FOR LEADERS

THE FEAR CHECK

Which fear deserves your attention?

SAY IT.

The threat in one plain sentence. A sentence can be checked and a picture can't.

SIZE IT.

One number from a source with no reason to scare you, beside a risk you already take.

STEER IT.

Hands open. Run it like the safety briefing before a flight. Where are the exits? What's my responsibility? Check. Now, engage in the moment.

IS THIS FEAR WORTH MY ATTENTION?

THE FEAR CHECK

1. HOW TO RUN IT

Knowing about a bias, and being told to resist it, didn't remove it in the studies. A short procedure you run on purpose is a stronger defense. Run these three steps in order.

1 **Say it.** Write the threat in one plain sentence. A sentence can be checked, and a picture can't.

2 **Size it.** Find one number from a source with no reason to scare you. In a company, use your own data, like the retention report, the pipeline or the incident log, not the loudest voice in the meeting. Set it beside a risk you already take without a second thought. If you can't find a number, write that down. You are still working from a picture, and finding a number comes before acting.

3 **Steer it.** Hands open, run the safety briefing. Where are the exits? What's my responsibility? Check. Now, engage in the moment. If the number says rare, that quick check is all the fear gets. If the number says real and large, write one plan, made once, calmly, and let it stand.

2. HANDS OPEN

A clenched fist is closing up. Turn your hands over, palms up and open, and leave them there while you run the check. The move comes from willing hands in Marsha Linehan's dialectical behavior therapy. It comes from clinical practice, not a lab, so treat it as a coaching practice.

3. SELF-AUDIT (CHECK WHAT'S TRUE)

- ☐ When my mind runs to the worst case, I see a picture before I ask for a number.
- ☐ I can name the last threat that took my attention for a week.
- ☐ I know which slow problem got less of my attention that week.
- ☐ I've never written the odds of the thing I fear next to a risk I take every day.
- ☐ When a fear hits, my hands close up before I notice.

4. ONE ROW PER FEAR

THE FEAR (say it, one sentence)	THE NUMBER (size it: the number, its source, the everyday risk beside it)	THE BRIEFING (steer it: hands open, exits, my responsibility, check)

If you can't find a number, write that down.

5. THREE DRILLS

Drill 1, SAY IT.
Next time your mind builds a scenario, write the threat as one plain sentence within a minute. Notice that a sentence can be checked.

Drill 2, SIZE IT.
Find one number from a source with no reason to scare you. In a company, use your own data, not the loudest voice in the meeting. Write the source.

Drill 3, STEER IT.
Turn your hands over, palms up and open. Run the safety briefing. Where are the exits? What's my responsibility? Check. Now, engage in the moment. Write the one real responsibility the number points to, and where your attention goes next. If the number says real and large, write one plan, made once, calmly, and let it stand.

6. TWO WORKED EXAMPLES

Mine

Say it: the worst-case scene my mind built in a crowded room.
Size it: about 1 in 57,000 across a lifetime (our math on FBI counts, 2021 to 2025), against 1 in 101 for dying in a car crash (National Safety Council, 2024 data).
Steer it: hands open, where are the exits? What's my responsibility? Check. Now, engage in the moment.

Hypothetical: before a board presentation

It's the night before, and a leader keeps rehearsing one hostile question that probably won't come.

Say it: a director is going to ask the hard one, and I'll freeze.
Size it: how many board meetings in the last 2 years actually included a question like that? Check your own record.
Steer it: prepare one answer, once, calmly. Then walk in with your hands open, and if the hard question does land, leave them open and put your attention on everyone at the table.

Braced, you wait for one question. Present, you hear everyone at the table.

7. SEVEN-DAY TRACKER (ONE ROW A DAY)

DAY	THE FEAR IN ONE SENTENCE	THE NUMBER FOUND (yes or no, and the source)	THE BRIEFING: exits, my responsibility, check (yes or no)	WHERE MY ATTENTION WENT NEXT	MY HANDS WERE OPEN (yes or no)
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					

Start the next time a fear takes over your week, and fill one row a day for seven days.

Preparing and hunting are different things. A plan made once, calmly, is preparation.

The Fear Check is a tool built by Dale Dixon from the research discussed in the episode. It is not a clinical protocol. daledixonmedia.com/fear