

FEAR AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP



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**SELF-DEFENSE
LEGEND TONY
BLAUER
EXPLAINS WHY
UNDERSTANDING
AND OVERCOMING
FEAR IS CRITICAL
IN PHYSICAL
COMBAT AND
BUSINESS ALIKE.**

hen squaring off with someone like Tony Blauer, you don't want to go in unprepared. So in the days leading up to my interview with him, I decided I'd better do my homework.

I was already familiar with him, because in the world of self-defense and martial

arts, everyone knows who Blauer is. His company, Blauer Tactical Systems, has been a leader in the self-defense industry for over 30 years. I'd also been wanting to attend one of his famous "Be Your Own Bodyguard" courses, so I was very keen to talk to him.

Then I checked out Blauer's Instagram. Most pics are him covered in sweat, wrestling or teaching self-defense. They are...intense. But as I continued through his feed, I found myself screencapping and sending posts to my friends saying, "Holy crap. I'm actually going to be talking to *this guy.*"

The account also features him with the likes of Sylvester Stallone (on the set of *Rocky 5*), Chuck Norris, and Brandon Lee. Then there are the photos of him training

UFC Heavyweight Champion Frank Mir, mixed in with shots of thought-leaders like Gary Vaynerchuk, and even Blauer talking to companies of soldiers. His videos feature some of the most aggressive training drills you can imagine.

Altogether, Blauer's feed tells a rich story of grit, determination, mastery, and service to his life's work of teaching other people how to stay safe.

Ironically, as we were scheduled to discuss the topic of fear, I began to grow more than a little apprehensive myself as I discovered more about this industry legend. Little did I know that this apprehension would quickly melt away as Blauer helped me to form an entirely new perspective on fear and stress management during our conversation.

I dialed him up at his home office in California, and we spent the following few hours talking about two of our favorite topics: fear and entrepreneurship. We discussed how his training in mindset and fear management can help entrepreneurs and their startups to function at elite levels. But before we get into the details, let me bring you up to speed on a guy everyone just calls "Coach."

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MEET COACH BLAUER

Blauer is best known for creating SPEAR, a reality-based self-defense system. If you've never heard of it, it probably means you're not into elite close-combat tactics or law enforcement. But trust me, Navy SEALs love this guy.

He has 40+ years of professional experience teaching people how to face down an enemy out to do them severe bodily harm. Over this time, he and his companies have consulted with elite teams within the federal government, including Navy SEALs, Army Special Forces, Air Force, Federal Air Marshals, the FBI, and many more. He teaches on the topics of close-quarter tactics, mindset, and confrontation management psychology.

“My company consults with actual departments in defense, SWAT teams, Homeland Security,” he says. “All of my guys are out there actually doing dangerous work on a regular basis. I know what works and what doesn’t.”

His training focuses heavily on physiology and neurobiology to manage our hard-wired reactions (things like flinch responses) to stress or threats of any kind.

What does that mean? It means he doesn't teach fancy (read: useless) fighting moves. Instead, he teaches what works. Blauer trains people through simulated, full-contact, sh*t-your-pants situations, so they can be prepared with effective responses should they find themselves facing the real thing.

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What makes Blauer uniquely qualified to train people on business mindset is that in addition to decades as a martial artist and self-defense instructor, he is also a successful entrepreneur. “Most businesses fail in the first five years,” he says. “I've been doing this now for 40.”

He brings cutting-edge behavioral and brain science straight from his combat training programs and into the boardroom. That's a very rare skill stack.

His years of research on fear management and mindset, combined with decades of practical business experience make Blauer a formidable

force in training entrepreneurs of all ages. In addition to his training courses, he's created a seven-figure products-based business with his patented High Gear tactical training equipment, which supplies government agencies and law enforcement.

Blauer's a legend in the martial arts world, but can hold his own just fine as a founder and entrepreneur.



Blauer with Arnold Schwarzenegger

Fear and Entrepreneurship

On the topic of business and self-defense, one of Blauer's key lessons is that fear shows up in many different forms.

It's easy to think of fear as it relates to a physical threat like getting mugged in a dark alley. But fear in business? Sure business is stressful, but scary? I needed a bit of convincing.

