The fear tax

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Here's what happens as a result of security theater at the Orlando airport:

• You wait in line at least twenty minutes
• There's a scrum of pushing and shoving
• The staff are unhappy and not afraid to share it
• An unreasonable workload leads to fatigue and errors
• People miss their flights

Here's what doesn't happen:

• Security is not increased
• Peace of mind is not enhanced

In other words, we're paying a significant tax (time and money) and getting nothing in return. In fact, we get worse than nothing. We could call it an anxiety program, instead of a tax. (After all, when you pay a luxury tax, you get some hard-won luxury as part of the deal).

The reason the TSA keeps changing the rules is not because the rules work, but because changing the rules creates more anxiety (for bad guys, they say, but for us too).

Another example: the MBA. A lot of entrepreneurs get an MBA because they are afraid to go out into world without one. They are seeking the reassurance a credential will bring them, even though the cost is huge and there's no data to indicate that they'll be more successful as an entrepreneur as a result.

We pay the fear tax every time we spend time or money seeking reassurance. We pay it twice when the act of seeking that reassurance actually makes us more anxious, not less.

We pay the tax when we cover our butt instead of doing the right thing, and we pay the tax when we take away someone's dignity because we're afraid.

We should quantify the tax. The government should publish how much of our money they're spending to create fear and then spending to (apparently) address fear. Corporations should add to their annual reports how much they spent just-in-case. Once we know how much it costs, we can figure out if it's worth it.

Instead of seeking out gatekeepers and critics and others that demand we get the broom of the wicked witch, perhaps we should just publish our work. The tax is too high.

Instead of forgetting about the wasted anxiety after the fact, perhaps we ought to keep a log of how often we needlessly pay the fear tax.

Instead of over-staffing, over-planning, over-meeting and over-analyzing, perhaps organizations should take lower-cost steps and actually ship.

Think about how much you could get done if you didn't have to pay a tax to amplify or mollify your fear...