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Fear, when not properly managed, is at best a time waster, at worst a recipe for business failure, and somewhere in the middle a barrier to positive energy flowing in your business. Identify your fears and make a plan to overcome them.

CHAPTER 5

Fear

The Fungus among Us

One of the nastiest *F* words I know is fear. It destroys love, reason, decency, creativity, compassion, logic, sanity, and forward motion. It's taken over our planet like a big, invisible fungus, spreading into every community, every business, and every human mind.

I'm not speaking of the rational fear of survival from a violent enemy or the panic we feel when a snake or a bear crosses our path. I'm talking about the fear generated by our overprotective egos (see chapter 3)—the one that tries to warn us of dangers that aren't really dangerous, such as speaking in front of a crowd or raising our rates to get paid what we deserve. That same fear repels goodness and suppresses our immune systems. That fear—the fungus among us—is the one in our stories about ourselves, the stories birthed through ignorance, misinterpretation, and procrastination. I know this because I grew up consumed with fear.

Fear Isn't "Pretty"

Despite my French and Italian heritage, I grew up as a

Southern gal who wouldn't dream of showing fear. No, no, no, darling, fear isn't pretty—it must be concealed. It's much more proper to talk about anxiety and stress. I mean, my goodness, I'm a business owner; stress is to be expected.

I hid behind the word “stress” for a long, long time. Then I heard Tony Robbins say that stress was simply “fear in disguise,” which made me shift my story. I became even more clever at hiding my fear from myself.

Here's how deep it runs: I was into this book's third draft before I realized I'd left out the chapter on fear. The page titled “Fear” actually remained blank. Blank! You know, “because I wasn't really sure what I was going to write about it,” said my twisty, two-year-old self wearing a frilly dress and wringing her hands.

You see, that's how absolutely tricky fear can be.

There's avoiding fear, fighting fear, and facing fear. I sometimes have the illusion I'm doing all of the above, but the truth is, fear can't be fought. It's like a flame that burns brighter when it's fanned with avoidance, antianxiety medication, and denial. It will have to be dealt with—faced rationally—at some point.

We all experience tragedy, failure, rejection, and trauma at some point in our lives. It takes deep courage to look fear straight in the eye during these difficult times. Don't get me wrong—there will be serious times when you can't deal with it head-on during the trauma. It's OK to have a bridge to help you through the really tough times, but make it a temporary bridge. Be true to your feelings and the situation at the time. Take time to heal and grieve when necessary. Be clear that not every fear-filled event will require this bridge. Each of us has our own way of grieving and healing. Yet in the end, facing our fears makes life more authentic and more loving.

I should note that clinical depression and fear are related but not the same thing. Depression frequently requires professional guidance and expertise to help take the best next steps for you. Don't delay or think it will just go away.

Fear Revealed

I'm getting a little wiser about my relationship with my fear. After a great deal of personal-development reading, I've made an agreement with my body that if I'm ignoring or hiding fear, my body will reveal it to me. (Authors like Wayne Dyer, Louise Hay, Anita Moorjani, Mike Dooley, and Brené Brown are among my favorite.) My body has taken on this task with great pride and enthusiasm.

If I'm being rigid and controlling: backache. If I'm avoiding obstacles, hiding from fear, or wishing things were different: migraine. If I'm unhappy with a situation yet avoid making the needed adjustments and blame others instead: anxiety. If I'm taking on other folks' issues and not setting healthy boundaries: neck and shoulder pain. All of these symptoms ultimately pile up, creating more stress within my body and emotions as they inevitably break down my immune system.

Once, a bunch of future-focused issues brought up fear, so I decided to put those concerns on the back burner of life. My body alert came in the form of a weird under-skin fungus that popped up on my back. Gross as those red splotches were, they provided great inspiration for the subtitle of this chapter.

And then there's fear-induced anxiety. I've learned to speak in public and now actually enjoy it. But one day my mentor Matt sent me an email stating, "Be ready to share your cold sales call presentation tomorrow. We're going to role-play." All of a sudden my chest and throat turned into hot, prickly concrete. Seriously, I could barely breathe. As soon as I made sure I wasn't having a heart attack, I began asking myself some big questions. For example, now that I'd learned how to speak in public, why was an audience of one giving me a volatile reaction?

