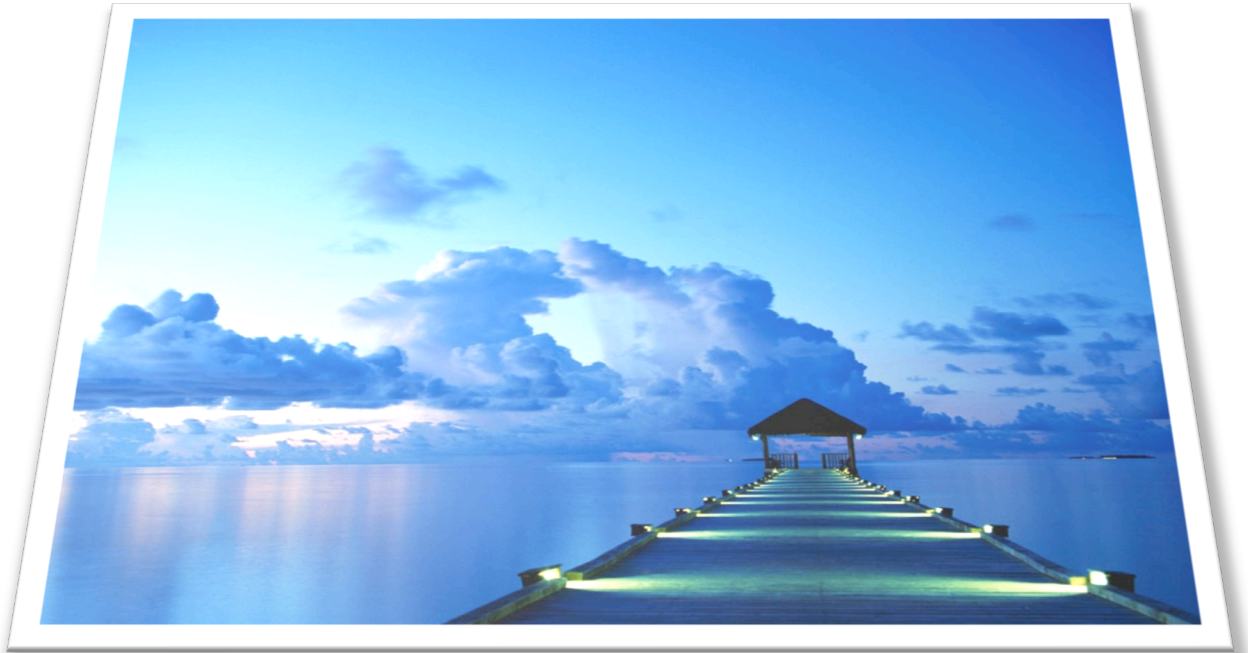


Fear Almost Ruined Me!



How I Overcame Fear and Panic to Regain My Life

By Merrill Fink

© Merge Publishing
Draft 6

Contents

1. The First Step	4
2. My Background	9
3. My Story of Fear	13
4. This is so Curable	24
5. You are Brave	30
6. You've got to Want it	34
7. For Family Members	38
8. Flying on Alcohol	43
9. Can Prescription Drugs Help with Anxiety? ...	47
10. You have to Face Your Fears	56
11. When to Trust Fear	59
12. Is there Something Medical Creating your Fear	67
13. Exercise	76
14. Sleep	88
15. Nutrition	99

16. Count Your Blessings	110
17. Take a Break	113
18. When it is illogical fear (Most are), Logic wont work	119
19. Living in the Moment	126
20. Professional Mental Help	132
21. Meditation	140
22. Confidence. How you get it back	148
23. Retraining your Brain	152
24. Don't Fear the Fear	158
25. Build a plan to beat your fear, like I did	164
26. The Fear Will Drop in Chunks	170
27. Putting it all Together	173
28. The Rest of your Life	178

1. The First Step

“Men go to far greater lengths to avoid what they fear than to obtain what they desire.”

□ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*

Fear and anxiety can be incredibly lonely. When you are coming apart on the inside and everyone around you seems to have it together, the loneliness can grow uncontrollably. When I went through this I felt like I was broken and had no idea if I was ever going to get back to my old self. I wrote this book primarily so that people that are affected by this can have a lifeline. I want you to have a friend to get you through the process of chaos and tension to a life of confidence.

Having gone through this process myself, it has opened my eyes to how many people in the world suffer from fear and extreme anxiety. I have a new ability for identifying the kind of coping mechanisms people use to get through the day. I have this ability because I have been there. I know the pain these people are in and I don't want it to go on another day. I know the pain family members are in who have to adjust their lives in order to accommodate the fear. It doesn't have to be this way.

