

WELCOME TO QUIET COURAGE – June 2006

The online newsletter for navigating life's changes and transitions from Bailey Coaching and Mary Ann Bailey, MC.

FEATURE ARTICLE:

Overcoming the Fear of Fear

I recently had dinner with a friend who was planning a trip to Bhutan this fall. Visiting Bhutan had been a long-time dream of hers and she was so excited when she found a wonderful tour through National Geographic. But during dinner, she began waffling on her decision to go.

She heard that the flight to Bhutan was extremely strenuous, that Bhutan had leeches, and she worried about contracting some weird Bhutanese illness. As the conversation progressed, I watched the positive energy which had initially propelled her to make the decision, and slowly give way to the natural fear we all feel when we begin to step out of our comfort zone.

How often has this happened to you? Maybe it was a job you wanted to apply for, but didn't because you didn't think you were really qualified. Maybe you had a great idea at work that you wanted to present to your team, but ended up keeping it to yourself because you didn't want to take the risk of being ridiculed.

Or maybe your life long dream is to bicycle through South America, trek through Nepal, or sail around the world but your "common sense" tells you that you are too old for such silliness and you would probably just end up getting hurt.

Our comfort zone is a very seductive place. We know it well. We feel safe there, and it is very easy to get lulled into believing that this is the sensible place to be living our lives. However, there is no creature alive that truly thrives living in a contained area; and that really is what our comfort zone is.

It is a small, confined area that, although may provide us with an illusion of safety, actually denies us the opportunity to expand our skills, talents, knowledge, and sense of personal power. It is because of the sense of fear we experience when we venture outside our comfort zone that we hold back from doing the things we truly want to do.

Making any kind of change in our lives, causes our bodies to respond by sending out little red alerts. When we feel our heart speed up, our breath get shallow, or our stomach tighten, we recognize these feelings as fear, as something to avoid, and our natural tendency is to retreat back behind that line that demarcates our comfort zone from what we perceive to be the danger zone.

And although we feel relief by retreating, the relief is only be temporary. Soon there will be something else that will come along to tempt us to take the risk of stepping over that magic line. Will this be the time we follow our hearts, or we will once again give into our fear of fear?

Most of us view fear as something bad and something to avoid and this holds us back from being creative, from learning new things, and from eventually reaching our full potential. But the fact is fear is not either bad or good. It is just energy and we have the ability to deal with it any way we choose. Letting it control our life puts us at its mercy and will keep our life small and very routine.

However, there is another way to address fear. Instead of giving in to the instinctual response of running from your fear, try the counterintuitive approach of acknowledging and accepting the fact that yes, you are feeling afraid but that's okay. Begin to look at fear as just a part of the process of stepping out and taking some risks in life.

Once you are able to recognize your fear and consciously make the decision keep moving forward in spite of it, you begin to shift the balance of power from the fear to you. You will feel more in control of your life and you will be better able to make choices that will move your life forward. You no longer will have to live your life from the confined area deemed safe by your fears.

But fear is a powerful emotion and facing it can be a very difficult and scary thing to do. Here are some helpful strategies for you to try the next time you find yourself giving up on a dream for the fear of fear.

1. Begin to observe when and how fear holds you back from doing things you want to do. Notice the times when your original excitement about something starts to be replaced by doubts and uncertainties. Observe without judgment.

You might want jot down what you see. What are you feeling? What thoughts go through your head? What kinds of reasons or excuses do you use to rationalize your change of mind?

2. Write down your fears. What exactly are you afraid of? Getting your fears out of your head and onto paper will take away a lot of their power and will allow you the opportunity to look at each fear with more objectivity.

3. Talk about your fears with a friend. Talking about your fears will lessen their power. Also, it will allow you to get support from people who may have experienced similar fears; and knowing that others have experienced and worked through similar kinds of fear will empower you to do the same.

Remember, fear is just energy. Do you want to use that energy to expand and propel your life forward; or do you want to use it to keep your life safe and contained within the confines of your comfort zone? The choice is up to you.

Until next time, all the best,
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