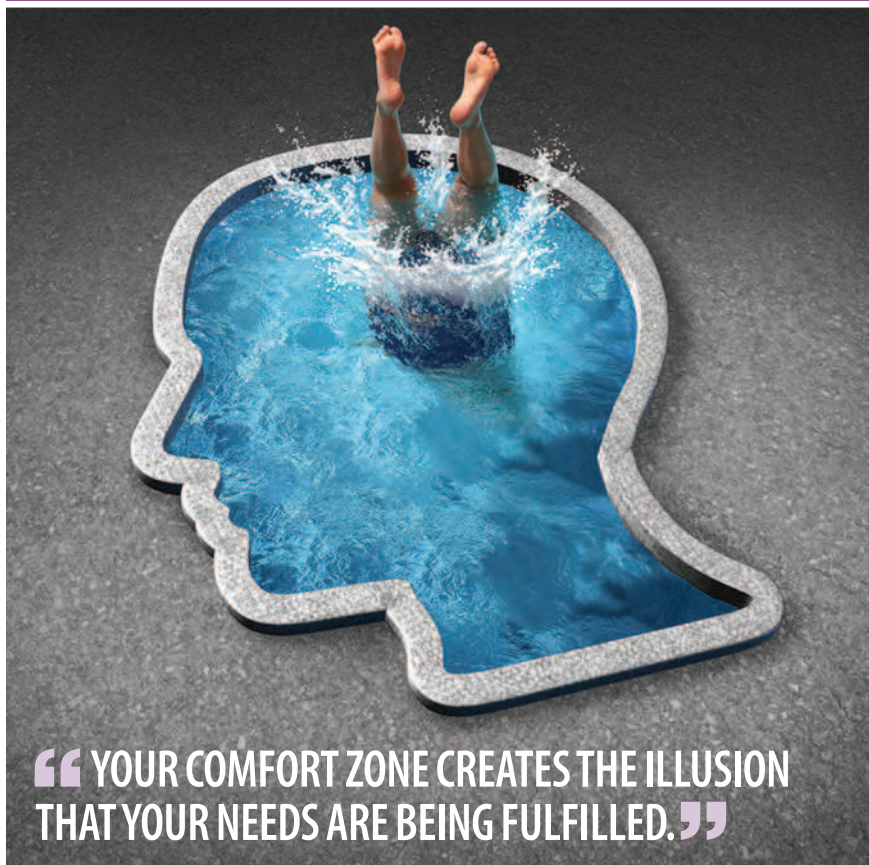




ASK YOURSELF this...

Use the summer holidays to get caught up with the most important person in your life: You

BY LEONARD CARR



“YOUR COMFORT ZONE CREATES THE ILLUSION THAT YOUR NEEDS ARE BEING FULFILLED.”

ARE YOU LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE? THE SUMMER holiday period is an ideal time to invest in Project YOU. It is almost impossible when the many complex competing demands of everyday life are vying for your attention and energy to find the time and space to look at the big picture of your life. To consider how you fit into that picture, whether your life is working for you, or if you are really working for some unseen management committee, for example from childhood, who dictated who you needed to be in order to be considered worthy or

successful. In this article, I am going to give you a worksheet from which you can design a project to get your world in balance and enable you to live large and fully alive. You may first need to wake up to the fact that you are so trapped in a comfort zone that you do not even believe any change is necessary in the first place.

When all aspects of yourself and your world are in balance, then you are in a state of wholeness that only needs to be protected. When you are in pain or discomfort you are forced to act to relieve

the discomfort. The most problematic place to be is where you are not aware of discomfort, but neither are you satisfied, happy, or fulfilled. This is called your comfort zone. Ironically it's the least comfortable place to be. Unfortunately you may be so habituated to being there that it feels like home to you. The familiarity, reliability, and safety of predictability is, of course, the trap. The very term is analogous to dreadful institutions of old age or psychiatric care that are named to sound like serene villages with willows, brooks, and shady pine meadows.

A comfort zone can be something that you believe gives you joy and pleasure. In excess, however, and at the expense of other important sources of richness, fulfillment, and need satisfaction, it keeps you stuck in distraction. At its most simple, you may overwork and not play enough, or gym and not love enough, study and not exercise enough, parent and not partner enough or pay attention to and take care of your own needs. Of course there will be more than one important aspect of life that you will no doubt be neglecting in favour of clinging to the security of your comfort zone. Comfort zones and addiction are synonymous.

