



**INNOVEST SME**

Accelerating Small Business



# Dealing with Workplace Anxiety

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# CONTENTS

	<b>Preface</b>	5
<b>1</b>	<b>Common Types of Anxiety</b>	8
<b>2</b>	<b>Recognizing Symptoms in Others</b>	14
<b>3</b>	<b>Coping Strategies (I)</b>	20
<b>4</b>	<b>Coping Strategies (II)</b>	26
<b>5</b>	<b>Don't Avoid the Situation</b>	32
<b>6</b>	<b>Differences in Anxiety and Normal Nervousness</b>	38
<b>7</b>	<b>Physical Symptoms</b>	44
<b>8</b>	<b>Recognize the Positive Aspects of Anxiety</b>	50
<b>9</b>	<b>Common Anxiety Triggers</b>	56
<b>10</b>	<b>When to Seek Extra Help?</b>	62

*A crust eaten in peace  
is better than a banquet  
partaken in anxiety.*

AESOP

# PREFACE

It is normal to have some fear or feel out of place at work sometimes, but when the anxiety begins to control you and keep you from performing your normal activities it becomes a serious problem. For many workers that suffer from some sort of workplace anxiety, their productivity decreases and they fail to contribute to the job, which can make them more anxious. While there are many forms of workplace anxiety, we can all learn to overcome them by identifying the key problem and finding a way to manage them, before they manage you.

*Our anxiety does not  
empty tomorrow of its  
sorrows, but only empties  
today of its strengths.*

CHARLES H. SPURGEON



# COMMON TYPES OF ANXIETY

Anxiety cannot be defined as one, isolated condition. It has many faces and can have hundreds of different symptoms. But before you can begin to understand and identify any type of anxiety, it is important to know the common symptoms and characteristics of different disorders. Only after you've identified the type of anxiety can you focus on the source and how to cope with it.

## SOCIAL ANXIETY

Social anxiety, also known as social phobia, is a type of anxiety where a person fears crowds or public situations because they feel it will lead to public scrutiny or embarrassment. This can range from simply eating in public to being among a large crowd in a store. Sometimes this person can be mistaken for having a shy demeanor, but these people have serious trouble socializing at work or even participating in meetings. This can keep them from being a team player since they frequently withdraw from the group.

## **Characteristics:**

- Extremely fearful of unfamiliar situations and people
- Feeling overwhelmed with anxiety when in social situations
- Fearful of being judged or watched by other people
- Unable to face social situations on your own

## **GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER**

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is the most common type of anxiety and is usually defined as a constant state of tension and panic. People who suffer from GAD generally do not have anything particular that they are worrying or obsessing about. They cannot identify the source of the anxiety, and therefore cannot find a way to resolve the problem. So they continue to feel anxiety every day with either no apparent reason, or will find a number of problems to fret about without knowing why.

## **Common symptoms of GAD:**

- Difficulty focusing, sleeping or concentrating
- Constant restlessness, irritation or edginess
- Feeling tired or having low energy levels
- Tense or clenched muscles

## PANIC DISORDER

Panic disorder is characterized by a constant state of confusion and fear which normally occur in sporadic episodes, or panic attacks. While it is normal to have some fear or confusion in our work, these feelings should not cause physical symptoms or interfere with our productivity. These panic attacks can cause sudden, debilitating symptoms, such as shallow breathing, sweating, increased heart rate, and physical pain. Often times many people do not realize they have a panic disorder since they may not recognize the symptoms of a panic attack, which can make this disorder hard to diagnose.

### **Characteristics:**

- Feelings of doom or losing control
- Stomach pains, dizziness or even fainting
- Overwhelming sense of fear, usually irrational
- Sudden heart palpitations or excessive sweating

## PHOBIAS

Phobias are more common types of anxiety and generally focus on one thing or situation, such as a fear of spiders or a fear of public speaking. People who suffer from certain phobias begin to have an overwhelming feeling of fear and anxiety when they are faced with their phobia and can usually return to a normal state once the item or situation has been taken care of. Generally these phobias don't interfere with our everyday

lives since we may not actually have to encounter our fears on a regular basis (such as snakes, spiders, heights, fires, etc.). But phobias that can occur at work, such as a phobia of public speaking or a fear of crowded rooms, should be addressed right away since they can hinder our ability to function normally on the job.

### **Characteristics:**

- Fear is normally focused on one thing
- Fear is usually instantaneous
- Inability to control fears, even after facing the fear itself
- Feelings subside when phobia has passed or has been avoided

### **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Angela was having a hard time adjusting at her new job. She often felt her new coworkers were judging her performance and making comments about her when she wasn't around. When it came time to participate in meetings, Angela often tried to hide in the corner of the office and hope her manager wouldn't call on her to speak. Soon, Angela became fearful of even coming to work, and her performance began to drop. After speaking with the office counselor, Angela began to see she was suffering from social anxiety and possibly even a phobia of public speaking or public spaces. She knew she had to get help right away if she wanted to be able to function at work.

*I promise you nothing  
is as chaotic as it seems.  
Nothing is worth poisoning  
yourself into stress,  
anxiety, and fear.*

STEVE MARABOLI



# RECOGNIZING SYMPTOMS IN OTHERS

If you are one of the few people that do not suffer from some sort of anxiety, then chances are you know someone who does. But could you recognize the symptoms in someone else if they had some sort of anxiety problem? Would you know what to look for? Sometimes it takes someone on the other side to recognize these symptoms in others and offer their help before the victim themselves can realize they have a problem.

