

Media Article



Vocational Guidance Services

THE FEAR OF SUCCESS

Do you realize that the fear of failure (where you dare not do something in case you 'fail') is similar to the fear of success?

Have a look at these statements, below, and see if you 'agree' or 'disagree' to them:

1. Often the cost of success is greater than the reward.
2. For every winner there are several rejected and unhappy losers.
3. It is more important to play the game than to win it.
4. In competition I try to win no matter what.
5. A person who is at the top of their career faces nothing but a constant struggle to stay there.
6. In order to achieve one must give up the fun things in life.
7. Achievement commands respect.
8. I become embarrassed when others compliment me on my work.
9. When you're the best, all doors are open.
10. I believe successful people are often sad, lonely, arrogant, or have few real friends.

Now re-look at your answers and analyze what they reflect about you. Do you fear 'winning' in case it attracts attention to you? Do you fear taking on new responsibility or risk?

Fear of success hit the headlines in the 1960s after a study by Ms. Horner in America. Her experiment went like this: She gave out a piece of paper that stated: 'After first term finals, Anne finds herself at the top of her medical school class.' For male respondents, the name Anne was changed to John. Horner wanted the respondents to write a story to continue this statement. Amazingly, in 65% of the cases written by women, Anne did not become a success – but was instead tormented by her classmates, was consumed with guilt over her result and some female respondents even wrote that she must have cheated.

However, of the male respondents, only 9% wrote stories that rejected a feat of success being negative. Therefore, this groundbreaking study showed women were more likely to shy away from the limelight that success could bring. The study also showed that we are more likely to 'fear success' in a career dominated by the opposite sex – as medicine was by men in the 1960s. As such, men's reactions could be similar if questioned about careers such as nursing or kindergarten teaching! Since the 1960s other studies have shown women and men now have similar levels of fear of success – thanks, of course, to these pioneering women who did venture into new career fields and made it easier for others to follow.

The sad thing about fearing success is that it can prevent you from trying your best in an attempt to 'blend in'. This is true of you if your answers reflected that you thought successful people at work are bound to fail in other areas of their lives, or become unpopular. If you do well, in something, is your first thought oh dear, now they'll expect even more of me in the future?' Do you put down your success to 'luck' only and does it make you feel uncomfortable? Why not allow yourself to luxuriate in your well deserved reward – be it riches or recognition?

Look again at the questions, above, and appreciate numbers 7 and 9 as the truth, rather than the others. Looking at number 2, if you 'agreed' to that statement then maybe you need to learn that being a success you are not preventing others from being successful. In fact, you may be providing them with just the role model they need to encourage their success too!

Go on: those who dare; win.

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