

When You Should Sail Outside Your Comfort Zone

Wikipedia defines *comfort zone* as “a behavioral state within which a person operates in an anxiety-neutral neutral condition, using a limited set of behaviors to deliver a steady level of performance, usually without a sense of risk.”

Most people, save for the adrenaline rush-chasing risk-takers, both loyally love and devoutly defend the warm, cozy bubble that encompasses their comfort zone. When something or someone challenges us to burst that bubble, our automatic response is often to rapidly generate plenty of bubble-protecting excuses that we believe justifiably exempt us from ever venturing outside our blessed safety zones.

It may serve us well to recognize that moving into a discomfort zone, if you will, presents several advantages that I believe can help coax us from our comfy, status quo cottages:

1. You'll have increased productivity. Our comfort zones are enemies of productivity because without the sense of unease that accompanies deadlines and freshly made goals, we tend to procrastinate, do the bare minimum of work required at our jobs or in our homes, and remain trapped in the land of “What if?” We lose the drive and ambition to learn new things, adopt new hobbies or hone a new skill. We also begin to fool ourselves into thinking we're being productive simply because we're keeping busy with, well, busy work. This sort of work is, of course, nearly always a hollow excuse given to prevent us from ever exiting our homey bubble. Pushing our personal boundaries can refresh us mentally, sharpen us intellectually and stimulate us emotionally, leading us to get more done more quickly and with more joy.

2. You'll be better prepared to cope with unexpected change.

Brené Brown, a research professor at the University of Houston, explains that one of the worst things we can do is pretend that uncertainty and fear don't exist. Indeed, we are in for an unpleasant surprise if we think our self-built bubble fortresses can fend off unwelcome and unexpected intruders forever. By taking risks and challenging yourself to things you normally wouldn't do, you can experience some of that uncertainty in a controlled, manageable environment. Learning to live outside your comfort zone when you choose to can prep you for life changes that force you out of it.

3. You'll be able to push past boundaries more easily in the future. Once you start stepping out of your comfort zone, the leap becomes easier and less intimidating over time; you'll grow accustomed to what researchers call "productive discomfort." Armed with a newfound acquaintanceship with the unfamiliar and uncomfortable, you'll find yourself more willing, more eager, more at peace with the idea of pushing farther and climbing higher.

Our lives are filled with the situations that beckon us outside our bubbles. Whether it's deciding to cut out sodas and sugar to lose the extra weight, go to the gym consistently, leave the job we hate, start a job we love or even to join a Bible study with, dare I say, *strangers*, we regularly come within inches of crossing the threshold of our comfort zones—but we hesitate. We turn back because we're afraid, because we lack the faith to move our feet forward.

One day Jesus was teaching along the Sea of Galilee when He decided to hop into a nearby fishing boat and make the rocking vessel His pulpit. Perhaps He noticed that the boat in which He sat was fishless, because after His seaside sermon, He told Simon the fisherman to move into deeper water and cast his nets there. Having had no luck all day, Simon responded reluctantly, but respectfully:

“Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5, NIV).

What do you suppose happened next to the fishless fisherman? The next verse tells us:

“When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break” (v. 6).

Not only did the nets start to break, but another boat had to come to their aid, and then *both* boats began to sink—and perhaps *stink*—with fish!

This snippet of Scripture speaks directly to those times in our lives when we find ourselves frustrated and forlorn, yet simultaneously unwilling to move past our comfort zones toward deeper, more promising waters. We feel like fishermen sitting idly in an empty boat. Like Simon, James, and John, we’ve done all we can with the talents, time, and tools we have. We’ve awoken before the break of day, set our sails, cast our nets, watched the moonrise and the stars appear, and returned home without having “caught anything.”

What do we do? To be completely honest with you, when I don’t catch the fish, so to speak, that I desire after an all-out effort and hours at sea, my first impulse is to return to the harbor and trade in my fishing nets for a new line of work altogether. The *last* thing I want to do is go into even deeper water and try again. I love my comfort zone too much! But that is exactly what Jesus asked Simon and the other fishermen to do. Despite his better judgment, Simon trusted and obeyed this captivating “Master” and was richly rewarded with a hardly containable catch of fish.

The Lord wants to do the impossible in our lives. But to do so, He asks us to trust him completely and to obey His word without conditions or complaints.

It is natural to have doubts and reservations and a hundred reasons why, to the “reasonably minded,” nothing will happen if we obey God and follow His guidance. But it takes *supernatural* faith, one that holds little regard for what the naked eye can perceive or the educated mind can rationalize, to venture out into deeper waters, believing fully in God’s ability to let men walk on waves or fill empty nets with an astounding surplus.

Ephesians 3:20 declares that God is able to do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.” Simon and his fishing buddies saw this to be true, and so can you. You will leave behind emptiness and sail into waters of abundance when you simply listen to and obey the word of God and the whispering of the Holy Spirit within you.

Diana Anderson-Tyler is the author of Creation House’s Fit for Faith: A Christian Woman’s Guide to Total Fitness and her latest book, Perfect Fit: Weekly Wisdom and Workouts for Women of Faith and Fitness. Her popular website can be found at [www.dianataylor.com](#), and she is the owner and a coach at CrossFit 925. Diana can be reached on Twitter.