## AVOIDING SOCIAL SITUATIONS

Avoiding different types of social situations is a common symptom of social anxiety disorder. Many people can fear a variety of social or public situations, including public parties or events, group meetings or even having to give a presentation to a large group. They will often find excuses to avoid getting into the situation, or will simply avoid it altogether. When you think of the people you work with, do you think of anyone in particular that displays this kind of behavior? Do you have that team member that shies away from the group? Or maybe they are not there when it is time to present the project? If so, you may have someone in your group that is trying, at all costs, to avoid these social situations, and may need your help to overcome it.

## DIFFICULTY IN ACCEPTING NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

Someone who suffers from some sort of anxiety disorder often has trouble accepting any form of negative feedback since they fear any type of rejection or judgment. Whether it from a coworker or from management, any negative feedback, or constructive criticism offered will most likely be combated or simply ignored. The employee often takes the negative feedback as a form of judgment being passed on them, which in turn can heighten their feelings of being scrutinized or embarrassed.

When preparing to speak with someone you suspect may not take the information very well, practice what you are going to say ahead of time and check for key positive terms and phrases. If possible, keep negative terms to a minimum. Gauge how the employee reacts to what you have to say, and take the time to talk it out with them if needed. Sometime you may have to check back with them to make sure they have understood what you were trying to say.

### **Tips:**

- Approach with caution – prepare wording ahead of time
- Note how the employee receives the information
- Follow up as needed – ensure the information was taken in

## DIFFICULTY IN FOCUSING ON TASKS

It is normal to lack concentration or focus at work, especially since there is normally more than one thing that needs our attention. But if someone

has difficulty focusing on several projects, or even one main project, it's normally due to some type of anxiety. External distractions, such as coworkers or office noises can cause distractions for people with anxiety since they tend to focus on the area around them and make assumptions about their surroundings (*"Are they talking about me?"* or *"Is that my computer making that noise?"*). However, they can also have internal distractions that we may not be able to see, such as hunger, paranoia, or even intimidation. Although we cannot always fix these distractions or the employee's problems, we can offer assistance to them in hopes it will help in some way.

### **Ways to offer help:**

- Offer to work with them on a project, if available.
- Let them know you are available for questions or concerns.
- Try to ensure that your work area doesn't contribute to their distractions (i.e. turn down any music or speak softly when talking with others)

## **IRRATIONAL FEARS**

It is normal to have some fears or concerns at work; but when these fears begin to control our behavior, or seem to have no basis, and then they can interfere with our performance and even affect those around us. Many people actually can recognize that their fears are irrational or have no reasoning, but they cannot seem to control it or change how they feel about it. Some of an employee's irrational fears can include a fear of

missing a project deadline when they have completed the assignment or being fired without direct cause. This person will often appear anxious all the time or may try to over-compensate for things, since this makes them feel as though they cannot be 'targeted'. If this type of person isn't addressed quickly, their fear may overcome their ability to work and they will not be able to function in the office.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Freddy was assigned to work on a group project with his new coworker Andrea. Freddy introduced himself and told her he was glad to be working with her on such a big project. Andrea didn't say much and didn't interact much with Freddy when they worked together. When Freddy would ask Andrea a question, she often seemed distant and had to refocus on what he was asking. When they had a benchmark meeting with their manager about the project's progress, Freddy notice Andrea had very little input and wasn't speaking up about her part of the assignment. When Freddy tried to ask Andrea about it later, she became defensive and lashed out at him. Freddy feared Andrea was having trouble focusing on the project or speaking with him about it, so he knew he had to speak with someone about it and hope they could get her the help she needed.

*Life is ten percent  
experience and  
ninety percent how you  
respond to it.*

DOROTHY M. NEDDERMEYER



# COPING STRATEGIES (I)

Once we have identified what type of anxiety problems we may be facing, we can focus on how to cope with them and keep them from controlling our everyday life. Since anxiety can affect everyone differently, not everyone reacts or displays symptoms in the same way. Therefore, they also cannot be handled in exactly the same way. Luckily, there are many treatments, therapies and self-help strategies available to the public that can be customized to our needs.

### KEEPING A JOURNAL

Keeping some sort of diary or journal is a great way to cope with episodes of anxiety or distress. Writing in a journal allows a person to write freely and openly without having fear of being judged or criticized, as it will not be seen by anyone. This can provide an outlet for our pent up feelings and allows us to express them in ways we may not be able to do in front of others. A journal is also a great place to document things such as goals, thoughts, wants and desires that we may not share very often. Some people choose to keep their journal in one spot, such as at home or in a desk drawer, while others opt to carry it with them wherever they go.

Whichever you choose, be sure to write in it often and don't let feelings of anxiety build up before you can write them all down again.

## **POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING**

Sometimes our anxieties can get the best of us simply because we let them by welcoming in the negative thoughts they bring with them. But when we use positive thinking and words of encouragement, we can change how our anxieties grab us. Phrases such as *"I'm going to faint!"* and *"I can't do it!"* can negatively affect how we handle a certain situation or problem and can make anxieties worse. But to counteract these thoughts, we can focus on calming and soothing positive thoughts that can make us feel better about ourselves and whatever situation we have to face. By putting a stop to thoughts that can lead to anxiety or stress and replacing them with positive and encouraging thoughts, we are conditioning ourselves to permanently adapt our brain to this type of behavior and improving the way we handle difficult situations.

