

# What Are You Not Doing?

A KILNERY CIRCLE EXERCISE

*There's a version of you waiting for you to arrive.*

# Kilnery

# Why This Exercise

WSJ doesn't headline executive fear. Leaders don't broadcast their fears. But the truth you already know is:

**Executives are driven by unconscious fears.**

They show up as reasonable decisions at first. But over time, they shrink the range of who you allow yourself to be.

It's a conversation you avoided.

There's an idea you shelved.

There's a part of your life architecture that you didn't blow up, even though you knew it was time.

Or there's a version of yourself you keep postponing because the current version is working well enough.

Fear in senior leadership almost never looks like fear. *It looks like good judgment.* "The timing isn't right" or "Maybe in a few years." It's dressed as prudence and no one questions it, least of all you.

So let's bring it out of the subconscious and decide what we really want to do with it.

# What the Research Shows

Daniel Pink's World Regret Survey, the largest study of its kind - spanning 16,000 people across 105 countries - found that **people overwhelmingly regret what they didn't do**, not what they did. Inaction regrets outnumber action regrets by more than three to one, and the gap widens with age. The regrets that haunt people most are what Pink calls "boldness regrets."

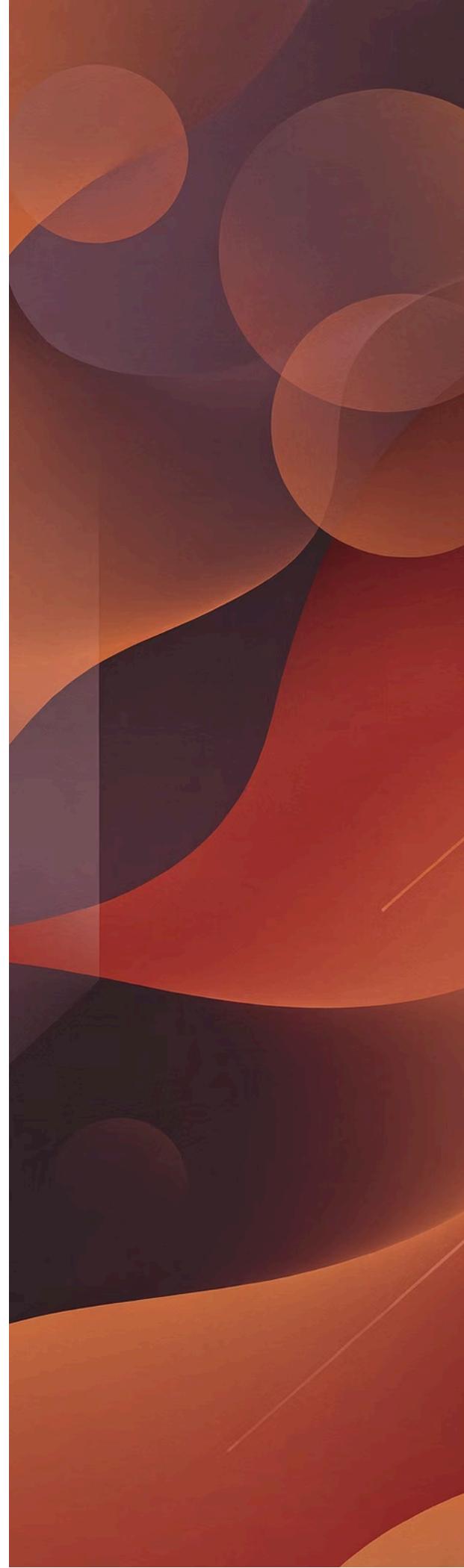
Boldness regrets are the chances we didn't take. The risks we didn't run. You know where this is going. It might even feel painful to read - because there's something in you calling you to take a chance and summon courage, which summons discomfort. So let's befriend discomfort. **Because the courage we didn't summon is what haunts us.**

What a great phrase.

**"Boldness regrets."**

Maybe try using that phrase this week - let's make it a thing.

# Boldness Regrets.



# The Most Common Regret

Bronnie Ware spent years in palliative care recording the regrets of people in their final days. The single most common regret:

☐ **I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.**

These aren't findings about other people. They are a mirror held up to the shape of a well-lived life — and they are about each one of us. These findings are a mirror for you. Are you living your true, fullest life? Right now? Or does that happen at a later stage?

# Before You Begin This Exercise

## Get Into Your Body

Us managerial types live in our heads. Our prefrontal cortex is awesome at constructing reasonable stories about why you're doing what you're doing. But we don't really need your default stories here, so let's soften that part of the mind and let other parts have a chance to come online and be heard.

I know it can feel painful to leave our heads. Thinking is so damn addictive and dopamine oriented.

