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Outside In

Skills and Professional Development





No growth occurs inside our comfort zone. A comfort zone is a place where we can operate in default mode. We've mastered what we are doing, how we are living, and who we are. We can handle things as they come because they are familiar and we've done them before. There is nothing wrong with comfort zones — that is, if you are not interested in doing anything to expand or increase your world or your life.

But to go to the next level, to get promotions, to launch businesses, or to live a life of purpose and meaning, we have to step out of our cocoons, our little life bubbles, and step into something that is at least a little bit scary, if not outright scary, to stretch our muscles, both mental and emotional.

Tony Robbins, the famed motivational speaker, has said: "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always gotten."

That is a simple way of saying if we are not living the life we want, we must choose differently to attain it. Have you ever thought about why you drive to work the same way each day? Unless your navigation system redirects you due to traffic conditions, you probably take the same route daily. It's because you are comfortable.

I would guess that when the navigation system suggests another route, you experience a moment of hesitation before you agree to change course. It may not be conscious, but there is a part of you that doesn't want to do the new route because it might be the wrong way to go — even as you are sitting in bumper-to-bumper traffic (this may be a non-issue for those of you living outside of Los Angeles or London).

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to attend Tony Robbins' "Unleash the Power Within" (UPW) program in San Jose, California. I attended alone. I am not the biggest fan of doing new things. I am, like many people, content to live my life doing things I enjoy with the people I know. I'm not afraid of new things or against doing them, but my natural inclination is to stick with the things I like.

So, the thought of going to this event was a little out of my comfort zone, as I didn't know what to expect, but going alone was stretching me quite a bit. If I had not just joined a real estate brokerage a month or so before this event, and not been invited by one of the top producers in the office, I probably would have passed on the idea and planned to spend the money and that weekend doing something more familiar. But I took the leap and purchased my ticket months in advance. As the event dates drew near, I finally decided it was time to figure out what was in store for me.

Before the event weekend, I started listening to a program that the salesperson suggested and found additional material on YouTube. I was familiar with Tony Robbins from the 1990s, but I hadn't followed him much since then except to know he was a big deal influencer, master coach, and neuro-linguistic programming practitioner. The beauty was that the concepts were the same concepts I share and instill with my clients and mentees. I was starting to feel comfortable that he wasn't going to take me on some tangent that countered my worldview.

And that's what the concern with unfamiliar ideas is. That, somehow, we'll have to change if we are confronted with truths that are counter to who we are. The interesting thing is, as a life coach myself, you would think I would have no problem with change. But the truth is that I am not unlike most of the people I work with or encounter. Change requires effort. Change requires time. And in a life that is already packed to the gills with activities and responsibilities, change sometimes seems like more than can be handled. So, it is just easier to stay where we are than to expend the effort.

The problem is there is no growth opportunity there. And as exciting and happy as one might be, there is more happiness and excitement to be had on the other side of comfortable, but it requires change to get there. Change in physical position, change in mindset, or change in perspective, but change nonetheless.

So, I started taking in the knowledge and asking questions about what would happen at the event. I found out very little except the days would be long with few, if any, breaks and there would be a fire walk. I immediately started thinking about how to survive days that went beyond 9 p.m., my typical bedtime. And then there was the fear that started to set in about walking on hot coals.

Over the course of the three days prior to the event, I went back and forth in my head about whether or not I would participate in the fire walk. The interesting thing about this is that I didn't make any effort to learn more about the activity but continued to worry about it. I finally mentioned to my husband that the fire walk was part of the program and learned for the first time that he had walked on fire at a Tony Robbins event.

While he explained the mechanics and the purpose behind the fire walk, I still had my doubts, but I was no longer fearful just from the mention of walking on fire. Now someone I knew had done it and lived to tell the tale. But knowing people have done it was not the same as doing it myself. What really got my attention and ultimately was the reason I was going to UPW in the first place, although I wouldn't realize it until sometime during the afternoon of the first day, was that I was living with a lot and making decisions out of fear — rather than from a place of confidence.

One of the reasons people attend Tony Robbins events and others like it is because it is a time of self

discovery and realization that we are not living our best lives if we are living life the same day after day. It starts with self-awareness. In fact, we cannot be the leaders we were created to be if we are living in fear. Fear that we'll be replaced. Fear that we aren't good enough. Fear that those we lead are not getting what they need. Instead, we have to face and let go of those fears and others, which shows the example of leading by doing.

I have spent much of my life in my own head. Over the course of authoring this column, some of my best realizations and moments of growth have come from thinking about what I would write and the lessons learned from my observations of others. My best trait as a leader is that I know I am not perfect. I don't have a problem being authentic with that fact. All too often those in positions of leadership feel a need to put on a front of perfection. That they have all the answers. In doing so, they don't allow others the opportunity to grow, which reinforces the concept of familiarity, the killer of growth.

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Whitnie Wiley was a long-time columnist for the *ACC Docket*, where she wrote the *Lead the Way* column for more than seven years. The column provided leadership tips for in-house counsel and others as they pursue their personal and professional goals.