

Managing Others Fears—and Our Own—During Frightening times

Jay Uhler

The man where I bought tires and got my car wheels aligned was really upset when I went for an alignment. A woman had verbally attacked him.

This was back during the big scare when auto tires were being recalled because they were causing fatal accidents. The woman wanted him to replace the tires on her car even though he did not sell the tires that were so dangerous.

I asked him if it had occurred to him that she was afraid that she and her children might die in a car accident because of the tires.

He responded that he had never thought of it that way. He relaxed because now he understood why the woman had acted so angry. She was feeling afraid and helpless about her predicament because he could not replace her tires. She probably could have bought new ones from him if he had ones that she needed and he may have even given her a discount if he understood the situation, but people don't think clearly when they are that upset and afraid and often do not express themselves well. A big reason is that often people themselves do not recognize their fears, therefore do not express themselves clearly and of course are misunderstood.

He felt much better when he realized why she was so upset and that he had not provoked her fear, which appeared as anger at him.

The woman probably did not know that her aggression was precipitated by fear. It is amazing to me when I am doing therapy to hear that many people do not recognize the amount of fear that existed in their family of learning, even when there was chaos or brutality. They don't recognize the ways that they learned to cope with fear. They often don't recognize the fear that is present as the emotion of fear.

It makes our lives much easier if we look for the reasons and the emotions behind another person's actions and understand what motivates them.

Many people attack or look angry, so they won't appear vulnerable. They attack believing that they will prevent being hurt if they attack the other person or they believe they will get what they want if they are aggressive and bully someone. It seldom works out well, even if they get what they want.

Others withdraw afraid that they will be hurt if they express what they need, so they cower in fear—at least inside, even if it is not evident on the outside.

Neither approach works. It is best to be aware of fear when it is there. Then we can decide what to do with it.

In the past, I came to know that sometimes when I was afraid, I would tighten my face and look angry. I was in an important situation where I felt vulnerable. I did not know the man, but I sensed that he would understand if I expressed myself, so I told him that sometimes when I am afraid, I look angry. I explained that if I appeared angry, it had nothing to do with him. It was about my fears related to the situation.

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My impression of him was accurate. He could not have been more kind. He listened to me and assisted me with the circumstances that were so important to me.

When we know that we are afraid, we can assess the safety of who we are with and then be open about our fear if we sense that they are trustworthy..

During the present time there is much fear about the financial world. Then fear takes on energy of its own. The fear gains momentum like a snowball being rolled down a hill. The ball of fear takes on more fear until it becomes enormous.

It is similar to when a person has a panic attack. They become afraid of their fear, then they become afraid of their increased fear, which is related to the original fear. As their fear of their fear of their fear increases their fear, they begin to panic. Then they panic experiencing panic and their panic escalates.

Did you follow that? If you did you are as whacked as I am.

It helps if we can catch our fear in the bud and remind ourselves that it is an emotion, not the reality. Fear does not predict the future; it only tells us that we are afraid.

It is important to recognize where our fear is coming from. Is it coming from the past? Is it related to a present reality? Or is it a warning about the future? Once we are clear about that, then we can decide what actions to take or to do nothing.

I believe it was Mark Twain who said that I have been scared to death many times, but will only die once.”

One problem with fear during difficult financial times is that we tend to withhold our money and get scared “stingy.” It can be important to be smart about what we do with our money, but that is different from withholding it.

Yesterday, I saw a fourteen or fifteen year old “child” sitting in Harvard Square with a sigh saying, “I need food for my lunch.” Was it true? I don’t know. Was s/he there because s/he needed it for her family and people would be more likely to give it to a young person than a parent? I don’t know. Did her family have lots of money? I don’t know. Was I foolish for walking by and then going back and giving her twenty dollars? I don’t know.

What I do know is that a youngster was sitting on a cold sidewalk on a cold day bundled up in a lot of clothes, so many that I couldn’t tell if s/he was a girl or a boy. I also know that s/he peered up at me when I put the bill in with the few pennies, nickels and dimes in the paper cup and she gave me a beautiful smile. (When she smiled she appeared to be a girl.) Hopefully the money helped someone during tough times.

We had a guest speaker on Sunday during morning worship at the church I attend. He left a lucrative photography business to establish a kindness center. He mentioned that when he goes through a highway toll booth, he will pay for the car behind him. They don’t know who he is and they won’t pay for his in return. It is just an act of kindness.

He will also pay for the coffee for the person who is behind him at the drive up window of the coffee shop.

Once he was speaking and mentioned that he pays people’s tolls and for their coffee. A woman in the audience raised her hand and said, “So you’re the one. You did that once for my husband and now he pays for the person behind him.”

Isn't the ripple effect wonderful!

When we contract our energy due to fear, we perpetuate contracted energy around us and in the world. When we stay open to be kind to others, even in small ways, we open the energy around us. We contribute to making the world a more enjoyable one for others and for ourselves. When people smile because of receiving an act of generosity, it reduces the fear in the world.

Even a smile changes people. Often walking through the grocery store, people will look at me and the quickly smile. Then I realize that I was smiling at them.

Oh! The ripple effect. Isn't it wonderful!

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(This article was written for listeners to the Jordan Rich Show, WBZ, 1030AM, Boston, MA. Share your thoughts with Jay at 978-685-8550 or [at jayuhler.com](http://jayuhler.com) or with Jordan Rich at radiospots@aol.com or mail them to Jordan Rich, c/o WBZ, 1170 Soldiers Field Rd., Boston, MA 02134.)