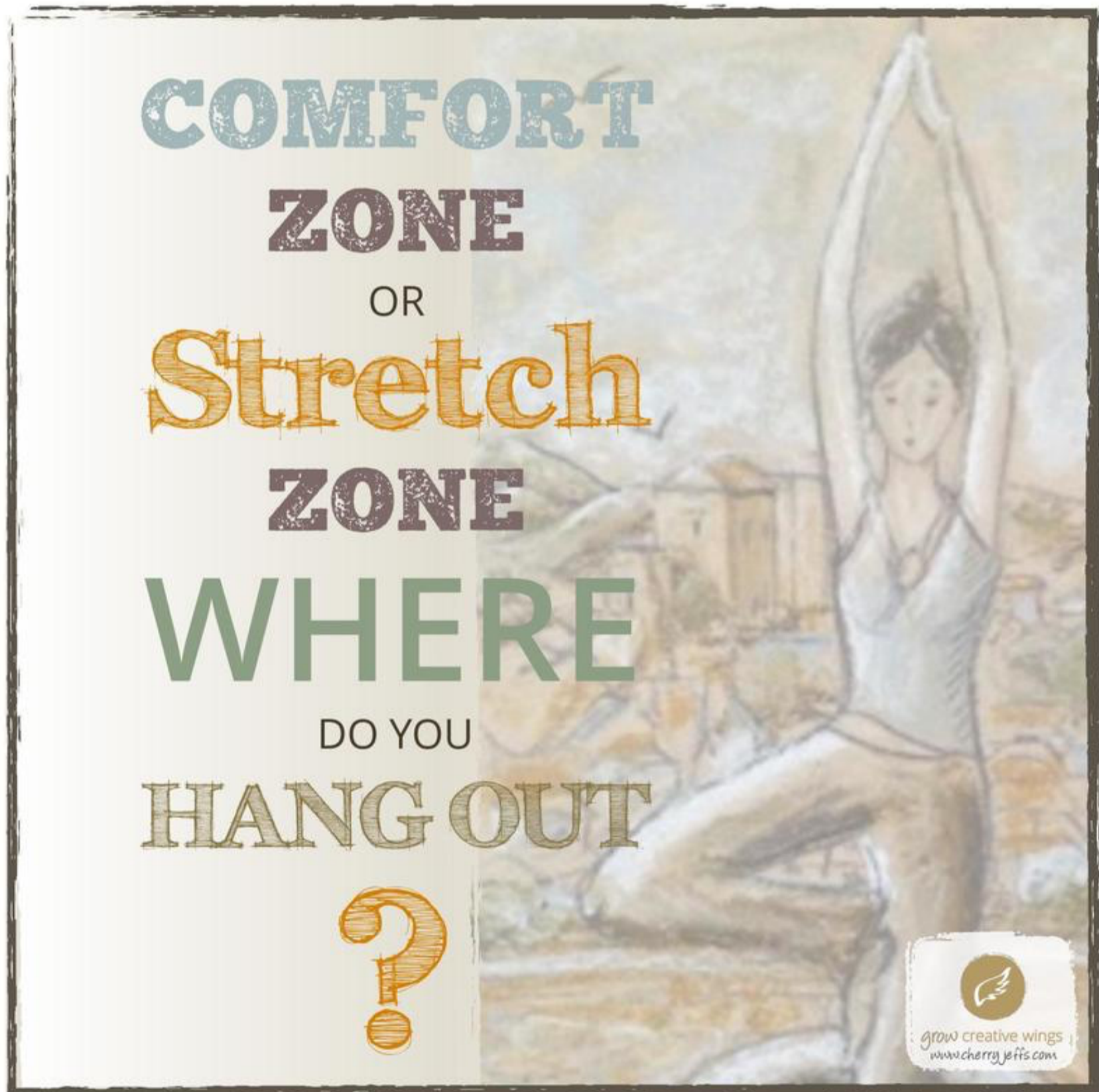


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## How to Stretch Out of Your Comfort Zone

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2 Comments



*Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals.  
Apparently we're all supposed to set them.*

But if you're anything like me, just the sound of those is enough to send you running full speed back into your comfort cave!

