

Work Life... Agreeing to travel outside my comfort zone

Situation:

I started back into the corporate world just a few months ago. My job involves installing computer systems and training people to use the computerized cash register systems.

My “safe zone” is about an hour away from home or the office. I’m usually comfortable doing that. When our assignments were passed out today, I learned that next week I’ll be going to a location three hours away. Driving, not flying! And a lot of it is going to be on the freeway.

Symptoms:

As soon as I heard the news I got a little upset. I really started to get myself scared on the way home from work. My thoughts: “How am I going to be able to drive for three hours straight? They’re going to expect me there at a certain time – what if I’m late? It’s going to be scary being that far away. What if I can’t make it? What will I tell my boss? This job is important to me.

I had a headache and could feel the tension in the back of my neck and even though it was time for dinner, I had no appetite.

Solution:

It took a while but I finally came up with some secure thoughts: I could break the trip down into one hour segments, drive an hour and stop, drive another hour and stop again, drive another hour and I’d be there. I could leave 30 minutes earlier and plan for three 10-minute breaks. No one else would have to know. Some people might choose to drive straight through and that didn’t make them right and me wrong. There is no perfect formula for driving from point A to point B. Basically I knew my limits and to try to drive three hours straight would be really stretching those limits.

For the part about getting there “on time” – I knew they were expecting me to be there around 11:00, and around 11:00 could mean a little before or a little after. Traffic and road conditions could play a factor in the total travel time, I could be flexible with myself. It’s not likely that you can make a three hour drive and time it exactly to arrive precisely at 11:00.

I also reminded myself that this trip was good practice for me. Maybe I could even drive an hour and 15 minutes without stopping – I decided to see how I felt. If I did feel a little uncomfortable, I could push myself a little. Discomfort is discomfort is discomfort – The same tools that I used to break the anxiety thoughts in the beginning to go even a half hour from home could and would stop the anxious thoughts even if I was farther away. They worked before and they would work again if I needed them.



Although most of trip would be on the freeways, there would be some less congested, scenic roads to travel on.

In the past:

If I thought I couldn't do something – I wouldn't, plain and simple! There was a time when I wouldn't attempt a half hour “trip” because it seemed impossible to me – the panicky feelings were too strong.

Like I said before – now I have my verbal tranquilizers. And even if I might be uncomfortable I can still make it through.



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