

8

Comfort Zones

Safety Net or Obstacle to Success?



OVERVIEW

In our past, when we really didn't want to go somewhere or do something, we found excellent reasons for not going or doing. Dozens of them, in fact! What we may not have realized is that we were coming face-to-face with our comfort zones. While some comfort zones are good for us, others hold us back; and it is time that we learn how to expand those limiting comfort zones and allow ourselves to grow.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, I will understand:

- how I have created my current comfort zones.
- some comfort zones can keep me safe and others can keep me from growing.
- which of my current comfort zones are holding me back from expanding my life, my education and my possibilities for the future.

As human beings, we seek the familiar.

LouTice

KEY CONCEPTS

Anxiety: An unpleasant emotional state of apprehension, dread, or distress that exists oftentimes with no objective.

Comfort Zone: A limited area of perception and association wherein the individual/group can function effectively without experiencing uneasiness or fear; a limited, defined physical or psychological area in which a person feels at ease; self-regulating mechanism; anxiety arousal control.

Self-Regulation: Adhering to and following an internal standard.

Tension: An emotional state characterized by restlessness and anxiety; a mental state where one is thwarted from achieving an end.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. What do I intend my comfort zone to be when I think about getting my education? My new career?
2. In what areas might I need to stretch my comfort zone to get the grades I want?
3. What are my physical signs that I am out of my comfort zone?
4. What “soft skill” or emotional intelligence (EQ) areas might I need to stretch to get the career I want? (Example: Accountability, patience, attitude, etc.)

EXERCISE: Change Five Things

DIRECTIONS FOR IN-CLASS STUDENTS:

This is a test to see how observant you are. Pair up with another student, place your chairs back-to-back, and sit down. When the classroom is ready, you will be instructed to stand, turn to face each other, and study your partner. When instructed, sit down. Then, quickly change five (5) things about your appearance.

When instructed, stand and face your partner. Count how many of the five changed things each of you gets and enter that number here _____.

You will be instructed when to sit down, and given any further directions for this exercise.

DIRECTIONS FOR ONLINE STUDENTS:

This is a test to see how observant you are. In order to do this exercise, you will need a friend or family member to work with you. When you are both together, sit back-to-back and each of you change five (5) things about your appearance. Give yourselves about 20 seconds to do this.

When you are both finished, turn and face each other and count how many of the five changed things each of you finds. Enter that number here _____.

ALL STUDENTS

When you have completed the exercise, turn the page and review the “Responses to Change” list.

EXERCISE: Change Five Things – Responses to Change

At the conclusion of this exercise, most participants change most, if not all, of the five things back within minutes of completing the exercise. (Please keep in mind that we are talking about changing back only those items that are not necessities. If you chose to take off glasses, for example, putting them back on is a necessity!)

Why do you think most participants switch back the five things, even when they are not instructed to do so?

How would you feel if you had to go the rest of the day without changing back?

Could you do it?

Online students: When the exercise is finished, without saying anything to your partner, observe how long it takes for them to change everything back to “normal” for them. Then ask them how the exercise made them feel.

Check all that apply to you:

- People feel awkward and ill at ease.
- People think not of what they have to gain, but rather, what they have to lose.
- People will feel alone, even if all others around them are going through the same change.
- People can handle only so much change.
- People are at different levels of readiness to change.
- People are concerned they don't have enough resources.
- If you take the pressure off, people will revert right back to where they were.

EXERCISE: Comfort Zone Shuffle

Directions: For each situation listed in the left column, decide which zone it fits for you: the Panic Zone (No way, no how. Can't pay me enough. I choose never to do that!); the Growth Zone (I'm not comfortable now, but I could grow into it.); or the Comfort Zone (Easy, no problem. Bring it on!).

SITUATIONS	PANIC ZONE	GROWTH ZONE	COMFORT ZONE
Starting school			
Going to a job interview			
First day at work			
Sky Diving			
Eating out alone			
Making the Honor's or Dean's list			
Becoming a Tutor			
Letting someone read your text messages			
Moving to a new town			
Becoming a Supervisor			
Becoming a Manager			
Speaking in front of a group of peers			
Speaking in front of a group of strangers			
Driving an expensive car			

Are there scenarios you have placed in the Panic Zone column that you may need to move to the Growth Zone, in order to reach your education goals? Which ones?

What insights from the Comfort Zone column might help you move some scenarios from the Panic or Growth zones?

For your Comfort Zone items, what did you do that made them comfortable for you?

Who helped you?

Where did you find your inspiration, or motivation, to keep going?

What plan or strategy (things you could actually do) will help you move some of the scenarios from Panic or Growth to Comfort?

EXERCISE: Three to Grow On

In the chart below are listed the top competencies and characteristics from the National Association of Colleges and Employers. Next to each competency, rate your current belief about yourself on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). Then, pick three (3) competencies that you intend to grow over the next year. Place an “X” in the column next to each.

NACE COMPETENCIES	MY RATING 1-10	PICK 3 TO GROW THIS YEAR
Communication Skills		
Honesty and Integrity		
Teamwork		
Interpersonal Skills		
Motivation/Initiative		
Strong Work Ethic		
Flexibility/Adaptability		
Computer Skills		
Self Confidence		
Problem Solving Skills		
Technical Skills		
Analytical Skills		

Of your three, what would it look like/feel like/be like if you were performing at a whole new level of effectiveness with regard to that competency or attribute?

EXERCISE: Interview

Imagine you are going for a job interview; the type of job is your choice. You will be meeting with the department head or manager, someone you have never met before. Your interview time is 9:00 am, one week from today.

