

Ep #16: The Mental Gymnastics of Fear



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With Your Host

Amy Latta

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Ep #16: The Mental Gymnastics of Fear

You are listening to episode 16 of *The Confident Coaches Podcast*, the one where we discuss the mental gymnastics brought on by fear. Oh, and steep mountain peaks and boa constrictors.

Welcome to *The Confident Coaches Podcast*, a place for creating the self-confidence you need to do your best work as a life coach. If you want to bring more boldness, more resilience, and more joy to your work, this is the place for you. I'm your host, Amy Latta. Let's dive in.

Hey my confident squad. How is everybody doing out there today? I just got back from Arizona and I am sitting in my office wrapped up in warm woobies and dreaming of the desert sun. No lie, I think I finally get snowbirds and why humans leave the cold to spend long periods of time in warm weather during the winter.

I always thought it was super weird that people would go south for the winter and then come back north but I get it now and I'm pretty sure that Trey and I, my husband and I will always make regular trips south during the winter because Arizona was so good to me. I've replenished all my stores of vitamin D.

But something so crazy happened to me in Arizona and we are talking all about it today. Let's just say I hugged a rock on top of a mountain for 20 minutes. True story. And I learned a huge lesson on the mental gymnastics that our brains will engage in when facing fear and I'm going to tell you all about it and how you can use this experience that I had in helping you feel more confident.

But before we dive in, I want to give a shout-out to Confident Coaches listener Amy. Not me, but my dear friend and amazing client Amy, who wrote this fabulous review of *The Confident Coaches Podcast* on Apple Podcasts. Amy wrote, "There are all kinds of podcasts out there for coaches, but Amy Latta's is a new shining star. She is human and approachable and not afraid to share all the work she has done to get

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where she is. I've already had mind shifts in just a few weeks of listening, so make sure you subscribe. You will not be sorry."

Thank you, Miss Amy, my awesomely named friend and also for being a fabulous client. Amy is a life coach turned copy coach, and we're working on her confidence so that she was become the best damn copy coach in the industry. This is the work I get to do? Are you serious? It's amazing.

Alright, enough chitty-chat. Let me tell you what happened in Arizona. I held onto a rock, shaking, teeth chattering, with tears for 20 minutes. I also held a boa constrictor around my neck, not at the same time. Maybe I should state that. In the process these two events, I learned a hell of a lot about the mental gymnastics brought on by fear.

So let's talk about how I got there. So there were six of us, three couples that went to Scottsdale for the weekend. It was a Valentine's Day trip. When we left St. Louis last Thursday afternoon it was like, 10 degrees. Literally freezing cold. For my foreign listeners, that's 10 degrees Fahrenheit. Not Celsius.

And we get to Scottsdale and it was gorgeous. Like, 74 degrees, bright warm dry desert air. We hung out at the pool, we hiked Camelback Mountain, which is right in Scottsdale. We had a day trip to Sedona, which I'd never been to before. It was magical and amazing. We're totally going to go back and just do Sedona.

Oh, and that's also where the boa constrictor comes in. See? This episode right here has grand adventures around every single corner. Now, it's really important to know that I love hiking. I have hiked semi-regularly for over 20 years. I'm not professional. Like I'm not a professional hiker, but I go just often enough.

I love foraging ahead on trails, I love discovering what's around the next corner, I hike in woods, I've hiked on mountains, I've hiked along streams.

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I'm up for just about any and all of it. What's also super interesting, given that I have this love of hiking, is that I also have a fear of open heights.

So what I mean by that is I'm not afraid to be up high. I can look out of a high-rise building. I live here in St. Louis and we have the Gateway Arch and they have these little windows up there. I can lay on the window just fine and look down. That doesn't freak me out.

So it's not the height in and of itself that freaks me out. But open heights with edges and drop offs and openness, air, that's a little bit different story. I remember hiking in my 20s in southern Illinois at this place called the Little Grand Canyon. And the entire hiking party walked out onto this overlook over a cliff and as they were all overlooking and hanging over the edge and their feet were dangling over the edge, I was like, sliding along the back wall as far away as I could possibly be.

