

ENLARGE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

“The comfort zone was designed to help you stay in your box.” Author unknown.

Those of you who receive my “Weekly Wisdom” email newsletter know that I recently included the above quote with some comments. The concept of people staying in their box has been surfacing in my life in many different ways over the last few weeks. As leaders, we often find ourselves staying in our comfort zone (our box). Perhaps it is time to explore the meaning of comfort zone.

COMFORT ZONE DEFINED

The comfort zone is where you live every day. You get up in the morning, go to work and pretty much know your routine. Yes, I know, a number of different, unexpected things may come up. But I’m guessing that your answers to questions or routines were established a long time ago. People know what to expect of you and can often anticipate your answers or how you will react in any given situation. You are predictable because you rarely change. You are living in your comfort zone; you are content and happy with the routine; there are few struggles or challenges.

ENLARGING YOUR COMFORT ZONE

As I work with people, I see how often they are stopped by fear. The truth is, there is not one person who does not live with fear. Some people are just better at seeing/feeling the fear and going through it anyway. Unfortunately, many wait until it becomes an “absolute must” and the pressure is truly on to complete the assigned task.

It’s the little things that can enlarge your entire comfort zone sphere. You do not have to do something monumental. Each time you take any kind of different action, it enlarges the sphere of comfort all the way around you in all areas.

Let me give you an example. I enjoy movies a great deal and have a favorite movie theatre in Vancouver. It’s my theatre of choice because it’s convenient and very familiar - - my comfort zone. One Sunday I asked myself, “What would happen if I decided to go to see a movie at a different theatre each time?” The only way to find out was to begin the process. I now enjoy the whole routine of driving to a new area and walking in and observing the environments, which I’ve discovered are all different even if owned by the same chain. “People watching” in the different areas brings it’s own rewards. It’s great to see places where we truly have a diversity of people.

On those Sunday afternoons, I come home refreshed, even if the movie wasn’t that terrific. I feel that I not only enlarged my comfort zone, but I learned something. One is reminded how big this world really is when wandering outside the perimeters of their box. Enlarging the comfort zone does not have to involve gigantic steps.

THE BOX IS NOW LARGER -- NOW WHAT?

In my experience the larger the box, the more opportunities appear that allow you grow in other ways. If a leader stays inside of his office (literally a box) all day, they will become

oblivious to the things around them. The leader doesn't see problems because she is not "experiencing" them.

Recently, a high-level leader told me that he had no communication problems in his company. I had previously interviewed some of his employees and knew that the organization included four generations of people. Some employees were complaining that they didn't feel at all significant in their positions.

It quickly became apparent that the company was communicating to all the employees in the same way -- employees were all in the same box. They may have understood what the leader was *trying* to say but it was said in such a way that it totally irritated the X Generation employees. The leader hadn't figured out that in addition to how people want to receive information, there are specific ways to transmit news to different generations.

Complicated? Yes. Impossible to learn? No. Yet leaders working from the confines of their box may be unaware that there is even a problem. The attitude is that there is no problem and nothing to fix.

Recently, I received an alarming email. It was released by the national organization of Human Resource Professionals and entitled "Top 10 Trends in Human Resources". Number 8 emphasized the "Use and Development of E-Learning". Then listed under "Key Employment Trends" was "Employee demands for customized employment relationships." How is more "Use and Development of E-Learning" going to foster employee relationships?

REWARDS FOR LISTENING TO EMPLOYEES

About a year ago, I bought a stock with the letters XTO. I bought it after watching "Small Business School" on Channel 10 on Sunday. The owner of the company said, "At 5:00 p.m. my assets go out the door. Without my employees, I would have nothing." I loved his attitude and figured it would bring him success. I am happy to report my hunch was right -- my stock has doubled in value and continues to climb. He cares about his employees, listens to them, asks for advice and his profits soar.

What would happen if today you got yourself out of your box (your office) and went out on the floor and talked to your employees? What if you asked, "What would make it easier for you to work for this company?" They just might come up with ideas that will stretch your and your company's comfort zone -- right into higher profits.

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An Executive Coach certified in Performance Coaching, Kathy Condon travels the world inspiring others as an international speaker and trainer. A published author, she is driven by a distinct purpose to motivate others to achieve their full potential. Her popular Ezine "*Weekly Wisdom*" offers insights and thought-provoking comments about current events, business communication and career issues is emailed to hundreds of people each week.

Kathy's book "***It Doesn't Hurt to Ask: It's all about Communication***" was released in March of this year. The book stresses the need for the use of simple tools to increase your ability to communicate more effectively with anyone. Even the technology inclined will learn small things that make a big difference in communicating and connecting with others.

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