I also wrote this book for my daughter. I see in her some of the same mental habits that got me into trouble. I knew I had to do everything I could to give her a playbook to a better life.

It is also important to note that this book is about anxiety and not depression or other mental disorders. Even though I am sure some of the concepts can be applied to other situations, I will keep the focus on fear and anxiety.

“When you do what you fear most, then you can do anything.”
— Stephen Richards

While I will spend a bit of time discussing the fear of flying, this is meant only to show a real world example of how to regain your confidence and reclaim your life. It does not mean that fear of flying is all this book is about, and I will talk directly about other fears too. I will try to give you a clear insight into what I went through and then discuss other examples of how to apply the techniques in different situations. I truly believe that these principals can apply to any fear and bring back the joy of life. It can be yours if you have just a little faith in the process.

I will discuss all of the critical aspects I believe brought me back from the brink of losing it all. This book is meant to be an action plan and give you some perspective from a person who has been there. My anxiety got pretty bad, but the worst by far was during the phase when I had no idea what was happening to me. It felt like “I was losing my marbles” at a pretty high rate of speed. Once I was armed with some knowledge to fight it, the anxiety was not nearly as bad. This book is made to get you or a family member into the recovery phase as quickly as possible.

Instead of giving you a couple of self help tips, I intend to show a complete plan for starting your recovery. I believe fear and anxiety are learned behaviors and that they can be **UNLEARNED. I believe fear and anxiety can be defeated with a combination of your attitude, knowledge, persistence and time.** I will share my experiences, discuss a

few concepts, and show you how to get to a better place. The bottom line is this is a framework for beginning the road to a better life that I know you can achieve.

To underscore the point, I believe there is a trick to everything. I believe we all need a set of skills to get us through the day and make a better life. I believe armed with a better understanding we will make better choices, make more friends and be more effective at work. There are secrets and fundamentals to everything in life from your golf swing to getting along with your spouse. I believe success in everything comes from a bit of good luck and a lot of hard work and wisdom.

I don't believe you were handed anxiety and expected to just "deal with it" the rest of your life. These thoughts are not normal nor do they have to stay with you to shape your entire life. I believe there are tricks to overcoming it and living a happier life. I want to share what I have learned and convince you that it doesn't have to end badly. **If you will trust what I have just said, then I believe you have already taken your first step to recovery and a better life.**

Even if you are not an extreme anxiety sufferer, I believe these concepts can help you. We all want to live a long and happy life. There are probably those out there who have an Aunt or Grandparent who lived to 100 years old all the while consuming two packs of cigarettes and a pint of scotch a day. I don't think that is the blueprint we can all replicate, although some will try really hard. By all means, enjoy your life. If that means a bit of wine along the way, I don't think that is a bad thing. I don't know what makes people live to 100, but I do know that those that do make it have a good "mental game."

To live that long you will probably have buried every old friend you ever had, and maybe even a few of your children.

Somewhere along those 100 years were some very stressful times and that will never change. These people need perhaps good genes and some good habits, but they need to be in great shape mentally and adapt to the changes of life. This book is as much about fixing your thought process and habits for a long happy life as it is eradicating extreme anxiety. You don't need to be an extreme anxiety sufferer to benefit from my experience. Everybody can work on these techniques. I do it every day. I don't want to just live, but I want to see just how good my life can be!

If I was able to recover my life, you can too. I am not superhuman. I am just an average guy with above average intelligence, charm, wit, and am ruggedly handsome. OK maybe I am more like average-ish, on a good day. The bottom line is I have stress, I over think stuff, I don't smile enough, I work too hard and I want the best for my family. I am not that different than you. We all have something in us that is probably broken that we should fix. If I am above average at anything it is that I want to eradicate this incredibly cruel mental state from everybody that I can. I have put an extreme amount of time into this book in the hopes that it will make a difference for somebody. Why not you?

The book is not a long read and is written as simply as I can make it. This is not a textbook, nor an academic discussion. I will not attempt to impress you with my knowledge of complex psychological terms. I wrote this with the help of my personal therapist, Mr. Steve Watson. He has thirty years of experience in this field and helped me out of my dark days. While editing this book I took some time to give the draft to actual anxiety

sufferers. I took their feedback and made it better. Together I hope we have made a plan to get YOU or a loved one started down a path to a better life. You will be so glad you did.

The best way I can describe my anxiety was as if I were wandering around hopelessly lost in the woods, endlessly trying to find my way home. I knew I was lost, but I had no idea how to get home. None. But I got out of the woods with some help. This book is meant to help you get your bearings and give you the tools to walk out of the woods too.

