

Stepping out of your comfort zone

by Emmet Hines

Every person has comfort zones within which he or she operates. Physical comfort zones are easy to identify. If your true AT pace for 100 Freestyle is 1:30 per hundred, any swim done at 1:40/100 would fall within your comfort zone. On the other hand swimming at 1:20/100 would quickly elevate lactic acid levels to the point of discomfort. Somewhere around 100 yards you would stray from your comfort zone.

Psychological comfort zones are a little harder to quantify. Most people find talking to a friend or a few friends at once to be no challenge at all. However, the thought of standing up in a room of twenty or thirty people to give a 5 minute speech, even if it is on a familiar topic, is enough to cause goose bumps and moist underarms for the majority of people. Giving a 45 minute speech in front of a live audience of 10 or 20 thousand (or a TV audience of several millions) is unthinkable for all but a tiny fraction of a percent of the human population.

The key to personal growth and increasing success in nearly every endeavor is the willingness to step outside of one's comfort zone.

- **In swimming this might mean doing something physical like swimming a particular set all fly instead of all free.**
- **or choosing to go on faster intervals or leading the lane instead of drafting off the leader.**
- **It might mean doing something more cerebral like deciding to enter your first meet.**
- **or setting a goal to swim a personal best time and then training toward it.**

Virtually everyone enjoys the feeling they get when leaving their comfort zone results in success. How about asking someone out for a date? This is out of the zone for most people. Yet how wonderful it is when the other person says "Yes."

Yet, fear causes most people to hesitate to step outside of their comfort zone. Fear of failure. And we all know, but rarely admit to ourselves, that the real "consequences" of failure are truly inconsequential and usually short-lived. It just doesn't seem that way at the moment of truth - the moment where we either decide to act or decide to remain quiescent.

It is obvious that enlarging one's comfort zones pays off in many aspects of life. It is not as readily obvious that the persistent and consistent practice of "steppin' out," even a short distance, from the confines of a comfort zone can yield nearly unbelievable results over the long haul.

There is a story about an FFA live stock show where the older boys engaged in a calf lifting contest. Each boy would, in turn, select and lift off the ground a heavier calf than the previous boy. Once a boy failed he was out of the contest. When there was just one boy left and he was about to be awarded the prize one of the younger, smaller boys that had been watching called out "Wait, I can beat that!" The other boys laughed at him, told him to be quiet and ruffled his hair. Undaunted, he walked over to his entry in the stock show, a nearly mature bull that weighed fully three times what the heaviest calf lifted weighed. He proceeded to lift that bull three inches off the ground and immediately was greeted with "Ooohs!", "Ahhhs!", applause and the prize.

When asked how he managed such a feat, the boy explained that, ever since the calf was born, he would lift the calf off the ground once a day. He never missed a day as the animal grew. The boy's calf lifting ability grew into bull lifting ability. To do this he never had to step very far outside his physical comfort zone. Yet by consistently and persistently taking small steps he managed to enlarge his comfort zone to immense proportions.

I challenge you to define both your physical and psychological comfort zones in swimming (or any other aspect of your life for that matter) and then set upon a course of persistent and consistent forays, outward bound.