

Winning Way 3

Embrace the Uncertainty

There is nothing assured to mortals.

—Horace (65–8 BC), Roman poet¹

We all know there are no guarantees in life; it's a real “no-brainer” fact of life. Still, for some reason, we just don't want to believe it. Death, taxes, and delayed flights—yes, maybe, we tell ourselves, but for some reason we can't reconcile that there's no one-time special suspension of the rules just for “me.”

Sorry. The fix is in. No guarantees. Ever!

However, if it's a 100-percent, money-back, no-questions-asked guarantee you're looking for, then here are a few you can count on and take to the bank any day of the week:

1. You'll keep *getting what you're getting* as long as you keep *doing what you're doing*.
2. Change is inevitable, but growth is optional.
3. You're absolutely going to hear someone complain about *something* today.

I'm sure it would be easy for you to add to this list, but these will do for starters. Frankly, the list of unrealistic, unsupported-by-life's-experience expectations is endless. Just review the list that follows. Do any of these unsupported-by-evidence expectations sound familiar?

- Arriving at work every day on time and performing your job will guarantee your job security.
- Careful and strategic planning and preparation will guarantee that you get a lucrative contract.
- Starting your own business will guarantee a steady stream of paying clients.
- Earning a college degree will guarantee the job you want upon graduation.
- Getting married to the love of your life will guarantee you marital bliss.

Let it go! Life *is* uncertainty! Embrace it and relax and get comfortable with what you really already know. If any of these “happy ending” expectations has any chance of happening, you have to stop making excuses and start doing something to make your expectations a reality.

How to Embrace Your Fear

Beth Rutter is a good friend of mine. I admire my Canadian buddy for many things, including her career as a regional office manager for a Southern California auto body shop chain. I also admire her for her courage to raise two sons as a single divorced mom, and the “head into the wind, no excuse” way she approaches life and all its uncertainty and fear. Here’s what Beth had to say on the subject when I asked her one day about living in fear:

One of the greatest gifts I ever received was the awareness that what happens in my life is wholly within my control and that the consequences of living in fear were very predictable. That’s not to say I don’t experience fear—I do—sometimes on a daily basis. In fact, that sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach has

become my barometer for where I need to go next whether in my personal or professional life. I have received so many unexpected gifts that would never have been available to me had I given in to my fears. Plus, the cool thing about [facing your fear] is that the more I do it, the better I get at it! If my children only learn this one thing from me then I will consider my time here well spent. I know that if I just give my all at every turn I will always be able to look back and say, “Yup—at least I had the guts to go for it at every opportunity.”

Clearly, Beth has a well-developed “go for it” mind-set that compels her to fly right into the face of uncertainty and assures her that she’s doing absolutely the right thing. Unfortunately, most of us have trouble overriding our programmed “fight or flight” mind-set, designed to shield us from any physical or emotional consequences that may result from our decisions.

According to Dr. Neil F. Neimark’s December 2011 article, “The Fight or Flight Response,” the flight or fright response was originally discovered by Harvard physiologist Walter Cannon, who found that this response was hard-wired into our brains and is “a genetic wisdom designed to protect us from bodily harm.” He notes that “this response actually corresponds to an area of our brain called the hypothalamus, which—when stimulated—initiates a sequence of nerve cell firing and chemical release that prepares our body for running or fighting.”²

“This fundamental physiologic response,” according to Dr. Neimark, “forms the foundation of modern day stress medicine. The ‘fight or flight response’ is our body’s primitive, automatic, inborn response that prepares the body to ‘fight’ or ‘flee’ from perceived attack, harm, or threat to our survival.”³ He continues:

When our fight or flight system is activated, we tend to perceive everything in our environment as a possible threat to our survival. By its very nature, the fight or flight system bypasses our rational mind—where our more well thought out beliefs exist—and moves us into “attack” mode. This state of alert causes us to perceive almost everything in our world as a possible threat to our survival. As such, we tend to see everyone and everything as a possible enemy...we are on the lookout for every possible danger. We may overreact to the slightest comment. Our fear is exaggerated. Our thinking is distorted. We see everything through the filter of possible danger...fear becomes the lens through which we see the world.⁴

The New Normal World

I see this innate fear manifested in today’s chaotic, uncertain workplace. Even with an improving economy, due to the downsizing, right-sizing, and layoffs that have defined many organizations over the last few years, most of us harbor some fear in our minds that we might just be the next one shown the door. This fear drives many of the behaviors discussed throughout this book, such as blaming others, not taking responsibility, the need to control everything, the need to be right no matter what (chasing perfection), distracted listening, and the lack of job or life satisfaction and passion for living.

Unfortunately, the crazy, confusing, and frightening world we live in today is here to stay. It’s the “new normal,” and I’m afraid we’re all required to be flexible and find a way to make it work—or, as a plain-spoken coach, mentor, or friend might say, “You’re going to have to suck it up and keep going!”