I'd intensely avoided my fear of a cold sales call. Can you really fear sales? No. I feared the callous rejections. I feared facing a process that I loathed. My body was making me painfully aware that I feared and detested the process

of learning the steps involved in cold calling for business development. My throat and chest hurt for hours afterward. Yes, fear can really freak out your body.

My body has become my warning light for all my fear-hiding mental trickery—as well as revealing that cold calls are just not my style of doing business. Are you so fortunate to have this alert system? A painful crick in the neck or a slipped disc or another physical symptom that we think will hurt less than facing the truth is a powerful cue to examine our fears.

How do you make such an agreement with your body? It may be through an intentional request to your inner wisdom. For some, it's a prayer. The key is to get silent, get clear, and ask for internal help. It's amazing how your body will respond. It's most likely already manifesting your fear, so maybe your "request" could be to be aware or to better interpret the "message" your body is sending.

I've often had to ask myself: How do I hide fear? How does fear rule me? Why am I not moving forward? Here are some of the ways fear might manifest.

Excuses: *I can't because I don't know how. I'm not smart enough to figure it out. I'll get rejected.*

Doubts: *Who do I think I am? I'm too young. I'm too old. I don't have the credentials, the looks, the talent, the money ...*

Hesitation: *If I take this leap, I may fail. I'll just wait and see what happens next. What would my family think if I broke tradition?*

Hiding: *If I sink down low and hide, they'll never know I can't do it. I'm too tired to even think about making changes. What's the use?*

Laziness and procrastination: *It might hurt to exercise. It will hurt to start exercising. It's too hard to do business development. Maybe later I'll be ready. I really don't want to feel the pain of change.*

These other manifestations may or may not be issues for you. Still, it may be revealing to ask yourself these fear-busting questions:

- What are my moon-shot business goals? Why haven't they happened?
- Why am I not in peak physical condition?
- Did I take four consecutive weeks of vacation time in the past year?
- Why isn't my annual salary my monthly salary?
- What task have I been avoiding for no good reason?

Did these questions bring you a tinge of anger? Did you suddenly start tuning out? Did you immediately have an excuse? That's your mind using a manifestation of fear to shield you from something it perceives as potentially dangerous. The mind is so very powerful.

Here's the great news: facing your fears, taming your mental demons, and stepping out with a healthy level of ego is seriously empowering. Not only does it begin to change the energy of your business and make it more magnetic and attractive, but also it is an amazing process to not be tethered by fear. Sure, it will pop up and constantly test us, but we now know the conversations to have with ourselves and our guides; we get better at finding the most profound questions to ask of ourselves and of others to take us to our next step. Sometimes that next step is our next phase, and often it is simply to get us to our next day. Learning to talk through fear will be the best gift you can ever give your business. As powerfully draining as fear can be on our businesses and ourselves, releasing fear and its constant play for power is seriously empowering, and it will leave you feeling rather fabulous!

False Evidence Appearing Real

There's no better creative exercise than finding evidence of how and why your fear is real. Think about that for a while. There is, of course, a healthy level of fear that keeps us from taking undue risks or gambling with an opportunity that could seriously damage our businesses or our health. Perhaps in

those cases, it isn't fear at all but well-earned knowledge or perhaps intuition.

Take time to discover what triggers fear within you. Is it from situations or behaviors from your past? Is that still valid today with all you know and the resources you have?

The time spent trying to prove that your fear is rational or justified is quite possibly wasted time. Fear will halt your forward movement. It's up to each one of us to face our fears and identify what we truly want to accomplish.

