

Victim to Victor

Battling Fear: The Connection Between Our Fear Response and the Victim Triangle

Part 3

The Hero's Journey, Episode 26

June 8, 2020

| Notes | |
|--------------------|--|
| Summary | <p>In this episode we look at our automatic reactions to fear—fight-flight-freeze—and the results of each one. We explore the connection between these fear responses and the roles in the victim triangle. We clearly identify the importance of this connection and how we can act from faith, empowering ourselves to face situations and consciously respond rather than unconsciously react.</p> |
| Main Ideas: | <p>The fight-flight-freeze response is our body's natural reaction to danger. It isn't a conscious decision, but an automatic response, one we can't control.</p> <p>Nunez and Legg (2020) identified that, "Specifically, fight-or-flight is an active defense response where you fight or flee. Your heart rate gets faster, which increases oxygen flow to your major muscles. Your pain perception drops, and your hearing sharpens. These changes help you act appropriately and rapidly.</p> <p>Freezing is fight-or-flight on hold, where you further prepare to protect yourself. It's also called reactive immobility or attentive immobility. It involves similar physiological changes, but instead, you stay completely still and get ready for the next move."</p> <p>When the danger is closer, we are more likely to fight or flee. When the danger is further, we often freeze as a way to gather more</p> |

information, avoid detection, and weigh our options. We can get stuck in freeze, especially if we feel we do not have the option to fight or flee, or if through repeated experiences neither of those remove the threat.

“While the fight-flight-freeze response causes physiological reactions, it’s triggered by a psychological fear” (Nunez & Legg, 2020). This fear is conditioned based on negative experiences. When the experiences were traumatic—abuse, disaster, accidents, profound loss, intense pain—then those responses are even more automatic and can create an exaggerated stress response. Even small events can be perceived as great threats. It makes it difficult to respond rationally and truly our behaviors become more and more driven by fear.

Main Action, Emotion, and Outcomes for Fear Responses:

From Grace LaConte’s (risk strategist) work

Fight:

- Action: attack
- Emotion: anger
- Outcomes: insult, blame, mistreat

Flight:

- Action: hide
- Emotion: denial
- Outcomes: avoid, omit, sabotage

Freeze:

- Action: Comply
- Emotion: Shut down
- Outcomes: justify and rationalize

Connection Between Our Fear Responses and the Roles in the Victim Triangle:

Persecutor: One who responds to a perceived threat by attacking, driven by anger, and feels justified in their actions because they were hurt (blaming).

Rescuer: One who neglects their own needs and responsibilities by rescuing others—avoiding by helping others avoid. They deny what is really happening. They sabotage by disempowering the victim to keep them dependent.

Victim: One who feels powerless to stand up or get away. They shut down and often comply and rationalize this response by pointing to their belief that they are not capable of doing anything else.

The roles in the victim triangle are responses to perceived threats, responses to fear, driven by the base instincts of self-preservation and avoidance of pain.

When we find ourselves in these roles, we can ask questions like, *What am I afraid of? What pain am I trying to avoid? What is the perceived threat?* These questions can help us get to the cognitive distortions and self-defeating beliefs that keep us in these roles.

While the initial fear response might be automatic, we can use tools to change that behavior when we are out of the acute situation and create responses that allow us to respond differently when the situations arise.

As Grace LaConte identified, there is a fourth option for response: **face**.

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| | <p>Face:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Action: Respond and defend ● Emotion: Connected ● Outcomes: Preserve and mitigate <p>A victor is someone who faces the battle, who has prepared—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. One who is armed with tools to empower and overcome. One who understands the purpose of pain (Episode 2). One who is motivated by faith, not fear.</p> <p>It is important to understand that our responses to fear were developed for our survival. They are not inherently bad. It is when we stay in that reactionary state—when our behaviors are consistently driven by fear, that it is negative.</p> |
| <p>Lesson Summary</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is a connection between the fear responses—fight-flight-freeze—and the roles in the victim triangle. This awareness helps us to understand that the behaviors are driven by fear as a way to protect ourselves and avoid pain. 2. We can choose a more empowered response. With focused work, utilizing effective resources, we can change our thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors so we can consciously respond rather than unconsciously react. 3. When observing your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors this week, ask yourself these questions: <i>What am I afraid of? Is the perceived threat real? Is it something I have the tools to face rather than avoid?</i> Give yourself grace. Understand where they are coming from, and begin to explore the idea that there is a fourth option: <i>facing</i>. |
| <p>Resources:</p> | <p>LaConte, G. (2017, October 17). What happens when we avoid pain in decision-making. Retrieved from: https://laconteconsulting.com/2017/10/17/what-happens-when-we-av</p> |

[oid-pain-in-decision-making/](#)

Nunez, K. and Legg, T.J. (2020, February 21). Fight, flight, freeze: What this response means. Retrieved from:

<https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/fight-flight-freeze>

Roelofs, K. (2017). Freeze for action: neurobiological mechanisms in animal and human freezing. *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci*, 372(1718). doi: [10.1098/rstb.2016.0206](https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2016.0206)