Living in the new normal conditions means we must learn to lean into our discomfort and forget the old comfort zones of the past. Your parents may have worked at the same job for 30 or even 40 years, but that world is gone for good. If you think you'll be able to keep your same job even for the next five years or that you'll be doing the same job five years from now in the same department, under the same boss, who expects the same level of performance, I suggest you think again. You know this, but I'll say it anyway: It just isn't gonna happen.

—*Quick Uncertainty Quiz*—

The first step to get a handle on uncertainty is to name the things that worry you. Take a minute and jot down the things that are creating uncertainty for you (professionally or personally) right now. You can list them here in the book or electronically on your computer, tablet, or other device. You can also print out copies of this and other exercises and assessments by visiting www.noexcuseguide.com.

Once you've identified your fears and uncertainty, determine how many of them you have direct control over. Do you think changing your mind-set might play a significant role in creating results different from those you normally expect? Write your thoughts down in the column provided next to the fear/uncertainty column. You'll find more tips on how to manage your doubt and fear as you move through this book to help you become a "go for it" player in the game of life.

I am uncertain and fearful because ____.	Despite the fear and uncertainty, I can take positive action by _____.
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	

Managing Fear and Doubt

The fact that you recognize that you allow your fear and uncertainty to win way too often is a good sign that you're on your way to leading a fearless life. As you know by now, most excuse making is just a convenient way to keep your terror at bay. You are already beginning to see that waiting for someone else to fix your problems or lead you to success isn't working. So, how do you move forward and start making positive changes? It's not as hard as you think. In fact, answers to this question are found almost anywhere you look. You just have to be ready to accept the answers and stay open to the possibilities.

Johnny B. Truant is a small business consultant who takes a unique approach toward what is needed for business success. His brand of "punk rock business consultant" pretty well provides all the definition that is needed to get an idea of his approach. Truant also is a guest blogger for several entrepreneurial sites, and his communities of readers look forward to his pithy, inspirational, and instructive advice. Here's an abbreviated version of an October 24, 2011, blog post directed toward entrepreneurs. It's called "6 Ways to Master Entrepreneurial Uncertainty," and it's certainly appropriate to any discussion about facing uncertainty and fear.

1. Embrace uncertainty.

Certainty is a cage. Sure, we all like that warm feeling that comes from knowing where we are and what's coming next, but that's not the way life is meant to be lived 24/7....

2. Uncouple fear from uncertainty.

The knee-jerk reaction to uncertainty is fear.... [E]ven though uncertainty often brings fear, uncertainty is not the same as fear.

3. Acknowledge fear, and hear what it is trying to tell you.

Look your fear square in the eye.... It's saying, "This might happen, so plan accordingly." But—and this is key—make sure you don't believe fear knows more than it does about the future....

4. Do something.

Action is the antidote to fear. If you're uncertain and afraid, the worst thing you can do is to simply wait to see what happens. Do something. Do *anything*....

5. Be courageous.

Fear is normal. Proceeding in the face of that fear is the courage you need in order to grow and to become more.

6. Live and learn from fear.

...[T]he key to being amazing is doing the things that frighten you.

My Own Run-In With Fear

For me, my fear factor was in low gear when I left a secure, full-time job to start JIMPACT Enterprises. I had been thinking about starting my own company for some time and colleagues at all the companies on my resume—Prudential, Vanguard, CoreStates Bank, Simmons Associates, and The Bob Pike Group—were all supportive of the idea.

So when I left my own comfort zone in the corporate world to expand my skills as a speaker and trainer, I just knew that eventually I'd be successful at honing my own brand of high-energy, passionate, and empowering training.

My uncertainty period kicked in about midway through my first year, when nearly all the work I'd been promised disappeared like sale items on Black Friday. Instead of reacting in a positive way, I let my uncertainty turn my days into a "tension convention." I started focusing more on paying bills than I did on securing opportunities. I spent more time talking to creditors than I did clients. I even thought about giving up on my business.

Then one day, it all changed. It wasn't that clients suddenly starting pouring in or that I found a secret stash of cash to keep the business going. No, my business changed when *I changed*. I put away my "woe is me" violin, and stopped playing the victim and blame game. I stopped relying on others to solve my problems. I started to look at my situation as a challenge—and I love challenges as much as I love seafood, jerk chicken, and the beach. I started operating out of a place of abundance—that is, I started acting, every day, like I had already arrived and that everything was going great. I decided to become Mr. Energy! My morning mantra was "I've got some JIMPACTing to do today!"

When I channeled my uncertainty toward building passion, enthusiasm, and creativity, everything changed. The energy in my voice changed. The enthusiasm in my voice-mail greeting changed. I welcomed calls from creditors, and suddenly the calls were friendlier. My mojo returned and I succeeded.

Handling Uncertainty Is Good for Creativity

According to a study cited by Jonathan Fields in his 2011 book, *Uncertainty: Turning Fear and Doubt into Fuel for Brilliance*, not knowing for sure what awaits you can be a powerful tool to increase creativity. According to the 2008 *Journal of Creative Behavior* study he cited, ambiguity is “significantly and positively” related to creativity.⁶ Who knew?

