

Fear Traps: Escape the Triggers That Keep You Stuck

Nancy Stella

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Nancy Stella's hopeful self-help book *Fear Traps* suggests a mindful approach to trauma and its effects.

Advances in neuroscience show that the human brain is more adaptable and malleable than previously understood, Stella says. Thus, her book suggests a new approach to trauma treatment. Here, chronic fear is indicted for keeping people trapped in their pasts, while new traumatic events are shown to trigger additional traps, locking people in cycles of fear and doubt: "the part of the brain that controls our fear is overstimulated." Grounded in science, this weighty self-improvement manual shares suggestions for overcoming issues like rejection and failure. It also names meditation methods for reconditioning a person's fear-based reactions to stimuli, challenging one's ingrained responses.

Stella proposes a six-step process to addressing chronic fear. Dubbed the Courageous Brain Process, it is designed to awaken neural pathways to "sidestep old pathways ... created by past traumatic experiences." Each step is introduced in turn; then, the book zooms in on common fear traps, like being afraid of being alone or the unknown, that help to illustrate the steps. They represent a simple, beautiful set of recommendations that operate through intentional, repeated guided meditations, undoing the lingering effects of trauma.

Stella draws on her story as an example, too, covering periods as when she was working through her divorce, and the scent of her soon-to-be ex's cologne became a trigger: "I sat next to my attorney feeling as if I were a little girl." This vulnerability makes her testimonies about the Courageous Brain Process inspiring; Stella is convincing in asserting that it can change people's lives for the better in part because of her confessional tone.

Though based in complex science, the book's advice and commentary remains on the therapeutic level. It dips in and out of Stella's therapy office, describing pivotal moments when her clients worked through their own fears, as in the case of a confrontation-avoidant person who had to have "the talk" with his partners about how their business was doing. Such examples move the book beyond the theoretical, making its proposals feel more practical and engaging. But the book's approachable guided meditations are its true star. Each follows the same outline, with clear focus statements, entries for what to do in each moment, and notes for how to end each fifteen-minute session.

Incorporating both hard science and the wonders of mindfulness, *Fear Traps* is an insightful self-help book concerned with how meditation techniques can be used to address trauma.

JEREMIAH ROOD (October 26, 2021)

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