**The War With Fear**
By: Christopher Warren, CNC

Part 1: What is Fear?

Through the miracle of evolution, whether you subscribe to a more scientific or religious view on the matter, we as a species have grown from our humble roots. We have done this through the passing of our stories, experiences, and even our genetic code. Nature has given us tools in order to survive so that we may pass on those traits that are valuable and do away with those which are not.

Biologically speaking fear is a built in mechanism that prepares us for stress. It is hardwired directly into our senses in order that it may deliver a rapid response to our physiological selves in order to respond to that stress. In its simplest form, fear is that built in failsafe that says “Don’t Die!”

Fear is often thought of as some sort of supernatural force without rhyme or reason that targets us as individuals and causes us grief and harm. It is easy to understand why many take this stance or one like it. The experience of fear is an uncomfortable one. In reality, it is an internal response to danger from an outside source. It raises our heart rate so that oxygen rich blood can feed our muscles, it widens our eyes so we can take in more information, it causes us to sweat to help keep our body cool, and perhaps most importantly it triggers the production of adrenaline in order to give us strength far beyond normal means.

This wondrous mechanism was developed long ago when the world was a more chaotic place for humans, where every turn could mean your doom. It is a mechanism that is shared with all other members of the animal kingdom on Earth. It is something so ingrained in our makeup that it is arguably the most defining attribute of our species. Fear is the tool of our Will to Live. It is something we likely experience in some form on a daily basis.

Fear then is not simply an emotive state that makes us uncomfortable. It is a very complex response system that can be triggered by any number of stimuli and based upon those stimuli and previous experiences it may trigger a variety of combinations within the body in response. In simplest terms we have become familiar with the “Fight or Flight” response which is somewhat overly simplistic. Many psychoanalysts offer up a third option “Freeze.” While still overly simplistic, this perhaps more accurately describes the general reactions to danger.

As our species progressed through the ages, we developed society, civilization, and glorious ways in which to defend ourselves from threats of nature and each other. We developed language, complex religions, philosophy, law, government, and even art. We as a species grew and improved upon ourselves with each generation and sometimes several times a generation. Along with the rest of ourselves our fear also grew and changed to adapt.

No longer was threat to our lives an hourly occurrence. In this day and age it is hard to imagine the danger of being mauled to death by a bear or some other ferocious creature or band of brigands but thousands of years ago this was the norm. Instead, our fear has grown with our cognitive abilities. The importance of surviving in the wild was replaced by the importance of surviving in society. Self image became increasingly important. Social standing, popularity, beauty, etc., became the traits which were needed to pass on genetically.

The need to survive socially was adapted into the fear mechanism and thus we begin to arrive at our current human condition where fear is coupled with not just perception but also with cognition. Where we begin to run into issues is the cognition in which our fear operates from is misinformed, incorrect, or exaggerated. Often, when fear first sets in with our initial thoughts, a conclusion is prematurely arrived at. This conclusion is rarely based on logic, proper information, or even any evidence. Instead we allow our minds to run wild, and unchecked in a panic. Our fear takes the information and generates a response.

Indeed, as humans we may perceive a threat where no threat actually exists because we have allowed our irrational thought processes to take over without checking the facts and making good choices based on solid information. This is the face of modern fear. It has become so overblown that when actual emergencies arise in which life is threatened, oftentimes our fear becomes a hindrance rather than the assistance we need in order to survive. In the end, we are defeated by ourselves long before an outside threat ever gets the chance.

Our greatest enemy, then, is our very own minds, which warps and is warped by our fear mechanism. It is an enemy that is relentless, cunning, patient, intelligent, and knows everything about you. It will imprison you for your entire life. The only way to break free from the tyranny of fear is to go to war with it.

Part 2: Preparing for War

The well versed warrior understands that going to war is no small matter. War is not a minor skirmish, requiring only a gallant showing of strength and a touch of skill. War is a complicated affair that requires training, preparation, strategy, flexibility, skill, cunning, bravery, and fortitude.