My Super Six Tenets for Eliminating Fear

So, do I still fight fear? Of course; no one gets a free pass on this one. But what I have that helps me is a structured way to turn my own fear of uncertainty toward a positive result. I have developed these six tenets to help me keep fear at bay. You can adopt or adapt these, or develop your own; these points work for me. I share them in my personal power sessions, and I even highlight them when I conduct presentation skills workshops and train-the-trainer sessions.

Here are my Super Six Tenets for shifting my mind-set when I need to embrace uncertainty, doubt, and fear:

1. **Meditate.** I meditate for 30 minutes every morning right after my daily devotion. For me, it’s just part of getting centered and balanced for the day, and it includes a spiritual connection in the form of a prayer. You’ll have to determine what prayer means for you and how it might help you with positive mind cleansing (for example, deleting any negative thoughts and thinking about how you’re going to put a positive spin on everything you do for the day).

2. **Train and feed your mind.** I will not allow my mind to think negatively or have “what if this went wrong?” thoughts. If I’m moving toward a WWW (wallow, whine, or worry) state, I quickly block out that pathway to negativity. This does not make me completely immune to negativity, but there is a negativity tipping point, and I do everything I can do to stay on the positive side.
3. **Connect with your spiritual side.** Spiritual, for me, is reading from a Bible or checking out a Bible quote app on my Android. Clearly, there are many ways to be spiritual and connect to this side of your humanity. No matter what connection you choose, I believe making this effort helps center and calm you for the success you expect to happen.
4. **Create a positive “store room.”** For me, having a physical place that signifies and holds empowering energy is a key resource. That’s why I have a room in my home devoted to storing and displaying all things positive, whether the inspiration comes from books, posters, music, or movies. I go there to reenergize. If you don’t have an extra room, even a corner of a room or dedicated bookshelf will work.
5. **Nurture your butterflies.** Celebrate the moments when you get those butterflies before a presentation, or even speaking up at a meeting or attempting something new. Don’t panic! Don’t run from the feeling. Embrace your nervous jitters. Even after all these years of speaking before thousands of people, my butterflies return. I’ve learned to love the butterflies, and I use them to help me

make an even better presentation. You can do the same, whether it's facing an uncomfortable situation at work, or having an important or difficult conversation with your spouse or teenage son or daughter.

6. **Examine the story you are telling.** Many of us live in stories and not in facts. The stories we tell ourselves evolve from our perceptions of what happens to us. You are not the sum of your credit score, and your value is not based on someone else's opinion of you. Are you giving others too much power over your personal story? You are the director and screenwriter of your own movie, so make sure you write the script that you want.

Eliminating Fear Exercise

What will you use as your standard practice (tenets) to eliminate fear and uncertainty from your life? You don't have to use the same tenets I use, but I do believe it is important that you establish regular habits that protect you from negative ways of thinking and the excuse making that results. Jot down your own tenets for eliminating fear in the space provided here or visit www.noexcuseguide.com to download this and other exercises used in this book.

My Tenets for Eliminating Fear and Uncertainty	<i>Brief description of the practice and how you'll implement the practice into your life.</i>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Conclusion

Do you think you are ready to face down your fears and make uncertainty your friend? Are you ready to open yourself to a more fulfilling and purposeful life? Then come from

behind the curtain of life. Hide your safety net. Let go of what he, she, and they said. Climb to the top of the mountain, take a deep breath, and *jump* into your joy. As the famous Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung framed the issue: “I am not what happened to me—I am what I choose to become.”⁷

STOP and START Personal Action Plan



STOP using these typical excuses for not embracing the uncertainty:

- Who’s to say everything is going to work out?
- That’s just not me.
- No one in my family has ever done that.
- Statistics suggests that the odds are not in my favor.



START using these timely exclamations for embracing the uncertainty:

- Here I go!
- I’ll show you!
- I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired!
- I can do this. No, I WILL do this!

START, STOP, CONTINUE DOING Habits

Now that you’ve given some thought to embracing your fear and uncertainty as a way to rid your life of excuse making, add other **START Doing**, **STOP Doing**, and **CONTINUE Doing** habits that will help you attain this goal.



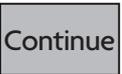
I will START Doing:

- ✓ _____
- _____
- ✓ _____
- _____
- ✓ _____
- _____



I will STOP Doing:

- ✓ _____
- _____
- ✓ _____
- _____
- ✓ _____
- _____



I will CONTINUE Doing:

- ✓ _____
- _____
- ✓ _____
- _____
- ✓ _____
- _____

Twitter/Facebook Affirmations

Post or tweet your one key takeaway thought, quote, phrase, or lesson learned in this chapter. Enlist your social network community of friends and colleagues to support your efforts to make positive changes in your life.

Make a note of your Twitter or Facebook post here:
