

# The F Word

Overcoming fear may be the most critical step in finding true happiness in your work, says “Passion Catalyst” Curt Rosengren. Here’s his plan for conquering it.

**F**ear is a dream killer. It’s the biggest and most common obstacle I see in my work helping people create passion-filled careers. Fear paralyzes, and it magnifies failures. Worst of all, it brings an acceptance of the status quo, however unpalatable that might be.

If it’s any consolation, fear is an equal opportunity obstacle: We all have it. Take fear out of the picture, and the possibility for achievement grows by leaps and bounds. And the good news is: We all have the potential to find a way past it. The big question is, “How?”

Here are five approaches I have found valuable.

## Shine a light on your fears.

If you’re not in tune with your fear, you are helpless to do anything about it. Without realizing it, you make that fear your de facto reality. I see people do that all the time; I also see the difference it makes when they bring those fears out into the light.

Just ask Misa Gidding-Chatfield. Prior to finding her niche as a life coach and workshop facilitator, the 52-year-old from Sacramento, Calif., had one unspoken fear holding her back – that the unique skills and passions she brought to the table had no value in the work world. In a series of nonprofit positions, most recently as a director of a community counseling center, she kept trying to fit herself into job situations where she had to drop who she was in favor of who she thought she needed to be. She excelled at her work, but it always seemed disjointed.

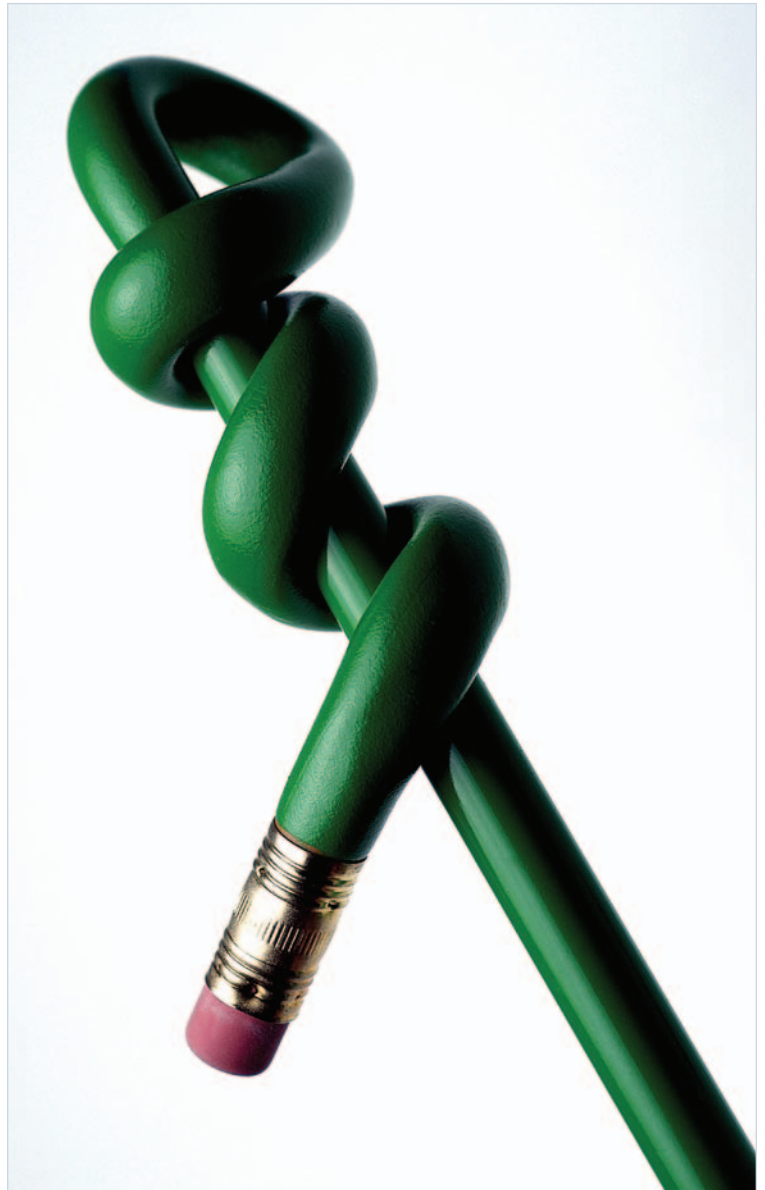
That fear was made even more powerful by the fact that she hadn’t been fully aware it was there. “When I found a way to articulate that, it opened up new doors,” says Gidding-Chatfield, adding that she began to “recognize the value of what I bring to the table.” It was a key step in finding a path that would let those skills and passions shine.