Full Circle: Framing Your Story

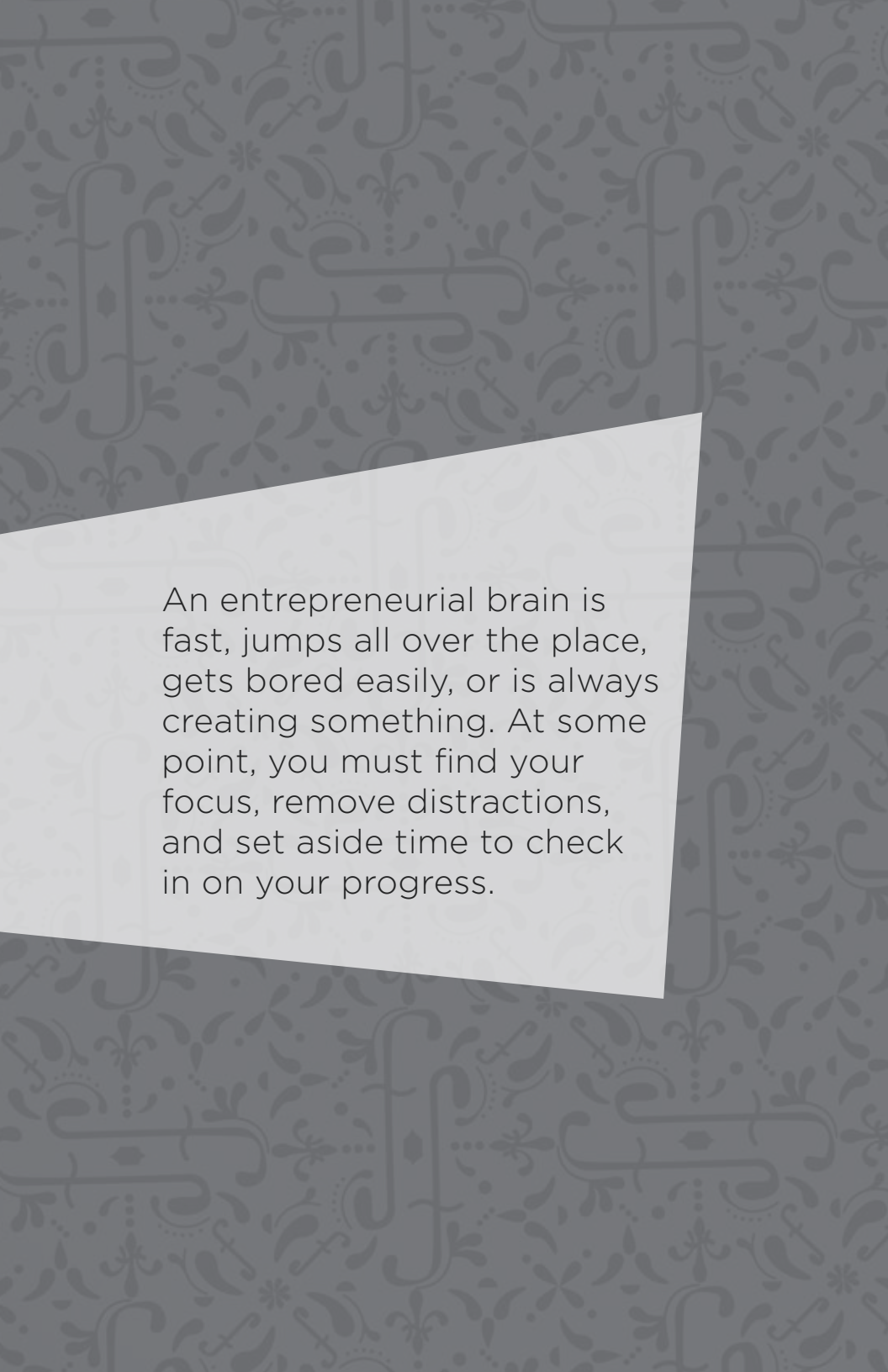
How is fear holding your health and/or business hostage?

List the top five ways fear is showing up and slowing down your business growth.

What clue is your body revealing to you about the state of your thoughts or business?

The *time* spent
trying *to prove* that
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or *justified*
is quite possibly
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Fear will halt your
forward movement.



An entrepreneurial brain is fast, jumps all over the place, gets bored easily, or is always creating something. At some point, you must find your focus, remove distractions, and set aside time to check in on your progress.

CHAPTER 12

Focus

Entrepreneurial ADD

Attention deficit disorder (ADD) is a condition that must be diagnosed by a trained mental-health professional through a complete, clinical evaluation.

Entrepreneurial ADD, on the other hand, refers to the characteristics that individuals with ADD often share with the typical entrepreneur: interpersonal skills, grit, energy, passion, creativity, and insight. These traits can be a distinct advantage for entrepreneurs, whether they're actually diagnosed with ADD or not. They're what help many of us business owners successfully launch projects and businesses.

Our entrepreneurial talent for coming up with ideas and solutions may be a blessing, but as a business owner it may also be a curse. The "ideas is what we do" motto works only if we can focus on our ideas long enough to implement, launch, and monetize them. Please don't minimize the negative impact that a lack of focus can have on your life and business.

