

## **Monster on the Balance Beam**

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The young girl gymnast must learn to do a cartwheel on the balance beam. The beam is about head height to her, and only 4 inches wide. It is high and narrow, and hard. Worse yet, there is an invisible monster on the beam. It wants to push her off-balance, to make her fall. When you fall your legs or ribs hit the beam on the way down and get scraped and bruised. And, then you hit the floor. That twists ankles and knees and fingers and wrists and elbows, and bruises head and face and all sorts of places. You'll hurt. The injured parts won't work, and you won't be able to do things for a few days. The bruises and scrapes will show in school tomorrow. Of course, there is no real monster on the beam. But, something wants to make you fall, and the outcome is awful.

It is bad enough walking along the beam, with nothing to hold onto, and the abyss far below on either side. But, it is much worse upside down, on your hands, in the middle of a cartwheel.

To protect herself from being injured in the trick, she wants to look at the floor, not the hard beam. This will let her see where to put her feet to land safely on the floor. But, this means she is not looking at the beam, and cannot guide her feet to land on the beam. So, her feet miss the beam, she falls, and scrapes her legs and bangs her ribs on the way down.

Or, to protect herself from being injured, mid-way through the cartwheel, she crunches down close to the beam. That way she won't fall so far. But, that means that she does not stretch her arms and torso, which means that her long legs can't place her feet under her center of gravity to be able to stand up and complete the cartwheel. So, she is caught, crunched over, with weight on one hand and one foot, falls off balance, and womps on the floor, after scraping her side on the beam on the way down.

Or, to be sure to land on her feet, not her head, she dangles her feet off to the side instead of keeping her center of gravity over the beam. But of course, this makes her fall.

The fear of the awful result of falling causes her to take protections to temper the undesired outcome. She looks at the floor, or she stays crunched low. But, to do a cartwheel, you need to look at the beam, stay over the bad thing, and extend arms and torso to be as high as possible.

Fear of falling leads to falling. The more you protect yourself from the awfulness, the more likely it will happen. If you are seeking to protect yourself from the awfulness, you are not paying attention to what is needed to succeed in the activity.

Fear prevents humans from doing what they could, becoming what they can, or venturing into someplace that leads to actualization.

Certainly, doing the cartwheel takes preparation, and the development of proper technique. "No Fear" in a person without skill will not lead to success in cartwheels. You can't be stupid about your skills. "Fools jump in where angels fear to tread". "Look before you leap." Those are all valid admonishments.

But, when you know you can do it, you can do it. When you have demonstrated all of the skills in practice, you can do it.

We are all afraid of the awfulness that might happen. For some it is in making presentations. For some it is writing. It could be in facing difficult conversations, finding the process within the complexity of pipes, proposing a design, letting something slip through the cracks, mathematical modeling, or any of the things that need to be done.

We need patient coaches that know the mechanisms of the task, and can help us develop the skills, behaviors, perceptions, and self-confidence that lead to proper technique, achievement, and success. We need coaching that can move us the next level of what is possible for us as an individual. We need friends that recognize how fear leads to underperformance, and who coach each other to acquire the fundamental skills, and to have the personal self-confidence to do it right. Help your teammates toward their best performance, and let them coach you. Then, "Just Do It".