### **Sample positive thinking phrases:**

- *"I can do this."*
- *"These feelings may be uncomfortable, but they won't last."*
- *"I will not fail and others will see my success."*
- *"My anxiety cannot make me lose control."*

## **HAVE A “ME” PLACE YOU CAN GO**

When we are feeling stressed or overwhelmed, it is important that we have a place we can go to that is just for us or a ‘me’ place. Whether you are at home or work, find a spot where you can go to be alone and take a few minutes to think to yourself. Sometimes this can include your desk or office, if in a private spot, or maybe you have a secluded table in the break room you can retreat to. At the end of the day you might go home to a cozy chair in the living room or retreat to a couch in the den where you can relax.

Having a ‘me’ place helps us feel better about our anxieties because not only do we know that this place is meant only for us, but we can be ourselves in this special place and release any pent up feelings (this also makes a great place to keep that journal we started!). So next time you walk into your office or go home at the end of the day, take a few minutes to find your ‘me’ place and designate it as such. Set it up with a couple of relaxing books, music or aromatherapy candles. It is your space, so customize it with things that will help you the most.

## **ESTABLISH ATTAINABLE GOALS**

Setting goals for ourselves is always a good practice and it is especially true when coping with our anxiety. But we want to ensure that our goals are not so large and daunting that we scare ourselves away from trying to accomplish them. Focus on goals that you can realistically achieve and set attainable expectations for yourself. Start with small steps, such as changing the way we view a situation or how we react to something, and

then make later goals to go from there. Keep in mind that some things you cannot change (like how you *have* to give a weekly presentation in front of the whole office), but you can make goals to change how you handle them (such as being well prepared and taking deep breaths).

### **Tips for setting attainable goals:**

- Start small – you can work up to the big stuff later.
- Decide what you want to change or obtain now.
- Determine what is in your power to change or control.

### **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Jeff has started to realize that he has increased anxiety when at work – possibly due to the amount of people and limited office space. He came to work every day and repeated phrases such as “*You can do this*” and “*You will do great*” to himself when preparing for his day to help boost his positive thinking. He then started keeping a leather journal in his desk drawer for times when he needed to let out his frustrations and anxieties. When he felt stressed, he wrote what he wanted and then put the journal back in his desk.

In the back of his journal, he kept a section for the goals he had made for himself, which included improving his relationships with his coworkers, and learning to overcome his anxiety of group meetings. Jeff knew it was still hard to face his anxiety of the office every day, but with his own encouragements and helpful coping tools at his disposal, Jeff knew he had ways to slowly help him change how he felt about it.

*If you want to conquer the  
anxiety of life, live in the  
moment, live in the breath.*

AMIT RAY



# COPING STRATEGIES (II)

We've learned by now that just because you suffer from some sort of anxiety does not mean you are 'crazy' nor do you have to spend your time and money in and out of the doctor's office. Coping strategies emphasize self-help tactics that can help you get a handle on your anxiety and prevent it from interfering with your everyday life. With just a little effort and motivation, you can be amazed at how successful you are at managing your anxiety and be your 'normal' self.

### TALK WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

We understand that you may not have shared with the entire world that you have an anxiety problem, but chances are you have informed someone close to you and sought help from them. Speaking with our family and friends about our anxieties and how they make us feel is a great way of gaining support and feeling better about your problems. Since you are among loved ones and people that know you personally, feel more available to open up to them without a fear of judgment or criticism. Feel free to seek their advice and help, especially since they know you better than anyone else. Chances are, you may find one of them suffers from

the same problem (or something very similar) as you do and can offer advice and help that you haven't tried yet.

## **GET ENOUGH SLEEP**

As a fast-paced and busy working individual, we often overlook the benefit of a good night's sleep. We end up sleeping less when we stay up late to finish a project or get up early to try and get our errands done. Sleep replenishes our body and gets us ready to face each new day by revitalizing our minds, but only if we are getting a fair amount of uninterrupted sleep each night. Without the recommended eight hours of sleep each night, our mind does not have the strength or ability to keep up with our coping strategies and can often 'give out' on us, which can only make our anxieties worse over time.

### **Tips for getting more sleep:**

- Designate yourself a specific bedtime and stick to it.
- Remove distractions, such as a television or computer, from your sleeping area.
- Help yourself relax with soothing smells or sounds at bedtime.
- Invest in an eye mask or black-out curtains to help darken the room while sleeping.

## **EATING WELL AND EXERCISE**

Some anxiety can occur from chemical imbalances in our body, which is why eating well and getting plenty of exercise can help improve our

general anxiety symptoms. When we eat well, such as getting plenty of vitamins and minerals as well as drinking lots of water, we are fortifying our body by improving our immune system against stress and anxiety. In addition, getting regular exercise helps improve our mental clarity and concentration, which can be diminished when we are focused on our anxiety and anxiety symptoms. Exercise has even been proven to help prevent anxiety problems from reoccurring over time since it helps us improve focus and our ability to deal with stressful situations that can increase our heart rates. So pick up a piece of fruit and go for a long walk!

## **BEGIN SMALL AND BUILD UP TO LARGER CHALLENGES**

When coping with our anxieties, we know we have to start somewhere. Where do we start and how do we reach our ultimate goals?