I deal with the challenge of a bouncing brain that's always searching for ideas to launch a new project. I've recently become aware that I constantly need to be working on a project

that consumes me, or I'll fall into a funk. If I deem a challenge too difficult or not creative and fulfilling enough, it's difficult for me to focus on the task. And I'm especially susceptible to distractions if I'm feeling fearful or fatigued. All this makes life difficult for those around me.

My ongoing challenge is segmenting my time so that I can engage in creative projects without sacrificing other parts of my life. For instance, I loved, loved, loved working on the local magazine I launched, but it completely sucked my focus away from everything else. My primary business paid dearly for that.

The ability to search tirelessly for new opportunities, generate tons of business ideas, and maintain an "I can do anything" mindset is fabulous when you're in innovation mode (or the company has grown to the point where your chief role is that of visionary). As an entrepreneurial business owner, we never want to run out of ideas.

However, once your business is launched, it requires a great deal of time and focus. It's impossible to build a long-term, successful business if every bright, shiny, new idea takes you off course.

Let's use our innovative brilliance to create processes, automation, audience awareness, and great teams so that eventually our hands-on involvement isn't needed. It's critical to get one business set up and functioning without us so that we can start the next, and the next, and build a successful empire.

Shiny Opportunities

I'm guilty of getting distracted by bright, shiny objects, which are best described as anything that moves, makes a sound, or crosses my visual field. I keep telling myself that my attention is getting better, but then along comes a distraction.

We all know that business ownership is full of distractions. Dealing with an endless stream of invitations for networking,

social events, conferences, and seminar events can deplete our time, energy, and focus. Once I added up the time and money it cost me in a year to attend events and then compared that to the jobs and referrals generated from those events. When I calculated the return on investment, I made a choice to drastically reduce my participation.

There was a two-month stretch during the holidays last year when I could have attended three business events each day. Can you guess how many of those invitations I said yes to?

Zero.

I'll admit that a number of them were tempting, and I felt the guilt of "I probably should" when I declined some of these events. But none of them had the potential to bring money directly into my business. Instead of attending these events, I used my freed-up time to reposition my firm with new marketing materials, help renovate my daughter's house, and write this book. Shiny! (That's for my *Firefly* tribe.)

But I'm not always this strong when it comes to resisting flashy opportunities. If there's an interesting-sounding business lecture, the voice of fear tells me that the presenter must be someone who knows how to do whatever I'm doing better than how I'm doing it. I hate thinking that I'll miss out on an amazing opportunity. But the truth is, most of these shiny situations have nothing to do with what requires my focus at the time. I think the Universe sends them just to test me.

How can you tell if something that comes your way is a real opportunity for you or simply a distraction? Well, I have three quick questions I ask myself whenever I'm in doubt:

- 1) Is this something I really, really want to do? In other words, will it bring me joy?
- 2) Is this something that will bring money into my business?
- 3) Is this something that has the potential to positively impact my business and profit?

If those questions don't settle the issue for you, then here's the final, deciding question:

If this event were happening tomorrow, would I drop everything and attend?

If the opportunity/distraction doesn't fall under the category of something I really, really want to do, then it had better positively impact my business by generating profit. I struggled with this idea at first because it seemed to contradict a heart-centered approach. But honestly, I spent too many years doing things that neither impacted my business positively nor brought me joy.

Much of the pro-bono work I've done brought me a great deal of joy. But pro-bono work that became expected rather than appreciated did not, and it didn't provide a return to my business either. For those situations, it makes better sense to write a contribution check instead of using my firm's time to provide free professional services.

The final question is important because if your answer is *not* an "oh, heck, yeah!" then I'd suggest taking a pass. It's way too easy to register for something that is weeks out and hope that your schedule will be less stacked. Keep in mind that you're asking yourself a hypothetical question here, not actually waiting until the last minute to make your decision. I recommend planning events as far ahead as possible in order to create a schedule that works with your energy and to-do list.

Flipping the Focus

Sometimes we need to flip our focus and look at a situation from a different perspective to see a better way.

I'd been working my home-based business for about five years, and my production schedule was over capacity. It was clearly time to move into an office space and hire my first employee.

I gathered my financials and requested a business loan. Unfortunately, I received a series of rejections. My lack of collateral was a factor, but I believe the primary reason

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my applications were rejected was that the loan officers didn't understand the nature of my business and my need for expansion.

It was a humbling lesson. I realized that I needed to effectively tell not only my financial story but also my business story. Neither of these stories were fully developed in the initial stages of my business.

