

# Turning fear into an ally

Are your fears helping you or holding you back?



“I can’t do it,” I said as I peered over the edge of the gorge and saw the river almost 400 feet below. The trail on which we were backpacking had abruptly ended in a sheer drop, continuing on the other side.

Stretched across the gorge was a rope bridge in the shape of a V, where the bottom rope for my feet was the thickness of my wrist and two smaller ropes for use as handholds were placed waist-high on either side. “I can’t do it,” I said more urgently to my uncle, who smiled back at my terrified 11-year-old face.

“OK,” he said, “but before we take the

began to list the possibilities, from the rope breaking to crashing on the rocks below, I sensed a change: I wasn’t as afraid as I had been when the thoughts were simply racing through my mind.

Then he asked me to look across the gorge and imagine exactly what it would be like to cross the bridge safely. This exercise was a little harder, but as I began to describe the feeling of stepping on the bridge, the cool moisture rising up from the river below, the thrill of being suspended in mid-air, and finally, the exhilaration and pride as my foot touched solid ground on the far side of

and for them, the voice of fear overshadows every other thought. In this state, they are paralyzed, turning away from every new challenge and opportunity. Others block the voice of their fear completely, refusing to even acknowledge it. This is like running with your eyes closed — you can avoid feeling your fears, but you may also fall into a deep gorge.

We need to listen to our fears, but we must also weigh them against the passion and hope of our outcome. Fear can be a good teacher when it warns us that we are not ready for something.

But fear can also be a poor judge of readiness, because it judges only on what we have done before, not on what we are capable of doing for the first time. Ultimately, we must decide whether our fear is helping us or holding us back.

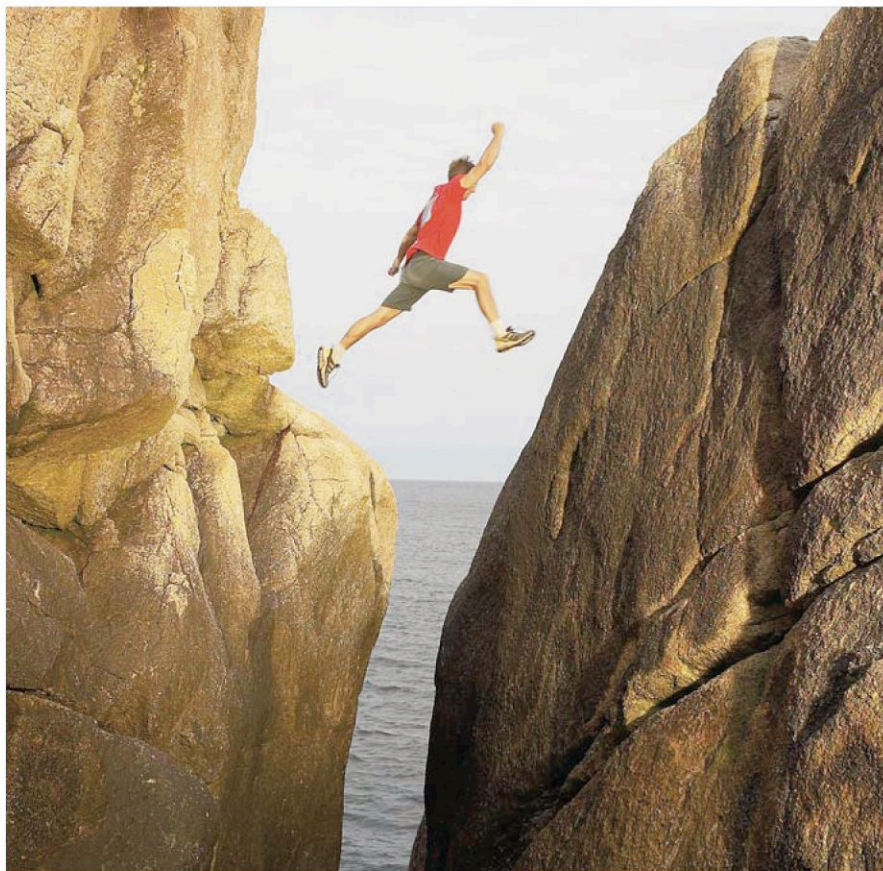
What are you afraid of? Leaving the safety and predictability of a job you’ve outgrown? Taking your company or your team in a bold new direction? Confronting an emotionally-charged issue with an employee or co-worker?

Listen to the voice of your fear. Make a list of everything that could happen. Bringing your fears out onto paper will help you see them more realistically. But then shift your thinking to all the positive, hope-filled outcomes you can imagine and add them to the list. If you do this, vividly and deeply examining both fear and hope, you will always know what to do.

In the end, your fear will either be a welcome warning that enables you to avoid real danger, or it will simply be the small voice inside that resists the unknown, a voice that we must acknowledge and move beyond if we are to grow and attempt great things.

Are there bridges of your own you need to cross? Overcome your fears and take the first courageous step. The greatest achievements in the business of life are waiting for you.

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long trail around the gorge, I want you to try something.” I didn’t know it then, but I was about to learn one of the greatest lessons in the business of life — how to turn my fear into an ally.

My uncle asked me to imagine everything bad that could happen if I tried to cross the bridge. It was easy, because every possible catastrophe was playing through my mind in Technicolor. But as I

the gorge, I felt something shift inside me.

“Now,” he said, “what do you want to do?” Without a moment’s hesitation, I said, “I want to go across the bridge.”

What had changed? I still felt the fear of all that could happen on that bridge, but I had learned to listen to my fears in the context of my hope.

Some people listen only to their fears,