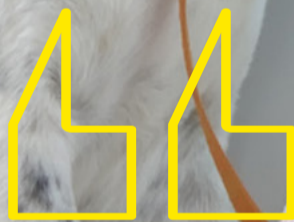
Blauer reminds me that fear is part of our primal hardwiring, coded deep in our DNA as a part of our basic fight or flight reflex. This is something that most of us are familiar with. But he points out that in the modern world of laptops, phones, and whiteboards, this fear response still gets triggered.

While we rarely ever actually run away in terror, we may express that innate urge to flee a situation in many other ways. Normally we don't even acknowledge or identify it as fear. Instead it shows up as procrastination. Anxiety. Stress. Addiction. Lack of confidence, and so on.

Why do we procrastinate? Because we are avoiding something. That's fear.

Why are we anxious? Because we are worried about what might happen. That's fear.

Why do we get stressed out? Because we are concerned about something. That's fear.



Everything comes back to fear," Blauer repeats throughout our conversation. "Everyone lives in fear. Fear of making the wrong decision, fear of retribution, fear of security, fear of saying the wrong thing, fear of looking stupid, fear of upsetting the boss, but they don't call it fear. Everyone has these fears, but so many people walk around like Connor McGregor, sauntering around like 'I'm good, I'm good, I'm good.'"

WHAT IS FEAR?

Blauer assures me that fear is, unfortunately, unavoidable. Fear is a permanent fixture for even the toughest people. What matters is not the presence of fear, but rather, what you do with that fear.

He frames fear as an acronym that stands for False Evidence Appearing Real, which leads to False Expectations Appearing Real.

It's all a product of the movies that play inside of our heads, visualizing harmful impacts that we think are going to happen and we desperately want to avoid. As a result, we experience certain physiological responses. If we didn't have these movies playing in our minds, theoretically we wouldn't be afraid of anything.

For example, when someone is about to go skydiving, the fear is a result of an internal visualization of harm. They're afraid of the expectation they are visualizing.

“That’s what the whole thing is, it’s this sensation of physiological changes,” Blauer says. “Butterflies in the stomach, that racing heart, vertical breathing, dizziness, anxiety.”

Applied to the workplace, we can see it manifest as procrastination, cortisol production, smoking too much, drinking too much, or being otherwise self-destructive. “I can usually track that back to some kind

of fear. Otherwise, why would they have a behavior that was self-destructive?... What are they avoiding?”

As we talk further, I begin to realize that this is such a simple, fundamental truth. In fact, each quarter here at Foundr, we have a company-wide strategy day, where our business coach Steve McLeod takes us through “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.”

This concept is based on the book and framework by Patrick Lencioni. Every 12 weeks, the team votes on what “dysfunctions” are holding us back from peak performance. The five categories are: absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability and inattention to results.

Guess what we always vote as our number one dysfunction?

