

**YOU DON'T NEED TO BE FEARLESS, JUST FEAR LESS**

Aimee Kimball, PhD, Owner, [KPEX Consulting](#)

I would be shocked if there was anyone reading this who hasn't experienced fear over the past few months. Whether it is fear over your health, your job, your family, or your financial future, there is a lot to be afraid of right now. As my colleague, JF Menard, who works with the Cirque Du Soleil put it, *the key to greatness isn't in being fearless, it's fearing less*. Think about that statement for a second.

People who can perform under pressure aren't immune to pressure, they just have the ability to experience less of it. For some it's natural, but for many it's because they train to fear less in situations that could cause others to panic. Elite athletes have drills to prepare for the end of close competitions. Surgeons complete years of training to prepare for when lives are on the line. Performers in all domains train their minds to cope with the anxiety that comes with high expectations and uncomfortable situations.

Right now, a common fear for a lot of people seems to be having to return to their office as businesses reopen. They fear returning too soon and getting ill. They fear that the new normal will be so strange and uncomfortable they won't like it. They fear leaving their family behind. I wish I had a crystal ball that could predict how things will be so I can tell everyone it will all work out. Alas, I don't. What I do have are mental tools that can alleviate the fear and downgrade it to concern.

**Trust people.** I know this is a really hard thing to do right now but the way I see it no one really wants to get sick and no employer wants their employees to get COVID-19. Most companies are painstakingly exploring all options to do the very best they can to assure everything is being disinfected as well as humanly possible. No one is saying, "Come back to work, the virus is gone, let's go back to business as usual." I've been to coffee shops, grocery stores, and have picked up take out, and I get a little anxious because I don't know these people or their hygiene habits. What I do believe is that the people working don't want to get sick any more than I do, so I make a cautious decision to trust them. I ignore the noise and focus on the fact that generally people look out for each other and I choose to believe that no one is intentionally putting me in harm's way.

**Talk about it.** Talk about your fears with others. Ask the questions that keep you up at night. You don't need to apologize or feel weird for asking how often the bathrooms are being cleaned or if anyone has been in your office in the last 24 hours. You don't need to feel awkward for asking a co-worker who she has been in contact with the last few weeks. You don't need to feel guilty for asking your spouse to wash his hands or your mother-in-law to wear a mask. You feel how you feel, you don't need others to validate that. By asking the questions and talking about your fears, fear ceases being this nebulous thing that grows bigger and bigger. By naming your fear and the emotion it elicits, you regain control over it. (ie: "I am hesitant to go to the office because I don't want to get sick and then get my family

sick. I would feel really guilty if that happened.") Once you understand the underlying emotions you can address those. In this example, it's not the illness you fear, it's the guilt. This decreases the fear of contracting the virus and allows you to explore the emotion you're actually afraid of instead.

**Define acceptable risk.** When I work with athletes coming back from injury who are afraid of getting reinjured, I often say one thing "Don't play again." They look at me like I'm nuts because they obviously want to get back out there. I remind them that the only way they can prevent injury is by not playing. For that matter, they shouldn't leave the house because they could slip and fall. They shouldn't play Xbox either because they could hurt their thumb. If an athlete wants to compete, they also need to be willing to accept the risk that comes with it. I'll say the same to you, if you don't want to get the virus, don't leave your house. Don't interact with others. Don't order anything. How much longer do you think you could handle that? If you want back in the game, you have to be willing to accept the risk that comes with it. Athletes don't rush back early, they come back when physically and mentally ready to do so. They have the doctors clear them to return to play. The same can be applied to this situation. For you, are you willing to accept a little risk to get back to doing what you love? I'm not telling you to lick doorknobs, sit in a room with someone who is coughing, or shake hands and not wear a mask. What I'm suggesting is use your best judgement, listen to the experts, and decide how to take some baby steps to return until you feel ready to handle maximum minutes again.

**Do I need to be this afraid?** In working with Cirque athletes as they fly across the tent, ski jumpers, and a variety of other athletes, JF Menard asks clients not *if* they should be afraid, but if they should be *THIS* afraid. It permits them to experience a concern rather than an anxiety-ridden fear. So, when it's time to return, don't worry about if you should be afraid (because it's ok if you are), ask yourself if your level of fear is in-line with the odds of whatever you're afraid of happening.

**Summary** When my kids hit an obstacle and want to cave to fear, I ask them to tell me about some of the coolest things they've done: going down a waterslide, riding a bike, etc. Before doing any of these things they hesitated and wanted to back away. As I mom, I was thrilled they were scared because it meant their little brain was doing its job. Your brain is hard-wired to keep you safe, to make you think twice before doing anything that could hurt you. Fear is just your brain telling you to think twice and make sure this is the decision you want to make. Don't let emotion drive decisions. You get to make the choice to tell your brain, "Yes, this is a scary thing, but I want to see what's on the other side of this fear." The best things in life require risk, courage, and trust. They don't necessitate you being fearless, they happen when you fear less.

***Make it Great!***