

geoff thompson

fear

the friend of
exceptional people

FEAR – THE FRIEND OF EXCEPTIONAL PEOPLE

Geoff Thompson

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About the Author

Geoff Thompson claims that his biological birth date is 1960, though his hair-line goes right back to the First World War.

He has worked as a floor sweeper, chemical worker, pizza maker, road digger, hod carrier, martial arts instructor, bricklayer, picture seller, delivery driver and nightclub bouncer before giving up 'proper work' in 1992 to write full time.

He is now a bestselling author, BAFTA-winning screenwriter, magazine columnist, playwright and novelist.

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Thank you very much to Rachael Osborne for doing
a fabulous job on editing this book and keeping
me in grammatical shape.

I would like to dedicate this book to my beautiful daughter
Jennie because I love her with all my heart,
and to my most beautiful lady Sharon,
with all my love and big kisses.

Contents

Introduction.....	13
Chapter One – What is Fear?.....	17
Chapter Two – The First Step.....	31
Chapter Three – A Few Home Truths.....	35
Chapter Four – What Are You Afraid of?.....	42
Chapter Five – Comfort Zones.....	51
Chapter Six – Step Two.....	60
Chapter Seven – The Inner Opponent.....	68
Chapter Eight – The Treatment.....	73
Chapter Nine – Principles of Exposure Therapy.....	77
Chapter Ten – The Fear Pyramid.....	93
Chapter Eleven – Visualisation.....	103
Chapter Twelve – Dealing with Killjoys.....	108
Chapter Thirteen – Hurdles and Pitfalls.....	114
Chapter Fourteen – Interviews.....	122
Interview 1: Peter Mathews.....	122
Interview 2: Andy Davis.....	133
Interview 3: Pat Leemy.....	151
Interview 4: Jim MacDonnell.....	158
Interview 5: Robin Horsfall.....	170
Epilogue.....	182

Introduction

'We are generally afraid to become that which we can glimpse in our most perfect moments; under the most perfect conditions, under conditions of greatest courage, we enjoy and even thrill to the god-like possibilities we see in ourselves at such peak moments, and yet simultaneously shiver with weakness, awe and fear before the same possibilities.'

Abraham Maslow



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Working one's way through a life that is fraught with intangible confrontation, in an adrenal-loaded body that was designed for conflicts of a physical nature (fight or flight), it is a small wonder that most people go to their graves with their best songs still in them. Evidently the adrenal syndrome is better suited to mortal conflict (fighting or escaping the sabre-toothed tiger) and is left wanting in a time when confrontation may be a boardroom meeting, high mortgage rates or a row with your partner.

Tangible confrontation on a base level – where the adrenal rush adds speed, power and anaesthesia to response – has been succeeded by confrontations of a rather vague nature; a run in with the boss, perhaps a business decision, even traffic jams are enough to trigger our rather sensitive adrenals into action. In these situations adrenalin is released but not utilised because neither fight nor flight is necessary. It would be unreasonable and antisocial (though often tempting) to strike a vindictive boss and unwise (though very common) to run away from confrontations in the home. So, very often, we find ourselves infused with adrenalin that can find no physical (or behavioural) release from our bodies.

This creates an inner pressure (and an eventual explosion – like the cork of a shaken champagne bottle) that can have a devastating and life-changing effect. When the explosion does finally occur it is usually without warning or provocation.

Concurrently the reasoning process, misreading the feeling of adrenalin for fear, builds a subconscious periphery that imprisons the part of us that wants to achieve. Fear is what keeps people ordinary.

It is said that knowledge dispels fear. Have a good look around you and have a good look at yourself. How many people do you know

INTRODUCTION

who are truly happy with their lot? Society is full of underachievers: not because we lack potential or courage, but because we lack an understanding of our own bodily reactions to confrontation. Adrenalin often catalyses panic, causing plans to be aborted or changed for fear of the consequences, or fear of fear itself.

Twenty-five centuries ago General Sun Tzu said, 'If you know your enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the outcome of a hundred battles.' Knowing yourself is understanding that fear is both a friend and an enemy. It's OK to be scared, we all feel fear, all of us. And we need it to keep our species alive. In this sense fear is a friend, it can be controlled and it can be employed as a life-changing fuel. It is only when we panic that fear becomes the mind killer.

Ian Botham succinctly advised us that 'life is not a rehearsal'. We have one chance to do something great, something worthwhile, something life-changing – and this is it. Most people are living lives that they don't want to live. Why? Because they are imprisoned in safe bet comfort zones that they dare not exit for fear of failure, success, change, risk, ridicule or whatever. They dream of better jobs, happier relationships, nicer cars, success and fulfilment but those ideals are seldom realised because lying ominously between fancy and fact is FEAR.

The blame for failure is frequently off-loaded with the *excuse syndrome*. 'If it wasn't for... I could really do something with my life.'

Most of us sit in the driveway of life watching it go by, too scared to pull out into the traffic, frightened to use fuel, and afraid in case we crash. Many have the dynamite needed to explode into an adventurous life but lack the courage and understanding to light the fuse.