There was also a problem with the way I packaged and presented my information. I tried to present like a professional accountant by having super-clean pages of data (lots of numbers) in lieu of a real financial story. But I wasn't an accountant; I was a designer, and my firm produced beautiful, colorful magazines and promotional materials, not spreadsheets.

It was time to flip the focus. I took the time to redo my presentation and recreate my business plan, financials, and loan request. I presented my story the way I would for a client.

I was still turned down by five banks, but the sixth one, Bank of America, wrote me a check for everything I requested. That gave me the safety net I needed for my first expansion. Changing my focus made all the difference.

From my designer days, I have a trick I use if something doesn't look right and I can't figure out why it isn't working. I print it out and stand across the room and look at the design in a mirror. Moving further from the project and seeing it reversed gives me a totally new viewpoint.

Sometimes we need to *flip* our
focus and *look* at a situation
from a *different perspective*
to see a *better way*.

Likewise, when we have a specific business challenge, we can flip our perspectives by asking a friend, stranger, or networking colleague for their point of view on the matter. Keep in mind that everyone has opinions, and you'll need to sort out the ones that are most appropriate. I've found that with this process, someone will invariably ask a question that topples my current theory and offers a brand-new frame of reference. This has the power to completely flip my focus on the situation.

Focus Check-ins

What should we be focusing on in our businesses? Well, first we need to understand the difference between vision and goals. "Vision" is the impact each of us desires to make on our world or industries or communities. It is also a key part of the roadmap to where we want our businesses and ourselves to arrive. It's like the GPS (global positioning system) address we plug into our map apps. It's frequently written in the present tense as though it's already happened. Our goals then are the rest of the map—the necessary steps that take us toward our visions. If you haven't clearly articulated your vision, it will be seriously difficult to focus and even more difficult to arrive at your destination.

We often focus on specific business goals that help us make short-term progress and get our plans started. But then we must set up processes to generate progress toward our goals. Focusing on, and documenting, a process creates long-term results.

Setting goals can often feel like trying to predict the future. Our unmet expectations can lead to disappointment or feelings of failure. I've set many goals with the expectation of a certain outcome unfolding in a certain way within a certain time frame. Either I didn't take the actions that were required to make those goals happen, or it wasn't the right time and circumstance. And most often the goal didn't happen because it wasn't part

of a grander vision and because I tried to micromanage the outcome. (I now fondly call this micromanaging the Universe.) When we create a goal, it must be part of a vision. Taking action and moving forward brings forth resources and opportunities, many of which we may not have been able to see as options. Once the vision is clear, we must surrender the details and the specifics of how we want our businesses' visions to come true. How we get there may be quite fluid or bumpy with important detours and delays that strengthen our experience and knowledge. Nonetheless, keep moving forward toward the vision. Keeping your vision clear is very important. Make yourself available for coincidences and small miracles along the way.

So stay true to your vision or destination, but don't become attached to the path, direction, or mile markers to get there. Those may change in ways we never could have imagined or planned.

Just because we plan or work to create something, it simply may not happen as we wanted or in the timing that we expected. Then all we can control is how we react to it. And perhaps "try, try again" with various different perspectives to get clearer on the vision.

When it comes to achieving goals toward my vision, I've learned to focus my energy on the process for progress. When I'm most focused, I schedule fifteen minutes each Friday to fill out a quick feedback grid to track my progress (filling it in daily helps tremendously). It's a simple review that provides helpful feedback and discoveries. For example, this practice has helped me realize that I wanted to increase referrals, but I wasn't scheduling enough intentional interactions, meetings, or opportunities to make that happen. Or I needed to increase my energy to manage the awesome projects I wanted to add into my business, yet I wasn't silencing my mind or exercising daily to increase energy levels.

The feedback grid helps me identify the five key things I must do on a weekly basis to achieve the results I'm seeking in my business. I chose to do this every Friday because it's another fabulous *F* word and rounds out the workweek.

It's amazing what we can learn about ourselves when we document and track our progress. Focusing on this feedback provides clarity and insight. Download the feedback grid at FabiPreslar.com/FwordsBook/downloads.

Full Circle: Framing Your Story

Will the professional event you're considering attending bring joy, opportunity, or profit to your business?

Are you willing to document and measure your weekly progress?

Have you created action steps to get you toward the goal you're focusing on?