

We haven't talked about fear in a while, but I felt we needed to dig in, so today we're talking about it...and believe it or not—

Fear Is a Habit—Not a Personality Trait

There's a lie that's been passed down to women for generations, especially as we age.

It sounds like this:

- “I’m just not brave enough.”
- “I’ve never been a risk taker.”
- “That’s just not who I am.”

Let's be clear: fear isn't who you are. Fear is something you *learned*.

And that means it can be *unlearned*.

In fact, fear operates more like a **habit loop** than a personal trait—wired into your brain through repetition, reinforced by temporary relief, and sneakily disguised as logic or “being careful.”

And that voice in your head that says you're not brave? That's not your intuition. That's your conditioning.



The Science of Fear: It's in Your Wiring, Not Your DNA

Fear is a biological response triggered by the **amygdala**, your brain's emotional alarm system. When your amygdala perceives a threat—whether it's a charging bear or the thought of speaking your truth—it hijacks your nervous system into **fight, flight, or freeze** mode.

But here's where it gets interesting: The more often you respond to fear with avoidance, the more your brain learns, *"Ah, this is how we stay safe."*

In neuroscience, this is called **reinforcement learning**—and it's the same principle behind habits like nail-biting or procrastination. Avoid the scary thing, feel instant relief, rinse and repeat.

You're not "unbrave." You're just running an outdated survival program.



Fear Is a Loop, Not a Wall

Here's how the fear habit loop works:

- 1. Trigger:** A situation evokes a memory or threat (e.g., rejection, failure, embarrassment).

2. Response: You avoid, freeze, say no, stay quiet, or delay.

3. Reward: You feel temporary relief (“Phew, crisis averted!”), which your brain *likes*.

That moment of relief *trains* your brain to repeat the behavior next time. But relief is not the same thing as growth.

Bravery vs. Courage: Know the Difference

Let’s get this straight:

- **Bravery** is instinctual. It’s running into the fire without thinking.
- **Courage** is intentional. It’s feeling the fear, understanding the risk—and doing it anyway.


Courage isn’t a personality trait. It’s a *skill* set. And like any skill, it improves with practice.

1. The beauty of being over 55 is you’ve got the life experience to back it up. You’ve survived more than you give yourself credit for. You’re not fragile. You’re just out of *practice*.

3 Ways to Break the Fear Habit Loop

1. Name It to Tame It

When you label your fear (“I’m afraid I’ll look stupid” or “I’m scared they won’t like me”), it activates the **prefrontal cortex**, the rational part of your brain. This calms the emotional center and puts you back in the driver’s seat.

 *Study Reference:* Dr. Matthew Lieberman at UCLA showed that affect labeling (naming emotions) reduces amygdala activity and increases control over emotional responses.

2. Practice Micro-Bravery

Do one small, uncomfortable thing every day. Not big leaps—tiny edges. Say the thing. Wear the color. Ask the question. Film the video.

Each act sends the signal:

“I can do hard things. I survived it. Let’s go again.”

 Bonus: This builds **dopamine circuits** that reinforce reward from action, not avoidance.

3. Visualize Success, Not Catastrophe

Your brain can't tell the difference between imagined and real success. Use **functional imagery training**—a technique proven to increase performance and reduce anxiety.

👉 Instead of rehearsing disaster (which most of us do), mentally rehearse the *win*. See yourself speaking confidently, hitting publish, or saying yes.

🧠 *Study Reference:* A 2016 study in *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* found that athletes using functional imagery training outperformed those using traditional visualization. Why? Because they felt the *emotion* of success, not just the scene.

Courage Is a Muscle. Train It.

The more you practice courage—even in small doses—the more it becomes your default.

And you want to know the real secret?

You don't wait until the fear is gone. You do it scared. You move while shaking. You speak while your voice quivers. You act before the permission slip arrives.

Because fear never fully disappears. But your relationship to it? That can change forever.

Final Thought:

You are not too old. You are not too late. You are not the scared girl you once were. You are a woman standing at the edge of her power—with the choice to step into it.

Fear may still knock on your door. But courage is what opens it.