Most people don't recognize where fear hides, where it lurks, or when they let it keep them from acting. In our culture today, we're sheltered from a young age and taught to avoid taking risks that are too big, setting goals that are too large, and expecting too much from ourselves for fear of disappointment or failure.

It starts in grade school. We see someone raise their hand; they say the wrong answer. They feel embarrassed and disappointed, so they raise their hand less. We make the same choice.

As we get older, we often lose. Sometimes we give our best effort. Other times we don't. We rack up disappointments and see other people do the same. With each missed mark, we grow cynical. We believe our ability to change the outcome is limited, that success isn't likely; we believe it's beyond our reach, so we give up.

We stop taking large risks, and then we skip the small ones. We make excuses. After all, the economy's terrible. We weren't born into a rich family. We feel okay about it because other people do the same thing. They reinforce our belief. They give us an excuse to give up on our dreams. They tell us life is hard, and we resolve ourselves to the mundane.

Don't fear failure. It's necessary and you must study it before success is possible. Each failure is a stepping-stone that leads to the top of a mountain where all your hopes and dreams rest.

Happiness comes when you see the progress of your resolve guiding you up those stones and leading you to the top of your own personal mountain. If you think this paragraph is too Pollyannaish, then set aside your ego and honestly think about your own mindset.

The possibility of success can produce its own fear, which is born from people's worry that their success is undeserved.

Some people's self-esteem is so low that they expect their fortunes to reverse, because of their own perceived inferiority and they would rather skip ahead to normalcy instead of waiting to be humiliated. Other people fear success because of the potential work and responsibility it may create.

Common criticisms of optimistic people often come down to certain themes, "That can't possibly work today," or, "It can only work if things don't change." If you look hard at these attacks, you'll see they have their base in fear: fear of trying and failing, and fear of succeeding and failing once things change.

For those who think foundational principles are obsolete and simplistic, the best advice is to look outside the sphere of miserable, unsuccessful people who perpetually whine about life's complications. Let them drown in their own arrogance. Instead, look beyond your own understanding and seek advice from people who *have* succeeded.

To the second point: the world will always change, but fundamental truths will always remain. Details will change, the delivery of things will change, the ways of writing and reading ideas will change, but the foundation of those ideas will always remain constant.

In other words, it's the vehicle, not the need for transportation, which requires continued learning. If you understand that, if you're willing to continue studying and doing, then don't let fear keep you from succeeding.

If you choose to make your dreams happen and no longer let fear of failure keep you from succeeding, recognize that fear of failure is more than just disappointment or regret. It's the fear of embarrassment. You're letting fear of what someone else might think keep you from doing what's necessary to learn and grow.

If what other people tell you leaves you constantly disillusioned, find those who are more supportive. Support yourself. Allow yourself to fail. Understand it's okay. Tell yourself what you'll do when you fail, and how you'll react. Prepare for it. Plan for it, and then do your best to succeed anyway.