So we were in Scottsdale and it was always the plan to hike Camelback Mountain on Saturday. So we set out Saturday morning, provisions in hand, layered up for a good two or three hour trip up and down the mountain. And it started out fabulously. I knew that the Cholla trail - that's the one that we chose to hike. There are two hikes up Camelback.

I knew that the Cholla trail had a gradual incline up the mountain with a rock scramble near the top. Now, a rock scramble is not rock climbing but it's not walking either. You're going to need your arms and your hands but it's not like you're going to need climbing gear or ropes.

And again, I knew all of this going in and I was not freaked out by any of this. I honestly - my worry was I just hope that I'm in a good enough shape to pull me up these rocks because I'm going with friends that do boxing every week and run and workout regularly, and I've just been hopping on my Peloton. Not exactly what you would do to get ready to go mountain climbing.

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So we were about three quarters of the way up the mountain when we reached the helipad. And I had heard that from the helipad up, it gets a little tough. That's where the rock scrambling is going to begin. So just past the helipad, I hit this spot where it was a sheer face you had to climb up and there was a steep drop below.

All my friends made it up ahead of me and then it was my turn. And then anxiety hit. Everything in my head said nope, nope, I can't do it, nope. I've experienced mountain anxiety before. When we were in Colorado a few years ago and we drove up Pike's Peak, I was practically laying on the floorboard of our minivan because of the drop offs.

We've ridden along the Blue Ridge Parkway in the Smoky Mountains during a snowstorm and I had to take really solid deep shaking breaths the entire six miles that we were on it because my brain kept telling me we were going to drive off the edge.

So it's anxiety. It's manageable. It's always been manageable but very palatable. Extremely uncomfortable, but still controllable. I felt overwhelmed by anxiety but I've never lost awareness of where I was or anything like that. So at this moment on the trail, that kind of intense anxiety hit me, like full-fledged fear. The fight or flight response definitely kicked in.

I started to feel some tears, I could feel the anxiety rushing through my body, which of course was like, the rush of all those hormones. Adrenaline, norepinephrine, cortisol, all of that coursing through my veins. And the mental gymnastics that kicked up inside my head. All of it brought on by fear.

So this is what I mean by mental gymnastics and have you experienced something like this before? This is kind of how it plays out. Like, "Amy, you are okay. No, no I'm not, I don't think I can do this. Alright, Amy, you're just experiencing anxiety. I know, I know I am, and it's awful and I don't think I can do it. Okay, Amy, your friends are here, they are safe, you are safe. I

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don't know, I'm not sure I'm safe, I'm not sure if I can do this. Amy, you can do this. You can feel this and you will be okay. Okay, I can. I can feel this, I'm feeling this, I can do this."

This flip-flop back and forth took a few minutes. My crew, very, very patient. The mental gymnastics of this moment was not super intense but there was definitely, you could see those flip-flops. Those backs and forths. And while the anxiety never went away, it was more like I was able to experience it and I was able to have the anxiety, it's like it stop laying on top of me and instead just kind of stood beside me so that I was able to talk myself to the point where, without looking down the steep, steep slope, instead, looking up at my husband and my friends who were up that sheer rock face and I was able to grab onto their hands and be pulled up.

And in that moment, yes, there was so much cheering and so much relief when I made it up. Like, I did it. I had wet eyes, I hugged my honey, he was so proud of me. My friend Stacy, who has zero fear of heights, she cheered for me. She took a selfie, we took a picture. And then we kept on going because that's what we do on a hike, you keep on going.

I could see the top. It was still a ways away but we could still see it. I could also see what looked to be another sheer face. I didn't focus on it, but I was aware of it. I could see it in the distance. And eventually, we did get there and I was okay, until I wasn't.

We were at the short walk along a steep ridge. A very narrow ridge with steep drop offs on each side. There were plenty of people on the mountain too. Did I mention that part too? Half of Phoenix and every out-of-towner was on that mountain it seemed like hiking up and down the mountain all day long.

