

Fear: The Motivator for Success

As I entered the doors of the Michigan Avenue lobby of Roosevelt University in the fall of 2006, I paused at the foot of the great staircase. I was flooded with many competing emotions. With a deep breath, I made a complete turn, taking in my surroundings. I attempted to slow my racing pulse but failed. My stomach was turning and my throat felt dry. "Could it be excitement?" I wondered. After all, I had dreamt of this moment for so long. Suddenly the definition of the emotion emerged with clarity: it was fear.

I glared at the staircase, for now it represented a monster blocking my entrance. Thoughts of failure began running through my head, and I began questioning my purpose for being at Roosevelt University. "Are you sure you can do this? Suppose you fail? It's not too late to quit. You can do it later," the voice of fear whispered. I was surprised at my reaction since I had planned and worked hard toward pursuing graduate studies for so long. "What should I do?" I wondered. I felt I could not possibly succeed academically, if this was how I felt.

Fear is an amazing emotion. It can chart our fate before we've started our journey, and dictate a path of failure if we let it. Fear is not an uncommon reaction to many of life challenges, and it can arise each time we embark on a new uncharted path in life. Attending college is one such path; for many people it will be their first time away from home, without the comforts of old friends and familiar surroundings. For others, college may become a frightening source of evaluation of their ability and may result in the person redefining themselves negatively. These fear-provoking constructs can potentially cripple personal satisfaction, growth, or success.

The good news, however, is that fear, though inevitable, can be redirected in a positive way to become a driving force toward success. The secret lies within our perception of the emotion. Do we perceive fear as a prediction of our doomed fate and a true reflection of our abilities? Or do we embrace the excitement often surrounding fear, and perceive it as a powerful energy paving the path to greatness and a better self? If we do the latter, then wisdom suggests we are on the path to success, and fear is nothing more than a motivator.

I discovered a great little book *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* by Dr. Susan Jeffers (1987) during my first year here at Roosevelt. Within it, she noted that the issue is not fear itself, but how we hold the fear. For those individuals that felt fear and overcame it, fear was totally irrelevant because they held their fear from a position of power and used it to their advantage. They saw themselves as powerful and saw fear as a challenge. For those individuals that allowed fear to paralyze them, fear was held from a position of pain and resulted in helplessness. The success to handling fear is to move from a position of pain to a position of power, and one such way of doing this is to carefully select our vocabulary.

According to Dr. Jeffers, many of us who carry fear in a position of pain choose crippling words to express ourselves when fear arises. For example, phrases like *I can't*, *I hope*, or *If only* signify a state of helplessness and failure. They imply that we have no control over our lives: that we are helpless, without choices, and without power. Instead, Dr. Jeffers suggests that we empower our speech and thoughts by using assertive, powerful words like *I won't*, *I know*, or *I can* that imply control. This is essential because our subconscious mind believes what it hears, not what is true, and will act accordingly.

If you're like everyone else and experience fear, take on the challenge of turning fear into power by utilizing Dr. Jeffers' vocabulary chart shown below. When fear emerges, stop, think, and instead of uttering a painful phrase, use an empowering one from the chart until it becomes a habit.

Turing Fear to Success
PAIN TO POWER VOCABULARY CHART

Position of Pain	Position of Power
I can't	I won't
I should	I could
It's not my fault	I'm totally responsible
It's a problem	It's an opportunity
I'm never satisfied	I want to learn and grow
Life's a struggle	Life's an adventure
I hope	I know
If only	Next time
What will I do?	I know I can handle it
It's terrible	It's a learning experience

It has been a year since I started my journey here at Roosevelt University, and understanding the power of fear has been instrumental in each of my successes. I have become more aware of the ever-changing nature of life, and with each intellectual awakening, fear has become my constant friend reminding me of my humanity, challenging me to greater heights, and making me grateful for investing in my education. Rather than voicing pessimism when fearful, I say with certainty, "Yes, I am sure I can do this. No, I will not fail, and I will never quit". Now I smile each time I approach that majestic staircase at the entrance of Michigan lobby, for it reminds me of my triumph and that I am making my dream of attending graduate school a reality. At the end of your stay here at Roosevelt I know that you, too, can feel powerful over fear.