



INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP SERIES

Lizard Brain

How Fear Compromises Performance



Lately all sorts of references are being made to the *Lizard Brain*, the Limbic portion of our brain responsible for our fear response. We hear reports on how fear raises its perturbing head in work and in life.

Personally, I am happy to see this phenomena being brought into the light because it is real and it affects all of us. If misunderstood or ignored, fear can have far reaching consequences. An inherent part of the human experience, fear is as natural to us as breathing; a natural protective mechanism courtesy of our incredible brains.

Fear can stand in the way of leadership effectiveness in a myriad of ways: *Worrying about meeting deadlines or reaching goals... being concerned about satisfying stakeholders inside and outside of the company... stressing over the reputation of your company... being concerned about how you are perceived by influential people in your organization, industry, or community.*

Of course, there are thousands of things to stress and be scared about. And, nothing is too minor! What is your particular thing?

I like to worry about whether I am delivering what is of most value to

others. For many years I scared the daylight out of - and paralyzed myself - by worrying about whether or not I am a good enough coach or facilitator... and then I ramped it up by comparing myself to others!

Through my 25+ years in the human development field, I know most people share these common fears, (i.e. Am I good enough? And, am I as good as others?) Yet knowing that these fears are simply limiting beliefs shared by many, doesn't relieve my angst, and it won't relieve yours either! So, what does?

To answer that question, let's first take a quick peek at brain physiology as it relates to fear. Professor Paul MacLean's research into the brain gave us the Triune Brain model. Sequentially, he describes how the three parts of the brain evolved in the human being:

First - Reptilian Brain: Controls our survival functions such as respiration, circulation, and digestion, along with our compulsion to protect our territory.

Second - Limbic Brain: Controls emotion and memory, and includes the Amygdala, the part of the brain which performs a primary role in the processing and memory of emotional reactions.

When fear is present, we do not have full access to our intellectual capabilities needed for problem solving. Situations are often distorted, so much so that we cannot see what is really true, and cannot sort it all out until the fear is released from our bodies.

~Chris Lucerne





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Third - Neocortex Brain: Controls our ability to think, analyze, judge, etc.

Thanks to the work of neuroscientist Joseph Ledoux, we can now understand how the emotional brain responds to fear. The Amygdala “feels” danger 80,000 times faster than our Neocortex thinks about it, and it triggers a fear response.

According to my mentors Drs. Kathlyn and Gay Hendricks (www.hendricks.com), experts in the field of mind-body integration, there are four initial responses to fear and the correlated behaviors that present themselves in the workplace and at home:

- ◆ **Fight:** Argue, attack, blame, criticize, justify, interrupt, or get physical.
- ◆ **Flight:** Run away, avoid or get busy, change the subject, deny the problem, dismiss as trivial or illogical, or make a joke.
- ◆ **Freeze:** Stonewall, analysis-paralysis, focus on minute details, intellectualize, or get “above it all”.
- ◆ **Faint:** Get sick, confused or bored, go blank or fuzzy, get sleepy, eat or drink to “stuff it”.

These responses point to the main reason you would want to expand your emotional literacy through your professional development, and enjoy a healthy relationship with fear. Instead of reacting as described above, you could know the moment you get triggered, know how to release the fear from your body, and then know how to open yourself to more productive and enjoyable options. Instead of fear commanding you, you could command fear in a healthy way.

It is important to note that when fear is present, we do not have full access to our intellectual capabilities needed for problem solving. And, we have limited access to our intuition, wisdom and underlying truth. Situations are often distorted, so much so that we cannot see what is really true, and cannot sort it all out until the fear is released from our bodies. And in doing so, the result is less stress, greater authenticity, and a sense of being in alignment with our own sense of integrity, not to mention much higher levels of productivity, creativity, and motivation.

You may be able to deduce that leaders who create dissonance in the workplace by instilling fear in their team, are really shooting themselves in the foot because they are totally compromising the brilliance, and therefore contribution, of their team members.

It is quite possible that you may not even recognize your own fear. Or perhaps you adamantly defend against the idea that you are scared of anything. This defense is natural, and even more so in men who have been conditioned to believe that it is not okay to be scared - and, furthermore, it is a sign of weakness.

These are simply limiting beliefs that can be changed. (A whole other subject that we’ll save for another day.) Suffice it to say, it is possible that you do not recognize your fear. And if so, then this question asks to be answered...

“Tapping into a genuine state of curiosity, opens the gateway for inner wisdom and deeper truth to emerge. Here you gain access to creative answers to your more perplexing problems.”
~Chris Lucerne





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Am I willing to have a healthy relationship with my fear so that I open myself to more options?

For me, before I started my somatic coach training and developing my own body awareness, I didn't have a clue as to how often I felt scared. In fact, I would have adamantly told you I wasn't afraid of anything. As I developed more body awareness and my ability to really tune into my emotions and my deeper wisdom, much to my surprise I learned that I was scared about something almost every single day. I had simply learned how to manage over the top of it.

In my opinion, learning to finely tune into and notice the fear signals located in your body offers the most reliable way to change your experience. However, here are a few more ways to know that you are scared.

- ◆ Worrying
- ◆ Feeling anxious or agitated
- ◆ Getting angry
- ◆ Having an upset or clenched stomach
- ◆ Stressing
- ◆ Ruminating

Being willing to create a friendly and healthy relationship with your fear is the first step. And, reducing fear will radically contribute to your stress management. Here are some wonder questions you can ask yourself to begin this process:

- ◆ *Hmmm... I wonder how I can get engage in my own emotional development and create a healthy relationship with fear?*

- ◆ *Hmmm... I wonder what my signature response is to fear: Flight, fight, freeze, or faint (or a combination)?*
- ◆ *Hmmm... I wonder what would be different in my life if I knew how to fluently identify and release fear from my body?*
- ◆ *Hmmm... I wonder what limiting beliefs I have about fear? What does it mean to experience and express fear at work and at home?*

If you would like a few tools to support you in your emotional literacy exploration, go to the Products page of my website and download - *Embracing Emotion, A Key to a Vibrant Life* and *the Art of Wonder*. More products on the subject of Wonder (curiosity) and emotional literacy are being added. www.chrislucerne.com

Note: Accessing a genuine state of curiosity allows you to solve your more perplexing problems, tap into your deeper wisdom and truth, and get answers that are unknown by your cognitive mind.

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