

# Fears Force Us to Underachieve



TAKE  
CONTROL  
OF YOUR  
ANXIETY,  
OR IT WILL  
CONTROL  
YOU.

IN EACH CASE, to grow into the type of financial advisor we wish to become or to ask a client for a referral, we need to take risks. Each day we have to move through a barrier of fear. We are afraid of looking stupid, being weak, of what others will think (including our associates), of being less than perfect, of being rejected, of failing, and the No. 1 fear of experienced financial advisors (as odd as it may sound): the fear of becoming too successful, of becoming too successful too soon, or of achieving extraordinary levels of success without having to pay the price.

From birth to death fear travels with us. It excites us, holds us back, traps us and, in a curious way, waits inside us to challenge us and lead us on to bigger parts of ourselves. It keeps us from what we want, but it shows us what we want the most. It can paralyze us or it can motivate us to prospect and ask our clients for referrals. The question of how we as financial advisors can cut through our fears and close the gap between our potential and our performance is, I believe, the single most important challenge we must solve. It may be the

No. 1 reason why so few financial advisors succeed, as well as why so many experienced financial advisors underachieve or find themselves stuck on production plateaus.

**We Are All Afraid** It's possible that our first experience in the world is fraught with fear; that we are pushed from the womb, from a world that is soft, warm, quiet, and comforting, into a nightmare of bright lights, harsh sounds, cold air and physical pain. We are born fearing loud noises, sudden unexpected movements and falling. During adolescence separation anxiety is a major problem.

We all have fear in common. Often the way in which a person deals with his fear becomes the measure of his life. If we are lucky, we are aware of our fears, and when those moments of choice come, those moments of reaching out or withdrawing, we can choose based on our own instincts of what is best for us.

Every one of your fears has been learned by you in order to protect your emotional system. Too many financial advisors have grown up with the fear that if they step out of

the carefully prescribed limits they have set for themselves, they will be judged and experience one kind of hell or another. Fear, guilt, and guarded behavior are a good possibility when one places too much reliance on the value systems and intent of an authority figure, e.g., your boss or father.

When we live in fear of what someone else will say about us or do to us when we act on our own instincts, it is impossible to develop a sense of self-confidence or self-worth.

Last year I asked a group of financial advisors to list the first five fears they had experienced during the previous 10 days. The following are a few

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of their comments.

Check off the ones that you have experienced during the last 2 weeks:

- “I’m afraid of being wrong.”
- “I’m afraid a prospect will ask me a question and I will not know the answer.”
- “I’m afraid of making a follow-up call to an angry client.”
- “I’m afraid of rejection.”
- “I’m afraid of failing.”
- “I’m afraid I cannot repeat my successes.”
- “I’m afraid I will embarrass my client if I ask him for a referral.”
- “I’m afraid of speaking in public.”
- “I am fearful of angry clients.”
- “I believe I have to be perfect.”

Success, failure, rejection, embarrassment, change are all fears that make it difficult to impossible to maximize your performance. Fear is:

- A knot in your stomach
- A pounding heart
- Feelings of guilt and worry.
- Forgetfulness.
- Performance paralysis
- Escape

Though it can take many forms, fear is the emotion you have to learn how to control if you are going to maximize your performance. It has shown itself to be stronger than bribes, threats from management or even having your car repossessed.

We acquire more fears as we age and the fears we have had for years actually increase in strength as the years go by. So, if you had a little anxiety as a youth when you were asked to speak to your elementary class, as an adult that fear may create total performance paralysis if anyone suggests you conduct a sales training meeting. Just the thought of asking a client for a referral may create one of a number of psychosomatic illnesses. Fear inhibits all of our prospecting and client-development activities.

**Fears are complicated and confusing** It is not always clear what our fears are, where they came from, how we got them, or how we actually nurture them and increase their control over our behavior. Fears can spring directly from one intense rejection or a number of low-level rejections. A financial advisor may develop a fear of asking friends and clients for referrals and simultaneously be fearless when cold calling or talking to strangers. A financial advisor may be completely at ease in talking to people with a mid-level of net worth and experience performance paralysis at the thought of talking to a high-net-worth prospect. Returning a phone call to a high-net-worth client, whom you believe is going to be angry, can generate so much anxiety that you might procrastinate the call for a day or more, and

lose a night of sleep as a result.

Performance anxiety is more general and vague than a specific fear. It has a tugging, nagging quality about it that is sometimes subtle, sometimes more direct. Some psychologists call it “an early warning danger signal.” Others think of it in more positive ways.

Many financial advisors have said they lose focus as their anxiety increases. Bob W., a 38-year-old financial advisor, called it “a nameless fear that creeps into me” and noted it seems to motivate him some days and depresses him other days. Sherry D., a 44-year-old senior vice president said, “I’m always aware of my anxiety when it’s time to make prospecting calls. My mind wanders; my energy, motivation and confidence deteriorate. It seems that the harder I try, the more frustrated I become. I know what I want to do, but I’m unable to do it. The anxiety in me feels like a huge lump in my throat. I don’t know what I am afraid of so I don’t know how to avoid or defeat it.”

A little anxiety is actually a source of motivation. When anxiety becomes self-defeating is when it increases to the level that it begins to seep into the time periods when you want to produce. That’s the point it begins to control your life. Frequently a vague, but powerful anxiety can take over your body, mind and emotions. It can develop into sizeable

## PERSONAL COACH: DR. AARON HEMSLEY

proportions. When you are highly concerned about the possibility of a rejection or a failure, or hypersensitive about what your client or center of influence will think about you if you ask for a referral, and when there is little connection between the things you're worried about and what is really happening, then performance anxiety is a problem and it is time to seek professional help.

We might say that performance anxiety become problematic or harmful to us when it goes unchallenged. We cannot help but know anxiety because there are times in our lives when, like it or not, we are going to have to ask for referrals, call clients and set up confidential fact finding interviews. To succumb to the anxiety then, to fail to control it, is to let it

gain additional control over your ability to perform.

We cannot know life, we can only move toward it. We cannot be fully prepared. We can only try to know the alienated and unconscious parts of ourselves. Whether or not that anxiety helps or hinders our performance is completely dependent upon the type of psychological training we have experienced. Psychological training will automatically turn performance anxiety into an exhilarating experience. Without effective psychological training that same anxiety will be experienced as debilitating and self-destructive.

Make no mistake that if you choose to deal with the negative consequences of performance anxiety, it will deal with you. The more you

ignore it, the more control it will take over your life. If you choose to deal with anxiety by denial or rationalization it is possible that your "choice" will force you to hit a production plateau and you may remain on that plateau for years. Unable to stand the tension and conflict that intense anxiety brings with it, you may automatically begin to underachieve. The solution, of course, is to participate in a psychological training program that teaches you how to identify, confront and eliminate anxiety. When that happens you will automatically begin to prospect for high-net-worth clients. The enemy is rationalization, denial, excuses and blaming. The solution is action. R

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