# Comfort Zone – to be in or not to be in




The concept of comfort zone is attributed to the psychologists Robert M. Yerkes and John D. Dodson, who carried out experiments to show that a state of relative comfort generated a constant level of performance.

Many posts about the comfort zone will tell you that your comfort zone is, amongst other things, the place where you feel deeply unmotivated, you are closed to new ideas, you feel isolated, find things meaningless and you experience deep apathy – DO NOT believe them!!

Your comfort zone is a great place to be in; don't let anyone convince you differently!

I don't know about you, but my comfort zone is full of great stuff; canoeing down rivers, playing the guitar, writing articles, making presentations, speaking a foreign language, cooking …… stuff that I have spent years learning, developing and honing – lots of quite exciting stuff and not at all boring!

Feder, Nadal and Djokovic are all in their comfort zone, they play tennis – Feder is not uncomfortable playing tennis against Nadal or Djokovic, he is in his comfort zone.

Yerkes & Dodson also pointed out that to improve or increase performance we need to experience a certain degree of anxiety and apprehension; this is what happens when we move "out" of

our comfort zone – our stress tends to increase slightly. Some people call this the “learning zone” or the “growth zone”, Yerkes & Dodson called it the zone of “optimal anxiety”; it is “just outside” the boundaries of our comfort zone.

The “just outside” is very important. I learned to canoe in a swimming pool, I then moved on to a local lake and then the canal before attacking my first moving water; the rivers I chose to canoe started to move faster and faster and eventually I was able to canoe down (with the more than occasional swim) some reasonably difficult Pyrenean rivers.

Each small excursion outside my comfort zone allowed it grow, until canoeing down Grade 4 rapids in steep sided gorges was (almost) within my comfort zone.

Some people say, “do it scared”; just go ahead and do it! Unfortunately doing things when you are scared and learning do not always go hand-in-hand; sometimes we can be so scared that all we want to do is survive and sod the learning!

I remember tackling a river gorge in flood, well before I was ready, and ending up on a rock in the middle of a raging torrent – an extremely unpleasant experience with limited learning!!

Operating inside your comfort zone is not the problem, it’s being “confined” within it that is the problem; you need to step just outside your comfort zone and study yourself failing in order to increase or develop your performance – identify what worked and what didn’t work and apply appropriately.

We all have a physical comfort zone, being able to perform when cold, damp, tired and hungry does not come easily; we also have intellectual, emotional and spiritual comfort zones and we need to regularly step, just outside, each of them in order to grow them.

The secret lies in finding a balance in which the anxiety

created by moving out of your comfort zone generates a positive sensation without becoming (too) scared or fearful; to do this you need to stay in your learning or growth zone – comfort zones do not increase in “leaps & bounds”

Having a large comfort zone will undoubtedly prepare you for difficult times, enable you to be more productive and increase your self-confidence – all part of the process of learning to be “comfortable with the uncomfortable”