The Dominant Strategy of Anxiety

CHAPTER 3:
Ahhh... The Comfort of Certainty
• I need to know what the right decision this. There is a right decision – I’ve got to figure that out before I can act.
• How do I know what to do now? What’s the absolute right decision here?
• Did I make the right decision? Will that decision cause harm? Am I going to be hurt in the future because of that decision?
• I’ve got to stay on guard. I can’t let anything bad happen. There’s a chance that something bad is going to happen.
• I can’t handle that.
• Will I fail?
• I need to be careful. I need to watch out.
• Above all, I need to avoid the symptoms.
• I must relax, right now.
• I have to do it perfectly.
• I must be sure that there is no risk here.
• This is too much for me. I can’t do it. I don’t have what it takes.
• There’s something wrong with me.
• I can’t let anybody know.

FIGURE 1: THE “GETTING RID OF” PROBLEM
## Illustrations of Anxious Worrying

### WORK OR SCHOOL
- I have to be sure that I succeed. What if I fail? What if I’m demoted?
- I can never make a mistake. But I think I made a mistake. It may be a big mistake.
- I have to figure it out. But I'm not smart enough. I don't think I can figure it out.
- I have to get an A on this test. But I didn't study enough.
- I'm not going to have enough money.

### RELATIONSHIPS
- Are they going to accept me? I'll never perform up to their expectations. I'll disappoint them. I can't let them discover how little I know.
- What are they thinking about me?
- I'm not sure whether he's the right one for me. I don't know what to do if he leaves me.
- I can't stumble over my words or making a mistake, they'll think I'm stupid.
- If my face turned red, I'll be humiliated.
- If my signature is shaky, I'll be so embarrassed.
- If I walk in now, everybody will stare at me.
- What if I can't think of anything to say?
- I might stumble over my words while I'm leaving the message, and I won't be able to erase it.

### PANIC AND PHOBIAS
- What if there's a spider out there, and I don't see it?
- How can I be sure that dog won't bite?
- I have to know whether a tornado is coming.
- I can't let myself have a panic attack.
- If I don't know how crowded it's going to be, I'm not going to go.
- What if I start panicking while I'm on the bridge?
- If my heart starts beating too fast, I'll panic.
- How do I know whether he's going to get mad? If he gets angry, I won't be able to tolerate it.

### OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD)
- Am I certain my hands are clean?
- I think that spot might've been blood?
- I felt a bump. I need to turn around and make sure I didn't run someone over.
- If I don't undo that, something bad may happen.
- There's a chance I just offended God. Can I gain his forgiveness?
- What if I did something terrible without knowing it?
- This doesn't feel right, and I can't move on until this feels right.
Your Winning Strategy

Step Back

CHAPTER 5:
Noise Pollution
"I have a final paper due before dinner on two texts I haven't read! And I haven't started!"

Your teenage daughter is out on a date. She was due home at midnight. It's now 2 AM.

You have OCD, and unnecessary “checking” is your thing. As you hear the hotel door close behind you, you think, “Did I lock the front door when I left home this morning?”

You & your partner had an argument at breakfast. You both said some mean things & then stormed off to work. Neither of you has apologized.

You called your partner at 10 AM, apologized, & scheduled to talk when you both get home. But you are still dwelling on the argument instead of focusing on your work.
Your Winning Strategy

CHAPTER 6:
Make it NOT About Your Content

"I can’t handle that!"

- humiliating myself in front of coworkers
- allowing my children to be in danger at school
- getting fired for a minor infraction
- contaminating my family with salmonella
- accidentally burning the house down
- realizing that I’m a bad person
- dying in a plane crash
- suffocating in an elevator
- causing my own heart attack
- being bitten by an aggressive dog

"I don’t like it, but I can handle it."

A generic sense of uncertainty & distress
Your Winning Strategy

CHAPTER 7:
Content and Competition

The Rules of Anxiety’s Game

1. If any fearful thought pops up, take it seriously.
2. Once you are scared and worried, try to get rid of those feelings.
3. Assume you don’t have what it takes to solve this problem, so back away.
4. Any time you start feeling anxious, take that as a signal of danger.

