



MENTORED

by the

KING



ARNOLD PALMER'S
SUCCESS LESSONS FOR
GOLF, BUSINESS, AND LIFE

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Brad Brewer

Use Fear for Fuel

The thought of being motivated by fear seems to run contrary to what many of us have been taught to believe. Can fear ever be used to our advantage? Arnold Palmer not only believes that it can be used constructively, he also believes it's one of the main reasons for his success in golf over the course of these last fifty-plus years.

Are you skeptical? Fearful? You aren't alone. The legendary Christian writer J. R. R. Tolkien once suggested that fear was "bad for thinking."¹ New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner, arguably the most controversial but successful executive in the history of baseball, was a man clearly driven to success by a fear of failure. George's father, Henry, was a world-class hurdler and used to run his boy through intense and demanding workouts in the family's backyard. George loved his father and worked tirelessly to make old Dad proud. One might question George Steinbrenner's intensity, but few would quibble with his success. He bought a deteriorating Yankees franchise for just over \$8 million in 1973. At the time of his death in 2010, the Yankees had won an additional seven world championships and were estimated to be worth \$1.6 billion. Most people, when faced with fear, retreat. George was ignited by the buzz to work smarter and harder toward his goal, his great love for success overcoming his fear of failure.

The Use and Management of Fear

In my personal library sits a prized possession — a thin black leather-bound book given to me by Mr. Palmer. It's titled *The Turning Point*,² and its contents are mostly Arnold Palmer's reflections of his matches and thoughts leading up to and throughout his 1954 U.S. Amateur Championship. I recently revisited this quick read, and it sparked my curiosity about Arnie's thoughts on his use and management of fear, especially when contrasted with the events of his early career that catapulted him to his next level of success.

"Mr. Palmer," I said, "I read in your book *The Turning Point* what your caddie Jimmy Gill said about you and your attitude during the week of the U.S. Amateur Championship. Gill was quoted as saying of you, 'He had something about him; that walk, the way he attacked the ball.' So let me ask you: Where do you think this inner confidence came from — all at the tender age of twenty-five?"

Arnold was quick to correct my error. "When I won the amateur, I was twenty-four," he stated, still smiling. "I was just short of coming up on twenty-five. And there were a lot of little things that made the difference in making it happen. One of the things that was very important was pretty simple: I didn't want to lose. I was afraid of losing! And I think that while everyone wants to win, not everybody is afraid to lose."

Up until then, despite all my years in golf, I'm not sure I'd ever thought about winning and losing in those terms. In effect, what Palmer was saying was that very few people are afraid to lose with the same degree of intensity as they have in wanting to win.

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"Everyone wants to win," Arnie said, "or they wouldn't do what they do. But not many people ever think about it. Many times I would think, *I can't lose. I just cannot.* Maybe it's an odd way to think, but it drove me to play harder than just 'thinking' about winning. Everybody wants to win the tournament, but this 'do or die' kind of outlook drove me to accomplish what I wanted and kept me moving forward. I

made a lot of golf shots out of desperation, thinking that I had to pull it off because, frankly, I was afraid to lose.”

It is better to be frightened now than killed hereafter.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill

Do-or-Die Kind of Guy

I was eager to dive deeper into the origin of the mindset that triggered Arnie’s do-or-die approach to golf. “How did you feel inside when you were going through those moments?” I asked. “For most people, that might generate crippling anxiety. But you were inspired to positive action and victory. How did you do it?”

Arnie inhaled deeply before responding. “It was an inspiration to me too that being a few shots behind inspired a ‘must need’ to hit the shots that I had to hit. And with this determination, I wiped out everything else from my thoughts. Of course, I think that was very positive for me. I didn’t have any question in my mind that I could hit the shot I was trying to hit. People say, ‘You really took a gamble!’ But there was no gamble in my mind. I never thought it was a gamble to do what I did. Risky, yes; a gamble, no way! If I didn’t pull it off, there were consequences, but I had confidence that I could pull off the shot that I had already pictured in my mind. To me, gambling would have been to try something that I didn’t feel confident doing — or worse, not trying to pull it off and hoping that somehow it all was going to work out.”

I would rather risk losing to win any day than lay up and hope for the best.

Arnold Palmer

Arnie was on a roll. “But that would mean the tournament was given to me instead of the fun of actually winning it!” he exclaimed. “And even though I have won this way before, those wins are never as sweet of a victory as those that you really go out and have to make happen through calculated risk. Putting the control into someone else’s hands and not taking the action of being in control of the situation is much more of a gamble to me. I would rather risk losing to win any day than lay up and hope for the best.”

The Difference between Risking and Gambling

Whether I’m guiding my children or coaching my golf students, I’ve also tried to be clear on the critical difference between a “risk” and a “gamble.” The term *gamble* is used to describe something that’s more or less out of our hands and left to pure chance. On the other hand, a *risk* should be calculated, meaning that we’ve weighed the probability of success and deemed it worth our effort.

By that definition, Mr. Palmer was not a gambler, he was a man who took calculated risks. What type of person are you? Would it surprise you that too many people, in my estimation, are neither? Sadly, they play all of life ultrasafe and wind up missing out on some great adventures. Quitting your job to pursue a dream of running your own landscape business is not a gamble — unless you know absolutely nothing about cutting grass. Quitting your job and using your savings to buy scratch lottery tickets in the hope of striking it rich? Now that’s a gamble!

I would urge you to consider living your life a bit more aggressively. Don’t be afraid to dream. Be bold. If I were an explorer and I knew what I wanted and I was prepared to set sail, I’d rather die at sea in a storm than spend the rest of my life tied up to a dock by the shore.

You get mentally tough through observing and emulating what other successful people do and putting yourself willingly into the heat of the battle, fighting to survive, and growing through each and every experience.

Arnold Palmer

Thriving — Not Just Surviving

Arnold Palmer is a man who came of age during an era in America when the real heroes were those returning from World War II — and those who didn't. Arnold Palmer's America imposed and impressed good morals and a tough work ethic, and Palmer sought to emulate those who helped to lift this country from the grips of the Great Depression. There was an underlying philosophy that nothing good comes easy; it comes only through hard and consistent effort.

Robert Collier was born in 1885, a nephew of the founder of the famous *Collier's Weekly* publication. Collier became a popular writer of self-help books and once put into words the very thing that propelled Arnold Palmer to victory after victory: your greatest inspiration could very well be a fear of losing. Collier wrote:

The mere fact that you have obstacles to overcome is in your favor, for when there is nothing to be done, when things run along too smoothly, this "Vital Force" seems to sleep. It is when you need it, when you call upon it urgently, that it is most on the job. It is the reserve strength of the athlete, the "second wind" of the runner, the power that, in moments of great stress or excitement, you unconsciously call upon to do the deeds which you ever after look upon as superhuman.³

The reality of possibly losing what he really desired to achieve triggered in Palmer a motivation to dig deep and create the shots he desperately needed to win. To Arnold, success has always been the same as surviving, and he was courageous enough to use the emotion of fear to his advantage. It's true that Arnie took losses very personally. But it's critical to make a sharp distinction. For Mr. Palmer, honorable play was more important than victory. In other words, to be worthy of the win was just as crucial as the victory itself — if not more so.