When we decide to change our behavior or find a better way to handle it, start with a small, attainable task to focus on. Once we've accomplished this, we can set another, slightly larger goal to strive for. Once we've reached this one, we continue in this same pattern until we have achieved our ultimate ending goal, whatever it may be. For example, you have made a goal to overcome your anxiety of speaking in front of large groups. Start small with something you can achieve first, such as practicing your speech and verbal skills. Then maybe you can practice speaking in front of a few people, such as family and friends. Ultimately you'll find yourself able to speak in front of a large group of people, such as while giving a presentation or a speech. The key is in knowing that you can achieve your goals, and having the patience as well as motivation to work toward them.

### **Tips for setting challenges:**

- Start with small steps and plan the larger ones for later.
- Determine what the first step would be and work toward that.
- Know what you can change and what you can't. Focus on what you can change.

### **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Cherry was starting to feel anxious since she was assigned to give a major presentation to her managers next week. Cherry had always had a fear of public speaking, but hadn't told many people. The first thing she did was call her mom, who once had some of the same fears. She talked with her about how she was feeling and how she was nervous about the whole thing. Cherry felt better when she hung up with her mom, but was still uneasy about it. So she decided every day before work she would take a 15 minute walk to clear her mind before stepping into the office. That way, she would be ready to work and feel more focused on the assignment.

She researched the presentation and learned what it was addressing so she would be prepared. She practiced some of the key points in front of her husband at home and asked for his input. Finally, the night before the presentation, Cherry made sure to go to bed early and not let anything distract her from sleep. When she arrived at the office the next morning to give her presentation, Cherry felt refreshed and prepared to speak in front of her managers.

*Nothing is so fatiguing as  
the eternal hanging on of  
an uncompleted task*

WILLIAM JAMES



# DON'T AVOID THE SITUATION

Anxiety is not something we can 'will away' and it will not go away simply by ignoring the problem. You can only distract yourself for so long and you certainly can't avoid the situation in question forever. While we cannot face our anxieties head on during the first round, we can stop ourselves from turning away from them and accepting them as something we need to deal with today.

## IT'S OK TO MAKE A MISTAKE

Mistakes are a part of everything we do, and can certainly happen anywhere and anytime. But making a mistake is one of the main points that drive people to have some form of anxiety. People with anxiety feel that if they make a mistake, then they will be judged or embarrassed; they feel it won't make the right impression. But even with these anxieties, we must realize that it is okay to make mistakes and severe consequences will not always come from them. Sometimes we have to physically say to ourselves "*The office will not crumble if I forget today's status report*" or "*The world will not end because I spilled coffee on the copier*". Reassurance, no matter how humorous it may sound, is one of the best ways to tell ourselves to stay calm after a mistake, face the problem, and move on.

Mistakes can have a positive and beneficial impact, as they are learning experiences. Make sure when a mistake occurs that we take something positive from the experience. No one is perfect, so therefore everyone makes mistakes occasionally, including you!

## **ACCEPT THE SITUATION, AND MOVE ON**

One of the most important steps in managing our anxiety is taking a deep breath and accepting the situations that come before us. Once we accept them, we simply move on with our lives and do not dwell on them. When you're faced with being a team lead for a group project, your anxiety may be through the roof, but if you take a deep breath and accept the situation for what it is, you can begin to manage the anxiety feelings. You then realize it is something you have to do, and that the feelings you are experiencing may be uncomfortable, but certainly won't harm you or even last forever. Once you've accepted the situation and took control of the feelings that come with it, you can move forward and focus on doing a great job.

### **Tips:**

- Always take a few minutes to let the information sink in
- Look at the whole situation and what your role is in it
- Look at the anxiety feeling you're having and try to resolve them
- Realize what you have, and move with that

## AVOIDANCE CAN CAUSE A CYCLE OF ANXIETY

When we start feeling anxious about a problem or situation, our first instinct may be to completely avoid it at all costs. But this action only hinders our progress to managing our anxiety symptoms since it can actually make the symptoms worse. When we avoid a problem or situation that makes us nervous, we are training our mind to believe that there is some sort of danger or consequence associated with it, so that any time you are faced with it again in the future, you create the same response. If we train our mind to fear these situations or problems that give us anxiety, then we are only creating *more* anxiety within ourselves and it becomes part of a cycle of anxiety. The only way to end the cycle is to face the situation and symptoms and work through the feelings that come with it.

### **Remember:**

- Anxiety feeds on avoidance – this makes our symptoms worse
- Avoiding symptoms doesn't make them go away or disappear
- The problem will not just go away – we can't avoid them forever

## IDENTIFY THE TRIGGER

When trying to manage anxieties symptoms and feelings, it is important to take time and identify the triggers that cause you to feel this way. A trigger is a physical or emotional event or situation that causes you start feelings anxious or nervous. Sometimes they are obvious (such as seeing a pile of bills on the table makes you anxious about money), others may not seem as obvious and the basis of them can't be identified yet (such as tensing up when you get into a crowded elevator). The simplest way

to identify a trigger is to write down events that you normally feels anxious or nervous when faced with them and then listing what kind of symptoms they cause, and how intense.

Many worksheets, charts, and exercises are available to help identify triggers and symptoms. Use the worksheet included with this section to identify some of your triggers and how you can work through them.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Drew was part of a training group that was responsible for training new employees. They held several orientations a year that included slideshow presentations and reviews of the company manual. The idea of public speaking or reading aloud made Drew extremely nervous, so he was normally in charge of creating the slideshow and working behind the scenes. However, another employee had called in sick and the other members needed Drew to read a large passage from the employee handbook about dress code. Drew continually denied and tried to avoid the other members, which only made his problem worse.