As warriors begin their profession, a decision is made to change how they will conduct themselves from that moment on. It often starts with physical exercises and mental discipline repeated over and over again until a basic understanding is gained. These first steps in any warrior tradition are designed to mold the person and challenge them to establish a sense of accomplishment and empowerment.

Ultimately it is the goal to continually challenge the warrior so that there is a constant growth that permeates into the person’s lifestyle. Most modern day martial arts schools, both east and west, do a fair job of providing the physical training. Some even provide an extensive mental discipline. Sports and fitness classes also do well in that regard. In either case physical training does wonders for the body. It increases positive endorphins, increases testosterone, stimulates blood flow to the body and the organs and, in short, improves the environment of the body in order that it may deal with stress. Physical exercise is therefore imperative for dealing with the horrors of war.

As for the mental aspect, it is important to engage the problem solving areas of the mind as they require exercise as much if not more so than the physical body in order to improve. Puzzles, games, such as chess or strategic simulations, or even just good old math are excellent ways in which to engage the mind. The study of logic, philosophy and critical thinking would also serve the aspiring warrior well.

By exercising the mind and body one naturally improves the self but also begins a self examination of strengths and weaknesses. The prudent warrior knows this assessment is as important as the exercises previously mentioned. By understanding where one’s strengths and weaknesses lie, one can make adjustments to training in order to improve weakness and maximize strengths.

While none of the things mentioned above do not specifically deal with fear, they present us with challenges and stresses that may include fear. They give us the tools needed in order to take on the challenges that fear sets against us. We set ourselves against these hardships and overcome them. We soon realize that through proper application we can overcome any challenge.

This is the point of training. We practice in order to stay strong in the various areas that are required to overcome conflict and hardship. Good training should make it into every aspect of our lives because fear will inevitably show up in the place in life we least expect it. From cooking to our place of work, we should endeavor to challenge ourselves and solve the problems that arise.

Part 3: Gather Intelligence

While training gives us the tools to help us solve problems, it does not necessarily deal with specifics. Thus we must move to the next stage of war and that is gathering intelligence on our enemy. In order to develop a proper plan of action we must know how our enemy acts, thinks, moves, rests and so on. Every piece of information on our enemy that can be gathered can be used against them in same way. Fear is no different.

Every person experiences fear in different ways. In fact, a single person can experience several individual fears with unique experiences for each. No one method will be able to conquer all fear. It is therefore important to gather as much information on fear as possible.

Books of psychology, philosophy and even religion are obvious sources. Other sources can be from other people and of course our own selves. Understanding how fear effects us mentally, physically, and spiritually will help us decide in what ways we must adjust in order to meet fear and deal with it.

Fear can manifest in any number of ways. It can be an irrational fear of a benign thing, a phobia of some sort. It can be a memory of heartbreak or frightening moment from our past. It can be some unexplained sensation or an overwhelming debilitating terror in the midst of chaos. Whatever form it takes, fear left unchecked will dominate your life.

It is important to understand that Intelligence, like training is an ongoing process, particularly in the case of fear. With each engagement it is important to monitor our adversary. It is also important to monitor the engagements of others. Share notes, discuss, compare experiences and develop a working model. By treating fear this way, it helps to visualize fear, to personify it, to recognize it as something that can be measured and ultimately controlled.

Part 4: Developing a Strategy

Once we have gathered enough intelligence we can build a profile of our enemy. We can begin to predict movements, estimate responses, plan for contingencies and essentially fight on our terms. Here we can make a strategy that we can use against fear.

What is of paramount importance at this stage is that knowing when fear will stick up its ugly head is simply not enough. We require a counter to fear’s movement. Simply put when fear does a thing, we will do a thing in response in order to keep it from taking control. In the military this is often called *pre-planned responses* and there is often a very detailed outline that is followed when mishaps, attacks, or emergencies arise.

