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# PART IV

Practical Tools: Applying  
*Reach* to Your Own Life

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You've had a chance to hear how others have grappled with situations outside their comfort zones. Now it's your turn to apply some of these tools to your situation.

Start by selecting a particular situation that is outside your personal comfort zone. Your situation might be:

At Work:

- Speaking up at a meeting
- Promoting yourself during an informational interview, conference, or job fair
- Making small talk at a conference or by the water-cooler
- Giving negative feedback
- Following up with a manager who has not responded to your request
- Asking someone for help

## At Home

- Having a difficult conversation with a friend, spouse or partner, or parents
- Making small talk at a party where you don't know anyone
- Confronting a parent whose child is bullying yours

These are just examples. Yours can be any situation where you need to act outside your comfort zone to be effective.

### Name Your Situation

My situation is:

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Next, answer the questions below and use the following scoring system to arrive at your answer.

1 = Strongly agree

2 = Agree

3 = Neutral

4 = Disagree

5 = Strongly disagree

### Competence Challenge Self-Assessment

\_\_\_1. I'm not very good at performing the task required in this situation.

\_\_\_2. I don't feel confident performing this task.

\_\_\_ Your combined Competence Challenge score

### Authenticity Challenge Self-Assessment

\_\_\_1. This behavior feels unnatural to me.

\_\_\_2. I don't feel genuine performing this behavior.

\_\_\_ Your combined Authenticity Challenge score

### Resentment Challenge Self-Assessment

\_\_\_1. I feel that it's unfair that I have to accommodate my behavior in this situation.

\_\_\_2. I feel resentful about having to change my style.

\_\_\_ Your combined Resentment Challenge score

### **Likeability Challenge Self-Assessment**

\_\_\_1. I worry that people won't like me when I change my behavior in this situation.

\_\_\_2. I'm afraid I'll turn people off when I change my behavior in this situation.

\_\_\_ Your combined Likeability Challenge score

### **Morality Challenge Self-Assessment**

\_\_\_1. I have serious concerns about the morality of this behavior.

\_\_\_2. When I perform this behavior, I worry about whether I'm being ethical.

\_\_\_ Your combined Morality Challenge score

### **Your Overall Portfolio of Personal Challenges**

Take a quick look at your scores. On which dimensions do you face the highest level of challenge? Which dimensions aren't as challenging for you?

Your Greatest Challenges (circle one or more):

Competence    Authenticity    Resentment

Likeability    Morality

Aspects That Aren't So Challenging

(circle one or more):

Competence    Authenticity    Resentment

Likeability    Morality

## What Are Your Avoidance Strategies?

It's perfectly natural to do whatever you can to avoid acting outside your comfort zone. We all do it! However, as a result of doing this, we also often limit our learning and growth and become less effective than we could be at our jobs.

So in the spirit of self-discovery, let's take a look at the specific ways you might limit yourself by examining four of the most common avoidance strategies. You can use the same situation or task you've been considering thus far, or a different one.

## Name Your Situation

Examples:

1. Going to a networking event
2. Having a difficult conversation with my colleague

Your situation:

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Next, let's take a look at four of the most common avoidance strategies that people use. Do any of these ring a bell for you? Remember to be honest with yourself.

### 1. AVOID THE TASK ENTIRELY

Are there any times you structure your life or job to avoid doing this task altogether—even though it could be critical for your job and career?

I use this strategy:

Often      Sometimes      Rarely

## Examples

1. I know networking events could really help my career and business, but I just hate talking with people I don't know . . . so I end up going to very few of them, if any.
2. I know I should have difficult conversations with my colleague, but they're just too stressful, so I avoid them.

Your situation:

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## 2. DO THE TASK ONLY PARTWAY

Do you ever only do this challenging task partway, perhaps doing the part that's slightly more comfortable and avoiding the rest?

I use this strategy:

Often      Sometimes      Rarely

### Examples

1. Because I feel so uncomfortable at networking events, I typically only go for a few minutes at the very beginning and then pretend I have somewhere else to go.
2. Because of how uncomfortable difficult conversations are for me, I tend to discuss only part of what's bothering me, or address only the issues that are easiest to talk about.

Your situation:

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### 3. PROCRASTINATE

Do you ever stall while attempting to perform this task, and as a result either miss a key deadline, or do it too late to have the most positive effect?

I use this strategy:

Often      Sometimes      Rarely

#### Examples

1. Because I feel so uncomfortable at networking events, I rarely respond to invitations and often put networking on the back burner.