So let's construct the cognitive argument for it: Your vagus nerve — the longest cranial nerve in your body — runs from your brainstem through your neck, chest, and abdomen, connecting to your heart, lungs, and gut. It's the primary pathway of your parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). We like the PNS because the PNS moves you from *default unconscious* to *being present*. We want to get away from the recycled thoughts where we automatically tell old stories, to a state where we chill out and listen to the creative, new ideas within.

To activate the PNS, slow your heart rate, deepen your breath, and allow the storytelling executive brain to chill, and take Child's Pose.

That's your first gift to yourself. Gently compress your torso to the ground. Feel the pressure of your forehead against any surface (you might want a pillow if your head doesn't reach the floor). You're not stretching here. You're not meditating. you're just chilling. And by doing so, pay attention to your body and breath. Allow the signals to your nervous system that you are safe enough to turn off the stories and listen to your body.



# Child's Pose — 2 to 3 Minutes



## Soft Surface

Kneel on a soft surface — a rug, a mat, a soft carpet.



## Fold Forward

Sit back on your heels, fold forward, and rest your forehead on the ground. Arms can extend in front of you or rest alongside your body.



## Breathe Slowly

Breathe slowly. Let your hips drop. Let the ground hold the weight of your head toward the ground or on a pillow. I like my forehead to touch something like a pillow or the ground.



## Inaccessible?

If this feels inaccessible, just lie flat on your belly or on a pillow.

**Wait until you feel something settle in your body and your breathing. Stay with that new slowing for a few minutes. Then sit up slowly and turn to the next page.**



# Part 1

## Your Fear Autobiography

### Major Moves

Before you look at the present, look at the past. You have decades of evidence about how fear operates in your life. Think of 2 or 3 major moves you've made: career shifts, relationship decisions, any big leaps. Professional or personal. For each one, jot down brief notes:

**What role did fear play? Was it the spark or the obstacle? Did it push you forward or did you push through it?**

## Times Fear Won

Now think of two times you let fear win: One is a big failure. Something that you wish you would have done differently or a road not taken. The school you didn't apply to. The other is a small one. A boss' joke you laughed at that you regret.

**What version of yourself were you stepping back from?**

**What did it cost you?**



## Part 2

### The Compass

Most of us spend our professional lives navigating toward comfort. I got x far in my career thanks to these things, or I achieved x with my life, or I have x responsibilities so I'll stay here where it's secure. Why would I change solid structures?

- If you held a compass like this one in your hands, which way would you walk?
- The things that have mattered most in your life, were they in the direction of comfort or fear? It could be both. No right or wrong answer.

**Name one or more things you are not doing right now. Something you sense you should be starting, saying, pursuing, or changing but aren't.** It could be large or seemingly small. Professional or personal. Listen to whatever surfaces - this is for you. You don't have to share it. You can pick a few if you'd like.

**What's the sensible explanation** you give yourself (or would give others) for not doing this thing? Write that down too. Notice how rational it sounds.

**What's actually underneath?** *Sit with this one.* Beneath the reasonable story, what is the real hesitation? Is it fear of failure? Of being seen differently? Of succeeding and not knowing what comes next? Of losing something you've built? Of finding out something about yourself?

Ask yourself the 5 Whys: *Why am I hesitating? ... okay, so why does that matter? ... ok, so why? ...*



**What is the pull?** What is drawing you toward this thing despite the fear? What makes it keep surfacing? What does this tell you about what actually matters to you right now?



**If you did this big scary thing, what would have to shift about your identity?** *"I'd lose my title and I'm afraid I'm nothing without a fancy title." Or: "I'd have to admit I'm fucking incredible, and that's terrifying."*

# Part 3

## When You Meet

After monthly reflections, each person will have 10 minutes to share from this exercise:

- What you noticed in your fear autobiography — any patterns?
- The thing you're not doing and what's underneath it.
- Any observations about fear in general.
- What you think the fear is pointing toward.

**Privacy: If you have something you're not ready to share, cool.** Name your second biggest fear. *but also.* Remember that naming your fear shifts your relationship with it. If you put the big, scary thing out on the table, it stops being that big scary thing. Talking about the scary thing is the stepping stone to being the courageous person doing that big, scary thing.

Also: if you don't know if you should do it, that's okay too. Maybe you're afraid and not sure. Feel free to use the group for council. Let them ask you questions.

### Friends Just Listen and Ask:

If the sharer invites questions, offer questions that help them explore this fear or adventure with possibility. If the sharer invites counsel, then great, go for it. Let the sharer guide the conversation.

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## Why This Matters

**Talent and ambition aren't what hold execs back. Unconscious and reasonable avoidances hold us back until they add up into a tradeoff we never intended to make.** Each avoidance is a small concession to safety that feels like wisdom in the moment.

Naming those avoidances out loud, in front of people who get it, they're seasoned, they have their fears -- this changes our relationship with the fear, and with our possibility.

# Further Reading

- Daniel H. Pink, *The Power of Regret: How Looking Backward Moves Us Forward*
- Bronnie Ware, *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*

*Brought to you by*

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