When they couldn't find anyone else to do it, Drew decided he couldn't let the team down and needed to step in. He was afraid of making a mistake in front of everyone, so tried to prepare himself and calm his anxious feelings. Halfway through the passage, he mispronounced a word and froze. While there were a few giggle from the audience, Drew continued on and managed to finish the passage. He now knew he could in fact speak in public and read aloud without suffering any physical harm or consequences.

*Neither comprehension nor  
learning can take place in  
an atmosphere of anxiety.*

ROSE F. KENNEDY



# DIFFERENCES IN ANXIETY AND NORMAL NERVOUSNESS

Everyone gets nervous when it comes to stressful situations, such as taking a test, finishing a project, or even teaching a class. Normal nervousness may cause mild symptoms such as fidgeting, stomach ‘fluttering’, or shaking hands, but they do not hinder your performance. Anxiety goes beyond simple nervousness because many symptoms of anxiety are described as ‘crippling’ or ‘debilitating’ and typically interfere with our ability to complete certain tasks. Distinguishing between these two stages is a big step in successfully managing anxiety symptoms.

## IT RUNS ALONG A SPECTRUM

Anxiety has a wide spectrum on which different symptoms and feelings can be placed. For instance, when preparing to speak in front of a group, you may feel your stomach flutter or ‘butterflies’, which is a normal part of nervousness. But if you approach the group and your stomach feels as though a pack of horses is running through it, then we’ve slid over to the anxiety side of the spectrum because symptoms are more intense. This

spectrum can also be seen as a 'range', in which symptoms can start off mild or moderate and then progress to the other side and become more severe. Anxiety spectrums can be divided into different disorders to help gauge symptoms and judge where a person falls in that range and can better pinpoint any characteristics of anxiety disorders.

### **Common anxiety spectrums:**

- Obsessive-compulsive spectrum
- Social anxiety spectrum
- General anxiety (GAD) spectrum
- Panic-agoraphobia spectrum

### **ANXIETY CAN HAPPEN WITHOUT A CAUSE**

While many fears are justified and usually have some sort of cause or basis, anxiety can happen any time and without a particular cause or root. Unfortunately, we are not always able to see that our anxiety does not have a real basis, yet we still have the same feelings. Common nervousness has a valid reason and some sort of signal that you could feel symptoms soon. Although it is unclear why, anxiety does not give us a warning sign. But you will always have the upper hand if you learn to accept the symptoms as they come and remember to work through them instead of turning away from them.

## **Tips for managing symptoms:**

- When symptoms arise, don't avoid them
- Determine if you just feel nervous, or if you're becoming anxious
- Record symptoms in a log or journal to help identify a cause

## **THE LENGTH OF TIME SYMPTOMS LAST**

General nervousness symptoms appear when we are faced with uncomfortable situations, but the symptoms usually do not last very long and, for the most part, subside soon after. However, anxiety symptoms typically appear quickly and last much longer than nervous feelings. Symptoms can last several minutes, days or can even span over a number of weeks. Feelings of anxiety can last for an extended length of time, especially since they can turn into a cycle of anxiety, which can be hard to end. When symptoms continue over a length of time, this causes more anxiety and can make it hard to distinguish when one set of anxiety feelings end and when others begin.

## **IT'S AN EXAGGERATION OF NORMAL FEELINGS**

When we are nervous, we can experience symptoms that cause us discomfort, such as shaking hands or quickened breathing. Symptoms such as these are normal and generally do not interfere with what we are doing. Anxiety symptoms can be similar, but they can appear more exaggerated and intense. Shaking hands can turn into whole body tremors, and shallow breathing can turn into choking or gasping for air.

Often times, symptoms can seem so severe, that people are thought to be suffering from some sort of physical medical condition, such as a heart attack or gastroenteritis. People who suffer from severe anxiety and exaggerated symptoms will often visit several doctors before being diagnosed with anxiety and begin proper treatment.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Alexa has always been afraid of public speaking. She knows it makes her nervous because her hands start to shake when she starts a presentation, but she always manages to make it through. Alexa is able to realize that while the situation makes her nervous; her anxiety is on a lower end of the anxiety spectrum and she can continue to function. However, a coworker mentioned that Alexa will need to create a music CD to accompany her presentation, and Alexa froze. She suddenly felt short of breath and her hands became clammy. She began to feel as though she could never get it done and thought the task was next to impossible.

After worrying about it for several days, Alexa decided to determine what she could do about the situation and first decide why she was anxious. She found out she had such anxiety about the music because she didn't know how to do something like this. She consulted with a friend of hers in another department to show her how to make the accompaniment and how to set it up. When it came time to do the presentation, Alexa recognized her usual symptoms of nervousness, but knew she didn't have any other feelings of anxiety about it.

*Anxiety is the space  
between the “now”  
and the “then”.*

RICHARD ABELL



# PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

Even though anxiety can affect us emotionally and cause various mental symptoms, it can also cause a long list of physical symptoms that can take a toll on us. Anxiety is more than just a feeling; it can be a physical ailment. Since they are normally the most strenuous part about having anxiety, many people mistake it for some other form of physical illness. Common physical symptoms include headaches, nausea, increased heart rate, and muscle cramps.

## RAPID HEARTBEAT

When we become anxious, our adrenalin starts to flow and causes our senses to go into overdrive. This causes our heart rate to increase and beat more rapidly. The body is processing a lot of emotions and feelings, and the heart has to pump faster, which causes the blood to flow faster. Since we cannot prevent this from happening, the only thing we can do for it is to take a rest and try to take deep breaths. Focus on your breathing and allow the feeling to pass.