There were literal traffic jams at some point where we just stood there while people moved back and forth. And I'd always heard so many hiking

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accidents can happen because too many people are at one point and someone slips and falls.

So I was trying not to let that information fill my brain. So we were at this one spot where you kind of pull yourself up along this ridge and it happened again. The anxiety. But this time, I didn't just feel it the highest intensity I've ever felt it. It went past that.

I froze. I was in the hiking path frozen, and suddenly I was cradling this one rock like death grip on this one rock at the peak of this ridge and I was stuck. And for the first time ever in my life, I did start to lose that awareness. I wasn't losing consciousness. I want to be really clear. I was not passing out. But I was losing awareness.

It was just pure anxiety. My teeth were chattering. I was in full body shakes. I was crying but it was like, without tears. It was like a wailing but softer. Later Trey, my husband, would tell me he's never seen me like that before. And Stacy told me that she's never seen anyone in that state before.

But in that moment, I was frozen. And I wish I could recount the mental gymnastics of that exact moment but I'm not exactly sure where it was. I was experiencing an anxiety attack for the very first time. All of those hormones came flooding back but a much more intense level.

I also wish I could tell you exactly how many minutes I was in that state, but I'm not entirely sure. I think it was just a few minutes before I was able to bring some awareness to the situation. So I'm just gripping death grip on that rock and all of a sudden, okay, I don't so much just hear blood pumping in my ears and I'm starting to be aware that my friends are still on the trail with me.

And I realized that I was blocking the path, making it dangerous for the other people around me. So my hiking crew, remember, there were five other people with me, including my husband. They found spots to squat or

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either sit near me and I slowly slid down into this little crevice just off the path. That's when the mental gymnastics brought on by this intense fear and anxiety began again.

"Amy, here we are again. You did it once, you can do it again. Nope, nope I can't. I'm pretty sure not this time. It's too much, it's too intense, I've never experienced anything like that. Nope, I don't think I can do this. You've already experienced this and you learned that you could. Let's remember what you experienced before. No, I don't think I can do it and not only can I not do it, I'm letting my friends down, they're going to be so disappointed in me. No, you are not letting anyone down. Your friends are okay. See, they're here. They're okay. No, I can't go on, I don't even know if I want to go on. Yes Amy, yes you do. Look up, the summit is right there. Just a few more minutes and you're going to be on top."

Now, this mental gymnastics routine was much more intricate than the last one I had just experienced before. There were a few more flips, there were some full twists in there, some uneven bars. Maybe there was a balance beam or two in there. In this case there was almost a literal balance beam.

But here's the most important thing; I stayed with it. I stayed with the mental gymnastics in my brain. I worked through it, listening to the two sides of my brain arguing with each other at the same time. And I started to take one mental move at a time. I was also able to observe around me.

The woman who was coming down the mountain and saw me and assured me that around this ridge, it opens up and it's straight to the top. My friend Holly, who said, "Hey, it's okay. You don't have to keep going if you don't want to." Her husband, my friend Todd who walked ahead and I could see him safe, looking around the boulder that the other hikers told me was where it opened up.

But most importantly, this is the most important thing for each of you guys listening out there. Me realizing that there were six of us and I was the only

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one overcome with anxiety. We're all on the same hike. We're all on the same narrow ridge, yet I was the only one who experienced an anxiety attack.

So maybe, maybe this intense fear, which sparked full-blown anxiety, to the point of my first ever anxiety attack, maybe it was possible it was all in my head. And if it's all in my head, that means it's all optional. I can feel this intense emotions and it is intense, right? I can feel this but I am not these emotions.

I can let these fantastical and intricate mental gymnastics routines play out in my head, but ultimately, I'm the only one in charge of how it ends. And with that realization, the mental gymnastics in my mind came to a halt and all I heard was, "Amy, you can do this. You can." It wasn't urgent, it wasn't shrill, it was calm, it was sure.

