

USING DISCOMFORT TO MAKE PROGRESS

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I want to encourage you to use discomfort as a talisman and energizer rather than a cue for automatic avoidance or denial. Why? Not to add unpleasantness to your life, but to help you benefit from the power residing in discomfort. This power includes information, energy for action from both positive and negative emotions and insight for avoiding repetition of unuseful habits, as you'll see explained in the benefits below.

Often the feeling of discomfort emerges when you are about to enter a new situation in which you don't feel your usual competent self. To prepare and develop more confidence for trying new approaches, use discussion, reading, practice, assistance from others and/or formal learning. Doing most anything worthwhile for the first time is challenging or possibly difficult, so be kind in evaluating your progress.

Here are three benefits from discomfort:

Information from discomfort can alert you to danger by telling you who and what to avoid. Do not dismiss your intuition; instead, find allies and other ways to protect yourself such as minimizing contact and keeping notes on what's happening as a record or catharsis.

Energy for action is embedded in most emotions, whether they be positive or negative. For example, enthusiasm and excitement lead to exploration and learning. Fear and anxiety can make you more alert and aware if you are not immobilized by them. Paradoxically, the more uncomfortable feelings may indicate that action *is* worthwhile because they show you are entering new, challenging territory, worthy of your efforts. Use them as cues to proceed when safe. Perhaps the only feelings that are dangerous are the unacknowledged ones; name them accurately to make them accessible and useful. Since some people disdain anything that they consider "touchy-feely," they would not have access to the energy for action in discomfort.

Insight can be thwarted when discomfort is escaped by going into a state of automatic pilot or unremitting busyness. This often leads to the repetition of outdated or unuseful habits that seemed to protect you in the past, but now are barriers to your development, progress in meeting goals and enjoyment of life. Examples are avoidance, postponement, rationalization, blaming others, blanking out and distraction with less important activities. When you notice these tendencies, ask yourself, "What am I choosing to avoid that may be in my interest to investigate? What modest action can I take to explore the possibilities now?" Insight can lead to action and vice versa.

In sum, getting comfortable with feeling uncomfortable can increase and improve your powers as well as expand your choices. To benefit from this handout, choose one of the processes described above to test and adapt. You may decide it doesn't work for you or find a way to enhance it or embrace it. Proceed with other approaches you think of that appeal as well.

What is the first action you will take or process you will explore below; briefly describe it as well as the related situation, possible allies, preparation, timing and other useful considerations:

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