FEAR – THE FRIEND OF EXCEPTIONAL PEOPLE

What most fail to realise is that whether you are facing a big business deal, a showdown with the boss or a couple of muggers up an alleyway you will feel fear. It is as much its unexpectedness as the feeling itself that turns men to mice.

When life presents us with a confrontation of any kind we will feel fear and its manifestation carries many disguises with varying degrees of intensity. It will always be present.

The purpose of this book is to help break down the prison walls by educating people in the mechanics of fear. How to recognise, understand and subsequently control fear and employ it as an ally.

This is not a book about phobias, though the symptoms and remedies herein are paralleled with those of the phobic condition. When dealing with fear at most levels the response of exposure therapy is the same. One systematically confronts a fear until desensitisation occurs.

Fear never goes away!

I learned very early on in my practice that whilst we can lose a fear of a certain thing or situation we will never get rid of fear completely, it will always be there whilst we continue to expand. Rather we learn to recognise and control fear, deeming it a powerful tool that will aid us in our response to confrontation.

The intent of this book is to allow people to see themselves from the inside out so that panic is replaced by understanding, and discomfort by relief.

The world is your oyster; it is only you holding yourself back.

Chapter One

What is Fear?

'The coward and the hero both feel the same feelings [of fear], the only difference between the two is that the hero handles the feelings and the coward does not.'

Cus Damatio (trainer to Mike Tyson)

What is fear? How can one define it? The English dictionary informs us that fear is 'an unpleasant, often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger.'

In layman's terms, when the brain senses danger it triggers adrenalin, a human turbocharge brought on by awareness and anticipation to aid fight or flight. This unpleasant strong emotion often causes terror immobilisation, or the freeze syndrome, in the recipient. Adrenalin is a little like fuel injection or turbodrive in a sports car and action is the metaphoric accelerator.

By engaging the clutch in a car and pressing the accelerator you utilise the turbo and the car moves at a faster speed. However, if you sit at the traffic lights pressing your foot on the accelerator without engaging the clutch, there will be no movement and fuel will be wasted.

Similarly, by engaging action (fight or flight) when we feel fear, we utilise the turbodrive of adrenalin, and trigger a fast and speedy spontaneous response. However, if action is not engaged and panic sets in, the excess energy will overwhelm us.

Positive Body Accelerator

Your positive body accelerator is action. When you act (engage the clutch), by confronting your fear, adrenalin is utilised positively, adding vigour to your response.

Negative Body Accelerator

Your negative body accelerator is panic, caused when the reasoning process mistakes adrenalin for fear. Excess adrenalin is triggered by panic (but not utilised) and the body is flooded, leaving the recipient overwhelmed and often frozen in the face of ensuing danger.

If you find yourself in a confrontational situation and do not or cannot act, increasing panic will trigger more adrenalin. Like the car, you will be pressing the accelerator without engaging the clutch.

In the gap between confrontation and action adrenalin can be controlled with diaphragmatic breathing (deep controlled breathing through the nose). This triggers what is known as the parasympathetic nervous system, which slows the release of adrenalin. Also, the knowledge that it is OK to be scared and that fear is a natural occurrence can offer great solace when the butterflies are invading your intestinal tract and your kneecaps are doing an involuntary bossanova.

In primeval days when mankind had to fight to live and eat, the feeling of fear was an everyday occurrence that would have felt as natural and as common as eating or drinking. In today's society, where confrontation is less tangible, the act of fighting or running for our lives is no longer a part of everyday living. So when a situation arises that causes the adrenalin to flow, we

WHAT IS FEAR?

neither welcome, use or like it because, unlike our prehistoric ancestors, we are unfamiliar with it. We panic. Psychologists call it the fight or flight syndrome.

In moments of danger or confrontation the body releases chemicals from the adrenal gland that hit and go through the bloodstream like a speeding train, preparing the body for fight or flight, deeming it stronger, faster and partially, sometimes completely, anaesthetised to pain. The more demanding the situation, the bigger the build-up and adrenalin release: the bigger the release, the better the performance (running or fighting). However, by the same count, the bigger the build-up and release, the harder it is to control.

Subsequently, because the adrenalin often lies unutilised in the body, it builds up like a pressure cooker and explodes into other aspects of our lives. This could be in the car as road-rage, or in the home by shouting at your partner or children.

If the adrenalin is not pushed outward it often turns inward and becomes anxiety, a constant background shadow that can creep quite easily into depression. We become afraid of the feeling of fear, and the very act of feeling afraid triggers more adrenalin and more fear. You end up on a downward spiral of fear and adrenalin. This exhausts the mind and confusion and depression can be the result.

The worst part of this cycle is normally the very first time that fear is felt about something. People tend to allow that first encounter to overwhelm them and then live in dread of it happening again. Of course this dread becomes a fear in its own right and we often end up more frightened of the feelings associated with fear than the actual object of our fear.