



# How to Fight Fear

By Dr. Kathleen Begley  
Professional Speaker and Author

**Note to Readers:** *This free e-newsletter, sent only upon request, comes from Dr. Kathleen Begley, owner of Write Company Plus communications training. She writes weekly on topics connected to business and personal success. Dr. Begley also does a blog called "Meandering to a Different Drummer." Click onto the website address at the end of this article to read her musings on life, death, and how to keep a neat wallet.*

Pride. Envy. Gluttony. Lust. Anger. Greed. Sloth. You may recognize these as the seven deadly sins, the behaviors thought by many religious stalwarts to give human beings a one-way ticket to eternal damnation. I struggled mightily earlier in life with an eight flaw I think should be on the list: fear. In my life, stark raving terror has caused me to disappoint more people and to achieve fewer goals than any other single factor.

When my father was dying 13 years ago, for example, I so feared watching the ravages of old age that I curtailed my visits to his bedside. It's my biggest regret. On the business side, way back in the 1980's, I got an invitation to interview for a job as a producer on an NBC news show in New York. I was so scared about competing in the big city that I climbed in bed, curled up in a fetal position, and never showed up.

In the current economy, I believe that anxiety is more rampant than ever before. I actually think you'd be half nuts not to have felt some fear during the past year. Fear of losing your job. Fear of being unable to pay your bills. Fear of falling short on your daughter's tuition. Fear of interviewing for a new position. Fear of ending up homeless atop a heating grate. Just remember that feelings aren't facts. Breathe deeply, accept the emotion, and let it go.

Here's the deal. You absolutely must fight fear with every ounce of energy you can muster. You simply cannot give in. To be blunt, waging an ongoing battle against anxiety of any kind is the number-one essential for creating a successful and happy life. Crippling fear will negate all the degrees, experience, and street smarts in the world.

Robert Lipsyte, a PBS host, wrote an article on this topic last week for USA Today. The headline was "Fear, For All the Wrong Reasons." "In an individual or in a society, fear instills a kind of depression that bogs us down," Lipsyte wrote. "At its worst, it makes us passive, drives us to lose heart, quit making informed decisions, quit voting or caring."

So what are some practical steps for fighting fear? Here are ideas I've learned over the years out of sheer necessity:

- **Identify the cause.** Most of my fears stem from my mother's death in a car accident when I was in college. That event turned my world upside down, instilling in me a lifelong worry about the fragility of life. Therefore, as I showed in the NBC debacle, I could protect myself from losing a fabulous career by never living up to my potential.
- **Share your story.** One of the most liberating moments of my life occurred when a polished business woman I knew only slightly revealed over lunch that she waged a constant battle against fear of becoming a bag lady. She convinced me that I could overcome my anxieties.



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- **Access resources.** As I was working on this article, I happened across a list of relevant books. Among them were the just published “Overcoming the Fear of Fear: How to Reduce Anxiety Sensitivity” by Margo Watt and Sherry Stewart.
- **Act as if.** Psychologists increasingly believe that you can change your emotions by altering your behavior first. I find that if I act cheerful, I actually become more optimistic. As Voltaire said, “Life is a shipwreck, but we must not forget to sing in the lifeboats.”
- **List the benefits.** Sometimes it helps simply to write down the positive ways your life will change if you can overcome your fear. If you’re so afraid of germs that you have begun avoiding colleagues at work, for example, your list might include payoffs such as “being plugged into the grapevine” and “increasing my visibility.”
- **Get a grip.** If fear of water is preventing you from joining your family on a dinner cruise, turn on your TV and watch news coverage of the human suffering caused by the recent earthquake in Haiti. Watching stories about people who have lost everything somehow puts my anxieties in perspective.
- **Create a mantra.** Organizations often use short sayings to launch change. So why not do the same for yourself? I find quotations from famous and infamous people particularly helpful in maintaining my motivation as a warrior against fear. My current favorite is a statement from writer Albert Camus: “In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer.”

*Dr. Kathleen Begley has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at [KBegley@writecompanyplus.com](mailto:KBegley@writecompanyplus.com). She responds to everybody.*