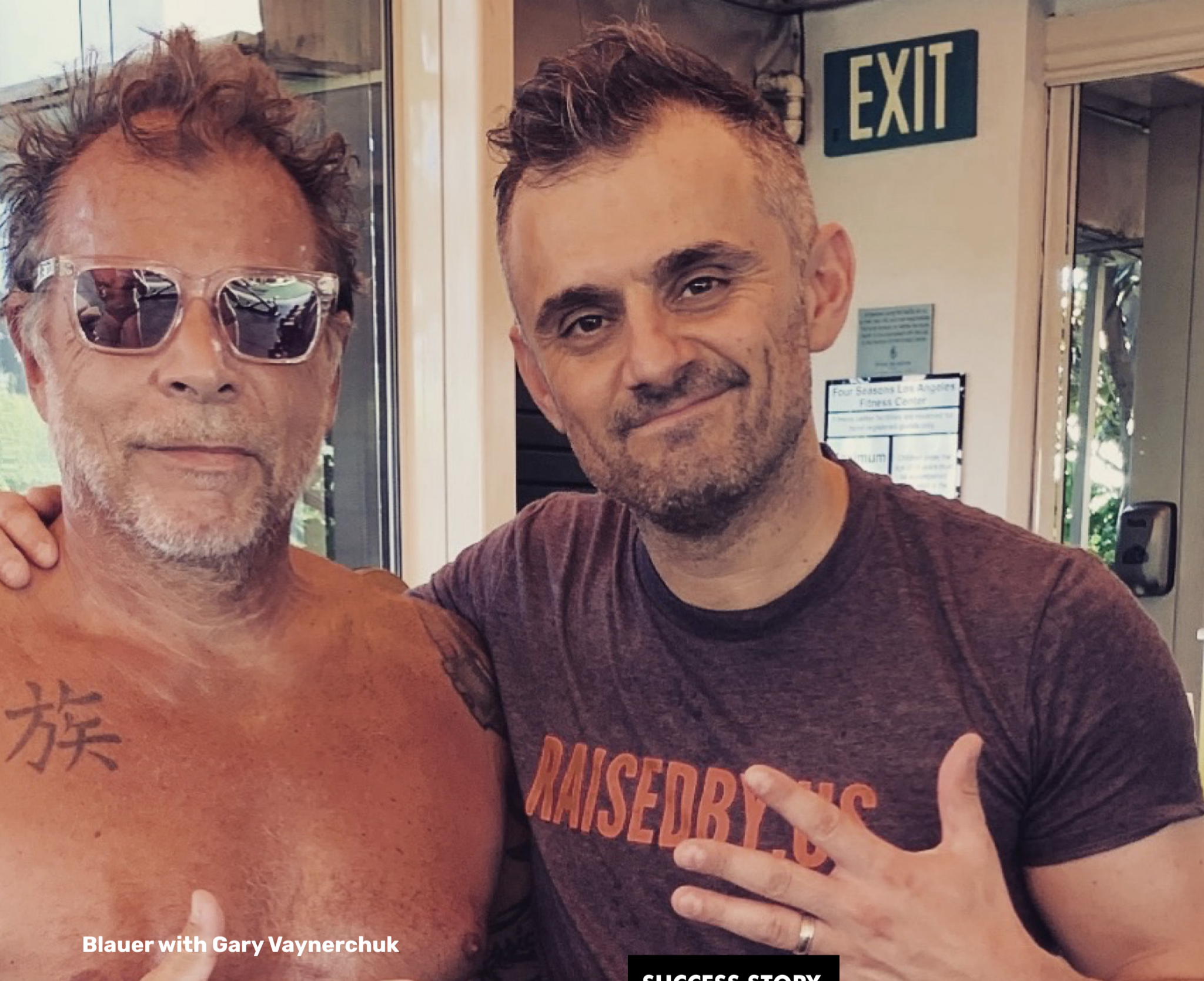
Fear of conflict.

Every. Single. Quarter.

Damnit. Blauer is definitely onto something here. Even at Foundr, a media and training company for entrepreneurs, fear has been holding us back from being our best.

“You know, the message here is that you’ve got to always be working on yourself because people are investing in you, as much as they’re investing in your product,” he says.

But the solution isn't just stronger motivation or better discipline. We need to learn how to handle the problem at its source—our fear response.



Blauer with Gary Vaynerchuk

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The Fear Loop

Bauer introduces me to the concept of the “fear loop,” a model for understanding how we react to a stressful stimulus.

“Hesitation is the gap time between stimulus, response, and action, and that’s when we are in the fear loop. Everything that I teach people about situational awareness, self-awareness, managing fear, the fear spike, and what happens to the body, is about making a decision as fast as you can to get through the fear loop.

Because doubt becomes hesitation. Doubt and hesitation unchecked, become fixation. And that fixation becomes procrastination. And if you’re really in danger, that’s going to create anxiety.”

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Author: *David M. Hobson is the Digital Strategy & Growth Manager and resident marketing expert at Foundr.*

Blauer explained to me that breaking the fear loop involves becoming aware of the state you're in and consciously trying to change it. "You're not going to make good decisions while you are stuck in the fear loop."

If you're anxious or panicky, you can say to yourself:

"Okay, I am anxious now. What am I thinking about? I'm obviously visualizing something in the past or my future that's creating a movie in my mind that's making me fixate on something negative and I'm getting anxious. I need to take a deep breath and make a plan to get out of the loop."

Once you have that conversation with yourself, you can map out what's going on in your mind. When you have a map, you're no longer lost. You can start finding your way out instead of freaking out and making things worse.

Fear is something you can't always control. But it is something that you can prepare for, and that comes down to building resiliency. And the starting point is always self-awareness—assessing the patterns you may have developed over time when it comes to fear, and resolving to break them.

That's a noble, worthy goal, whether you're an elite soldier parachuting into an unknown territory or an ambitious entrepreneur doing the same.