Living in the Now — Lesson 4

Get Back on Track When You're Focused on the Past or Future

Staying present is hard if you keep focusing on the past or the future. Both are unproductive places. The past cannot be changed, so it does no good to dwell on it for hours or days at a time. The future cannot be controlled, so it's not smart to dwell on it either.

All you really have is now but it's hard to appreciate the beautiful moment you're in when you're distracted by the past or the future. Here's how to overcome these mental blocks and stay present…

Consider if Past Failures Are Keeping You Stuck

Many people suffer from a fear of failure. Sometimes, this is because they've experienced a past failure or witnessed someone else's failure that had a negative impact on their life. For example, some people fear their marriage will fail because they witnessed a parent's marriage crumble. However, how do you know if a fear of failure is holding you back? Here are a few signs to look out for…

Sign #1: You Procrastinate on Most Projects

For some, procrastinating is caused by apathy and a lack of motivation. For other people, procrastination masks a fear of failure. Each person has influencers that urge them to put off doing things.

If you never get the slides done, you can't make the presentation, and then you can't fail the presentation. This can also lead you to fear being assigned more responsibilities and creates an endless loop of self-doubt that keeps you paralyzed.

Sign #2: You're Concerned about Disappointing Others

Sometimes people define failure as letting other people down. It's natural not want to disappoint other people, particularly those closest to you. However, when it becomes something that holds you back, the feeling should be examined. The fear of failing someone can be just as destructive as the fear of failing yourself.

Your fear can even negatively impact your career or relationships. For example, if you fear disappointing your boss because you're not a good writer, then you may find excuses not to turn in your report. The problem is that eventually your boss will get annoyed and may give you lower marks when it's time for your annual review.

Sign #3: You Lower Expectations

When you have a fear of failure, you may find yourself downplaying your skills and accomplishments to other people. Failing can seem so much bigger and more defining than achievement.

If you've failed at something—as everyone has at some point—you may have started lowering the expectations of those around you. If you continuously tell people that they shouldn't expect much from you, it's a sign a past failure is keeping you stuck.

Sign #4: You Get Sick

Many people get physical symptoms of anxiety or stress when they're nervous. You can also get the same symptoms if you

have a constant fear of failure. In fact, the symptoms you get are the same you can experience with any other phobia.

An upset stomach is one of the biggest symptoms to look out for. The idea of repeating a past failure can make you feel physically ill. You may also experience lightheadedness or dizziness, chest pain, sweating, and trembling or shaking.

Sign #5: You Self-Sabotage

This is like procrastination, but it goes a step further. When your fear of failure is too great, you may find yourself sabotaging projects or relationships before they get the chance to start.

For example, if you're afraid of failing a report for school, you may never start it and end up failing anyway. People who are stuck because of past failures feel that it's better not to try at all, since they fear they'll fail anyway.