Your comfort zone creates the illusion that your needs are being fulfilled. In reality it diverts your focus from what you need, but may not know how to access. Some people unconsciously cling to neediness, pain, or anxiety rather than being comfortable and having no excuse to avoid the challenges of adult responsibility. Some belief systems help you to hide from the parts of life that intimidate or

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overwhelm you. If, for example, you believe you can never be too rich or too thin then money, controlled eating regimes, and gym can give you an alibi to avoid spiritual growth or deep psychological encounters. You may love work, but nevertheless need to examine if you balance that with play and relaxation. Recreation and creativity can serve to bring your life as a whole into balance and, therefore, serve your work, even though how that happens is not always apparent. If you believe that inspiration and religious fervor alone is equivalent to wholeness, you may become neglectful in your material life and financial responsibilities and find yourself inspired, but in financial straits. You may learn and grow wise, but neglect your health and not have energy or connection to the practical world to do anything constructive with the learning.

What follows are some preliminary questions that could help you to start looking at the big picture of your world and assess where you stay in a comfort zone and what you tend to avoid or neglect. Begin by asking yourself whether in general you feel a sense of physical, mental, and spiritual vitality? Do you feel fully alive and drawn to your future by enthusiasm and inspiration? The opposite would be feeling that you need to push yourself to go forward or to get things done or to reach your goals. Are you driven by personal vision or by duty, habit, compulsion, fear, guilt, need for approval, or shame, which is a fear of being seen as defective or not good enough? Do you love completely? Do you love with your head, in the sense of admiring, respecting, and valuing your loved ones? Do you love with your heart, being open to give and receive love, showing your vulnerability, showing compassion, kindness, and generosity to those you love? Do you love with your body, being comfortable in your

own skin, comfortable in the presence of others, showing warmth, affection, playfulness, and the freedom to be creative and move with enjoyment and ease? Do you feel joy for the success of others? How able are you to soothe your frayed nerves or overwrought emotions? Do you know how to deeply rest and relax? How often do you allow yourself this comfort? Are you able to play and engage your inner child? If not, do you see any connection with this and with being intolerant, impatient, irritable, and grumpy? Do you feel secure, grounded, safe, contained, in command of your world, or do you find that you are simply living in reaction to circumstances and to the demands and behaviours of others? Ask this question in relation to your physical, emotional, and spiritual life. Do you believe your life is truly yours to live? Are you entitled to claim your voice, needs, values, aspirations, and to live it the way that you would most prefer?

Are you able to stand your ground, say no, set limits and boundaries even with yourself when necessary? For example, to not rage, overwork, or overspend. Do you feel connected to your creativity and passion? Are the major investments that you make in life expressions of your aspirations, talents, preferences, needs, and feelings? Is there anything that you need to birth or put into the world that you sabotage, hold back, or block? Are there ways that you use your talents, such as strength, wit, or critical thinking, against yourself instead of using them to serve your interests? Does your most important work in life feel as if it is driven by passion and purpose or does it seem me-

chanical, driven by routine, or compulsion? Do you become more self-reliant and push harder to be independent in situations where it would be more constructive to ask for collaboration? Do your habits and lifestyle support your purpose? Do your daily investments take you closer to becoming the person that you aspire to grow into or not? How connected are you to your heart? How connected is your heart to others? Are you open to both giving and receiving love? Do you work harder when you should be letting go, becoming more present and paying more attention to feelings and taking care of your needs? How big is your circle of concern and compassion? How could you extend it to be broader and more inclusive? Are you investing enough in those whom you love as well as in friendship and support? Do you go inward when you need to be building connections?

Are you open to the subtle whispers, the yearning, and the voices of your heart? Are you open and honest with yourself about your needs, feelings, aspirations, and desires? Can you express what is in your heart in an open, clear, and authentic way to others and to the world in general when necessary? Are you as open and sincere as you could be? In what ways do you need to pay more attention to and deepen your wisdom and understanding of life? How could you deepen and grow your perspective on your history, gain more understanding of your choices and habits, revisit taken-for-granted roles and beliefs, and take a more balanced and effective approach to life? What would you like to achieve in the next year? What can you commit to and how could you lay the foundation for success in the first weeks and months of the year? How will you know when you are on track with keeping your life in balance? What will the consequences be in the long term of not being true to yourself and betraying your interests, needs and ideals? ■

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