



Unleashing your full potential

Stella James once said, "Failure is not failing. It's not trying." And what makes us unwilling to try? Jack Garwood takes us from the cradle to where we are now, taking in fear, expectations, our beliefs and our self-worth along the way.

When we are babies we learn to walk by one attempt after another, after another, after another until we finally succeed. We are not now surrounded by young children and adolescents in wheelchairs who 'gave it a shot' but, as it didn't work out, thought they would try something else instead. When we first went to school and the teacher asked us for a volunteer a forest of arms would surround us.

I now give speeches to business leaders and professional career people and ask for a volunteer. Do I see that same forest of arms? Am I invaded by an army of willing participants, all heading towards my lectern? You know the answer. Suddenly, delegates find that the pattern on the floor becomes the most fascinating of objects. Or perhaps it is time hastily to scribble some notes. One thing is certain - it is imperative to ensure there is no chance of eye contact with the presenter.

What happened along the way that smothered that free spirit within us - that part of us that is about the joy of learning, the joy of living? We may have acquired skills and knowledge, but growing up did not become a place to bloom and blossom, but a place to hide away our enthusiasm and zest for all that the world had waiting to be unveiled.

Why? The answer is fear.

The fear factor

Fear is an acronym for False Expectations Appearing Real. We

picture a world that is hostile where something unpleasant may happen. If I volunteer, that presenter will embarrass me in front of the whole of the rest of the audience; I will have to stand up there and people will look at me - and make unfavourable judgements; he may ask me something and I will look a fool if I don't know the answer.

There are several interesting aspects to what is going on here. And they are often inter-related:

- First, there are our expectations, being judgements of what the future holds.
- Second are our beliefs about ourselves and the world.
- Last is our level of self-worth.

Expectations

Holding an expectation means that we will be uninspired if we are anticipating a positive event and it comes to pass, yet we will be disappointed if it fails to materialise. With negative events we will experience fear that may express itself through anger, worry, withdrawal, self-pity and fatalism.

If we drop our expectations and accept that whatever happens 'in the moment', that allows us to make the most of the prevailing circumstances, whether negating a negative or making the most of a positive. As Shakespeare said in Julius Caesar, "There is a tide in the affairs of men that, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

Does this mean that we should not plan? No. We hold the goal for which we strive but, on the way, we

attune ourselves to events and find ways that are most efficacious to reach that ideal, rather than being beholden to, and burdened by, some preconceived notion of 'how things should work out.' By adopting this approach, life now turns from being a ponderous, predetermined drudge, to a light, dexterous, free-flowing dance.

Beliefs

Beliefs are the presuppositions within any statement that we make. "I can't do public speaking"; "My manager/staff don't understand what I have to put up with"; "Why does this always happen to me?"; "Wow, isn't the world/business/my partner a fantastic marvel?"

Our beliefs are shaped by our environment, particularly when we were young. Parents are a large influence on our beliefs so what messages are we getting here? Research shows that between the age of one and eighteen we are told "No" five times every day, and we are given positive affirmations about ourselves four times - every year.

And how uplifting is the world we live in? Switch on the television or

radio while you are reading this article. Is the impact a positive or negative one? And consider your work and colleagues. Are we giving each other

praise and encouragement throughout the day or being pressured to meet targets and performance standards imposed from outside? No wonder 70 per cent of our thoughts are purportedly negative ones.

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Beliefs become important because they are one of the filters by which we 'see' the world. In every moment we are bombarded by some two million bits of information, yet our conscious mind can only process up to nine. So, as you read this article, you are unaware of your left foot on the ground - until I mentioned it.

We delete, distort and generalise the bombardment of data coming at us and use our beliefs as the filter. In other words, we only accept data that accords with those beliefs. As Henry Ford said, "If you think you can or you think you can't, you're right." So if the world we experience is determined by our beliefs, and most of those are restricting or disempowering, we will be hard put to realise our full potential.

So how do we change our beliefs? Awareness is key. Listen to the statements you make and the assumptions (i.e. beliefs) within them. Through regular monitoring, we can note those that enhance our quality of life and those that do not. Over time, we will change, because we automatically nurture those that serve us.

However, a more proactive approach to change is through affirmations. Here one takes the new belief one wishes to acquire, e.g. "I am a confident and entertaining public speaker" and one repeats the phrase, preferably out loud, for some twenty or more times at least twice a day. Another way is to assume the new belief. If we believed that, say, "Awful things always happen", then note, perhaps by even keeping a written record, the good events that are happening, even down to waking up; not going hungry, but having a filling breakfast; the commitment of one's partner, the list goes on ...

Self-esteem

Beliefs have an effect on our self-worth or self-esteem. Some of us have difficulty looking at ourselves in the mirror and seeing a wonder of nature looking back. Our level of self-esteem results in the same consequences as betting a pile of chips at a casino. If we have a large pile of chips, we will venture out and go for

things. If we lose, "Bah, so what? There is plenty more where that came from." When our pile is small, we are parsimonious and hoard the little we have, not chancing the betting table of life.

Again, focusing on the good things in life, and the good things about one's self, will start to change one's perceptions. Also, arranging to make small changes over time that lead to a large change in one's self-perception can be very effective. "Today I will find out about toastmasters to gain skills in public speaking." "Tomorrow I will phone the local contact to find out more." Gradually these steps take us forward to become a more empowered and resourceful person. This can be enhanced by celebrating and rewarding ourselves for the steps taken. For example, when I have investigated toastmasters, I will treat myself to a lunch with a colleague in the local coffee shop, rather than staying at my desk.

With low self-esteem, we do not always recognise the compliments we receive, or fob them off with comments like "Oh, it was nothing." Looking the person in the eye and saying "Thank you" will help you feel good about yourself and encourage the person to compliment you again in the future. Also, complimenting and thanking others at every opportunity, like people at checkouts in shops, builds our self worth.

As one's self-esteem grows, we trust in our own intuition rather than accepting the judgements of, and taking the advice of, others. This is helped when we are clear about what we want, particularly if this is aligned to a sense of a greater purpose for one's life.

In conclusion, we can start to realise yet more of our potential through awareness. To quote John Whitmore: "I am able to control that I am aware of. That which I am unaware of controls me." In particular, start focusing in on expectations, beliefs and self-esteem, where you have a golden opportunity to give yourself the quality of life you truly deserve. Go to it!

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Unleashing personal potential through one-to-one telephone coaching or motivational speaking is the focus of Spire.

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Failure

The selection of quotes below summarise the topic of failure nicely. Do any of them strike a chord with you?

"Many of life's failures are people who did not realise how close they were to success when they gave up."
Thomas Edison

"For every failure, there's an alternative course of action. You just have to find it. When you come to a roadblock, take a detour."
Mary Kay Ash

"Fall seven times, Stand up eight."
Japanese proverb

"Persistent people begin their success where others end in failure."
Edward Eggleston

"A man can fail many times, but he isn't a failure until he begins to blame somebody else."
John Burroughs

"There are two kinds of failures: The person who will do nothing he/she is told, and the person who will do nothing else."
Perle Thompson

"If you want to increase your success rate, double your failure rate."
Thomas Watson, Sr

"Failures don't plan to fail; they fail to plan."
Harvey Mackay

"I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody."
Bill Cosby

"Do not look where you fell, but where you slipped."
African proverb

"Success is going from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm."
Winston Churchill

"Keep in mind that neither success nor failure is ever final."
Roger W. Babson

"It's not whether you get knocked down. It's whether you get up again."
Vince Lombardi