

“The only thing we have to fear ... is fear itself.” These famous words were spoken by Franklin Delanor Roosevelt during his inaugural address in March of 1933. This was Roosevelt’s first term. The country was in financial distress, the Great Depression had taken a toll on American’s psyche and Europe was in a state of unrest. Things did not look so good and the country was wanting leadership out of those perilous times.

When Roosevelt spoke of “Fear” he was talking not of the fear of war, which, a few years later would ironically put many back to work in the armed services and factories, but he was speaking of economic fear. The fear of hopelessness. The fear that there was no way out of the mess the country was in and the fear that everyone was doomed to a life of misery and poverty rather than the life of Liberty and opportunity that so many had come to America in search of.

With history, of course, you always know how the story turned out.

So, we can now look back and see that almost as a result of America entering the war in the Pacific and Europe the country slowly came out of the economic depression. The mobilization of our military, the industrialization of factories to feed the war machine and the unity with which we worked lead us to an economic recovery. And with “necessity being the mother of invention” the need to defeat the enemy brought some amazing technology that eventually found its way back into the public market place, increased our productivity and in some instances creating entire new industries.

I’m really not trying to make this a history lesson but I do want to share with you some thoughts on Roosevelt’s statement about “fear.” Fear is a primal emotion that is used by man far too often. It can be destructive, debilitating and produce serious physical and emotional problems. We tend to be fearful of far too many things and situations in our lives.

If you choose it to be, chronic fear can be your everyday companion. This is a big issue, long term fear. The persistent fear that another terrorist attack will take place, the fear that the economy will falter, the fear that you'll come down with an incurable illness, or the fear that global warming will cause the ice caps to melt, raising the ocean levels to a point that most of the United States will be underwater. (Then we could only race at Bandimere's)

This list may sound ridiculous but trust me, a lot of people walk around afraid of many things even stranger than the ones on my list. This fear slowly but consistently and constantly wears on them, eats away at their psyche and can have physiological effects as well as psychological.

The second type of fear I'll call acute fear. This is immediate situational fear. The fear of an unscheduled request to meet with your boss, the fear of getting lost in a strange neighborhood after dark, the fear of public speaking or the fear of driving a fast race car for the first time. This

type of fear can create instant havoc in our minds and bodies.

Intense and immediate fear has a transforming effect. Heart rate can double, respiration rate increases, the digestive system shuts down and the increased blood flow goes elsewhere in your body. Blood vessels expand, chemicals are released into your body that allow you to withstand more pain and your blood will begin to coagulate quicker, in anticipation of injury.

There are two problems here.

First, your reaction time does not improve. Your physiological ability to react to a stimulus, (say a light bulb coming on) does not get quicker. Second, your brain function drops to lower brain activity (a more primal part of the brain) and given choices you will increase the number of bad choices. You basically get stupid. Now I think it should be obvious that, as a race car driver the two things you need are quick reactions and smart choices, yet those are the two things that go "out the window" when fear enters your mind.

I guess that you may be asking yourself if drivers are ever afraid and if so, of what? Easy answers. First, yes. Second, losing. Believe it or not one of our most basic fears is that of poor performance. Looking like a goof, embarrassing yourself, letting the team down or letting yourself down.

The “fear of failure” is one of our arch enemies and it occurs in beginners and professionals alike. The paradox is that we are afraid of poor performance which most likely will cause poor performance.

Please don't believe speakers, coaches or athletes that say the “fear of losing is what motivates them.” Fear is in most instances a terrible motivator.

The big secret is that our emotions, including fear, are in our complete control. We “do them”, they don't “do us”. Once you get an understanding of this, you gain a competitive edge over your competition. We spend time at our school discussing this very topic, enabling individuals to

seize control over all their emotions, using them in the appropriate manner when necessary.

Once a person understands this they literally can exclude "fear" from their lives. Remember "the only thing to fear is fear itself".