Fear, Worry, and Living With Uncertainty · About 4 minutes

When Preparation Starts Asking for a Guarantee

Keeping useful care without having to settle every possibility

The confirmation is still in Leon's inbox. He has checked it already. His hand goes back to the phone.

He is a fictional organizer arranging transport for a community event. The accessible vehicle is booked, the time is confirmed and the driver has the correct address. Leon keeps reading the same document while imagining a breakdown, a road closure or a passenger becoming ill. Each possibility feels like another task he has failed to complete.

If he is looking for the driver's contact number, the document can help. If he is looking for certainty that the journey will go smoothly, it cannot.

Give preparation a job it can do

Worry often accompanies responsibilities that deserve attention. A missing accessibility arrangement requires action. An unreliable service may warrant a backup. Some occupations and situations have checking procedures that should be followed, regardless of whether you feel anxious.

The question is what the next check can accomplish under the circumstances. Will it supply missing information, change a decision or fulfill a duty? Or are you asking completed paperwork to make the future feel secure?

Research on generalized anxiety has identified difficulty tolerating uncertainty as one element in a model of persistent worry.[1] That perspective can help explain why more information sometimes fails to feel sufficient. It should not become a diagnosis of everyone who checks carefully, or an excuse to disregard a real risk.

Leon might need a clearer procedure rather than a conversation about his motives. Once the required checks are identified, he has a way to know which ones remain. If a new fact appears, the plan can change. Responsible preparation includes responding to information; it does not require forecasting every possible event.

Stopping can have a meaning of its own

For some people, putting the paperwork down feels like ceasing to care. Continued worry becomes evidence of vigilance: if I keep thinking, perhaps I will prevent the mistake.

That is one possibility, not something we can assume about Leon. But if it fits your experience, it may be worth distinguishing care from the particular activity you are using to express it. Another hour of rereading may cost rest without adding protection.

Try comparing these reasons for checking the booking:

"I need to confirm that the vehicle can accommodate the passenger's chair."

"I need to feel certain that nobody will have a difficult day."

© 2026 Brian Kennedy. All rights reserved.

The first can guide a useful inquiry. The second has no reliable finishing point. You can remain concerned about the passengers after completing the inquiry.

Sometimes the next step is another call, expert advice or a change of service. Sometimes the work for this decision is complete and your feelings have not caught up. Company may help with that remaining uncertainty. You do not have to handle it alone or turn it into another self-improvement exercise.

Leon's confirmation shows where preparation runs out of work to do.

After the last useful check, there is still the prospect of being worried. What would Leon like to do with the evening he was trying so hard to protect?

Companion reading · When Worry Becomes a Way of Caring

Full pathway companion · included with paid learning
Pathway introduction: Fear, Worry, and Living With Uncertainty (public introduction; full modules require access).

Sources and further reading

[1] Dugas, M. J., Gagnon, F., Ladouceur, R., & Freeston, M. H. (1998). Generalized anxiety disorder: A preliminary test of a conceptual model. Behaviour Research and Therapy, 36(2), 215–226. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0005-7967(97)00070-3 Source.

© 2026 Brian Kennedy. All rights reserved.