I got up. Not a full stand, mind you, but I got up and turned. And on my hands and feet, I climbed along that narrow ridge with a sure and steady movement. I just put one hand in front of the other. With the mental gymnastics gone from my head, because I made the conscious choice to end the routine, I was able to see for real what I was experiencing. A narrow but walkable ridge and I was okay and I was safe.

Not only was I safe, with each hand in front of the other, with each next best step, I started to feel confident, sure. I want to be really clear. Fear and anxiety, they never left the party. They were still there, but it's like they walked over to the other side of the room. And with each movement forward, I became stronger in feeling sure and confident that I was doing what I said I wanted to do and I was reaching my goal. In this case, summiting Camelback Mountain.

And as I rounded that boulder that I had seen Todd standing at, that the other hikers had said it gets better around that corner, sure enough, a few steps down, off that ridge, and it opened up and then we kept going. As I

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kept going, I could feel the tears. Like the best kind of tears ever. I'm kind of feeling them right now.

I had done it. I had never felt so much fear. I had never danced around like that in such an intricate mental gymnastics routine. So I had certainly never talked myself through it to the point of being able to move not just past it but actually through it. And with each next best step forward, with each hand movement forward, actually feeling more sure and more confident as I went along.

When we got to the top, I held Trey, my husband, and I just cried. I was so overcome that I had overcame a fear like none other I had ever known. A fear that, let's be honest, if I had known that was waiting for me, I never would have even faced it, right? I cannot possibly express the level of elation and damn near euphoria of having overcome that level of anxiety and fear.

And also, I think it's super interesting to note that when we started back down the mountain, I never once experienced a moment of anxiety. Even at the two points that had initially created it. Having faced it, having worked through it, having overcome it, having created self-confidence for myself in those moments of intense fear, showing my brain that it really was all in my head and because of that it really was all optional and I had the tools to work through it, facing those same moments on the way back down, they just didn't pack any more punch for me.

My friends noted, they were truly marveled like, how did I hike down with such ease? I was laughing and smiling and talking the whole way down. They were like, what happened to panicked Amy? And the answer was simple. She learned what she was capable of.

It also, by the way, became a running joke. Any time anybody worried about looking silly or dumb for the rest of the trip, someone else would reply, "Hey, if Amy can hug a rock on top of a mountain for 20 minutes, you

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can do whatever this thing is right here." Just so you know, that's going to be a new thing. Hey, if Amy can hug a rock on top of a mountain for 20 minutes, you can go on Facebook Live.

So this story of overcoming fear and learning what you're capable of when you face the mental gymnastics inside your own mind would not be complete without me sharing what happened the next day in Sedona. So there was no hiking in Sedona, unfortunately, as everyone was wiped out from Camelback.

But as we drove up to Sedona, we found ourselves in the town center, where apparently there was a couple that shows up there all the time with their two Great Danes and a bunch of reptiles. They had cages of reptiles. So there was a tarantula, a bearded dragon, and a couple of snakes.

Now see, I love snakes. I remember holding a snake for the first time in kindergarten and thinking, "Oh my gosh, they're so soft and so cool." Never ever have I ever had a fear of snakes or any anxiety whatsoever. So it was no big deal when I was offered to hold Gertrude, the boa constrictor.

I wrapped her around my neck, I let her crawl around on me, I cooed at her, I was like, "Hey baby girl, how are you?" Just like I would my own puppy. I would have held her all day. And my friend Stacy, who apparently has no fears ever about anything, she was right there with me.

I did notice Todd, he walked up and around that big boulder on the narrow ridge just the day before, would not come close at all. My friend Holly snapped a picture and she sent it to me. So I posted that picture on my Facebook feed for my trip to Sedona post.

And the comments on this picture of me holding a boa constrictor, my friend Sarah said, "Oh my gosh, you are very brave. That might give me anxiety." My friend Nicole said, "Oh hell no, you are brave." My friend

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Cheryl said, "Never." She spelled it out. My friend Tammy posted a meme of Tracy Morgan shouting no, no, no, no, no, no over and over again.

