



Of comfort, courage and chocolate

To achieve our possible potential, we need to expand our inner horizons
says **Chandralekha Maitra** of Group HR

What do you do?" The question follows us like a shadow for most of our working lives. It comes at us, challenging our youth, defining our middle age, starts losing steam in our mid-50s and then discreetly disappears after 'retirement'. Because we have stopped 'doing'? Not so long ago women who answered, "I am a housewife", inevitably closed the door on this rich conversation piece — housewives don't 'do' anything, do they? Consider how ironic that such a simple question can define our very existence. Indeed, what do I do? Or is the question really, "Who am I?"

Many may consider this self-questioning absurd — of course we know who we are and what we do: I am Ajit Dutta, 37, Indian, Hindu, Bengali, accountant, my wife teaches, my two children are in school. My hometown is Durgapur. Of course I like my job! Why? Because it pays my bills, brings me security, gives me satisfaction... well, sometimes. Have I ever said no to my boss? Bad idea! Can I dance the salsa — why would I do that, what would people think of me? What colour is water? Greyish... blue... silver... Is euthanasia a personal or legal question? Well...

Pushing those horizons

Most of us define ourselves by the parameters of our comfort zone, that invisible but very real space that marks the boundaries of what we know and understand. By staying within this comfort zone we reassure ourselves that our lives have achieved that wonderful thing — security. And security equals happiness, does it not? As long as we remain with what we know, it brings us another wonderful gift — confidence. T Harv Eker, author of *The Secrets of the Millionaire Mind*, says that our comfort zone equals our money zone. And therefore in order to have more money in our lives we must expand our comfort zone. As sapient as this truth may be, the soul whispers an addendum — that our comfort zone also equals our joy zone, our love zone, our fulfilment zone, our spiritual connection zone...

The uncomfortable truth is that if we want more of anything in our lives, whether material, emotional or spiritual, the place to start is by expanding our comfort zone and finding the courage to let go of the familiar. What keeps us penned in, looking out wistfully, is not just inertia or procrastination — it is the powerful

magnetic force of habitual ways of seeing the world and people around us, of doing, of thinking. But if we are to develop in any direction from where we are today, we must step outside that comfort zone. There is no other way. All things considered, there may be nothing particularly amiss with what we have and what we do today. Things may have worked well for us thus far. But the reality is that human potential knows no comfort zone. Nor is it defined by security and familiarity. It is characterised by an ever-receding horizon and it is within the power of each individual to challenge those horizons.

Conquering fear

But to explore the world of our unused potential, we are first required to conquer ourselves and those unacknowledged fears of the new and the unknown, to face the ghastly spectre of failure and what ifs... The first thing to accept is that yes, it is possible to overcome one's fears. Not magically, not immediately, nor in a moment of epiphany that one can thank God for.

Like the potholes on the road, one has to negotiate them one by one. Start with the small things that break the pattern — go for a movie alone, eat oysters, say hello to the doorman, think about the trust vote, present an innovative idea to the boss, smile at old people, thank the person serving in the cafeteria... One starts stretching the edges of one's comfort zone, first in small things and then in major ways one never thought one could ever do.

Setting goals

But do we know what we want? Focused intention combined with action is a powerful force. However, the statement fails to mention the difficulty and necessity of focusing the mind on a specific goal. We definitely know what we don't want. We don't want a boring job. We don't want to be poor. We don't want to disappoint our loved ones.

Most individuals spend a lifetime on this quest to know who they are, why they are and what they want. Living and being find meaning based on this identification of self, apart and different from every other being who has walked the earth. It is given to only a few inspired souls to travel beyond this search for identity and meaning to a place where all things are one, where all forms are merged in the greater 'I'. A Buddha, a Ramakrishna Paramhansa, a Mother Theresa, a Dalai Lama, a Christ. For the rest of us, there is a minutely graded ascension towards self-discovery and realisation of potential. Each peak and plateau of life is a voyage



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powered by the individual desire and belief that one can be more — that tomorrow is indeed full of new possibility and promise.

The first step is to acknowledge the desire to grow. The second is to believe in one's potential to do so. The third is to identify one's own truth. The fourth step leads to goal-setting. Finally the vital fifth step — action without fear of failure. Maybe we are not as wonderful as we would like to be, but neither are we as bad as we fear. The truth really does set one free. Free to work on being more — much, much more; free to forgive ourselves for our frailty and lack; free to express gratitude to others and recognise what we owe them; free to acknowledge our fears without letting them dominate our lives. Above all, we are free from the fear of taking the steps out of our comfort zone to look at the outer reaches of our own potential — potential to think, to feel, to achieve.

And when all is said and done, whether a particular day is lost or won — one remembers that among the constants in life, there will always be chocolate. ●

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