“I wash my hands to get rid of contamination.”

“I do a repetitive behavior to get rid of my doubt about something that seems risky or dangerous.”

FIGURE 2: STEP UP TO A NEW PERSPECTIVE
Your Winning Strategy

CHAPTER 8:
Move the Massive
1. Every object in the world (including you and me) will keep doing what it's currently doing until something forces it to change.

2. This explains why your beliefs—the ones that have kept you from tackling this problem—will remain in place until you force them to change.

3. The more massive the body, the more it will resist change, so greater force will be required to move it in a different direction.

4. Therefore, if the beliefs that are in your way are strong, if they have big mass, then they’re going to put up a strong fight against your efforts to change them.

5. To alter the direction that a body is moving, you have to use force as strong as or stronger than the force that's causing it. The body will then change in the direction of your force.

6. This means you have to act in a powerful way that is opposite of what Anxiety expects, so that you can force it to change direction. This same action is probably going to scare you, and a part of you is not going to want to get scared. Your courage and your determination must become equal to or larger than your scared feelings. And then you have to take action.

7. The most disruptive force is a sudden, hard push in a new direction.

8. Therefore, if you want Anxiety to change, you must practice changing your point of view at a moment's notice, for at least a few moments, so that you can welcome what you fear. That is NOT the direction Anxiety was taking you. Now you’re suddenly pushing Anxiety in a different direction.

9. Once force is applied, how fast an object changes is inversely proportional to the mass of the object.

10. So if you have trouble applying the skills you learn in this book, or if you apply them but you don't make much progress, then explore the possibility that some of your beliefs are still keeping you from stepping forward.

11. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

12. That’s why you should expect that Anxiety is going to resist your efforts. It's going to fight back. And a part of you that’s vulnerable to Anxiety’s messages, is going to resist your efforts; a part of you is going to fight against change because change is disruptive.
Your Winning Strategy

CHAPTER 9:
Be Mindful of the Moment
The part of us that can detach from our worried, self-critical, or hopeless judgments in order to simply notice what we are thinking and feeling.

Observing the Signs of Resistance
Practice stepping back to notice these tendencies

- stalling or procrastinating
- becoming numb or feeling flat
- retreating to a safer place
- over-preparing
- continually researching
- continually seeking advice

- checking repeatedly
- seeking the “right answer”
- detailed thinking-through of all possible options
- worrying!

FIGURE 3: STEP BACK TO GAIN PERSPECTIVE
The Art and Gift of the Quiet Moment

- Cue yourself (for instance, “I think I’m stuck again”)
- Shift into a pause of quiet. Loosen the grip of that automatic, negative reaction to the present moment. Let go a bit.
- If you’d like, do it with a breath: a nice long inhale and a slow exhale. On that exhale, gently invite your mind to “quiet” or “let go.” Allow your mind to respond to your invitation.
- Slacken your jaw. Loosen your shoulders. Relax your eyes.
- Give yourself an added gift: a mere five seconds of self-compassion.
Want It

CHAPTER 10:
Taking the Paradoxical Point of View
### Synonyms for Point of View

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame of reference</th>
<th>Approach</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mindset</td>
<td>Position</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Perception</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disposition</td>
<td>Belief</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Standpoint</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stance</td>
<td>Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame of Mind</td>
<td>Outlook</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The work is not going to be about your uncomfortable sensations, it is going to be about your response to the sensations.
Your Winning Strategy

CHAPTER 11:
A Profound Experience with the Toilet
“Why can’t this be over now? I can’t stand this. Why does this always happen to me?!”

“Obviously this is happening to me. I accept that, even though I don’t like it. Now I’m going to decide what to do next.”

You experience something unpleasant

You mentally resist: “I don’t want this!”