In your world, you can start by asking yourself, “What am I afraid of?” Be honest and clear. Imagine actually pursuing your dreams and notice what fears come up.

Once you have your list, examine which ones are impacting

you most. Pick the biggest, baddest daddy-o of them all and ask, “How is this holding me back? Are there any assumptions I’m making? How likely is it? Is it really as bad as I think?”

When Gidding-Chatfield looked closely at her fear, she found that not only were her unconscious assumptions flawed, they were holding her back from fully embracing her natural gifts and



abilities and allowing herself to do what she does best. Shining a light on that fear made all the difference.

## Break it down

Once you have identified those fears, take a look at them and ask, “What small step could I take that would start to face that fear and build a path around, over or through it? What habit could I start developing? What are the factors feeding that fear? What can I do about that?”

Hate networking? (I have lots of clients who do.) Consider taking it on in two steps: First, what are the easiest parts to do? Can you contact people from your past? Who might owe you a favor? Second, the mechanics of networking have a variety of methods, from group events to one-on-one. What works best for you might be the easiest point of entry.

Using your fear as a starting point rather than an impenetrable roadblock is the key. If, for example, you have a fear of failing, take a look at what you can do to build a solid foundation to maximize your potential for success. If you have an ingrained fear of what others will think, it might help to take a close look at the real impact of making your decisions based on others’ opinions, as well as the effect of making decisions based on what’s right for you.

## Reinforce yourself

Fear feeds on the belief that we can’t handle what might happen, and then we unknowingly reinforce that belief. I encounter people all the time who discount their accomplishments (“It was just luck” or “It was easy”) and magnify their mistakes. The message? A nonstop barrage of “I’m not good enough.”

Perfectionism is a, well, perfect example. So many of my clients spend their time on what they’ve done wrong. I urge them to look for opportunities to praise themselves. (They often feel awkward at first.) Find ways to remind yourself that you really do have what it takes. Make a list of accomplishments and look at what abilities and characteristics allowed you to do that. Look at obstacles you’ve overcome and examine how you did it. Take small risks that will allow you to build confidence as you succeed.

Addition by subtraction can work wonders as well. Take stock of the things that drain your confidence and energy. Whether that is a habitually self-critical way of thinking or people in your life who continually reinforce the negative message, find a way to eliminate or reduce it.

## Take action

Taking action, any action, is one of the most effective tools for success I know.

In the late 1990s, Tim Alsberg left a lucrative career in the technology industry to pursue a path that ultimately led him to co-ownership of a growing Seattle-based alternative-healthcare company called The Tummy Temple. Along the way, he’s seen plenty of opportunity to move past fear.

One thing he’s learned is that it’s never as bad as we think. “Any time fear becomes a paralyzer,” notes the 37-year-old Alsberg, “there’s usually an overexaggerated scenario in the mind. It’s rarely grounded in reality.” Taking action forces you to shift your focus from that overblown fear to the nuts and bolts of making your dream reality.

Look at what you want to achieve, identify a step to take – however small – and take it. And then do it again. Taking action gets you out of the victim’s seat and into the driver’s seat.

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## Get centered

It’s so easy to get wrapped around the axle, spinning

yourself tighter and tighter into a knot. The antidote is incorporating something into your daily life that will help you slow down and get grounded.

In Seattle, Will Hewett felt understandably anxious when he decided to leave his career-long corporate marketing path at age 40 without a clear picture of his next destination. He describes it as “an invitation for all the critics and demons to party in my head.” Hewett realized that he needed some anchor points to help ground him amid all the uncertainty, so he turned to friends, meditation, yoga and music. That sense of grounding enabled him to let go of the anxiety and allow the process to unfold naturally, ultimately leading him to a new path as a leadership consultant.

When you find the critics and demons showing up for a party, find ways to ground yourself and show them the door. Use whatever relaxation tool – meditation, exercise, religious service – helps you. The key is to slow down and get your footing.

Remember, pursuing your dreams is about forging your unique path. That can create a fertile soil for fear to take root. Recognize that, take steps to counter those fears and show them who’s boss! **W**

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Curt Rosengren is a self-described “Passion Catalyst” who helps clients find passion in their careers. He lives, works and writes from Seattle and blogs about career passion at [blog.occupationaladventure.com](http://blog.occupationaladventure.com).