

# PERSONAL *TRANSFORMATION*

## MASTERY



- Master your brain
- Overcome fear
- Build confidence
- Get motivated

- Know your life purpose
- Develop a healthier you
- Build good habits
- Get focused

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## **GUIDE 3:** OVERCOMING FEAR

Want to become the most incredible, unstoppable version of yourself?

I'm not talking about the usual 'self-help' stuff. This goes beyond being a little better with the opposite sex, or being a little more productive.

Want to take on all new challenges, explore new frontiers, grow and transform yourself?

Then the answer is to overcome your fear. Your fear is what is holding you back. Your fear is what is making you less capable and less formidable. And your fear is what is taking away from your happiness and your fulfilment.

It's time we destroyed fear once and for all and unlocked our full potential.

## **THE SAMURAI CODE**

If we want to learn how to really conquer fear, then we can turn to some examples from history. Some of the most fearless, formidable warriors of all were the samurai. So how did they achieve this complete lack of fear?

According to legend, there was a technique that the samurai would practice right before battle in order to eliminate their fear. To do this, they would vividly imagine every possible way that they could be killed. They would imagine being impaled, dismembered and decapitated.

Then they would focus on accepting these possibilities and coming to terms with them. They would become okay with a horrific and brutal death.

The samurai were actually a very morbid and fatalistic bunch. The bushido code explained that it was an honour to die in battle and that they should *constantly* keep their mind on death.

You'd think this would make them more fearful but paradoxically, it empowered them to be the completely ruthless, fearless warriors that they were. This makes sense: if you fear death, then you will fear life.

If the samurai have accepted the worst thing that could happen to them and if they have come to terms with it, then what reason have they to be afraid?

Now imagine fighting someone who has zero fear of death: who is willing to put themselves at risk, to launch 100% into a movement and not be concerned for the potential outcome. They would be *devastating*.

The good news is that we live in a much less dangerous time and you probably *don't* need to come to terms with your death in quite the same way. But we can take this same notion and we can look at ways to apply it to our own lives.

## LEARNING FROM THE STOICS

Interestingly, stoic philosophers took a similar worldview when it came to their fears. Stoics believed that the secret to happiness was to be prepared for all the worst possible outcomes and to live inside those possibilities. They thought that blind optimism was one of the quickest ways to leave yourself miserable and disappointed.

Think about it: if you constantly expect the worst and get the best, then you are going to find yourself feeling either pleasantly surprised *or* getting what you expect.

If you constantly expect the best and get the worst, you are going to be consistently disappointed.

If you accept that negative things happen and you've *prepared* for them, then there is no reason not to take chances and risks.

And there is a beauty in things going wrong. The saddest points of our lives are rich with emotion because we have lost things we

cared about. The only way to avoid that is to lived a bland and unexciting life. The moments when we have felt sacred for our lives have been the times our biology and psychology were tested and we had to use our wits and our courage to survive.

The stoics pointed out that the times we are most likely to curse the heavens are the times that we are shocked. For instance, you don't swear when it starts to rain – this is a normal occurrence and something we anticipate. You swear when you burn your hand because you were surprised.

If you expect things to go wrong, they don't catch you out.

## FEAR SETTING

Tim Ferriss is the author who wrote *The Four Hour Workweek*. This is a book about finding ways to make your job fit around your lifestyle, instead of having your lifestyle fit around your work. This means deciding what you want from life and then creating a career that will work within that context.

Tim explains that many of us will remain stuck in jobs we hate and living lives that we find unrewarding because we're scared of what will happen if we take a chance.

If we go travelling, our partners might leave us. If we take up a new career, then we might fail and end up bankrupt and destitute. If we look for a new job, we might get turned down by everyone.

Fear keeps us frozen and prevents us from moving forward. We are naturally risk averse which means we'd rather cling on to what little we have rather than go forward to win the big prizes.

To get around this, Tim borrowed the concepts from stoic philosophers and formalized them into a process that anyone could use to get over their crippling fears.

The process goes as so:

1. First, identify the goal or thing you would like to change. Let's say you want to quit your job and start your own business.
2. Next, write down all of the things you are afraid of and all of the things that could go wrong. First, your partner might think you are irresponsible and they might leave you. Second, your new business might fail and you'll be left with debt. Third, your house might get repossessed. Fourth, you might end up vagrant. Fifth, your friends might laugh at you. Sixth, it might all go to plan but you find you hate your new position even more. You get the idea.