You step back and notice your resistance

You choose to drop your resistance & move to acceptance

So you can focus on how to handle the moment

Two Responses to a Tough Moment

Resist It

Accept It

Chapter 11: A Profound Experience with the Toilet
FIGURE 6: STEP BACK, NOTICE THAT YOU ARE RESISTING, THEN STEP UP TO EMBRACING THE MOMENT

"I’m Willing to Experience This at This Moment"

- You are accepting a situation that already exists.
- Becoming upset about a difficult state of affairs is like moving into shock.
- It’s best to accept the present before we attempt to change it.
- When you stop fighting the present moment, you can turn all of your attention to ways to influence the next moment.
Your Winning Strategy

CHAPTER 12:
Message to Self: I Want This
Choose to Become Distressed and Afraid

- You have to voluntarily and purposely choose to generate distress if you want to learn to manage distress.
- Go after what threatens you, welcome the discomfort, and allow the occasional punch in the gut from Anxiety.
- Give yourself a paradoxical message similar to “I actually WANT this feeling.”
- Choose to feel clumsy, awkward, unsure and afraid.
- Act on the mottos, “Love the mat” and “Run towards the roar.”

Giving Your Amygdala a Chance to Learn

1. Step into a safe, reasonable facsimile of the traumatic scene
2. Let yourself feel threatened and get scared
3. Welcome the fearful sensations: “This is what I want right now”
4. Hang out

FIGURE 7: EXPECT THAT YOU WILL RESIST, AND THEN PRACTICE DETACHING, AGAIN AND AGAIN
# Another Paradox

Only do what you want to do. And you need to keep finding ways to want to do the hard stuff.

# A Paradoxical Twist to Habituation

- **Want** to step into your feared situation.
- If your doubt or distress shows up, then **want** it to show up.
- If your doubt or distress gets stronger, then **want** it to be strong.
- If your doubt or distress sticks around, then **want** it to stick around.

# These Come Automatically - So Accept Them!

**The Intimidation:** A thought, image or impulse that makes you uncertain, anxious and at risk. **The Urge:** Your insistence on removing the threat by something you do or say. It will take the form of, “I can’t let that happen!”

# Stepping Back and Wanting It

1. Notice the threatening thought, image or impulse.
2. Name what you notice – “Oh, I’m worrying about that again.”
3. Want that – “Good! I want this doubt.”
4. Notice that you feel scared.
5. Want that – “Good! I want to feel scared, too.”
6. Hang out while feeling uncertain and frightened.
### Step Forward

**CHAPTER 13:** Dangling by Fingertips

1. Step toward – not away from – your challenges.
2. Have faith that you have the ability to master your anxious worry.
3. Willingly & voluntarily choose to feel clumsy, awkward, unsure, embarrassed, insecure & afraid.
4. Permit yourself to fail on your way to success.
5. Invest energy into this work.

**Facing the Challenges Ahead**

The training occurs on the route. Get as close as you can, as soon as you can, to the event you fear. Practice your skills there.

**CHAPTER 14:** An Olympic Attitude

Here’s a secret that might come in handy: the biggest challenge you will face is your own personal high standards. Lower your standards and then act.

Your perspective must change, or you will focus too much on not losing instead of on winning.

**CHAPTER 16:** “I Made It as Unpleasant As I Could, and Then I Waited”

To get stronger, you gotta do stuff you don’t think you can do, and you gotta do that stuff while you simultaneously doubt that you can do it.
Be Cunning

CHAPTER 18:
Act as Though This Is Such a Clever Tactic

Don’t wait until you are certain that this approach will work for you. Take actions now, while you are feeling doubtful, scared and insecure about my suggestions.

FIGURE 8: WELCOME DOUBT AND DISTRESS THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR

CHAPTER 20:
“Give Me Your Threats - Let Them Come”
Make Your Play

CHAPTER 21:
You’re Going Where?
FIGURE 9: FACING THE THREAT CAN FEEL TOO FRIGHTENING

FIGURE 10: YOUR OUTCOME PICTURE WILL MOTIVATE YOU TO PUSH INTO THREAT
Your Winning Strategy

CHAPTER 22:
Plan Your Strategy
Chapter 22: Plan Your Strategy

FIGURE 11: SWINGING OVER TO A NEW STANCE

Be sure everything is OK
Get comfortable
Treat fearful thoughts seriously
Stay safe
Feel confident before acting

Seek out doubt
Provoke your discomfort
Treat fearful thoughts absurdly
Agress into new territory
Scare yourself

Protect & Defend

Courageously Step Forward & Risk

FIGURE 12: HOW TO MAKE YOUR PLAY

I can't do this!