It is time to come home. The book builds on a set of basic principals in the early chapters and then gets into very specific techniques by the end. It is not a long read, so please hang in there and **do not skip from place to place trying to find that one golden nugget.** You know, read a little here, read a little there, then put the book away. Please don't do that! It is a process and I tried to make the book interesting and entertaining enough to hold your attention to the end. Hopefully.

ASSIGNMENT.

There are ASSIGNMENTS at the end of most chapters to get you on the path to success. Follow the process and I believe you will see a better quality of life. The ASSIGNMENTS are designed to logically start you from the beginning and get you to a better place. They are meant to have you take action in a logical order and in the topic that was just discussed. The rest is up to you. Take the life you deserve and Triumph Over Your Fear!

2. My Background

“But fear doesn't need doors and windows. It works from the inside.”

□ Andrew Clements, *Things Not Seen*

You are probably wondering what business I have helping people with their fears. What qualifications do I have? To start with, I have been a pilot for Southwest Airlines since 2007. It is my current job. I can also tell you I have no medical qualifications whatsoever. The closest thing I have to a medical degree is marrying a great nurse. That is why I wrote this book with some professional assistance. But, what I do have is the benefit of living through this. Trust me. You could call it the school of hard knocks.

Before my days with Southwest Airlines I spent 20 years flying the F-16 as a fighter pilot in the U.S. Air Force. I flew the F-16 and experienced everything a fighter pilot can do. I flew in the first Gulf War and spent the rest of my career trying to be the best pilot I could be. I have dropped bombs in combat, been shot at, flown over twice the speed of sound, and met every G force limit that airplane could give me.

But you didn't come to me to hear about my flying career and how good I thought I was. I only tell you this because I want you to understand something. While doing all that very dangerous flying I was never once afraid. Never did I think, I have to get out of this plane! This is nuts! I am going to get myself killed! Not once. Not once in twenty years. Oh I had performance anxiety. I would worry about my flight the next day. Would things go well? Could I measure up? What could go wrong? Those are what I would call nerves. I was

occasionally nervous and not always supremely confident in the face of a challenging mission. I had plenty of adrenaline, but never was I fearful, and I don't think I was really that different from the pilots that flew with me.

I moved on from the Air Force to my current job at Southwest Airlines. I am still flying, but certainly the mission is different. But, I had the same emotional realm in the airline industry. I would occasionally have adrenaline getting the plane and the people safely to the destination, but I never once had a fearful thought. That is, until it all changed.

In almost an instant and seemingly out of nowhere, I became the opposite of everything I just described. I went into such a downhill slide that I was almost willing to give up flying entirely. And when I say flying, I don't mean giving up being a pilot, my fear became so bad I couldn't see even getting on an airplane as a passenger! This was an incredibly big deal because flying is all I have ever known my adult life. Most of my friends are retired fighter pilots. It is an inescapable part of my life. It was not something I could just give up on without a fight.

I will give you a lot of details on what I endured, but mostly I want to give you a plan of action to a better life. **I do not have expertise, but I do have experience.** I have been to that crossroads between getting back my life or completely going off the cliff. I have had the mental struggles that are probably very similar to yours. From that experience I hope to inspire you and shine some light on the process of recovery. I will give you a roadmap and share some ideas and concepts that worked for me.

Giving out all the details of the worst part of my life is a personal struggle since most fighter pilots are not too chatty about their inner thoughts. We are not “huggers” and we are not experienced at discussing our feelings with each other much less total strangers. I accept the fact that I will probably get some ribbing on this topic from a few old friends. That's OK. Just know that this book is from the heart. **I put everything in here that I thought would help.** I hope it works for you.

There is one more thing. I am not the boss of you. Getting rid of a fear or constant anxiety is a personal struggle and is different for everybody. My struggles are not the same as yours. There will be times that I sound kind of bossy and direct. I have really tried to eliminate that, but I feel some points are not negotiable. If that turns you off, then I am sorry. It is not my intent to be a blunt instrument. I just want to see you succeed. So think of it as a well intentioned pep talk.

You have to make your own choices in life, but please do not discard the entire system just because we differ on a couple small points or you don't like my jokes. Also, don't skip entire chapters because you see the title and you KNOW what I am going to say. My intent is to take a few concepts you may or may not have heard and get you to think about it in different ways. My intent is to keep it loose and it is OK if you have a slightly different way of getting to the same place. I am all for it and would welcome your feedback.

On the other hand, if you are still in a very tough place, I urge you to read the entire book to see the whole picture. All the concepts have been vetted through a licensed therapist and I will tell you everything it took for me to have pretty dramatic

success. I will give you all my secrets. What I would like is for you to adapt these concepts to your own life on your way to better days ahead. I wish you good luck!

Now, here is my story.