So how can we reliably and repeatedly enter the Stretch Zone without totally freaking ourselves out?

Why BHAG's trigger our Lizard Brain

In the last post, [What exactly is the Comfort Zone? And why should you get out of it?](#) we explored three zones:

1. Comfort Zone
2. Stretch Zone
3. Panic Zone

We discovered that the Stretch Zone is where we need to spend a substantial percentage of our time.

But, while hanging out in this optimum zone is all very well in theory, the reality is often very different.

BHAG's - while they sound exciting - often have the opposite effect of what we intend.

Instead of landing us nicely in the middle of the Stretch Zone, they have us overshoot it completely, planting us right in the Panic Zone.

The Panic Zone is really the [Lizard Brain](#) rearing it's prehistoric head.

And we know what the Lizard Brain wants, don't we? To get us back into our nice, safe Comfort Zone as quickly as possible!

So how can we leave our Comfort Zone in a way that doesn't threaten our Lizard Brain?

## Redefining Our Comfort Zone

The first part of the answer lies in mentally redefining the Comfort Zone.

Think of your Comfort Zone as your Home Base.

Here you're in a place of confidence. You know that you're competent at the tasks you have in front of you. You're safe.

Anything outside the Comfort Zone is going to be a bit stressful.

But, as we saw last week, there's a difference between a bit stressful (Stretch Zone) and unbearably stressful (Panic Zone).

To make sure leaving the Comfort Zone isn't unbearably stressful, you need to make a bridge between the Comfort Zone and the Stretch Zone.

It's like still having one foot in your Comfort Zone.

## Perfecting the Ratio of Comfort and Challenge

Artist, Elaine Gabriel has the perfect example of how create this kind of bridge.

Elaine has been painting a series of pears for over a year now. Not surprisingly, as she says herself, she can now 'paint the heck out of a pear'!

So how does she make sure that pears aren't just too comfortable to be challenging any more?

Elaine says,

*"...when I paint a pear, I pair it up with something else I haven't done before, whether that's a new*

*color scheme or composition, or a new item.*

*I find it easier to approach that way, rather than having everything in the painting new.”*

Elaine’s example is a perfect illustration of how we can enter the Stretch Zone without losing our anchor completely.

As long as she’s painting pears there’s a strong component of familiarity to pacify her Lizard Brain. He sees her getting out the pear and he goes to sleep. By the time Elaine gets out the rather challenging sugar bowl, he’s already snoring.

## Holding on to competency

So the key to moving out of our Comfort Zone, and into the Stretch Zone, is not to throw everything we hold dear out of the window and leap into an abyss. Instead we need to maintain a firm grasp on something we’re competent at, and combine it with a new challenge.

This way our time in the Stretch Zone will be satisfying and rewarding, and we’ll want to keep on stretching.

## Quick Exercise: Where do you hang out on the Comfort-Stretch continuum?

*To help you get an overview of how much time you normally spend in the Stretch Zone, try this quick exercise.*

### Exercise Instructions

To find out how far in or out of your comfort zone you normally work, think of a project you’ve recently completed and jot down the answers to the following questions.

Best to go quickly so that you don't censor:

1. At the time of doing your project, what aspects felt comfortably inside your Comfort Zone?
2. What aspects of the project felt slightly outside your Comfort Zone?
3. What aspects felt totally outside your Comfort Zone?
4. What did you do in this project that felt challenging at the time, that you now take for granted?
5. What did you do in this project, that you still can't believe YOU did?
6. What part(s) of this project did you think you would find challenging but turned out not to be?
7. What really scared you in this project? Did you do it?

If so, how did you feel after?

If not, why not? How did you feel after?

Once you complete the exercise, look over the answers and see how what you did and felt during your project relates to the 3 different zones of Comfort, Stretch and Panic.

In the light of this, is there anything you would change about your approach for your next project?

**Coaches Tip:** *Over the next week, think about your own work and ask yourself how you could combine familiarity with challenge in just the correct dose?*