



Outside the Comfort Zone

Follow these five steps to break your way out of the status quo.

By Paul Lemberg

Comfort is defined as a condition of pleasurable ease. You can become comfortable with all sorts of things — good and bad. You're comfortable because you've learned the right responses and feel adequate to the challenge. You know how to gauge your efforts, so you needn't work too hard for acceptable results. And it just feels so good.

The problem is that staying in the comfort zone will kill your organization. Why? "What's wrong with being comfortable, as long as it's the good kind of comfort?" you ask.

On the face of it, nothing. Except that things change. When you're in the comfort zone — that place of pleasurable ease — it

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means you've accepted the status quo. You like it, and you hope things remain just the way they are. You aren't changing with the changes. You aren't making progress. You've probably lost sight of your vision, and you're doing things you've done over and over and over.....

And the precipice you're rushing toward is just out of sight around the bend.

What to do about these nice-feeling but dire circumstances? Here are five steps to getting out of the comfort zone.

One: Recognize that you're in the C-zone. See "Test Yourself: Take the C-Zone Challenge" on page 15. Your score will let you know if you're in the comfort zone and, if so, how far into the zone you've sunk.

Two: Re-commit to your vision. Do you have a vision? Are you passionate about it? When was the last time you thought about it? Is what you see in the future the place you really want to take your organization? If you don't have a vision, or no longer feel strongly about it, then it's time to do some vision work.

Test Yourself: Take the C-Zone Challenge

Take this quiz to see how deep you are into your comfort zone.

- _____ 1. Have you become used to the way things are?
- _____ 2. Have you stopped pushing your organization forward?
- _____ 3. Have you ceased looking for new opportunities?
- _____ 4. Can you think of more than one time recently when you've taken your eye off the ball?
- _____ 5. Have you started to let certain things — things that used to be important — slide?
- _____ 6. Have you become comfortable with your current circumstances?
- _____ 7. Do you dislike change?
- _____ 8. Did you once have a vision, which you've let fall by the wayside?
- _____ 9. Do you know you could accomplish more?
- _____ 10. Is everything just fine?

(Score five points for each “yes” to questions 1 through 10.)

- _____ 11. Can you state, with clarity, what new ground you've taken this week?
- _____ 12. Have you contemplated your vision or your mission this week?
- _____ 13. Have you scored a major win in the past two weeks?

Score 5 points for each “no” for questions 11 through 13.)

- _____ 14. When was your last innovation? If it was more than one month ago, score 5 points.
- _____ 15. Name two things you've gotten used to even though you don't like them. Score 5 points for each one.
- _____ 16. Name two things you've sacrificed for your vision in the past month. Subtract 3 points for each one.

Scoring:

10 or under: Congratulations! Yours is a cutting-edge organization, and you're doing a great job of fulfilling your mission.

11-15: You are borderline comfort zone. Remind yourself of your mission, and get busy.

16-20: You are definitely in the comfort zone. Start the five step program, immediately.

21+ : You are deep in the zone. If you can rouse yourself, seek help quickly.

What are the consequences of maintaining the status quo while the world around you changes?

Three: Set new goals and objectives. Where does your newly resurrected vision lead you? What goals do you want to achieve along the way to realizing it? Be specific. Be concrete. (You don't have to do a whole strategic plan here, just get the motor running again.)

Four: Examine the consequences. If you remain in the comfort zone, what's likely to happen next? What are the consequences of maintaining the status quo while the world around you changes? Be brutally honest. If things truly look rosy, wonderful. Good for you. But if they don't.....

Five: Take action. The stuff that used to work, well it doesn't work now. In the end, the only thing that really makes a difference is action. And you may not be used to action; you may have lost the habit. Here's the short solution to busting out of the comfort zone: Set five new actions that will move things forward. Pick one and execute it right away. Start today. The best time would be as soon as you're done reading this article. Then pick another and do that. And so on. It sounds simple — and it is! The hard part is lifting off that easy chair and getting started. ■

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Resources

Eadie, Douglas C., “Putting Vision to Powerful Use in Your Organization,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 13, No. 4.

Jenson, Donna, “Sharing the Vision: Every Leader's Obligation,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 8, No. 5.

Jones, Richard L. & Douglas C. Eadie, “Fostering Innovation & Growth,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 12, No. 1.

These resources are available at www.snpo.org/members.

When was the last time you thought about your vision?

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