Detach

"I want this"

Step forward

PAGE 27
Mary’s Principles

1. Face your fears in small ways that you have control over.
2. Gradually do these things longer.
3. Then do the harder things.
4. Talk yourself through it in a really strong, commanding voice.
5. And talk to your primitive brain. Let it overreact, and then say, “I like your expression, but you don’t have to juice me up so much next time. I’m fine; save that for real situations.”

Bob’s Principles

1. Make a decision. Ask yourself, “Am I going to be depressed and think about how much of my life has been wasted by Anxiety, or do I have something to live for?”
2. Try something new. Take on the challenge. Do it. Don’t hold back. If you never try it, you will never know whether it can help you.
3. Take some of those self-talk phrases and make them your own.
4. Remind yourself: “I know things are going to bother me, and they’re going to continue to bother me. I’m okay with anxiety and uncertainty in my life. In fact, I invite them.”
5. Keep moving. Don’t let this problem take up any more of your life. Tell yourself, again and again: “Keep moving.”
6. Talk to Anxiety: “Bring it on! Let’s go. Game time. Come out and play.”

The Game Strategy

- Thinking about this stuff is not going to cut it.
- Your actions are to be paradoxical.
- It’s not how big or small a step you take; it’s that you take a step toward the threat.
- Only do what you want to do.
- To get stronger, you have to want to do the hard stuff.
- There will be times when you must “act as though.”
- When you don’t know what you want, want that.
- Hold fast to your strategy as you step forward.
Your Winning Strategy

CHAPTER 23:
Change Your Voice
Examples of Self-Talk

**PRINCIPLE**
Anxiety needs you to avoid. To get stronger, take risks, including the risk of failing.

To step forward, you need to feel uncertain and uncomfortable. Anxiety needs you to avoid those feelings by not stepping forward.

The closer you get to the challenge, the more noisy worries will show up. They will feel as though they are signals of danger. You must learn to detach from those messages. Don’t fall for that.

**SELF-TALK**
“I want to do this, even though it feels risky. I want to get stronger.”

“It’s OK that I’m anxious right now. I can handle not knowing how this will turn out. I need to do this. I’m glad I’m doing this, even though it’s hard.”

“I expected these worries would show up. I don’t need to pay attention to them. But I do need to tolerate this anxiety that they’re generating.”

“Good. I want these feelings, even though they make me really uncomfortable.”

“This is really scaring me right now, but I want to keep going. I can handle this.”

“I’ve got to feel awkward before I can feel competent. And I want to master this.”

Want whatever doubt or discomfort shows up.

Want to take on challenges; seek out the tough encounters. That’s the attitude that gives you power.

You’ll be dominated by Anxiety if you seek perfection. Willingly choose to feel awkward and clumsy as you engage in any challenging activity.
### Examples: Self-Talk > Encourage OR Instruct

