PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS OF TOPICS FOR WSP 17:
Befriending Fear of Failure: Clearing a Path to Your Goals

The course is designed to help participants discover and practice strategies to move past internal obstacles to innovation and success. The fear of failure interferes with our willingness to risk, a key element in every successful project. By engaging with rather than avoiding fear of failure, we become familiar with our own triggers and find ways to challenge self-limiting thoughts and actions. We will explore practical techniques to address the states that feed fear of failure -- anxiety, self-doubt, vulnerability, shame, and uncertainty -- and harness the varieties of courage that equip us for success.

The course has three objectives:

• To release creative energy and sharpen mental focus by befriending fear of failure
• To translate psychological research on motivation and resilience into useful strategies
• To create a temporary community of safety in which to build courage and claim power

First Saturday Content

The day will be divided into 5 periods with an hour for lunch and short breaks. In each period, I’ll do some talking on an aspect of our topic, I’ll give out a handout for reflection and writing, and we’ll debrief in small groups or the whole group. The first Saturday’s topics are:

• We will learn how to value the positive aspects of fear and recognize its destructive interference more quickly. Developing a growth mindset, challenging stereotype threats, and learning real-time resilience skills can help us move through fear to action.

• Self-doubt eats away at enthusiasm and motivation, so learning to manage our fear of being incompetent or unworthy is vital, especially in the current culture of "never enough." Cognitive and Buddhist psychologies offer practical remedies to ease the mind.

• Sociologist Brené Brown maintains that shame resistance isn't possible, but shame resilience works. Since, as she writes, "shame is biology and biography," we need to recognize its roots in our bodily memories but go beyond them to shame's antidote -- empathy. We will explore how to increase self-compassion and the physical courage to counteract feeling fatally flawed.

• The ability to be vulnerable is a strength unacknowledged by the dominant culture. As we increase our vulnerability tolerance, we gain emotional courage for risk-taking.

• Risk requires letting go of guarantees, yet we can learn to set aside the fantasy story line of permanent security and learn habits and practices to take uncertainty lightly.

The second Saturday will be custom-designed for the particular needs of the group, using the results of a brief survey I’ll hand out right before the end of class on the first Saturday.