How stinking fascinating, right? So many people having intense fear, talking about being brave and experiencing anxiety over something that I felt zero fear over. Wait a minute, this is not a universal fear. I felt no fear even though a lot of people do, and neither was the fear I experienced on the mountain. That wasn't a universal fear either.

I experienced it, yet no one else in my party did. So *if the fear is not universal, then it is only in our mind, and if it is only in our mind, no matter the mental gymnastics that play out in there, it's all optional, and we get to decide how the routine ends and to end it.*

Now, before I wrap up and I share this week's action steps with you, I want to make sure you all know that I know that we're talking about situational anxiety. I'm talking about the emotions of fear and anxiety that come from thoughts. I am not talking about clinical anxiety, which is something someone may be diagnosed with by a medical professional.

I am talking about - this entire episode is talking about anxiety as a feeling, which comes solely from how I am thinking and not from the situation. Clearly, not from the situation because here were two examples two days in a row of how one circumstance, in one case hiking a mountain ridge, in another case, holding a boa constrictor, can elicit a variety of thoughts and feelings that were not universal.

And in that case, the fear and the anxiety is always optional. Also, as a side note, I invite you to check out the webpage for this podcast episode on amylatta.com. This is episode 16. So it's amylatta.com/16. I'm going to post some pictures from the trip for you guys so that you can see the mountain and you can see Gertrude, the boa constrictor.

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Fortunately or unfortunately, no one took any video or pictures of me during my anxiety attack, which I appreciated in the moment, but now I'm like, kind of wishing I could see that rock that I held for 20 minutes again so I could show you guys. Hey guys, there's the rock, my new best friend.

Alright, so here's what I want you guys to do with this this week. What fears do you have in your coaching business? Fear of failure, success, humiliation, embarrassment, judgment. Now take some time this week to make a list of everything you're afraid of doing in your life coaching business. Going to networking events, introducing yourself to strangers, going live on Facebook, hosting a webinar, speaking on stage.

What else? What am I leaving out? Fear of someone telling you no. Fear of the big business problems like taxes and hiring and firing. Like, just get it all out there. All of the things that you have anxiety or worry or fear about.

Now look around at the people in your life that you look up to, the people you admire who are doing what you want to do.

And consider two things. First, it's possible that they did not fear those things that you fear. And if they did not fear those things and you do, that means it is in your head. *You have a mental gymnastics routine going on in your head and it's entirely optional, and you get to decide when it ends.* What if you decided to let that end this week? What if you decided to let that end right now?

The second thing to consider, it's possible that these people you admire had the same fears as you and they just decided to end their mental gymnastics routines and they put one foot or hand in front of the other as they worked through it. They learned to take the next best step forward with fear and anxiety along for the ride. You can do the same thing, just like them.

Just like I have. In my business, on that mountain. I'm not saying it won't be uncomfortable, but your willingness to stay with it and to work through it

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and to acknowledge that it is all optional will allow you to keep moving forward with your next best step. And with each next best step forward, the more confident you will feel. You got this, guys, and until next week.

Friends, I am so excited to offer you a podcast-only treat. I am sharing with you the five-day Unblock Your Confidence mini course. It is only available to *The Confident Coaches Podcast* listeners and the only way to get your hands on it is right here. Why do you need this course?

Well, in this five-day mini course, you will learn why it seems like you struggle with confidence when others don't, how to build trust in yourself, how to get over your fear of failure, how to stop caring so damn much what other people think, and the best thing you can do to unblock your confidence today.

All of that in just five days. This is some of my best work waiting for you. Visit www.amylatta.com/unblockconfidence to get yours. Again, that's [amylatta.com/unblockconfidence](http://www.amylatta.com/unblockconfidence). Go now and get started today.

Thanks so much for listening to *The Confident Coaches Podcast*. I invite you to learn more. Come visit me at amylatta.com and until next week, let's go do epic stuff.