

What Would You Do if You WEREN'T AFRAID?

The biggest factor holding you back from success and happiness may be fear – that you create. By Glynis Horning

Getting over your fear can lead to amazing experiences...

What's your fear? Muggers, rapists, sickness, perpetual singledom or simply speaking up in public? Or is it the insidious, formless sort that sits in the pit of your stomach, disturbing your sleep?

Risk and loss are part of life, and a degree of fear is a natural part of our self-preservation skills set. But too much can hold you back, locking you in limbo while opportunities and valuable experiences sail by, says Durban psychologist Rakhi Beekrum. As your worries grow, your world shrinks: that's one of the reasons women still struggle to assert themselves as strongly as men in relationships, and to achieve as much as them in the workplace. In the latest Global Entrepreneurship Monitor survey of 69 countries, women reported being generally more afraid of failure than men – and although 126-million of them were starting or running businesses in 2012, they were less confident about their abilities than men.

We need to change our mind-set, and learn to manage and override our fears

There's an argument that part of this may be linked to the way we are wired. Faced with a stressful situation, humans have two options – fight or flight. According to a recent Australian study, men tend to fight, reacting more aggressively than women,

who are more likely to try to defuse situations and find support. The study suggests this could come down to a gene only men have: the SRY gene, which seems to affect their hearts and brains during stress, elevating blood pressure and encouraging aggression. Women's responses seem largely shaped instead by oestrogen and other pain-controlling biological opiates, which discourage aggression and incline us to 'tend and befriend'.

Arguments about different wiring can be dangerous, says psychologist Cheryl Potgieter, deputy vice chancellor and head of College: Humanities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. 'They have been used to legitimise racism, homophobia and sexism,' she says. But she does support the findings of Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, who writes in *Lean In: Women, Work, And The Will To Lead* (Random House Struik), 'Women are hindered by barriers that exist within ourselves. We hold ourselves back in ways big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, by pulling back when we should be leaning in.'

There's been a shift, and more women are becoming courageous enough to speak their minds and attain their goals, writes Sandberg. But we're still inclined to internalise society's messages that it's wrong to be outspoken, aggressive and more powerful than men, and often continue to lower our expectations of what we can accomplish, compromising our career goals to accommodate partners and the children we don't yet have.

What's the solution? We clearly need to keep working to remove the remaining external barriers to women's progress in the workplace and ensure we're treated with respect in our relationships. But just as importantly, says Potgieter, we need to change our mind-set, tear down our internal barriers, and learn to manage and override our fears.

Storm your barriers

1 SEE THEM

To become aware of your inner barriers, analyse your actions.

At work, do you 'sit at the table', as Sandberg puts it in her book, or hover in the background? How do you approach meetings: do you speak up or do you wait for someone else to ask a question so that you don't have to?

Out of the office, do you wait for someone to 'fix' things for you, or to 'find' you and discover your 'hidden worth'?

2 SEE PAST THEM

Understand what these barriers are holding you back from. This means understanding what you really want. Ask yourself what you would do if you were not afraid, says Beekrum. Would you accept that great career opportunity? Start writing that novel? Explore the world solo? Disclose your sexual orientation? Ask out that great guy in finance?

3 CLEAR THEM!

Yes, you're scared – but if the stakes are right, you need to act anyway. Buff up your courage with strong mentors, and learn negotiation techniques and how to set boundaries. Consider a life coach and assertiveness training, and for deep-rooted issues (self-esteem, shyness, needing to be liked), think about seeing a psychologist. 'You need to face and defuse your different fears,' says Beekrum. ▶

Define and Defuse Your Fears

FEAR OF FAILING

DEFINE IT You're frightened to try things in case you fail, or fall short of what you expect of yourself or imagine others expect of you.

DEFUSE IT Remind yourself that failing at times is part of succeeding – without it, how can you learn and grow? If you *do* slip, what's the worst that can happen? 'Do the research and get expert input,' says Beekrum. 'Then go with your gut.'

FEAR OF SUCCEEDING

DEFINE IT You subconsciously fear achieving your dream, perhaps because of the expectations it will raise or the attention it will bring.

DEFUSE IT If you don't pursue your dream, ask yourself how you will feel looking back on your life when you're your mother's age. Then chase the dream!

FEAR OF SPEAKING UP

DEFINE IT The thought of speaking out *anywhere* fills you with dread.

DEFUSE IT To master this skill, join an organisation such as Toastmasters International (Toastmasters74.org) or hire a life coach. You need to be able to present your ideas to get ahead.

FEAR OF BEING ALONE

DEFINE IT You're afraid to quit a job or relationship that isn't working because you're terrified of being on your own or having to start again.

DEFUSE IT 'Weigh the risks and ask yourself if, some day, you'll regret the choices you've made,' says Beekrum.

FEAR OF LOSING POPULARITY

DEFINE IT You're afraid to express yourself freely or strike out for something you want because others are against it, and you're afraid of losing friends.

DEFUSE IT If you can't be fully yourself, you can't be the best 'you'. Those who genuinely care for you will stick by you – the rest should not concern you. 'You have one chance to live,' says Beekrum. Do it in a way that makes *you* happy! ☘

FEAR OF LEADING

DEFINE IT You fear taking responsibility for outcomes that can affect you and others.

DEFUSE IT Remind yourself that others will usually be willing you to succeed. You were chosen for certain qualities – learn to wield them and shine. Get coaching or do courses to help. 'It's a myth that some people are born leaders,' says Beekrum. 'You can easily learn to lead.'

FEAR OF BEING INADEQUATE

DEFINE IT Negative experiences in your past or negative social messages can set you up for this fear, however skilled and competent you are.

DEFUSE IT Build on your skills, and seek emotional support and counselling. 'Refuse to let others define who you are,' says Beekrum.

FEAR OF BEING VULNERABLE

DEFINE IT You fear exposing your hopes, fears and dreams to others.

DEFUSE IT It takes courage, but if you open up little by little, you will discover that it disarms and warms others, helping them relate to you.



Sibabaliwe Nhize Nota, 19, waitress, Durban

'I'm scared of making decisions – I wait tables

at a cool restaurant with great, helpful people, but I'm not sure where I'm going and what I should be doing with my life.'



Nokwazi Slindile Sithole, 25, marketing student, Durban

'I'm afraid of being

disowned by my family because of who I am – because of my sexual orientation and lifestyle.'



Nirupa Gopidayerl, 25, architect, Durban

'I fear failure. I've been given the

opportunity to head up a huge project and I jumped at it – but I worry about messing up.'



Bethany Lewitt, 23, fashion stylist, Durban

'I have a fear of not fulfilling my passions.

Styling is something I love ... but what if I don't crack it?'