It is impossible, of course, to plan for every emergency that may arise, particularly with fear. Yet having a basic outline for responding to a threat can effectively set our minds to deal with whatever our enemy may throw at us. It is therefore very critical to assess the self and all of its aspects during this stage. We must be able to understand what we can and cannot do.

It does us little good to develop a response that is unreasonable because we are unable or unwilling to do what is required. That only serves to incite helplessness in the face of fear. At the same time it is important to realize that every problem has a solution and that there is more than one way to arrive at the solution.

With all this in mind it is important to account for all assets available, which often requires one to think “outside the box.” Oftentimes, we tend to deal with problems in a brute, straight on method, pitting strength and endurance against that of the problem. The problem with this approach is that it only relies on a small portion of our available resources and then exhausts them. Attempting this approach with fear is like trying to arm wrestle an opponent that can change arms at a moment’s notice and as much as it wants without ever tiring.

When dealing specifically with fear one should take refuge in activities, memories, experiences, and outlets that tend to bolster positive thinking. Reflecting on accomplishments, physically exerting the body, drawing, writing, video games, word puzzles, etc., can all be part of the arsenal against fear. Notice how these are things we began our training with. It cannot be an artificial remedy however, but rather something that truly speaks to the individual. An athlete would not likely do the same thing an artist would do in terms of coping with fear nor should it be tried. What should be done is something that allows the individual to express themselves in a way that empowers them. It can be one thing or several things as long as it is something, and there is always something available. Self-reflection then is a very essential.

A great deal of time and effort should be spent in developing a strategy even if fear is at your door step on a daily basis. The more robust your collection of intelligence the more complete your strategy will be, and the more effective your plan of action will be which moves us on to our next step.

PART 5: Draw out a Plan of Action

We have educated ourselves, we have trained ourselves, we have gathered intelligence, we have developed strategies, now it is time to draw our path to victory. This is the point where we bring our skills together and develop the plan we need to win. At this point you should have a very strong picture of what you understand your fear to be.

At this stage, our fear can be personified in a sense. Give it form, a face, even make it a person or a monster. Doing this helps to visualize the problem, and when we can see the problem, it is easier to find the solution.

Just as every person’s fear will be different, so too will the plans be to conquer that fear. That being said making the plan can follow a single successful mold that can be built off of. I had the pleasure of learning a planning method that SEAL teams use in order to carry out their seemingly near impossible missions. I will offer it here in suggestion for the reader in making their own plans.

1. BEGIN AT THE END. Declare what the goal is, what the solution of the particular problem is. What the terms of success are, etc.
2. ESTABLISH THE REQUIREMENTS TO ACHIEVE THE END. What actions are needed in order to achieve the particular end goals.
3. START STEPPING BACKWARDS. Work backwards setting up checkpoints, contingencies, and alternate paths.
4. END AT THE BEGINNING. At this point you should have a clear understanding of what training requirements, assets, and skills you will need in order to the achieve the goal.
5. WORK FORWARD FILLING IN THE GAPS. Now work forward making sure you account for possibilities you had not previously considered. Develop contingencies as necessary.
6. REPEAT STEPS 1-5. Go over everything one more time. Making sure the plan is clear and understood.
7. EXECUTE.

This method is tried and true and has gone from the SEAL teams to the business world. This method allows for not only a clear path to be drawn but also allows for flexibility. It is simple and easy to do and can be applied to any problem you may have.

Once a plan is in place, it is much easier to deal with a seemingly impossible task. After all you just drew the map to the solution based off of all the intelligence you had gathered, training you have done, and education you had gained.

Things only seem impossible because the path is not clearly seen. By making a good plan with clearly understood goals along the path, the “light at the end of the tunnel” is much easier to see. I will end this part by stating one of my favorite sayings.

“If you fail to plan, plan to fail.”

PART 6: ACT!

