A person with long hair

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Moving Beyond Fear of Success

April 25, 2021 Hello friends.

I hope you had an amazing week.

This is the last week of our Getting Unstuck series. So, if you’re just joining us for the first time, I encourage you to go back to Episode 13 and listen to all five.

In this series, we went deep into all the ways our brain keeps us stuck.

Because you know, in my practice we focus on something called causal coaching and so we use methods that get right to the root cause. We don’t spend time on the symptoms or behaviors. We deal with brain science because everything we do or don’t do first starts with your conscious and unconscious thoughts and beliefs about yourself and your ability to do it.

And THAT is what drives the things you do and the results you get.

The coaching methods I use blend the latest in cognitive psychology, positive psychology, and neuroscience.

These are the same tools elite athletes and peak performers in business use.

Because THEY have access to experts who’ve taught them that it’s not enough to focus on strategies or taking smart actions – you need that too, of course – but the REAL SECRET is making sure your brain is working FOR you. Not AGAINST you.

And the brain is a tricky thing. We don’t always recognize its attempts to mislead us or sabotage us.

So, this week, we’re tackling the last in the Getting Unstuck series and it’s about Fear of Success.

And this is one that we don’t hear about as often as we should. I think it’s because it’s not logical so to most people it feels like a made-up problem.

I mean, why would anyone be afraid of success, right?

Fear of failure, sure.

And that’s what we talked about last week. Failure is scary, it costs us a great deal and we make it mean all kinds of bad things about us and our possibilities.

But what’s scary about success?

That’s what we’re all working for right?

Right.

BUTTTTTTT…as we’re about to find out, there’s a whole lot more to it than that.

So, let’s dive in. This one is going to be interesting.

Let’s start with a definition. In the simplest of terms, Fear of Success involves the fear of GETTING the very things that you want.

What?!!?

I know. I know. It makes no sense logically.

But as you dig into it, there are actually three big themes that come up around Fear of Success.

1. **Fear of Isolation** that comes from the success. This is about the fear of what it means to be “different” from friends and family. It’s our primitive fear of being cast out of the tribe. It can also be in part concern around what it would mean to surpass someone that you admire. This is all about the fear of how your success will change your relationships with others that you know and love. And maybe a little about the guilt associated with WANTING a level of success that moves you away from people you love.
   1. Will I still have friends, or will I be all alone?
   2. Why can’t I just settle for what everyone else has and is?
2. **Fears around the consequences of having the success**. This is about the new situations you’ll be in that you might not be equipped to deal with. And it can also be about the fact that being more successful makes you more of a target. So, with that comes concerns over what other people will think about you and/or say about you. And it’s about your own concerns about whether you’ll be ‘good enough.’
   1. Will I be able to handle it?
   2. What if I’m not good enough?
3. **Fears around your ability to keep the success**. Many times, we know we can be successful in getting the thing we want, but we worry that if we DO achieve the success, we’ll be a one hit wonder. That we won’t be able to duplicate it. And then we catastrophize (which we talked about last week) and worry we’ll end up homeless and living under a bridge.
   1. What if I can’t KEEP being successful?
   2. Will I lose everything? (my job, my money, my business, my family, and friends)?

Bottom line, when you strive to become and do more than maybe the family you were raised in or the friends you have, the stakes get raised.

The success you want will always comes more responsibility. And with more responsibility there comes more pressure. More work. More demands. More expectations. More things to learn. More obstacles.

Another way the stakes get raised is that more success means doing more things you’ve never done before and that brings an increased possibility of…you guessed it…failure. But not regular failure that you might fear now, but failure with higher stakes. Next level failure. Failing when you’re more visible. When you have more to lose.

The problem with Fear of Success is that many times we don’t understand that’s what is really happening.

We just think we don’t “feel” comfortable going after that new thing. But we’re not really in touch with the fact that under Fear of success is characterized by emotions like:

* Guilt – over what it means to ‘want’ a next level of success
* Anxiety – over whether we’ll be able to ‘deal’ with having or being a success and the increased visibility, expectations and inevitable criticisms that come from it
* Worry – over whether we’ll be able to equal or maintain the success again
* Fear – over possibility losing the love of family and friends

And because we’re feeling these more negative emotions, we self-sabotage or hold ourselves back without really understanding WHY we’re doing those things, like:

* Setting low goals – We set the bar low so we’re not really challenged and can’t really BE a success
* Procrastinating – We stall long enough so the opportunity passes
* Perfectionism – You shoot for perfection and since that’s never really attainable, you fall short and use that as a reason not to try again.
* Quitting – You quit right when you’re on the verge of success.

Does any of this sound familiar? If so, you might be wondering where you start when it comes to understanding what’s happening for you when it comes to success.

So I’ve got an exercise for you to go through. Let’s make this interactive, so hit the pause for a minute while you grab a pen and paper or get your laptop.

1. Define your version of success:
   1. I would be successful if I\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (then list them all, one thought per line). It could be dollars earned, title, possessions, relationship, family.
2. Get in touch with the emotional implications of the success you want.
   1. Pick the one you most want from the list. Imagine yourself having it.
      1. What one word emotion does it bring up for you? (Does it excite you? Scare you?)
      2. What would change about your life for the better if you had it?
      3. What might change about your life for the worse if you had it?
3. Identify what’s getting in the way of the success you want.
   1. Now, when you look at that thing, ask yourself the following:
      1. What would have to change for you to get this?
      2. What feels uncomfortable about potentially having this?
      3. What are you putting off doing that would get me there?
      4. Why are you avoiding doing those things?

On this one it’s very important to fully explore how you define success and what’s getting in your way. For example, your habitual procrastination might not just an annoying little habit. It might be your own form of self-sabotage.

The good news is that Fear of Success can be overcome by choosing new thoughts about what it would mean to have, do and be everything you dream of. Some potential thoughts might be:

* I welcome the responsibility that comes with the success I want.
* I can help more people with the added income I will earn.
* I’ll always be surrounded by friends and family.
* I don’t have to be perfect to be successful.
* I’m capable of not only achieving success but of maintaining it.

You might not believe these things at first but through self-coaching and using some of our cognitive-based tools you can shift from fearing the change associated with next level growth to embracing it.

The last thing I want to leave you with is this.

When you’re in a phase of our career or business that’s about vertical next level growth, it’s normal to experience uncertainty.

That comes from the discomfort or uncertainty about who we’re becoming vs. the comfort or certainty of who we’ve always been.

That’s because most of us spend most of our time thinking about and examining what’s happened in our past. Even if it’s not what we want for our future, we KNOW what it is because we’ve lived it or we ARE LIVING it NOW.

Our future hasn’t happened yet.

And when we’re going for new levels of achievement, it makes our future even more uncertain. But it doesn’t have to. Another way of looking at this is about learning how to purposefully shape Future You.

And that’s what we’re going to talk about next week.

So, until then, explore your Fear of Success or any of the other Fears we’ve discussed in this series. Know what has been holding you back so you can let it go and get ready to start molding the exact version of YOU that you choose to be in the Future.

Until next time, make it a great week my friends.