

Frozen

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By David A. Case

“My anxiety level is through the roof!” That response came from a simple question, “How are you doing?” Then I asked the others in the room, “How many of you struggle with anxiety?” Nearly every hand went up.

Anxiety is a form of fear, and fear is universal. Fear is visualizing some form of pain or negative outcome that might happen in the future. We all do it on a regular basis. Sometimes, it’s actually a good thing. We are able to visualize the negative consequences of staying on the path we are on, and we can use that anticipation of negative outcomes as a motivation to change our behavior. With a change in behavior comes a change in outcomes for the better.

At the simplest level, fear is visualizing. Those who struggle the most with anxiety are those who have a vivid imagination. Our greatest strength is always our greatest weakness.

Someone who is gifted at visualizing scenarios can be unable to act when that gift is focused on the negative outcomes of a situation. Instead of fight or flight, they freeze. Their imagination isn’t frozen; It is still very active. They’re just not able to force themselves to act in a way that might change the outcomes in a more positive direction. When fear is heightened to the level of anxiety, the person is generally in a sort of locked down state, shaking on the inside, doing nothing (or at least nothing positive) on the outside.

So, how do we break out of this bondage to fear? The simplest answer is to just act. Almost any action that is not completely foolish will be better than staying in that frozen place. The person who is frozen struggles with, “What if I do the wrong thing?” I often respond with “Just do something, even if it is wrong.”

Obviously, I don’t mean for them to be reckless, and to go use drugs, for example. That would be a foolish action that would make things much worse. Most of the time, people have enough sense to know that they should not do the totally foolish thing. And in the example of drug use, what will cause a person to use drugs is inaction. After they stay in their frozen state for too long, they will hit a level of hopelessness where they are going to use, period. Any action at an earlier point might have helped keep them from using.

“Do something, even if it is wrong.” Saying that may be dangerous, but there is even more danger when a fear gripped person does nothing. Most of the time, that “do something” should be talking to someone who is in a healthier place. Getting advice. Then acting. Unfortunately, the people most in need of good advice often have no one healthy anywhere on their radar. For those people, good advice is to find some different friends, or connect with an organization that will provide positive support.

Sitting and stewing on the negative is the worst thing a person struggling with anxiety can do. Just about any kind of action will at least move the churning imagination away from the most negative places. Choosing to “just go on with life” can be a good choice; most fears never end up coming to pass. Staying in a frozen state generally causes bad things to happen sooner and with more negative outcomes than if the person had simply gone to work, or fixed a meal, or taken a walk, or just about any action that has some positive value.

Do something. For anyone struggling with anxiety, this is the first step.

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