



High Performing Business Owner Derailed by Fear

By Nancy Capistran, PCC, CPC

Experiencing fear is human. When we are grappling with our own demons, it is better to be in the driver's seat than in the passenger's seat: we need to acknowledge, respect, and own our fears. Those who are looking to ascend to their next level of success need to move beyond timid actions by first understanding what their deficiencies are, and then learning, practicing, and developing in those specific areas. Fears live in our head, but they are prohibitively potent in the ways that they can hold us back. Getting specific about what is actually freezing you up is an awareness that is critical to moving forward. If you are to heal, you will need to make peace with yourself and your situation. When you are able to be honest with yourself about what specifically is hampering your progress, you can begin to conquer your fears.

While I was in transit to a client meeting, I received an unexpected call from my client's husband letting me know that my client had just been in a very bad car accident. He went on to explain that her vehicle had been hit by a police officer's cruiser while the officer was responding to a call.

The law enforcement agent had a red light at the intersection. He did not have his emergency lights or siren active at the time of the motor vehicle impact. My client had a green light and was proceeding through the intersection when the collision happened. The primary responsibility of a police officer is to safeguard the public even when responding to a call. Instead, he had come barreling through the intersection at an incredible rate of speed that, upon investigation, revealed his skid marks being at least 30 feet long. The force that he hit her car with was so strong that her vehicle was propelled onto a neighboring street before she was able to finally gain enough control to bring it to a full stop. Two weeks after this intensely traumatic event, she received word from her insurance company that she was found to be 100% not at fault.

She knew from the force with which her head had hit the steering wheel that there would be repercussions. Unfortunately, the ER doctor at her local hospital didn't take the time to pursue the extent of her injuries, so she suffered in silence from a variety of symptoms without knowing what to attribute them to. Nightmares forced her to relive the trauma of the accident daily. She suffered from dizziness, frequent headaches, exhaustion, lack of appetite, and a general feeling of "fuzziness." Reading and writing emails became challenging for a woman who had been a creative writing major in college. The rental car sat in her driveway as she tried to conduct the majority of her business by phone. She chose not to mention any of these issues to anyone for fear of alarming her family and damaging her credibility in business. It took an episode of extreme dizziness followed by a fall down a flight of carpeted stairs before she came face to face with exactly what she was suffering from. Her husband was able to take her to the ER at one of Boston's world-class hospitals, where she was diagnosed with post-concussion syndrome. This diagnosis confirmed everything that she had been experiencing. She was referred to an orthopedist,

a neurologist, and a psychotherapist. The orthopedist recommended surgery for her broken elbow followed by eight weeks of occupational therapy. The neurologist recommended a CT scan. The psychotherapist recommended that they “talk through” the accident on a weekly basis as a way to process through what had happened. She followed their recommendations verbatim.

From my client’s perspective, things were moving at a snail’s pace. The stress surrounding this terrifying event had created significant emotional turmoil in her recovery. Every aspect of her life seemed to require baby steps. She had been a road warrior who was accustomed to spending much of her day driving to meet with clients in person. For over four decades, she had been a top producing outside sales professional. She had always prided herself on her independence and her boundless energy; now she was relegated to being dependent upon others for assistance with bathing, dressing, drying her hair, errands, food shopping, cooking, etc.

She told her husband that she wasn’t sure she would ever be able to drive again. She told her colleagues that she wasn’t sure if she would ever be able to work again. She told herself that she wasn’t sure if she would ever get back to herself again. She perceived everything as a loss. These deep-seated fears kept her living in crisis. She didn’t seem able to transition herself into living in recovery.

Her successful career and vibrant personal life had all been put on hold as she fought to get back to her baseline. My client had previously been one to prosper in spite of opposition, hardship, and any setbacks. When she was finally “sick and tired of being sick and tired,” she knew that she was ready to begin her rebuilding process. She healed from her surgery, completed the full course of occupational therapy, physical therapy, and psychotherapy, and began taking strength training classes five days a week. She also began driving again, and slowly over a number of months she returned to her regular activities.

Even though we talked via phone on a number of occasions throughout her ordeal, there was a four-month hiatus before we were finally able to start working together again in person. I was curious about how she was able to come from such a dark place and ultimately accomplish all that she had. She told me that she believed that we each have our own relationship with fear. She knew that what had taken place for her the day of the accident had paralyzed her in fear. At some point in her recovery, she made a conscious decision to not allow fear to incapacitate her. She knew that she was willing to do whatever it took to get her life back. She hired a personal injury attorney to take on her case. This bold move was extremely difficult for her, but essential for her recovery. She believes her case is straightforward and will be settled easily. She doesn’t expect that it will need to go to trial, but if it does she is ready to tell her story in a strong, clear voice.

Fear can haunt us. Some people’s fears affect them so dramatically that tasks that were once interesting are now pure drudgery. We all have limitations, but they do not have to define us. Many people experience a gravitational pull on their behavior. Their lives are so fast-paced and over-stimulated that they are unable to centralize their thoughts. Ultimately, even relaxing becomes stressful because there is so much noise going on in their heads.

Our brains are wired to protect us. Taking chances is part of being alive. However, when the risk is escalated to against all odds, no two people respond in the same way. For some, fear tends to hinder and inhibit them, while for the bravest among us, it triggers a growth spurt, allowing us to aspire to a higher level of success. Open-mindedness helps us to be receptive to hearing fresh perspectives and learning

new skills. Acquiring these assets, and then combining them with a heavy dose of endurance, enables us to fight through the many complexities we experience.



About the Author: Nancy Capistran is a best-selling author, an award-winning, internationally certified executive coach, motivational speaker, and trusted advisor. She is Principal of [Capistran Leadership, LLC](#), and [Crisis Interception, LLC](#). Nancy's best-selling international leadership book: [Open Your Eyes and LEAD](#) shows readers how to become a positive force in the world and how to balance and manage omnipresent tensions while striving for leadership excellence. Capistran shares inspirational stories and advice from her 30+ year career to help both seasoned and emerging leaders develop intentionality while maintaining their core values and beliefs even when life's pressures dictate otherwise.