



How Being Uncomfortable Can Feel Great

Break Out of Comfort Zones to Experience Life to the Fullest

The term “comfort zone” has always struck me as wonderfully descriptive, the perfect words for a place where all feels safe and right with the world. But contentment comes at a cost — comfort zones sometimes evolve into boring, same-old-same-old traps where nothing changes, including you. Many people are so busy being comfortable they don’t realize they have actually become seriously stuck. Getting stuck can happen at every level, she adds, from those who have achieved great professional success and are resting on their hard-won laurels to people who live in a world of denial pretending it’s okay to stay in unhappy marriages... remain at dissatisfying jobs... accept poor health and so much more.

When we limit our focus to just one or two zones we exclude the possibilities that exist in other areas. Take, for example, people whose entire focus has been on getting ahead in business. Success is very rewarding, but one day the work may end abruptly or simply become stale... and then what’s left? Friendships, family bonds and personal interests have faded. How much better to commit yourself to having a happier and fuller life by regularly climbing out of your comfort zones to reach the next level and then the next. “Your achievement becomes the new status quo, so you need to reach again... so goes life,

The best state of mind is one in which you continually push the envelope, in most if not all areas of life. One tool she uses to help people visualize this (and see how they get lazy) is a list of the 18 different aspects of a rewarding life...

1. Relationship to self: What do you say about yourself to yourself?
2. Romantic relationships: Whether you are currently in such a relationship or not.
3. Undesirable character traits: Your personal shortcomings — anxiety, anger, moodiness, lying, fear, whining, being a brat, etc.
4. Family: Your relationships with your parents, siblings and children.
5. Career/business/school life: How it’s going, your level of satisfaction, how much you love what you’re doing, what you strive for.
6. Time: How you manage your time, to-do’s and scheduling, tasks you’d like to get to but don’t, how you’re using your life. Is there anything you could be doing better?
7. Body: Weight, appearance, presentation.
8. Spirituality: However you define this.

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9. Money: Wealth. Are you happy with the amount you earn, the amount you've saved, how you spend it, how it's managed?
10. Bad habits: Vices, biting your nails, overeating, drinking, smoking, addictions, partying.
11. Community: Friends, depth, intimacy.

12. Sex: Are you satisfied with the quantity and quality? Your history, including past or current cheating on your part or your partner's.
13. Romance: Giving and receiving attention.
14. Home: Do you like your house or apartment? Does it reflect you well? How does it feel and look? Does it feel like home?
15. Personal space: Organization, cleanliness, clutter, etc.
16. Learning: Wanting to learn about things you aren't taking the time for, like flying or guitar.
17. Fun and adventure: Vacations, self-indulgent time, out of the ordinary events.
18. Health: Physical, mental and emotional.

TAKING THE STEP

The first step is to decide where you would like (maybe even need) to shake your life up. List all the things you've ever wanted to do and then consider the zones in which you are stuck. Identify these by labeling life areas you consider "good enough."

Then consider what challenges you can dream up for your life this year. In the area of health and fitness, you might train for a race or take a new kind of class... to enhance your connection to friends and community, volunteer at a local museum or hospital or attend a church service where you don't know a soul. Learn and stimulate yourself intellectually by enrolling in a class to learn French or Chinese. Is your marriage in the "good enough" zone? You could get out of that comfort trap by trying a new way of communicating with your partner, such as a shared journal or morning walk-and-talks. Come up with new activities you can share, or plan a vacation to a place you've always dreamed of visiting. There are thousands of ways to get unstuck and at least a dozen places most people need it, which means your work is cut out for you.

GETTING OVER THE GLITCH

The problem is, leaving a comfort zone requires entering a "discomfort zone," which is why so many people shrink from the task. Lauren says she finds that first attempts to get unstuck always bring up two predictable internal voices. The first is what she refers to as the brat. This voice will immediately start to complain — "I'm too old for this," or "I can't afford it" or, "I don't have time" or even "I don't need this." The other voice is the chicken... which expresses fear in statements such as "I have no idea how to go about this" or "I wouldn't be any good" or "I'm sure that

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wouldn't work." These voices also like to blame other people or external situations for how you became stuck, rather than acknowledging your responsibility to yourself. Hear your internal voices, but don't let them control you.

Departing your comfort zone can be scary, but it is also where life starts to be a whole lot more fun. It takes courage to step out of the known for new adventures, both large and small, and being brave makes you feel good about yourself and gives you a sense of pride. It is invigorating to go to the other side of fear, where you jump into something that makes you feel really alive. "I am not talking about adrenaline rushes," "I am talking about being honest in relationships with others and with yourself and being willing to put them at risk... about doing things that are new and daunting... meeting new people, developing your talents and putting yourself out there. Learn to love the thrill of breaking down your fears so that you leave your comfort zones again and again as you do more and more." This is true freedom, she says. You can put it into practice right now.