

# *Fear is Giving You Bad Advice:* **PUNCH IT IN THE FACE**

BY SUSAN SANDLER

I BELIEVE WE ARE HERE to discover who we really are so we can use our gifts to make this world better. What mostly stands in our way is fear.

I came to this conclusion after a series of losses in my 50s *forced* me to wake up, punch fear in the face and navigate new realities. Stepping up despite my fears convinced me I was capable of more. And I was sick and tired of being afraid.



By the time I turned 59 and lost the job I loved [The organization I worked for relocated and I didn't.], I was hungry to face my fears and become the person I was meant to be. I was terrified, but committed. I embarked on an intensive, rollercoaster journey of self-discovery. I started my own business because it would test me. It has. I invested in a pricey, intensive public speaking program because I knew a big commitment would make it harder for me to escape facing my fears about not being enough. [More about how this turned out later.]

## *The Grim 10% Statistic*

MOST OF US TINKER AROUND with changing ourselves. We typically take one step forward, get discouraged when it's hard, and then we go back to the status quo. Statistics bear this out. *Only 10% of people actually accomplish their goals.* Only 10%!

Changing our typical way of being is hard. Most of us don't jump at the chance to change. Most of us are pushed into it kicking and screaming. Although it feels like hell when a crisis or a tragedy strikes, these *hardships are also openings for growth ... if we are willing to move toward our fears and learn what life is trying to teach us.*

## *Why Change is So Damn Hard*

LET'S PEEL BACK THE ONION for a moment and examine why it's so hard to change. It has to do with how human beings are "wired".

*The National Science Foundation estimates that we have 50,000 thoughts in any given day. And 95% of them are the same thoughts we had yesterday.* And the day before. This chatter fills our minds with distortions and illusions that pretend to keep us safe. These lies just keep us small and afraid. *We confuse our fearful thoughts with reality and we give up prematurely* [Hence, the grim 10% statistic.] Our real Self remains asleep under the suffocating blanket of fear.



*Fear is very tricky. It often masquerades as your protector.* Sometimes it is, like when you encounter a physical threat. More often than not, there is no real danger. It's just that old busybody fear nagging you to stand back and stay in line. It hisses: "You are not enough" and other nasty lies. And so we armor up ... afraid to speak our truth, take risks, be real, be vulnerable... *and we stop moving forward.*

So, what are we *really* afraid of? *Mostly, we're afraid of losing love.* You see, we're wired for connection *and* to be on the alert for danger. This is a leftover from when the average life span was 31 years old and our very survival depended upon being accepted by our tribe. That is why fear of rejection and disapproval is so powerful.

## *The Secret to Punching Fear in the Face*

THE OTHER DAY I LISTENED to a podcast interview with author Nancy Duarte. She referred to that uncomfortable place we arrive at again and again when we are braving new trails, the “Messy Middle”. It sure is. I’ve learned that this caterpillar soup we are in as we form our wings... *this uncomfortable place of doubt and fear and lonely and even physical discomfort ... is “normal”*. Wanting to escape is understandable. *Warriors... the members of the 10% club... learn how to stay.*



Whenever we step out of our comfort zone, fear escalates. Yet, we can’t grow by staying safe, by listening to the voice in our head that pretends to keep us safe. We learn from experience. *We build courage and muscle by taking brave steps before we’re ready.* In the doing, we strengthen our wings and build confidence... step by step.

When I joined that intensive, pricey public speaking program in 2013, all my old fears... and some crafty variations... rose up to meet me. In fact, the first day when I got up in front of the other students to give a speech I wrote about my own family [a story that I’d told dozens of times before], I froze. I tried five times to say the first few lines and each time was overcome by anxiety and couldn’t remember my lines. But, I persevered, and with guidance, I was able to deliver that speech like a pro. In fact, the teachers told me that I had a special gift as a speaker and, if I wanted to, could command big audiences. In 2016, I was chosen to speak at TEDxWilmington Women and received a standing ovation for that speech about my family. It was called, “Punch Fear in the Face & Claim Your Life”. The following year I premiered a one-woman show/theatrical keynote called “Wings” [<https://susanlsandler.com/speaking/wings>] about life on the other side of fear. I got a standing ovation. But the best part was that I had lived my message on that stage. I had punched fear in the face again.

# How to Calm the Voice of Fear

I'VE EXPERIMENTED WITH A LOT of different ways to manage the voice of fear when it arises. Here are several that have been especially helpful [There are others, but my father always said, "Leave 'em hungry!" So I will.]

1. **Meditation:** When I first began to meditate I couldn't sit still for more than 60 seconds [and those 60 seconds felt like an eternity!]. Now, three years later, with regular practice and guidance, I can meditate for hours... and regularly go on extended meditation retreats. Although there are meditation apps and tapes available, I recommend that, at least in the beginning, you get guidance from a well-respected teacher.
2. **Reach Out to Special Teachers and Fellow Seekers:** These are people you can rely on when you need skills, help, encouragement and perspective. When you are in the messy middle of forming new wings, they will remind you that the struggle you are experiencing when you attempt something big simply means that your wings are forming and you are worthy and deeply loved. [They will also be good sources of referrals and resources.]
3. **A Good Cry:** Emotions don't store well. One of our biggest challenges as humans is sitting with our feelings. A good cry is a wonderful release. The first time I experienced its **healing** power was when my Main Squeeze and I sobbed into each other's arms one day as we grieved the deaths of our parents. [I'd never seen my Main Squeeze cry before. It was not only healing for both of us, it brought us closer together.] Since then I regularly practice giving my emotions the space they need.
4. **Wine:** [Oops, how'd that get in there? That's from my old list.]
5. **Become Comfortable with Discomfort:** I'm learning to see discomfort as a sign of growth. When fear and discomfort arise [thoughts, feelings and pictures], I remind myself that it's a sign that I'm stretching myself and I'm spreading my Wings. I give myself a hug. Then, I meditate.

## What You Can Do Now?

FIND A QUIET MOMENT AND enjoy a cup of tea or a glass of wine and reflect on the following questions. Maybe write your thoughts down in a journal. Really take your time.

*What is waiting inside of you waiting to be born?*

*What could you accomplish if you didn't let fear stand in your way?*

*What's one small step you could take to move toward your dream?*

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NEED GUIDANCE TO GET UNSTUCK & GET GOING?

Contact me [<https://susanlsandler.com/contact>] and let's schedule time on the calendar to see if I might help. I'd love to talk with you!

## DISCOVER

## CLARITY COURAGE CONNECTION



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HI! I'M SUSAN SANDLER. I hope you found this article helpful on your journey to create a more satisfying and fulfilling life.

I'm a TEDx theatrical public speaker and expert in personal and organizational transformation. I love helping women 45+ discover their dreams and take the brave steps that will bring them to life.

My TEDx talk, "Punch Fear in the Face & Claim Your Life," [<https://susanlsandler.com/tedx>] received a standing ovation at TEDxWilmington Women and continues to inspire women all over the world. I hope it inspires you.