3. Now score each of those things on how *honestly likely* they are to happen. Would your partner really leave you? It's unlikely unless there are problems in your marriage to begin with, so we can give that a '2'. Would you end up destitute or would you probably find another job, even if it's a step down from what you were doing before? Give that one a '3'.
4. Next: do these things really matter? Score them 1-10. If your friends judge you... who cares?
5. Now, you're going to go through that list again and you're going to write down all the ways you could cope with the things that go wrong. These are your contingency plans and the things that you could do to cope. For instance, if you ended up broke you could get benefits, you could dip into your savings, you could ask your parents for help, you could take on a part time job. If your partner left you, you could fulfill that dream of travelling the world.
6. Then go through the list *another* time. This time, write down all the ways you can mitigate the risk so that it is less likely to happen. Worried about getting into debt? Then write a business model that doesn't involve a big upfront expense and bootstrap your way to success. Worried about leaving your job? Then start your business in your free time first.

Now you're going to do something else: you're going to think about the worst case scenario if you *don't* follow through with your plan.

That might be that you end up stuck in a job you hate. That one day you'll be 80 years old and you'll look back on your life and feel that you never made anything of it. That your body and your mind atrophied from lack of challenge or experience.

What's worse? I know how I feel!

And focus on what we discussed on that section on stoicism: bad things *will* happen. You can't possibly avoid all bad things happening.

Meanwhile, you are only responsible for your own emotions. You can't make everyone happy all of the time so don't even try. What you should focus on is accepting this reality and then just doing what you need to for your own emotional and psychological wellbeing in the meantime.

This is why Tim also has the mantra that you 'don't ask for permission, ask for forgiveness'. If your partner is going to be unhappy that you travel, that you take up a business... so be it. You can't live without taking chances because of someone else your whole life or you will be filled with resentment. And you could



die tomorrow, or lose your legs in a car accident. Maybe your partner might run off with another man/woman!

How they react to your decision is up to them. But you can't let that define your actions.

You can't hold onto things just the way they are. You can't prevent bad things from happening. All you can do is live life to its fullest and richest right now. That's why you *have* to take those chances.

## TAKING CHANCES

The above technique can work when you need to make a big decision or plot the course of your life. But what about that acute fear? That short-term fear?

Here, the exact same process comes into effect. Scared to speak up in public? Then quickly run through that fear-setting technique where you consider the possible outcomes and why they don't *really* matter. You ultimately have two choices: stay quiet and *remain* fearful, or take chances and grow as a person so that you're less scared next time.

Thinking of doing a bungee jump? Then again, run through all the things that could go wrong and how likely/serious they are. Sure,

the rope could snap or turn out to be too long, but you know that the likelihood of that happening is somewhere in the region of 0.0001% or less.

Not only that, but it would be over instantly, you'd never know anything of it.

And you can't live your life in fear.

So, jump!

Returning to the stoics for a moment, there is a saying that you can't control what happens to you, but you can control your reaction to it. Keep this in mind and keep your *reaction* calm, even when the world is crashing down around you.

All of this can be helped with a little meditation, mindfulness and CBT. CBT is 'cognitive behavioral therapy', which is a form of psychotherapeutic intervention that recommends changing your thought patterns in order to change the way you feel and the way you behave. Techniques include the powerful 'thought challenging' which essentially amounts to fear setting. Here you simply look at the limiting thoughts and beliefs you have and then assess how realistic or valid they are. Sound familiar?

And unsurprisingly, CBT is one of the favored methods for overcoming phobias!

But something that is even *more* powerful from CBT is the notion of ‘hypothesis testing’. This means that you don’t just test the ideas in your mind: you actually get out there and test them in person.

If you have a crippling fear of public speaking, then you get out on stage and you *purposefully* give a rubbish speech. You experience that ‘worst case scenario’ first hand and you prove to yourself that it really isn’t that bad.

In doing this, you can learn to desensitize yourself from the things you would normally find scary and you can become a much more fearless and confident version of yourself.

And this is really the very best way to overcome fear: it’s to keep pushing yourself and challenging yourself. Keep subjecting yourself to the very things you find daunting. Fear is a good sign – it’s a sign that you’re growing – and the more you practice keeping your mind calm and steady in these situations, the more you will find that reaction comes naturally.

And one more thing: remember to breathe! Breathing deeply will activate your rest and digest system – the parasympathetic nervous system – and this will slow your heartrate and subdue your panic response.

Keep your eye on the prize: if you can eventually eliminate fear, you can take on *any* challenge and succeed.