilege of meeting Madeleine Homan, colleague of Ken Blanchard and coauthor of *Leverage Your Best: Ditch the Rest*. She described four fears that typically prevent people from boldly asserting their creativity and insight. I told Madeleine about my weekly articles and obtained her permission to share our conversation. You’ll recognize these fears easily!

Fear of failure. This fear can be overcome through several means. First, consider “What’s the worst thing that could happen?” After serious consideration, the disastrous possibilities aren’t nearly as ominous as the anxiety feels. Further, you can take preventive steps to minimize the likelihood that this “worst thing” will occur.

Think forward in time, painting a constructive vision of the outcome you’d prefer to generate. With the desired result in mind, work backward in weekly increments. Forecast the actions that will lead toward your preferred result. Planning will give you the confidence you need to proceed.

Fear of being judged and found lacking. Do you ever imagine someone you hold in high esteem asking you, “Who do you think you are?” Though you realize that probably won’t *really* happen, there’s that nagging thought that somebody somewhere just might challenge your authority: “You’re not smart enough” or “You’re not qualified” or (well, you can generate your own judgmental imaginations better than I can—it’s amazing how creative we can be when we are identifying our limitations!).

Fear of pursuing the wrong thing (or that it will be too hard). We all wish there was a way to guarantee that we always make the right choice. Ah, but rarely do we have the benefit of that clarity. One of the most important roles a leader plays is to offer clarity of action when the direction is uncertain. No one respects a leader who exercises “squirrel” decision-making (as in darting back and forth across the road in front of a car).

Do your homework. Do a gut check as well as a rational analysis. Ask for and get help. Make your plan, then be tenacious. “Trial and error” is one of the best ways of learning, so make more mistakes so you can learn all you can!

Fear of losing what already exists. Ah, this may be the most prevalent reluctance of all, though it’s rarely acknowledged. To obtain better outcomes, you have to give up existing good things. To fulfill its purpose, a ship must leave the shore, losing sight of its safe harbor.

We all have our comfort zones. You may not like the circumstances that currently exist, but at least you know them well and have some degree of security with them.

Ask yourself, “What need do I doubt will be met, at least initially, by taking the next step?” After you become aware of your hesitation, you can consider options for how to let it go or replace it. Remember, to get what you’ve never had, you must do what you’ve never done.

Which fear is yours today? What reluctance typically keeps you from boldly pursuing your dreams, small and large? I invite you to join me in stretching, smiling, and overcoming your fears with new confidence.

Since this article was published, another fear keeps coming up in my work with clients. That is the fear of being extraordinary. Each time I've dealt with this concept with a client, I've referred to the following quote from Marianne Williamson's 1992 book, *A Return to Love*.

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?'

"Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

"We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us. It's in everyone, and, as we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Dennis Hooper, December 30, 2012