### **Tips to help relax:**

- Sit down in an open area with lots of air
- Take deep, calming breaths
- Allow the symptom pass before attempting to resume activity

## PANIC ATTACK

Panic attacks are a common symptom of different types of anxiety. Although they can be serious and scary, but panic attacks are not life-threatening. It often acts like the body's alarm system that is telling us something is wrong. Symptoms usually peak in a few minutes and then subside soon after. Many people who have panic attacks will have more than one, some right after another, which can make symptoms worse and increase the fear of having more panic attacks in the future.

### **Common symptoms of a panic attack:**

- Upset stomach
- Dizziness
- Fatigue or restlessness
- Muscle pain or spasms
- Rapid breathing or gasping

## HEADACHE

Increased anxiety and adrenalin is the main culprit for causing various types of headaches. The sudden anxiety affects the muscles in our body, and our head is full of them! Anxiety headaches differ from normal, everyday headaches in that they occur more frequently, are more intense, and can last much longer. The pain can appear on any side of the head and can sometimes reach into the lower neck and spine. Unfortunately, these headaches cannot be avoided; they can only be treated or tolerated.

Common treatment options include pain reliever medicines, relaxation techniques, or home remedies.

### **Tips for relieving headaches:**

- Take a pain reliever medicine
- Lay down for an extended period of time
- Take deep, calming breaths
- Avoid sudden changes in light or noise

## **TREMBLING OR SHAKING**

It is normal to feel some shaking or trembling when we become nervous, such as during a public speech or when waiting for an important phone call. But when we have anxiety or start to feel anxious, the shaking and trembling become more intense and lasts for a longer period of time, which causes us to feel as though we cannot proceed. Sometimes we become so anxious about *not* trembling or shaking that it only makes the symptoms worse. Trembling or shaking is a result of our body's 'flight or fight' response, and is caused by extra adrenalin or energy being rushed to the muscles, supposedly getting them ready for 'action'.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Bobby has a phobia of heights. He feels anxious anytime he has to go a few stories off the ground and definitely wouldn't fly or go on the roller coasters. So when his department was moved to the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of the

building, he started to become anxious. He would feel his hands shaking a little while riding the elevator higher and higher. When he saw his new office had open windows that overlooked the city, Bobby started to get a headache and thought his heart was going to beat out of his chest. He wasn't sure how he was going to function in his new space!

However, Bobby decided he would have to find a way to work in his new office or he wouldn't be able to get any work done. So when he got in the elevator, he took a deep breath and assured himself it was alright. When he was in his shared office, he sat facing away from the window or asked to switch with a coworker. Bobby knew he was afraid of heights, but he also knew he could overcome the symptoms and function as normal.

*Do not anticipate trouble,  
or worry about what  
may never happen. Keep  
in the sunlight.*

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



# RECOGNIZE THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF ANXIETY

Whether people like anxiety or not, it is a normal feeling that everyone experiences at some time or another. As with everything in life, anxiety can have negative and positive aspects associated with it. However, anxiety disorders often focus on only the negative effects and symptoms it can cause. While the physical and mental symptoms can be exhausting or even debilitating at times, anxiety can also alert us to something that is wrong and prepares our body to “flight or fight”.

## IT ALERTS US TO DANGER

One of the most beneficial, and most overlooked, aspects of anxiety is that it alerts ourselves to a sense of danger and tells us that something is wrong. Anxiety tells you not to walk alone at night or touch a stove that looks hot. If we didn't have these feelings of anxiety, we might encounter a dangerous situation and not recognize it. We might ignore our instincts and touch the hot stove, thus burning our hand in the process.

At work, you may have anxiety about your new boss or going into a crowded elevator that everyone takes. This anxiety is beneficial, since

you may not yet know your boss and should be on guard to how they react to things. The anxiety about the elevator gives you a hint that a crowded elevator is dangerous and that something could go wrong, so you avoid the elevator, take the next one, and feel safe. Anxiety may arise to sense us of danger, but once the situation has passed, the impending feelings should subside.

## **IMPROVES SELF-AWARENESS**

Anxiety raises adrenalin and causes the heart to beat faster, which prepares the body to take any action that is needed. By activating that natural 'flight or fight' defense people have, we become more aware of ourselves and our surroundings. We become more aware of what it is that is causing us to have these symptoms and tells us to pay attention to them. We can see if the problem is mental or physical and decide the best way to handle it. When we improve our own self-awareness, we can be better aware of our surroundings and learn how to better function in them.

### **Self-awareness and anxiety:**

- “What am I doing here?”
- “Why do I feel this way?”
- “How can I react?”
- “How will this affect me?”

## **CAN BE A GREAT MOTIVATOR**

Sometimes people need a little push to make a decision. Motivations come in all shapes and sizes, and anxiety is one of them. While we may believe anxiety keeps us from doing certain things, it is also motivating us to do others at the same time. Anxiety may tell you that you are too anxious to give that speech in front of everyone, but it is also motivating you to conquer your fear and do what you have to do in order to deliver it. Another instance is that anxiety may tell you that it is dangerous to leave your car unlocked in the empty parking lot, so your body reacts and is motivated to lock the doors before you leave. Anxiety will tell you to be ready for anything and it will motivate you to make choices as to what you can do to be prepared.

