



Becoming a Fearless Decision Maker

Gail Cohen writes about stretching beyond your comfort zone in her audio book, Thinking Outside the Lines. Gail makes a statement that has become a benchmark in my life: she challenges her audience to make one decision a week that makes your palms sweat. That's right. Once a week, do something so uncomfortable that it makes your palms sweat.

I don't always hit the benchmark but life is certainly more interesting and more rewarding when you push past your comfort capacity. What I do see as I travel the country and work with people from all positions and stages in their lives is that we've become a nation of fear-based thinkers, instead of fearless and courageous.

There are some legitimate reasons for developing this limiting habit: 9/11 was the first time in our young nation's history that the United States mainland was invaded and threatened. Politicians, corporations and some religious leaders capitalized upon our natural fear and distorted the perception that until 2001, we as Americans were completely "safe." I beg to differ.

Here's the problem with fear-based thinking: it robs you of critical thinking skills, makes bad behavior acceptable and forces a reactive vs. proactive focus. None of these mindsets will lead you to uncovering and utilizing your natural strengths and talents.

Every day, the news carries stories of people and companies who have lost their ability to use critical thinking skills: the bank manager who wanted to fingerprint a man born without hands or the home-improvement company who fired an employee for wearing a "Support our Troops" button in honor of his deployed brother. Now, really. Stop and *think* about these two scenarios...yes, rules and guidelines are important but we still have to weigh the merit of our decisions. A fear-based thinker believes that following the rules will protect them and keep them safe from harm. Sadly, time has proven this is not always true.

Have you noticed that bad behavior in public seems to be on the rise? Is there so much anger in America that we all feel we have to act up to be heard? As a parent, I watched my children copy the behaviors and attitudes of their friends and environments; what is this public display of angst and bad manners teaching all of us? And sometimes this behavior is rewarded with media coverage that is

mistaken for celebrity status. Fear-based thinkers are overwhelmed by emotion and can't see any other venue than to infect the rest of us with their negativity and fears. No, thank you.

And finally, fear-based thinkers struggle with looking a day, a month or a year ahead. They are trapped in the past, reliving their fears, and become reactive to their surroundings and relationships. They have no plans but to complain to anyone who will listen about how unfair life has been to them. Sadly, they don't have the capacity to move themselves past their unhappiness because they get attention or feedback for their misery. This attention bolsters their egos and reinforces justification of their feelings, which creates a vicious circle.

So, how do you break the cycle of fear-based thinking? You start small, very small, with a decision that makes your palms sweat. Maybe it's something as small as going to lunch in a public place by yourself. Perhaps it's signing up for a course or program you've always wanted to take but don't think you have the talent or ability. Or, maybe you'll try volunteering an idea or suggestion at a meeting without being asked.

Try these small, sweaty decisions for four weeks and then ask yourself what has changed for the better in your life. Fear is a natural occurrence in our lives and can serve as a powerful motivator if you harness those fears and use them as catalysts to create new and powerful habits.

Go ahead. What do you have to lose? A little fear, perhaps? Have fun with taking small, incremental steps to become a fearless decision maker and watch your life align with your purpose.

You'll find more ideas like fearless decisions in the "Real Women Have Chipped Nails" and "Lessons of a Life Diva" programs by Allison Adams Blankenship. Allison gives your teams hands-on tools that are immediately usable. Call 800-644-7641 or visit www.PrecisionSpeaking.com to find out how to bring Allison and these types of programs to your organization.