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Article published - Nov 13, 2006

CHUCK TALK: f you're not uncomfortable, you're not growing

Ways to get out of the mediocre 'Comfort Zone' and stay moving ahead

BY CHUCK MACHE

It was the 1980s, and my sales manager called me into his office. Spread across his desk were my weekly sales call reports dating back four or five weeks. All paper in those days, these reports tracked my weekly sales calls and showed the companies and organizations that I was either selling or attempting to sell.

I knew this was one of those “uh-oh” meetings. We were about to have the meeting about my sales numbers, my productivity that was well-documented on the call reports (well, sort of) and my potential that I was not living up to.

Next to my reports were those of the top sales rep in the company. Her report was full of new prospects, while mine showed a pattern of working with the same accounts over and over again. She was outselling me, and one of her keys was constant focus on getting new business.

That was my first recollection of the words “Comfort Zone,” and I was stuck right in the middle of one. I was comfortable with my income. I was also lucky because I had a sales manager who was doing his job. He challenged me to take it to the next level as he used the facts in front of him to make his point.

Now, I’m not a big fan of sales call reports, and I think that most sales people required to use them will “alter” them in their favor. At the end of the day, it’s all about actual sales. However, in this case, it was the best use of a sales call report that I can remember because it exposed my Comfort Zone.

So much has been said and written about the Comfort Zone that I think we just gloss over it because we’re so familiar with the term. We all know what it means.

So my goal over the next few hundred words is to inspire you to leave your Comfort Zone behind and fight to get to your next level.

Trust me when I tell you that the Zone knows no industry, no career, no title, no race, no religion and has absolutely no biases. All those willing to be comfortable will be accepted. It is universal and prevalent in sales, marketing, accounting, finance, legal fields, human resources, information technology and administration. President, senior manager, middle manager, staff-level or independent contractor can qualify with little barriers to entrance.

I define the Comfort Zone with this equation:

Personal Motivation + Focused Attention = Your Comfort Zone

The more we have of each, the less likely we are to be stuck. Make sense? Highly motivated and focused individuals tend to go to the uncomfortable places. That's how they constantly improve.

So consider getting into the uncomfortable zone by following these steps:

1. Make a list of what it takes to get to the next level in your career. Meet with the best and find out what they are doing that makes them the best. Be thorough. One thing I've learned about successful people is that most of them are willing to share what they know. If you are the best, find someone better than you. If there's nobody better than you, then I suggest you're not looking hard enough. Or, congratulations. Or, you have some ego issues – better left for another time.
2. Match your strengths and weaknesses against the list you've just made. What will it take to get you to the next level, and what do you hate or avoid doing?
3. Focus your attention on working on the things that you've deemed to be your weaknesses. Get uncomfortable working on them until you are so good that you're comfortable. Then get uncomfortable again by repeating the above steps to continue breaking through to new levels.
4. The best live in the Uncomfortable Zone, always working on their game. If we want, we can all choose to be at a crossroads in our career. Down one road is the smooth, paved, well-lit, often-traveled road whose destination is as well-known as the road from your home to your local grocery store. It represents our Comfort Zone. Down the other road is a rough, unpaved, dimly lit, sometimes frightening, windy road that we are certain leads to more personal enrichment on many levels than we've ever experienced before. But, it is a difficult journey.

I hope you dare yourself to break through to the next level. Or, I hope you have a manager that's doing the job and challenging you to find your next level.

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Chuck Mache, president of Chuck Mache Communications, is a speaker, consultant, coach and author of "The Four Kinds of Sales People: Your Personal Path to Breakthrough Achievement." Sign up for Chuck's complimentary monthly newsletter "Chuck Talk" at www.chuckmache.com/nb. "Chuck Talk with Chuck Mache" appears on the Entrepreneur Magazine Radio Show and may be heard live or via archive at www.entrepreneurtalkradio.com