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notice the Noisy Worry</th>
<th>Then Encourage Yourself</th>
<th>OR Instruct Yourself</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I didn't study enough. And if I don't get an A on this test, I'm screwed.</td>
<td>I can handle not knowing. It's OK to be anxious right now.</td>
<td>I'm letting that thought go now. I'm going to pay attention to question 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If my heart starts beating too fast, I'll panic.</td>
<td>I was looking for an opportunity to get scared like this.</td>
<td>There I go again: scaring myself. I'm going to focus on finishing this run.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I certain my hands are clean?</td>
<td>I want to not know right now. Plus, I get to be uncomfortable! That's what I'm looking for!</td>
<td>Don't answer that. Step away from the sink and walk out of the bathroom now!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What if there's a spider out there, and I don't see it? That's freaking me out!</td>
<td>This is exactly what I want: another chance to feel scared about spiders.</td>
<td>I expected those worries because I'm practicing now. Now let's see if I can find another web.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are they thinking of me? I'm probably disappointing them.</td>
<td>This lets me practice feeling unsure. Plus, I get to score a point!</td>
<td>I'm not answering that question. I'm going to focus back on the presentation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivating Messages</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I'm willing to feel unsure right now.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm willing to feel anxious right now.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Be scared &amp; do it anyway.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Go toward what scares you.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do the opposite of what Anxiety expects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I want this to feel intense.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gimme your best shot!</td>
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<tr>
<td>This is a good opportunity to practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Love the mat.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek out uncertainty.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I can handle this.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can take the heat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seek out discomfort.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I want this.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I must risk.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I want this to stick around.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I want my life back!</td>
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<tr>
<td>My job is to move forward.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choose active over passive.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm willing to feel awkward &amp; clumsy.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Examples of Talking to Anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notice the Noisy Worry</th>
<th>Then Respond in a Cunning Way</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I'm afraid I won't have enough money.</td>
<td>Yes! I scored a point!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If my face turned red, I'd be humiliated.</td>
<td>Oh, thanks for that! Would you give me that thought again?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I don't know how crowded it's going to be, I'm afraid to go.</td>
<td>Excellent! Could you scare me more, please?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I felt a bump. Did I just hit someone?</td>
<td>Alright, OCD! Thanks for showing up. I was looking for another point. Keep them coming!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I've got to find out!</td>
<td>Is that the best you can do? Can't you throw a little more fear of God into me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What if he's not the right one? Maybe my soulmate is still out there. But then what if</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I break up with him and I never meet anybody else and I lead a sad, lonely life?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Chapter 23: Change Your Voice**
FIGURE 13: HOW TO TALK TO ANXIETY: THE FORMULA*

Request
- Beg
- Urge
- Invite
- Plead
- Encourage
- Demand
- Want

An increase
- Stronger
- More
- More intense
- Longer lasting
- More frequent
- More threatening
- Scarier

In whatever bothers you
- Worries
- Fearful thoughts
- Physical sensation
- Doubts
- Confusion
- Mistakes
- Embarrassment

FIGURE 14: THE PARADOXICAL MOMENT - "PLEASE GIVE ME MORE"

Transaction begins
Anxiety:
"You should feel threatened here!"

You:
"I do! But I’m not threatened enough. Please give me more!"

Transaction ends

* Adapted from Wilson, Reid, Don’t Panic: Taking Control of Anxiety Attacks, New York: Harper, 2009
Your Winning Strategy

CHAPTER 25:
Make Your Play
The Rules of the Game – How to Play with Anxiety

- There’s only one play in this competition, and only one point can be scored in that play.
- You complete each play by turning your attention back to your chosen task.
- You can score a point in 3 ways: sub-vocalize encouragement, instruct yourself to take action, or deliver a cunning message to Anxiety.
- You can only score a point when you’re being bothered by Anxiety.
- You can score points even when you are anticipating a difficult task.
- You can score points back-to-back.
- Scoring a point may scare you, and that's okay.
- Don’t look for the benefits of scoring a point.
- It’s an attitude shift, really.
- In this competition, you win every time you score a point. Focus on scoring as many points as possible.

How to Score a Point

1. Move toward any task that you predict will generate at least some uncertainty or distress regarding your worried theme.
2. When you notice that you feel bothered by doubt or distress (whether before, during or after that task):
   a. Step back and acknowledge that it’s happening (“Ugh. This is hard.”)
   b. Welcome exactly what’s happening (“Yes, and this is what I’m looking for.”)
   c. Sub-vocalize a message that helps you stay engaged in your chosen activity:
      1) Encourage yourself (“I can do this.”)
      2) Instruct yourself (“Keep moving!”), or
      3) Talk in a cunning way to Anxiety (“Give me more, please.”)
3. Then turn your attention back to your chosen task, even while you still feel uncertain and uncomfortable.

SCORE!
FIGURE 15: THE PROVOCATIVE STANCE - “I WANT EXACTLY THIS”