

eWellness magazine

Just Because You Couldn't Doesn't Mean You Can't

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Early in Karl's career, he had no problem accepting a technical promotion from junior technician to senior technician. When asked to be a supervisor, self-doubt became his constant companion. He agonized over the decision for days. He had trouble sleeping at night and concentrating on even the simplest tasks. Finally, with the

support of his family and co-workers, he reluctantly took the promotion. Five years later, he has been asked to apply for the department manager position, where he will have to manage a hundred employees, including other supervisors. Self-doubt has returned, and he is extremely anxious about the unknowns associated with the increase in responsibility. He has a week to apply for the job and is dreading more sleepless nights.

Most of us don't like change. We like to be comfortable. We like to play things safe. We avoid risk. We put ourselves in safe little boxes and then we miss out on opportunities for growth and advancement, both personally and professionally.

It is said we spend 70% of our time in our comfort zone, when we should really spend 80% of our time in our *uncomfortable* zone. Where do you spend your time?

Getting out of your comfort zone is a lot like exercising muscles that have atrophied. As babies, we learn to stand by trying to stand up and then falling down, over and over until we succeed. The same thing happens when we learn to walk. Around the time we learn to ride a bike, things change. We want to enjoy that the mobility of bike riding but we fear falling and looking bad in front of our family, neighbors and friends. Usually, with the encouragement of a family member or friend, we overcome the fear – and we learn to ride a bike.

However, as we get older, we often find it easier to say "I can't do it" than to try to learn a new skill or take on a new challenge. We tend to stay in our comfort zones and our "step-outside-the-comfort-zone" muscles atrophy.

Karl decided to seek the advice of Sydney, a former supervisor and mentor. Throughout her career, Sydney has moved around within the company, taking challenging assignments and growing in value to the company. The company rewards her risk taking and she is now a division manager. Sydney talked to Karl about the importance of stretching yourself, of being uncomfortable, of testing your limits.

Sydney gave Karl these five steps to exercise the "step-outside-the-comfort-zone" muscles.

1 – Vary your routines One sign of being comfortable is sameness, doing the same thing over and over. Do you take the same route to work every day?

Do you find yourself eating in the same restaurants, even ordering the same meals? What would happen if you didn't go to the same place, or if you didn't have "the usual"? Consciously decide to do something different. Break out of your routines. It will probably feel very uncomfortable at first – Great! Experience the newness. Over time, it will feel less and less uncomfortable. The more you do it, the easier it becomes.

2 – Try new hobbies Ever thought about being a magician? Playing the ukulele? Knitting? Performing standup comedy?

Make a list of 20 things you think would be fun to try, and then pick one. Find a class through your local continuing education, YMCA or parks and recreation department. Sign up, attend the first class and go in with the idea that you will have fun. If you are really bad at it, so what? At least you tried. Now, try another activity on your list! Chances are, you will have fun, develop new skills and you'll likely make new friends.

3 – Try new things at work Is your first response when the boss asks for volunteers to avoid eye contact, shrink down in your chair and try to make yourself really, really, *really* small ?

Often times, your organization will be asked to provide people to participate in focus groups or special committees, for example for an open house or for planning a holiday party. Seek out lateral work assignments and volunteer yourself. Make your manager know you are happy to fill those roles that, in the past, you and most of your co-workers probably shunned.

4 – Say yes If your natural inclination is to say No to new opportunities, change your mindset. The more you say **Yes** to new opportunities, the broader your experiences will be and the less afraid of new things you will become. Want badly to say **Yes** and set a high threshold for saying No. Use this new mindset at home and at work.

5 – Get back up Falling down is not failing. We often hear, "it is better to try and fail than to fail to try". Inventors rarely create their inventions the first time. They try, observe the results, and then try it differently. They repeat it until they get the results they desire. Another saying we often hear is, 'the only person who doesn't make mistakes is the one that doesn't do anything'.

When you try new things and they don't flow smoothly, don't be discouraged. There are often bumps in the road. What is important is how you handle the bumps in the road. Do you know when to ask for help? Do you figure out what happened and then provide corrective action, so the same problem won't occur again? Each time you go through a learning experience, you become more seasoned and more confident when facing future challenges.

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When you stay in your comfort zone all the time, you will feel unfulfilled, like you aren't getting everything you want out of life. By taking steps in your personal and professional lives to get comfortable being uncomfortable, you will open yourself up to new, challenging opportunities. The more you do it, the easier it becomes. Just because you couldn't do something before, doesn't mean you can't do it now.

Karl now knows many places to go for dinner, plays the ukulele for friends at parties and, in his second year as a department manager, is gaining more confidence in his leadership ability.

*About the Author **Walt Grassl** conquered his crippling fear of public speaking at the age of 50, and through his Internet radio show, "Stand Up and Speak Up," he is determined to help others do the same. Walt's accomplishments include success in Toastmasters International speech contests, performing standup comedy at the Hollywood Improv and the Flamingo in Las Vegas. He is also the author of the book "Stand Up and Speak Up". For more information on Walt Grassl, please visit <http://waltgrassl.com/>*