## **PREVENT MISTAKES**

Because anxiety motivates us to make good decisions and to take action, it also helps us prevent mistakes. Anxiety told you it would be a mistake to leave your car unlocked in the middle of the parking lot, which motivated you to lock the doors. At work, you realize a project is coming due soon and become anxious about finishing it, so your anxiety pops up and says it would be a mistake to procrastinate and motivates you to work on it every day. Many people refer to this theory as just using common sense, but it has only become common sense because we listen to our body's instincts and learn to recognize when it is trying to alert us to something. When we listen to what anxiety tells us, we recognize a sense of danger or alarm and help prevent mistakes before they start.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Patty was working on a team project with several other people. She became anxious when her partners did not complete their parts before their meeting deadline. Patty couldn't focus on her work and always felt nervous when she left the office at the end of the day. She decided to consult with them and find out what was going on. Her feelings proved correct because her teammates were having trouble collecting the data needed for their part of the assignment. Patty then became motivated to help them find what they needed and helped them meet the group's deadline. Patty was glad she listened to her instinct and decided to check on her teammates.

*One cannot remove anxiety  
by arguing it away.*

PAUL TILLICH



# COMMON ANXIETY TRIGGERS

An anxiety trigger is something that sets off our feelings of anxiety. Sometimes recognizing the trigger is not so easy, since a trigger can come on suddenly while others are well known and expected. If we can identify our own anxiety triggers, we can avoid them or even stop them from happening. But other times, if the trigger is unknown or not as obvious, we may have to find ways to just adapt around it.

## UNCERTAINTY OR FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

Fear is a big cause of many anxiety triggers and symptoms. One of the biggest fears associated with anxiety is uncertainty or the fear of the unknown. Not knowing how a situation will result can make some people simply shut down. The fear of not knowing how a project went over or not knowing how well or poor a speech will be delivered can make some people simply avoid the situation, causing a lot of missed opportunities. Others may try to find out as much information as they can so that they can feel more informed, but if it doesn't satisfy the 'need' to know, then they may just quit altogether.

### **Questions that make us anxious:**

- “What will happen if I do \_\_\_\_\_?”
- “What will happen if I don’t do \_\_\_\_\_?”
- “Will this change anything?”
- “Will something bad happen?”

### **HOLDING IN FEELINGS**

When we hold in our feelings, we are not allowing our body to express how it naturally feels. This forces our brain to hold in our negative thoughts or emotions and creates a large storage bin for them to brew. Often times we suppress our feelings because we become anxious about how others may perceive them or react to them. But if we keep them inside, they cause more anxiety since we have to keep more control over them – which then leads us to continue to think about them and dwell on them. While we cannot always say whatever we want, when we want, there are ways of coping with our feelings and keeping them from attacking us on the inside.

### **Sample ways to express feelings:**

- Keep a journal.
- Talk with a friend or counselor.
- Start a blog.

## **PUBLIC SPEAKING/SPEAKING UP**

When it comes to speaking in front of others, we are allowing them to hear what we have to say and possibly pass judgment on it, which can cause us to take these feelings of judgment or rejection personally and cause anxiety. When speaking in public or in front of a group, we become anxious because we feel as though we are in the hot seat and cannot escape if we start to feel uncomfortable. We begin to fear making a mistake or having someone not like us. When we fear speaking up, such as to a manager or a coworker, we are second guessing ourselves and fear repercussions if we do not agree with them or like what they have to say. Although most of these fears are generally unfounded, they can be a strong cause in many cases of anxiety.

## **TRYING TO BE PERFECT**

Some people strive to be perfect; and some come pretty close. Others want to be perfect in many areas, such as our work and personal lives, but feel anxious in the process or when we fail to do so. When we make a mistake, we don't feel as though we did a perfect job, and can make us feel as though everyone is watching us (which leads to more anxiety!). Not being perfect, or not even being the best at something, cause make us feel as though we are not good enough and that others may be passing judgment on us. This can cause further anxiety since we are obsessing about what other people think of us.

## Remember:

- The age old saying -"No one is perfect."
- Perfection won't make others happy.
- Perfection will not make you happy.
- Imperfection is how we learn and adapt.

## PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Matthew was assigned to make a presentation about the new software system the office was adopting to their computers. He has always had a fear of public speaking, and just thinking about being in front of a group of people triggers his anxiety. However, he is normally able to handle himself very well and make it through the information. So he studied the information and made a presentation and prepared for anything his coworkers would need to know.

The day of the presentation, his manager informed him the presentation was not for his coworkers, but was for the board of supervisors for the department. Matthew immediately felt anxious and began to sweat profusely. He immediately kept thinking of things such as "*What if I make a mistake?*" or "*What if they don't like the presentation?*" which increased his anxiety. When he was in front of the supervisors, he tried to handle himself as he would in any other presentation. Although he made a few slip ups, he managed to deliver the presentation very well. Matthew then wondered why he had become so anxious in the first place.

*It is well to remind  
ourselves that anxiety  
signifies a conflict, and so  
long as conflict is going on,  
a constructive solution  
is possible.*

ROLLO MAY



# WHEN TO SEEK EXTRA HELP?

Sometimes our anxiety can be too overwhelming to settle by ourselves. We have to learn what our limit is and how must we handle our on our own. Self-help methods and techniques are a great way to try and manage your anxiety and anxiety symptoms, but sometimes we have to realize when we need help from others and when to seek extra guidance in order to help ourselves.