2. I often put off having difficult conversations, rationalizing to myself that it's not the "right time," when in reality, I'm just procrastinating.

Your situation:

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#### 4. PASS THE BUCK (AND HAVE SOMEONE ELSE DO IT)

Do you ever ask or assign someone else to carry out what needs to be done because it's too uncomfortable for you to do, thereby avoiding the task, but in the process limiting your own learning and growth?

I use this strategy:

Often      Sometimes      Rarely

## Examples

1. Because I feel so uncomfortable at networking events, I often get my assistant to attend them for me (even though I probably should be the one representing the business).
2. I sometimes get someone else to talk with my colleague instead of me since I'm so uncomfortable doing it myself.

Your situation:

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## Unlocking Your Sources of Personal Conviction

Ask yourself this question: If you didn't experience any anxiety at all in your chosen situation—if it were completely comfortable and stress-free—would it be something you'd *like* to be able to do? Would it be exciting? Would it help your career? Would it help your self-confidence? The answers to these questions can help reveal your potential sources of conviction—why, for you, it might very well be worth taking that leap and stretching outside your comfort zone.

So let's take a look at a few potential sources of conviction.

You can evaluate each possibility by using the same scale as before:

1 = Strongly agree

2 = Agree

3 = Neutral

4 = Disagree

5 = Strongly disagree

### Potential Source of Conviction #1: Respect

- \_\_\_ 1. Doing this behavior will make me look good in other people's eyes.
- \_\_\_ 2. Doing this behavior will win people's respect (or a particular person's respect).
- \_\_\_ Your combined score for Respect

### Potential Source of Conviction #2: Skill Development

- \_\_\_ 1. Doing this behavior will help me develop skills I don't currently have.
- \_\_\_ 2. Doing this behavior will help me improve existing skills.
- \_\_\_ Your combined score for Skill Development

### Potential Source of Conviction #3: Career Advancement

- \_\_\_ 1. Doing this behavior will increase my chances for promotion.
- \_\_\_ 2. Doing this behavior will help me move up the career ladder.
- \_\_\_ Your combined score for Career Advancement

## Potential Source of Conviction #4: Boosting Your Self-Esteem

\_\_\_ 1. Doing this behavior will make me feel proud of myself.

\_\_\_ 2. Doing this behavior will boost my self-esteem.

\_\_\_ Your combined score for Boosting Your Self-Esteem

## Potential Source of Conviction #5: Helping Others

\_\_\_ 1. Doing this behavior will help me contribute to a cause I care about.

\_\_\_ 2. Doing this behavior will help me make a difference in others' lives.

\_\_\_ Your combined score for Helping Others

Which of the potential sources of conviction received the highest score for you?

Is there another potential source of conviction for you that is not on this list?

## Learning to Customize Your Behavior

One of the best ways of making your new behavior feel more natural and comfortable is to make it your own. Customize it: Put your own personal spin on the behavior so it feels authentic to you but also still effective and appropriate. Below you will see five different potential tools you can use to customize your behavior. See if any of them apply to you and your situation.

### CUSTOMIZABLE ELEMENT #1: YOUR DIALOGUE

These are *your* words—what *you* actually say. And you will find that there are many ways you can make minor adjustments to what you actually say so that it feels slightly more comfortable and natural for you.

For example:

- If you're terrified of speaking up in meetings, you might learn a few catchphrases to get people's attention, such as: "Have we thought about this?" or "Here's another idea we might consider."
- If you have to deliver difficult news and are afraid,



you might script out the first few sentences of your message.

- If you feel awkward making small talk in social settings, you might think of a few relevant topics ahead of time, or work on a few conversation starters that you know you're comfortable talking about.

Can you think of ways to customize your dialogue to make behavior flexing more comfortable for you?

If so, jot down an example for yourself.

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## CUSTOMIZABLE ELEMENT #2: YOUR BODY LANGUAGE

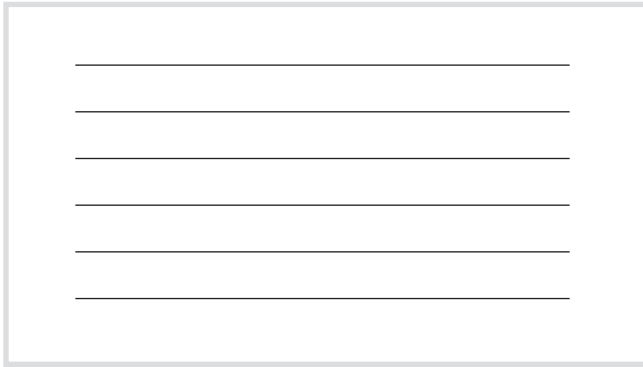
Another lever you have for increasing your level of comfort is your nonverbal behavior—your posture, your eye contact, your smile, your tone of voice, and the way you sit or stand or walk.