On your own, think about this scenario. Using your “Going For An Interview” Worksheet answers below, visualize the interview. See yourself giving the interview of a lifetime and getting the job.

GOING FOR AN INTERVIEW WORK SHEET

Where am I going to be interviewed?

How am I going to get there?

What time will I need to get out of bed?

How should I be dressed?

Who do I need to take me there?

What questions am I likely to be asked?

What questions do I want to ask?

What qualities is the interviewer probably looking for?

What sort of attitude should I have at the interview?

What is the best possible outcome for me?

If I am successful, what do I see as my next step?

SUMMARY: Fundamentals

We all know how we feel when we are “in the zone.” It’s “flow and go” time, because we are operating in a space where we know who we are, what we can do, and we can feel confident. Life’s good, and why would we want to change that?

Let’s take a minute to talk about comfort zones, what they are and what they do. Our comfort zones are defined by our habits and attitudes and our beliefs about who we are – in other words, our self-image. We can act a little better than we think we are, and a little bit worse, but as long as we are acting close to our self-image, we are in our Comfort Zone.

A good example of a comfort zone is a thermostat on a wall. We set the thermostat at 68 degrees, and if the temperature falls below to say, 66, then the furnace kicks in. If the temperature goes up to 70, then the air conditioning turns on. The key is the 68, which is the center of the thermostat’s comfort zone. It could be held to a constant 68 degrees, but that would not be energy efficient, so HVAC people leave a comfort zone of about 4 degrees. We do the same in our minds, with our self-image.

The challenge comes when our comfort zones are keeping us from growing by not allowing us to be more and do more. If our comfort zones are too small, we are likely feeling frustrated by what seems like our inability to change, and yet we let our fear of growing and changing hold us back to what has always been normal for us. We let our lack of confidence or low self-efficacy build prisons of our own making.

Now when we try to grow bigger than our comfort zones, it causes tremendous tension in our system. Like the rubber band. If my lower hand is Current Reality for me, and I try to grow into something different – my upper hand – then the rubber band gets taut, and so do I. Like the tension in the rubber band, I get tense and anxious, and all I want to do is go back where I belong.

You know how this feels, if you get called up to give a speech or presentation in front of a group of people – one of your least comfortable situations. You get all sweaty, your memory goes blank, your heart starts pounding and you start to hyperventilate and your knees start to give out. And what is your self-talk saying? “GET ME OUTTA HERE!!!!” So much for trying to grow beyond your comfort zone, right? Wrong. There is a way.

As I mentioned before, your comfort zones – and we all have a lot of different comfort zones within us – are defined by our self-image. And what defines our self-image? That picture we hold of ourselves, in our subconscious. So, in order to change our self-image, we need to create new, replacement pictures. And how do we do that? By monitoring our self-talk, and changing the words we use that are creating those small comfort zones.

It’s a matter of taking your imagination into the future. You practice in your mind with people that normally make you upset. You take yourself into the way your life is going to be in the future. You practice taking yourself and familiarizing yourself with where you want the job and who you want to be with. You allow yourself to travel there, safely, over and over and over.

You're going to see later on that if I can't visualize the future with safety, I won't do it. I won't do it, or I'll just do it once. Then, back I go. But I won't admit to myself the truth. I'll just say to myself, "It was stupid." "I didn't like it." "It rained too much." You will find reasons to go back.

Watch yourself in your comfort zones. School could have been out of your comfort zone, but you are here now. Universities could be out of your comfort zone. They "used to be" out of your comfort zone, right? Going into business for yourself could be out of your comfort zone.

Now, you could be very comfortable in school, but when you go to get a job, you're out of your comfort zone in the interview. Take yourself, in your imagination, and get comfortable with the future you want.

Comfort zones are not a bad thing. Some comfort zones keep us safe, and keep us from doing some pretty stupid things – like running across the freeway with cars whizzing by at 60 miles per hour, or walking alone through a dangerous part of town. It's the comfort zones that are holding us back that we want to change, if we truly want to be more than we are today.

We want to bite off more than we can chew, and then grow into the person who can take an even bigger bite! And while we are growing ourselves, we are also growing those around us – our families and friends – because we are living examples of what is possible for them, too.

SUMMARY: Application

Let me ask you, what would you think of a parent, grandparent, guardian, or caregiver of any kind if the very first day they introduced the idea of pre-school or kindergarten to a child was the first day they pulled up in front of the building and said, "Get out, I'll see you at 4:30." If you did manage to get the child out of the car, the child would be attached to the bumper as you tried to pull away.

The panic in the child would have little or nothing to do with aspects of attending school but rather everything to do with the fact that the child is being introduced to school with having no idea what school is. The child's comfort zone would be completely shattered. There was no introduction to the "new normal" that school would bring. It almost sounds nonsensical that anyone would do this to a child. But how often do we do it to ourselves?

We throw ourselves into situations without ever taking the time to prepare our mind for what is to come before we are actually in the situation. So let's go back to that child. What might you do far before the first day of preschool or kindergarten actually begins? You talk about school, you play school, you talk about all the wonderful things the child is going to learn, all the friends they are going to make, etc. You may start doing this with the child years before the first day of school actually begins. You are simply changing the construct in the child's mind. The more vivid the picture the more excited the child becomes. The child is creating the new normal of what school will look like, feel like, be like far before she is ever actually there.

So what happens when the first day school actually begins? The child can't wait. They have one foot out of the car before you even stop it and run to the door without even saying goodbye. But what about the person dropping the child off? Tears. We spent all the time preparing the child for

the new normal and no time preparing ourselves. You can't just do it for others, or wait for others to do it for you. You need to do it for yourself. It is essential to grow your own mind into the new normal far before you are actually there.