## FEELING OVERWHELMED

Anxiety symptoms can be exhausting and can take a toll on us mentally and physically. While managing our anxiety is no easy task, it should not feel so overwhelming that we cannot function in our everyday lives. Anxiety can grow and grow if not handled properly, which can only make us begin to feel worse about our problems rather than seeking help for them. Sometimes the help from family and friends may not be enough to ease our symptoms and will need to be handled by a professional.

When to seek help:

- If symptoms are too big to solve yourself
- If there are too many issues to deal with at once
- If anxiety is keeping you from functioning as normal

## PHYSICAL CHANGES

When we feel anxious, our minds and senses are constantly changing, but anxiety can cause physical changes in ourselves as well. Anxious feelings cause our heart to beat faster, which in turn makes our blood flow faster, causing shortness of breath, profuse sweating or ‘butterflies’ in our stomach. It heightens our senses, so that every little change around us is exaggerated and made to appear bigger than it is. These somewhat random symptoms become habits over time and we are not able to control them any longer. Most importantly, anxiety can make us feel more fatigued and exhausted over time, since we are constantly putting all of our energy into trying to manage or avoid our anxiety. Changes such as these cannot be managed until the source of the anxiety is managed, which may require additional help.

### **Sample physical changes include:**

- Rapid heartbeat
- Rush of adrenalin
- Increased sweating
- Fatigue or exhaustion

## UNABLE TO WORK OR FUNCTION

As we’ve said before, some anxiety or nervousness is normal and healthy in many cases. However, when these feelings overcome us so much that we are unable to perform our normal duties or simple tasks, then we

know it has become a problem. Anxiety can alert us to danger or help us make better decisions, but when it interferes with making any decision or with making everyday choices, the anxiety has taken over. No matter how much we tell ourselves we are managing our symptoms, if we are at the point where we cannot work or play as normal, then the anxiety is managing us, and we must seek additional help and guidance to get them under control.

## **PANIC ATTACKS**

Panic attacks are very common with anxiety problems. Symptoms usually peak very quickly and can be very intense, such as shortness of breath or a rapid heartbeat. Generally, these attacks are very scary and have serious symptoms, but they do not cause immediate health implications and are not life threatening. But sometimes panic attacks can become so severe that they become debilitating and stop us in our tracks. The symptoms can be so severe that we create other problems, such as choking, nausea, fatigue, or fainting. This prevents us from functioning as normal. These types of panic attacks need to be evaluated by your doctor and will need to be possibly treated with medications or remedies.

### **Recognize symptoms of a panic attack:**

- Rapid heartbeat or pulse
- Shallow breathing – gasping or choking
- Dizziness
- Muscle pain or spasms
- Fatigue or restlessness

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Linda routinely suffered from a fear of crowded places and would often have a minor panic attack when she was in a crowded room in the office, such as the cafeteria or the lobby. Since her office only had a few people in it, she could normally retreat there and calm herself. But her manager informed her that they were expanding the department and were bringing more employees into the office. Linda instantly became more anxious at the thought of more people coming in. She began to feel ill and worried constantly about how she was going to cope. Over time Linda became more fatigued and had trouble focusing on her assignments. The day before the big move in, her coworker suggested she take the day off and seek some help from her doctor. Linda agreed and decided she needed to seek additional help if she was going to be able to function in her own office space.

*Worry often gives a small  
thing a big shadow.*

SWEDISH PROVERB

# CLOSING THOUGHTS

- **John Kenneth Galbraith:** All the great leaders have had one characteristic in common; it was their willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time. This, and not much else, is the essence of leadership.
- **Robert Albert Bloch:** Anxiety is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained.
- **Susan Jeffers:** We cannot escape fear. We can only transform it into a companion that accompanies us on all our exciting adventures.
- **C.S. Lewis:** Some people feel guilty about their anxieties and regard them as a defect of faith. I don't agree at all. They are afflictions, not sins.



**Rick Chisholm** made history when he single-handedly changed the professional Audio Visual industry by breaking all the rules and capitalised over 50% market share in Australia with very little capital, no partners, mergers or lenders and set up the first franchise operation of its kind in the world in the late 1990's and early 2000's.

As a 7x founder of companies and 30x businesses such as Innovest, AI Machine, Lightsounds, LSW, Light Emotion with revenue in excess of \$300 million and having employed more than 1,000 staff over the last 35 years. Rick is known as the Start-Up and SME Guru and is Author of a number of books including Business Success for Life. Unlike many mentors, he actually walks the talk and has a number of businesses under management in such areas as Automation, Events management, Importing, Distribution, Retailing and E-commerce.

His BIG passion is Business Education empowering Businesses Owners through knowledge and skills. Whilst Rick has experienced great success, he has also endured many failures. Rick has faced and overcome the exact same challenges you are facing now.



**Tala Chisholm** is an SME specialist who has owned and managed several small to medium sized businesses in the last 20 years, several of which were eventually sold. She has extensive experience in the fields of retail, franchising, licensing, dealerships, education, importing, distribution and consulting.

Her expertise lies in building and implementing customised cross-platform database and software solutions for businesses, automation, IT, web marketing, advertising, graphic design, business administration, process refinement and implementation. Her business experience ranges from bricks-and-mortar Giftware retailing to highly technical fields such as Security, CCTV, Entertainment Lighting and Audio sales, hire and installations as well as e-commerce.

Throughout her career she also trained and mentored Franchise business owners as well as internal division managers. Some areas of training included retail operations, management practices, business strategy, accounting, cash-flow, marketing, customer service and IT. She has also headed up the drafting of Operating Compliance Manuals for Franchise operations and implementation of all the elements involved.

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