For example:

- When mustering up the courage to speak up at a meeting, you might stand up tall, lean forward with your hands slightly at your sides, and plant your hands firmly on the desk.
- When having a difficult conversation with a partner or spouse, you might make sure not to have a “closed” or “defensive” body posture—like with your legs or arms crossed—so that you appear open to listening and hearing the other person’s perspective.

Can you think of ways to customize your body language to make behavior flexing more comfortable for you?

If so, jot down an example for yourself.



A rectangular box with a light gray border, containing six horizontal lines for writing, centered within the box.

### CUSTOMIZABLE ELEMENT #3: TIMING

In certain circumstances, timing is another variable under your control—and that might mean the timing of the situation itself, as in when it occurs, or also the time and pacing of your behavior within the situation.

For example:

- If you know you're going to be stressed having to deliver bad news to someone, you might choose a time to do it when you feel most capable—perhaps after a long run, or sandwiched between activities you enjoy and that give you energy.
- If you dread networking events with lots of people, you might purposefully come a few minutes early so you can get your confidence flowing with only a few people in the crowd.

Acknowledging that you don't always have complete control over time, can you think of ways to customize timing to make behavior flexing more comfortable for you?

If so, jot down an example for yourself.

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#### CUSTOMIZABLE ELEMENT #4: PROPS

In theater, you bring props to the show—items that you carry with you as you execute your role. The same is true in organizations.

For example:

- You might wear your favorite “power suit” when you know you need to be assertive.
- If you're about to make a big presentation, you might wear your “lucky” ring, or something else that makes you feel courageous.

- If you are uncomfortable giving critical feedback to a colleague, you might bring your notes with you, or even aspects of the work you wanted to give feedback about.

Can you think of any “props” you could integrate into your situation to make behavior flexing more comfortable for you?

If so, jot down an example for yourself.

#### CUSTOMIZABLE ELEMENT #5: THE CONTEXT

Finally, in certain cases, you can customize the context—or your position or role in that context—to maximize comfort and performance.

For example:

- If you’re afraid of participating in a classroom discussion, you might sit in the front row so the class seems smaller.
- If you’re afraid of going to a networking event, you might bring a supportive colleague, especially if

you sense that having them there will make you feel more relaxed and confident.

Can you think of ways to customize the context for your situation?

If so, jot down an example for yourself.

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## Developing Clarity

When taking on a job or a task outside our comfort zones, our thinking patterns can become our worst enemy. We can become fixated and obsessed by worst-case scenarios, and also by best-case scenarios, when the reality is somewhere in between.

Can you think of a situation where you've experienced this kind of exaggerated, polarized thinking?

Here's an example: You're asked to take on your first major leadership responsibility. You're honored to be asked, but stressful thoughts immediately flood your mind in the form of "worst case" and "best case" thinking:

### "Worst Case" Thinking

I'll feel awkward and unnatural leading meetings and telling people what to do. I'm afraid it will feel intolerable. I'll feel overwhelmed. I won't be able to make sense of my responsibilities or do them successfully. I'll feel trapped in a job that feels like something I didn't sign up for. People will hate me since I'll be the one making tough calls and mediating conflicts.

### "Best Case" Thinking

This job will be a perfect fit for me right away. I'll succeed immediately and be seen as a leadership "prodigy." Everyone will love and respect me and I'll handle conflict with ease.

The antidote to this distorted thinking is clarity: the ability to take that middle-ground approach and “normalize” your thinking about the most *realistic* scenario.

### Realistic Thinking

I'll feel natural at times—and at other times probably less so. I'll have to grow into the role over time. I'll have some successes and some failures. The job will be a learning experience. There may be moments of resentment, but I imagine I'll also enjoy aspects of the job. Some people will really like me, and others won't as much . . . but that's just part of the job.

How about you? Can you try this out for a situation of your own?

### Name Your Situation

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### Your Worst-Case Thinking

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### Your Best-Case Thinking

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### Your Realistic Thinking

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