

## ANXIETY

“To run in anguish from anxiety is futile, since anxiety will not go away any more than our breath will go away. To be ‘cured’ of anxiety makes as much sense as to be ‘cured’ of heartbeats or of metabolism. The presence of anxiety does not mean that we are sick, but that something within us is trying to be born. To grow is to experience anxiety. There can be no growth without it.”

“If we do not feel anxious, it may be appropriate to encourage it for the sake of rebirth. For our learning or transformation to be effective and truly reconstructive, we must seek out the maximum amount of tolerable anxiety. The changes that occur in intensive transformational experiences do so by undermining our deepest suppressed assumptions – a condition of grave anxiety. Such anxiety must be encouraged for rebirth to take place. We can mobilize the anxiety of birth, and thus facilitate growth, when life events or another person gives us first of all – – a ‘shocking’ assessment of ourselves. However, when the ‘shock’ comes from a friend or helper, the person must be the equivalent of an artist. The shock must be loving, [and ideally] is perceived as such. And, it must occur in a genuinely supportive environment. It must also be based on an accurate assessment of our project or our being–in the world. The shock must be strong enough to undermine the old and nonworking world design of ourselves, but not so violent as to arouse more anxiety than we are able to cope with. It is this shocking and anxiety-producing experience, this quick grasp of the new possibilities of one’s existence that makes the arousal of the anxiety of [growth] worthwhile.”

From *Freedom and Accountability at Work*  
By Peter Koestenbaum and Peter Block

### More On Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal and healthy reaction to events in our lives. It only becomes a problem when we fear it - when we have anxiety about our anxiety. That is most likely to occur when we cast blame onto others for our own anxiety. When we can experience anxiety as a quality of our humanness - only then can we limit the power we give to generating our own suffering.

**Anxiety is a very poor indicator in making decisions.** It can be dangerous and is usually deceptive. If we try to avoid causing anxiety in another, our communication is not as honest as necessary to resolve the issue at hand. When we respond to someone else’s anxiety with our own anxiety, we are in a reactive mode – we are in the box. When in the box, we are out of touch with our power. We are less likely to make the best decisions. We are less likely to take appropriate action. When we are in the box, we are more likely to fail in our endeavors to improve the situation because we are off balance. When we feel resistance to anxiety, we can learn to use that resistance as an early warning system that we are in the box. Convert the anxiety to excitement by recognizing anxiety as a signal that something needs to change. Investigate your thoughts – only rarely do they reflect reality. Find ways to practice finding gratitude in the situation. If nothing else, we can be grateful that we are learning to use the power tool of anxiety to get out of the box. When out of the box, we are far more likely to make wiser decisions and demonstrate more appropriate behaviors in our actions.

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## **EXISTENTIAL or AUTHENTIC ANXIETY AND NEUROTIC ANXIETY**

Philosophers make an important distinction between existential and neurotic anxiety. Neurotic anxiety is not a separate type but rather a dysfunctional derivative of the basic anxiety, which is existential. Existential anxiety, also called authentic or natural anxiety, is healthy and is the natural condition of the person when in a state of self-disclosure or self-examination. Neurotic anxiety is diseased and is the denial or unawareness of natural anxiety. Natural anxiety leads to creativity, whereas neurotic anxiety leads to loss of focus, less awareness and even symptoms of ill health. In other words, neurotic anxiety includes the fear of anxiety. It is second order anxiety, which is anxiety about anxiety. Natural anxiety reveals our truth of what it means to be human. As such it is a normal and desirable phenomenon, something to be cultivated and cherished, to be chosen voluntarily, and a condition that leads to strength, peace and freedom to grow. It represents all those characteristics of our essence needed to achieve true health. This distinction is important because it reverses the conventional view that all anxiety is pathological. We no longer need to be surprised when our attempts to cure or transcend anxiety do not work!

Adapted from *Freedom and Accountability at Work*  
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