



DOING THE HARD WORK

The hardest work of leadership is often the work within.

When Fear Starts Writing the Story

Learning to recognize when past experiences, fear, and ego are predicting a future that may not actually be there

Experience teaches us. Trust someone and get betrayed, and you learn to be more careful. Take a large financial risk and nearly lose everything, and you learn to protect cash. Speak honestly and get attacked, and you learn that keeping quiet may be safer. Those lessons can be valuable.

But sometimes our minds learn the lesson **too well**. Something painful happens once - or a few times - and our internal warning system begins treating that outcome as if it is what normally happens. **Possible starts feeling probable. 'That happened to me' becomes 'That is what happens.'** That is where fear, experience, and ego can quietly begin writing our story for us.

1 Recognize that your mind is trying to protect you

Fear usually has a story. Maybe you lost money, someone betrayed you, you were rejected, a business failed, you disappointed someone, or a decision had painful consequences. Your mind remembers. When something resembles that experience again, it warns: **'Do not let that happen again.'** That protection can be useful until avoiding the past begins preventing you from fully engaging with the present. The objective is not to eliminate fear. It is to understand **what your fear learned**.

ASK YOURSELF: When I feel unusually anxious, defensive, controlling, or avoidant, what past experience might my mind be trying to prevent me from repeating?

2 Separate what is possible from what is probable

If something painful happened to you personally, your mind does not experience it as a statistic. It experiences it as **evidence**. You trusted an employee who betrayed you, so every employee can begin to feel dangerous. You expanded aggressively and nearly lost the business, so growth begins to feel dangerous. Those outcomes are possible. But possibility and probability are not the same thing. An outcome that occurs infrequently can feel overwhelmingly likely when you have personally lived through it. **The feeling is real. The probability may not be.**

ASK YOURSELF: Am I evaluating how likely this outcome actually is - or how strongly I remember what it felt like when it happened before?

3 Watch for the ego that develops around the fear

We often associate ego with thinking too highly of ourselves. But ego can also be the identity we build to protect ourselves: **'I do not need anybody.'** **'If I do not control it, it will not be done right.'** **'You cannot trust people with money.'** **'I always have a backup plan.'** These beliefs may contain wisdom. They may also contain scar tissue. Over time, a protective behavior can become part of how we understand ourselves. Then challenging the behavior feels like challenging who we are. Sometimes what we call a strength is partly something we became very good at because we were afraid.

ASK YOURSELF: Which parts of my identity might have originally developed as ways to protect me?



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4 Do not let one side of the cube become the whole cube

Your experience gives you a legitimate side of the Rubik's Cube. If you experienced betrayal, failure, loss, conflict, or humiliation, that side is real. **You do not need to pretend it did not happen in order to grow.** The problem comes when your experience becomes the entire cube. Someone else may have trusted and experienced loyalty, taken the risk and succeeded, delegated and watched someone flourish, or been vulnerable and experienced connection. Their experience does not invalidate yours. It reveals another side. Humility says: **'My experience taught me something important. But maybe it did not teach me everything.'**

ASK YOURSELF: Have I turned something that happened to me into a rule about how the world works?

5 Update the story with new evidence

Growth does not require forgetting what happened. It requires allowing **new experiences to update old conclusions.** Trust someone with something small. Have the conversation. Delegate one decision. Take a measured risk. Establish the boundary. Then pay attention to what actually happens. Maybe the feared outcome occurs, and that teaches you something. Maybe it does not, and that teaches you something too. Every result different from what fear predicted is new evidence. **The old experience remains part of your story. It simply stops being the only evidence allowed to testify.**

ASK YOURSELF: What small, reasonable action would allow reality to test a belief that fear has been asking me to accept as fact?

The Ego Demon Within

There is a voice inside most of us that is very good at protecting the world we already understand: **Do not risk it. Do not trust them. Do not look foolish. Do not let go of control. Do not get hurt again.** Sometimes that voice is wisdom. Sometimes it is fear. The hard work is learning the difference.

EXPERIENCE	FEAR	STORY	EGO	BEHAVIOR
Something happened	Do not let it happen again	This is what happens when...	I am someone who always...	Control, avoid, protect
NOTICE	QUESTION	TEST	LEARN	UPDATE
See the pattern	Is this fear or fact?	Take a measured step	Observe reality	Revise the story

The goal is not to destroy your ego. It is to keep it from becoming the unquestioned author of your decisions.

THE FEAR-OR-FACT TEST

EXPERIENCE - What happened to me? What real experience taught me to expect this outcome?

FEAR - What am I trying to prevent? What specifically am I afraid will happen again?

PROBABILITY - How likely is it actually? Am I confusing a vivid possibility with a probable outcome?

EGO - What identity have I built around protecting myself? Do I need to be the person who is always prepared, independent, right, strong, needed, safe, or in control?

EVIDENCE - What else is true? What experiences - mine or someone else's - suggest another outcome is possible?

TEST - What is a reasonable next step? How could I test this belief without recklessly ignoring legitimate risk?

UPDATE - What did reality teach me? Does my old belief still deserve the same influence over my choices?

What would I do differently if I believed the past was information about my future - not a prediction of it?

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Some of the beliefs that helped us survive difficult seasons can eventually become the beliefs that keep us from growing beyond them. The goal is to honor what experience taught us without allowing our most painful experiences to become the only lens through which we interpret what comes next.

AgStrat works with founders and leaders who are building both stronger organizations and the personal capacity required to lead them. To begin a confidential conversation, contact AgStrat at virgil@agstratsolutions.com.

Awareness | Courage | Curiosity | Growth | Leadership