

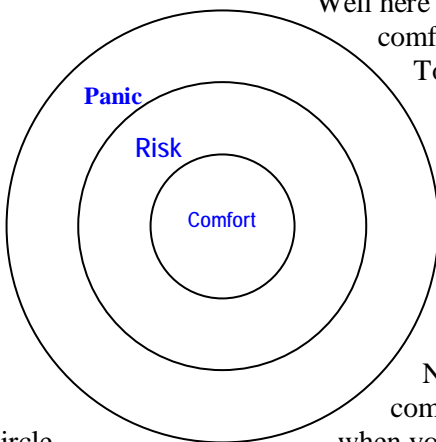
## Why Staying in Your Career Comfort Zone Can in Fact Be Risky!

*“Do one thing every day that scares you.” Eleanor Roosevelt*

Whether it's presenting a new business proposal, asking for a pay raise, or considering a career change, career moves can be nerve wracking. We are, by nature, creatures of habit, and new career opportunities may be enticing but they also threaten the status quo. They take us out of our comfort zone and that can be a scary thing. At times, just thinking about a possible career move can trigger the fight or flight response and leave us running for cover. This is precisely the reason why we tend to stay in jobs that aren't satisfying. At least we're secure in knowing what we have rather than needing to face uncertainty and the unknown.

### A New Way of Thinking about Comfort and Risk

Well here's an exercise that will offer you a new way of thinking about comfort and risk.



To the left, you'll see a picture that consists of three circles, one inside the next, that represent your personal career comfort, risk, and panic zones. The smallest circle represents your comfort zone and this zone is surrounded by your risk zone which is in turn surrounded by your panic zone. Now, focus on that smallest circle, your career comfort zone, and imagine what would happen, over time, to the shape of this circle if you always stayed within your comfort zone. Actually, your comfort zone circle would shrink over time if you never went outside of it.

Now what about the reverse scenario...what happens to your comfort zone

circle

when you go beyond it by taking risks? Yep, I expect that you're catching on and realized that your comfort zone circle would expand.

So, by making a new career move, by taking some risks, we go beyond our comfort zone and, as a result, we increase the size of our comfort zone over time. We expand our world and our sense of self. Now this does not mean that we need to place ourselves in the panic zone when making career moves. We can make choices that involve taking various levels of risk without inviting sheer panic.

### Determining our Career Comfort to Panic Action List

How would you apply this model in your own career? Begin by selecting a career challenge or goal that could involve action steps that fall both in and out of your comfort zone. Next, make a list of activities that fall into each of the three zones for you; comfort, risk, and panic. For example, a 'Comfort to Panic Action List' for someone who's looking for a job might look like this (as you review this list, keep in mind that one's comfort zone is a very personal thing and what is in the comfort zone for one person could be in the panic zone for another).

#### Comfort Zone

- ▶ Searching Monster.com for job postings in my career interest area and submitting resumes for positions that look like a good match.
- ▶ Calling Uncle Bob to see if there are any openings in his organization that match my career goals.

#### Risk Zone

- ▶ Scheduling a networking meeting with my neighbor's boss.
- ▶ Going in person to an organization of interest to attempt to speak with an HR representative and to submit an employment application and resume.

#### Panic Zone

- ▶ Networking and building my list of contacts by joining and becoming active in the local chapter of a professional association dedicated to my career interests.
- ▶ Contacting a well respected and nationally recognized leader in my field to gain specialized industry perspective and job search advice.

Each example above could actually be placed on a continuum ranging from low comfort to high panic. By all means, go ahead with activities that are within your comfort zone but be sure to also include those that fall within your risk zone. You can also try experimenting with ways to change your perception or experience with a given activity in order to change the level of risk or panic for that activity. For example, by reading a book or attending a workshop on networking techniques, you may move the first 'Panic Zone' action item (Networking and building my list of contacts...) from the panic zone to the risk or comfort zone list. This shift from panic to risk or comfort might also happen by first attending a 'professional association meeting' with a colleague in order to get acquainted with association activities and members before volunteering to get more deeply involved. Step by step, your comfort zone will expand ever wider and your confidence will increase as you acknowledge and reward your risk taking efforts.

I'll close with another quote by Eleanor Roosevelt. May it inspire you to take small steps into your risk zone as you shape your career...as you shape your future.

*"In the long run, we shape our lives, and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility."*

Susan B. Posluszny, OPTIONS for Career & Life Planning

**About the Author:** Susan Posluszny is the founder of OPTIONS for Career & Life Planning, specializing in unique programs and services to support students and adults in transition with academic and career planning. Susan is a Master Career Counselor with over 25 years of career counseling experience. Her career counseling and coaching practice is located in New Boston, NH. Subscribe to Susan's e-newsletter, Career Options, at <http://www.careeroptions4me.com>

**Note:** You're welcome to reprint this article as long as it remains complete and unaltered (including the "about the author" section) and you send a copy of your reprint to [susan@careeroptions4me.com](mailto:susan@careeroptions4me.com).



**Susan B. Posluszny, MA, NCC**  
**OPTIONS for Career & Life Planning**  
 New Boston, NH  
 603-487-2952  
[susan@careeroptions4me.com](mailto:susan@careeroptions4me.com)  
<http://www.careeroptions4me.com>