

Unit 5.4 Expanding Your Comfort Zone

OVERVIEW

Do any of us really like to be uncomfortable? Of course not. Then why *shouldn't* we stay in our comfort zone? After all, we're relaxed, familiar, and probably more confident when we're in our comfort zone. Isn't that the prescription for optimal performance?

Not necessarily. First, just because we're in our comfort zone doesn't mean that we're doing things in the right way. In fact, one of the problems is that people tend to fall back on behaviors and strategies that are most "comfortable," even if they're not particularly effective. Second, oftentimes the only way for us to grow is to *leave* our comfort zone. And, third, sometimes there's no choice: we are forced into an unfamiliar or uncomfortable situation, but still have to perform.

Whatever the reason, when we leave our comfort zone, we have two choices. We can look forward with trepidation and fear, knowing that we're out of our element, or we can look forward in a relaxed and constructive manner, visualizing ourselves succeeding. Which approach is likely to be more effective?

The answer should be obvious. In fact, visualization is the key tool for succeeding in unfamiliar and uncomfortable situations. When we become really good at visualizing ourselves in a new comfort zone, two things happen. Everybody else begins to think that we *are* comfortable, capable, and competent. More importantly, we in fact *become* comfortable and confident—and those are characteristics that lead directly to success.

UNIT QUESTIONS / EXERCISES

1. Think of a very uncomfortable situation for you. Now, think about the worst that could happen if you failed. Is the result really that catastrophic? And if you did fail, how could you recover? Share your answers with your coach and/or the group.

2. Think of the same uncomfortable situation. What is the best that could happen if you succeeded? Describe yourself in this new situation, using positive, first-person, present-tense terms? How do you feel when you see yourself in this situation? Discuss your answers with your coach and/or the group.

3. Think about how this applies to your work relationship at John L. Scott. Think of a situation completely outside your organization's or team's comfort zone. Why would you be likely to fail in this situation? How could you succeed? Discuss with the other members of the group which outcome is the more likely, and why.