You have educated yourself, you have trained yourself, you have gathered intelligence, you have built a strategy and you have a solid plan. None of this will amount to anything if you do not act. This is certainly the most difficult part in the battle with fear. This is likely the first time striking back at fear, and by its very nature this is scary. This is the point where the decision to win is truly made. Everything up to this point has been good intention. But good intentions without good actions are nothing.

Not to worry. If everything was done properly in preparation a clear first step has already been drawn out. You should be more than ready to take that very simple first step. Once that first step is achieved, go to the next one, and so on and so forth. It truly is that simple.

If the first step is still difficult, keep in mind that you have already decided to fight against fear. You have been making decisions towards that end by simply reading this far. All that is required is to choose again to fight. If the first step is just too much, then step back, review your plan, and change it until you realize you can do it and then *…do it*.

The beginning of every battle is always the most difficult, even if the battle is to get off the couch and go to the gym. Once the first step is made, the next is easier and before you know it you are in the thick of it and victory is in sight.

Make no mistake, however. Battles come with bruises. There will be times of discomfort and difficulty. There will even be times where you will want to give up and back out. This should be recognized and understood and also become part of your plan. It is okay to make a strategic retreat, but it is never okay to quit. The important thing to take away here is that things will happen that you did not foresee. These things will prey on you. Take the hit for good measure, add it to your intelligence, back out and adjust your plan, and then come back stronger. Never quit.

PART 7: Bringing it all together.

The battle with fear is one that will likely carry on for a lifetime. Even now you may have a fear of a thing that you do not realize, or there may even be things you do not know you are afraid of because you have yet to experience these things. Knowing this one should always be prepared to have fear creep up and then know how to deal with it when it does.

Remember that fear is essentially a part of us and is even a necessary and valuable function. The important thing is to control it rather than have it control you. Fear as a mechanism helps to keep us alive. Fear as a trap of the mind that keeps us from realizing our true potential is where the real fight is fought. It is a war for the mind that you wage with yourself.

It is very important to note that in this war you are not alone. There are those who are very well trained to assist you with your problems. There are friends and family that will help bolster you. They should become a part of your plan as necessary. Never be afraid to seek help.

This writing is not a solution, it is a guide to help find a solution. The solution has to be found by every individual just as the actions that are taken and the choices that are made must be done so by every individual.

Beware the roadblocks along the way. These roadblocks often can be found in the well intentioned, societal norms, and even in mass media. Excuses made on your behalf or by you or images of how “normal people” should look, act, and live are all things you will likely come across. Do not allow such things to keep you from striving from realizing your true potential.

The Navy has many slogans and mottos. One I particularly enjoy is “No excuses, only results.” Remember if you have a solid plan, you have trained yourself, educated yourself, and have good intelligence then you can achieve any goal, impossible as it may seem and as much as others may doubt you.

Ultimately it is up to every person to decide to conquer their own fear. Imagine all the things you could do if fear did not stand in the way of your decisions. Imagine how different the world would be and how richer life would be. It is not some fantasy world I am talking about but rather one that could exist if people did not let fear keep them from doing the miraculous things they are capable of.

All of this starts with a single person making the decision to face fear in all its many guises. This person would be a shining example to those around them. They would be a beacon for others to rally to. Because once fear has been pushed back the vibrancy of life replaces it. It becomes infectious to all who are around it. People will naturally want to mimic this behavior.

It all may sound a bit lofty, but ask yourself, how much do you enjoy being around people who have a positive outlook on life? These kinds of people are a joy to be around, they inspire us. Simply talking with them seems to lift our spirit. They seem to have no problems. I can assure you that they do have problems and have just as many fears as you. The difference is simply that these people have learned to deal with their fears and difficulties in a manner that allows them to maintain control.

Making the decision to fight fear is the first step in living a rich life, not free of fear but in control of it. If you can control your fear, you can control any aspect of your life. Make the decision to fight fear. The world deserves it. You deserve it.