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## Is fear limiting your team's performance?

Written by Amy Silver on February 3, 2021

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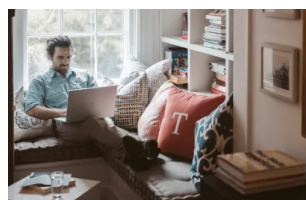
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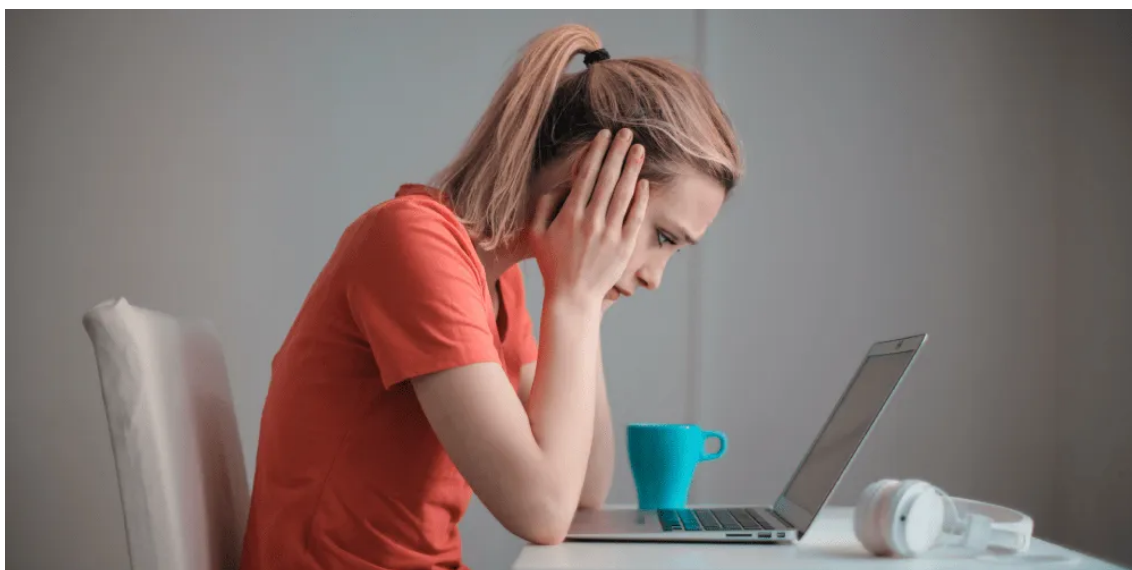
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**Peaceful conversations avoidant of emotion or robustness means that we avoid courageous conversations. It can lead to a lack of energy in a team or a surface level of conversation that fails to get to the conversations that matter. It can also point to people hiding their true feelings only letting them out in less appropriate ways, writes [Dr Amy Silver, Founder, The Courage Club](#)**

Fear is key to our survival. Fear's job is to protect us from danger by pointing out risk, physical and social risk. It tells us to avoid situations that put us close to risk and it does this by triggering a physiological system designed to help us fight, flight or freeze. Clever. Except, when it gets involved in things that they need not. Often our fear voice tells us to avoid risks that would be good for us. Here are a few common ways fear can interfere with our performance in a team. Fear wants us to:

- *Hide that we do not understand something in case people think less of us.*

But then we might not know how to support each other, or we may have gaps in our knowledge, worse we hide mistakes or errors. We also get some people anxiously striving for perfection which slows down workflow.

- *Agree with the most powerful person in the room.*

Fear tells us to only voice opinions that are safe and sanctioned. This makes for much less useful conversations or ideas. It promotes groupthink and makes true inclusion of any difference very hard. We also see over-reliance on the leaders to make decisions and we become vulnerable to command control leadership styles.

- *Keep quiet or in the background in case we get judged.*

Employees may feel they need to present a mask instead of their true self. We get people who are not psychologically safe enough to point out new ideas, mistakes, or misunderstandings. This breeds silence, disengagement and wasted potential. The team fails to build on each other's potential, and we get silos of workflow or relationships.

- *Put walls up, defend or attack to protect our status or position.*

Even when this is not toxic, we can end up battling in ways that stop the progress of good ideas.

- *Stick to what you know, do not risk failure.*

This is of course why and how we struggle to change or be agile.

As individuals in a team, the more we fear, the more we protect ourselves. The more we protect ourselves, the less we trust, each other and ourselves. Fear limits our performance as a team.

When our fear voice is in control and we are not, our behaviours become guided by fear-based intelligence, not by our intelligence or even our goals.

### **Fear-based conversations**

Fear does not always look like cowering in the corner biting our nails. A good way to assess fear in your team is to consider your conversations.

When conversations are *combative* there is some level of fight happening. We see people sparring over things which appear to be territorial, more blame centric or ego-based and while they take up huge energy and attention, they are not constructive. When the airtime in a group is disproportionately shared, it indicates that some people's intelligence is not being capitalised and it would be worthy to investigate the level of fear.

When conversations are full of *polite, pleasant* conversation it can be a sign that there is not the safety to discuss things at a deeper level. Peaceful conversations avoidant of emotion or robustness means that we avoid courageous conversations. It can lead to a lack of energy in a team or a surface level of conversation that fails to get to the conversations that matter. It can also point to people hiding their true feelings only letting them out in less appropriate ways. This is the type that I most frequently see at work and the type that have the most to gain through working on their fear.

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### Controlling our fear

Managing our fear means we can have courageous conversations that lead to remarkable team performance. Examining the courage, the vulnerability, humbleness, openness, sharing, asking for help, good listening and contribution by all, fun meetings, ability to change direction or adopt new ideas are key indicators of a group of people who are managing their fear well.

Fear is natural, necessary, and normal. It can even be very motivating if we have a good relationship with our fear. However, if our fear voice becomes very loud it can dominate and tell us what to do. When our fear voice is in control and we are not, our behaviours become guided by fear-based intelligence, not by our intelligence or even our goals. Our choices become fears choices.

*Image Source: Pexels*

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**Amy Silver**

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