

# Catalyst

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## The Bigger Game – Comfort Zones

*[This is part nine – and the final part – of a series on the Bigger Game leadership and change model. For the rest of the series, see Writings at [www.DancingStar.com](http://www.DancingStar.com)]*

### Comfort Zone.

Sounds good, doesn't it? After all, who doesn't want to be comfortable? To have a full belly, a roof over your head, a soft place to sleep, companionship, good work to do, importance in the world, money?

Have you ever sat down to a good meal...and arisen two hours later full to the point of pain? Or turned off the alarm and rolled over, only to wake up later feeling achy from over-sleeping? Too much of a good thing?

The easy thing to say about comfort zones is that you want to identify them, assess whether or not they serve you, then take action to remove those that don't.

However, what we've found in working with people (not to mention ourselves!) is that talking about comfort zones is easier than changing them – have you ever tried to quit a bad habit, or tell a colleague with whom you are close that their performance is unacceptable? – and it's not always easy even talking about them.

There are many ways to uncover comfort zones. Where do you feel out of place? What makes you uneasy? Where are you avoiding opportunities which would cast you in a bigger/different role?

Here are some examples with which you may be familiar:

- spending hours on email
- staying in hierarchy rather than working in teams
- communicating by memo rather than having difficult conversations
- delaying/not returning phone calls

### The Bigger Game Model

Comfort Zone	Hunger	Compelling Purpose
Sustainability	The size and quality of the game you play designs who you become	GULP!
Allies	Bold Action	Investment

They can often seem harmless – “oh, that's too minor to bother with”. Look closely – are you avoiding something because it's easier to do nothing, a something that will fester and one day erupt unless you deal with it?

It can be tricky to evaluate honestly when you're in your comfort zones, what they cost you, and whether they benefit you. So, review them with a trusted mentor, coach, advisor or other ally. An ally can help you spot what you might miss – for instance, that you don't give yourself enough credit, or that you think you should be able to handle things yourself,

when to ask for help is simply to acknowledge that you are human, just like all of us.

Comfort zones are one of the most powerful components of the Bigger Game model. Exploring them can be confrontative. But don't let that stop you. To quote Paolo Coelho, “discontent is a gift from God to get us on the right track”. If you're feeling stuck, have a look. Do be aware – looking here is likely to bring a desire for change, because comfort zones are the spawning ground for change. In fact, your comfort zones could well be the source of your Bigger Game. For instance, those who pushed through their comfort zones around slavery in the world have initiated efforts that continue to this day.

Understanding and identifying our comfort zones, and the stagnation which can come from living in them for too long, can point us to that for which we hunger. Whether you are into an addiction, a comfortable work routine, or being a couch potato with the channel surfer appended to your arm, look for the deeper longing beneath.

Or to put it another way, next time you find yourself complaining, think of that complaint as an unexpressed request. What is it for which you long?

– by Deborah Huisken (original material derived from and published with permission of the Bigger Game Company, [www.thebiggergame.com](http://www.thebiggergame.com)).

### ARE YOU UP FOR IT?

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*The ultimate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind and still be able to function. – F. Scott Fitzgerald*



## Deb's Corner



I recently gave a talk on the Bigger Game to close to 100 business people and business school students in Wales...a stretch for me, as I can get panicky in front of a room full of people.

My comfort zone would keep me from ever going near such a room... except that I want to see change happen in the way this world does business. I see this model and my work as contributing to that effort. If I can't speak to large numbers of people about my work, then others who have similar goals can't join in, we don't know that there are potential alliances to be formed, and my target audience will never hear my message and have the opportunity to integrate that message into their own lives.

So, standing in front of that room, the first thing I said was "this makes me uncomfortable, which is an example of one of my comfort zones". That broke the ice, for me and my audience. The feedback was some of my best ever.

Here are other examples of comfort zones. "Jeff" owns a small business that he has built over several years. It's stable, and he's now looking at next steps. Our goal is to clarify where and how to grow his business.

One major consideration is bringing on additional staff. He spoke about one person in particular that he is considering bringing on board. She would bring some excellent qualities not already in place, knows the business, has been around since the

beginning. However, Jeff is not yet ready to commit to bringing her back into the business. On several occasions recently Jeff needed something from this person which he didn't get, resulting in loss of customer good will, lost time and money, missed deadlines, and damage to his company's reputation.

As we spoke, he realized that the way he interacted with this person felt familiar. Not good, but familiar. I asked Jeff how the all-important deadlines and related information were being communicated.

He cleared his throat, thought a minute, and replied "well, maybe I wasn't entirely clear about that. I hate to be the heavy after all..."

We've identified a habit, a comfort zone he's in. In trying to be nice, he is not giving this person the information she needs to do her job responsibly. This is a small, three-person company. No big deal, you might say. Except how will he fare as he grows into the ten-person company he envisions, and beyond? Or when he tries to implement the changes in his industry which are integral to his vision?

Another client has money issues. She wants to play in the big leagues, but is struggling financially and can never seem to catch up. She wants to give good value for money...yet she's getting worn down from lack of it.

Comfort zones aren't always comfortable. Sometimes they're just more familiar than the alternative.

What are yours?

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Send comments, questions, and submissions to 32 North Taylor Hill Rd, Montague, MA 01351 USA, or e-mail to [info@DancingStar.com](mailto:info@DancingStar.com). For return of postal submissions, include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. We reserve the right to edit articles for length, clarity, and readability.

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## QUOTES OF NOTE

- If you coast, you only coast one way and that's downhill. – *Jeff Taylor, Monster.com*
- Progress always involves risk; you can't steal second base and keep your foot on first
- Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow
- The man who wins may have been counted out several times, but he didn't hear the referee
- You never really lose until you stop trying

## THE BIG PICTURE

Here's an example of comfort zones on a global scale. Think of the stagnation which has happened in the history of countries like China, Rome, Russia, and other once-great nations. Such countries, down through the ages, have made the mistake of relying on their past, pushing the power of a traditionally great nation past its prime, and have fallen. Greatness must be achieved by each new leader, each new civilization, each citizen.

To quote Alexander Tytler, an 18th century Scottish writer, "The average age of the world's greatest civilizations has been two hundred years. These nations have progressed through this sequence: from bondage to spiritual faith; from spiritual faith to great courage; from courage to liberty; from liberty to abundance; from abundance to selfishness; from selfishness to complacency; from complacency to apathy; from apathy to dependence; from dependency back again into bondage." Let's learn from history. Complacency, e.g. comfort zones, are part of a downward spiral. Recognizing this gives you an opportunity to choose. Are you where you want to be in the cycle? What needs to change?