A sample activity from the Trainer’s Activity Pack:

Using Emotional Intelligence at Work

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Thank you for downloading this sample activity. You are welcome to use this material in your training programs. This sample activity is just one of 17 contained in Using Emotional Intelligence at Work, published by Owen-Stewart Performance Resources Inc.
#4 - THE ART OF LETTING GO: You’ll Never Be a Butterfly if You Can’t Stop Being a Caterpillar

INTRODUCTION
The status quo, by definition, is the accepted way of doing things. It’s the path of least resistance, and for that reason it can be attractive. But the status quo has to change, and keep changing, or we’d still be living in caves. Each change has brought with it some resistance. You have to let go of the old to let in the new.

Change brings loss. Even good change means something has gone. It may be easy or hard to let that go, but it should be acknowledged. People sometimes get stuck in the past because there’s something they can’t put behind them. They can’t accept the loss, so they can’t move forward.

This activity is designed to help people leave their old comfort zones and tryout the new. It may be scary, but it’s also exciting.

PURPOSE
• To help participants overcome the fear of change and to give them the courage to tryout the new – without being reckless – in a way that ensures positive growth and learning.

APPLICATION
This activity can be used as part of any program of change or personal development.

WHAT HAPPENS
The activity starts with a brief discussion of a joke that carries some profound messages about personal change. There follows a discussion of risk-taking, which is reinforced by small group discussions on the risks the participants have taken in
their own lives. This is then linked to the concept of comfort zones and the experience of loss.

Finally, the participants do an exercise to look at the motivational balance between the fears of change and the benefits of the status quo (comfort zone); and the risks of the status quo and the benefits of change (the risk zone).

**TIME**

Overall time required: 2 hours.
- Butterfly Joke: 10 minutes
- Risk: 45 minutes
- Comfort Zones: 15 minutes
- The Motivational Balance: 45 minutes
- Summary: 5 minutes

**MATERIALS & RESOURCES**

- 3 Overhead/PowerPoint Masters:
  4.1: The Butterfly Joke
  4.2: Comfort Zones
  4.3: The Motivational Balance
- 4 Handout Masters:
  4.4: Risk
  4.5: Risk, Change and Choice
  4.6: The Self-Defeating Spiral of Risk Avoidance
  4.7: Blockers and Drivers
- Overhead projector, or PowerPoint® compatible laptop computer and screen.
- Flipchart and stand or whiteboard.
- Markers for trainer.
- Paper and pens for participants.
- Space for small group work.
HOW DO I DO IT?

Butterfly Joke

Ask the group this question: ‘What issues about personal change are embodied in this joke?’ The responses should be that people:

- don’t realize their potential
- fear the unknown
- tend to see the world from where they are now
- can’t anticipate what the future will bring
- should never say never.

Growing and developing involve letting go of something. Letting go involves risk. Where there is risk, there is doubt. Where there is doubt, there is fear.

Risk

Ask the group, ‘What are people afraid of when they’re considering making a change in their lives or careers, or in the way they do things?’.

List their ideas on a sheet of flipchart paper.

Distribute Handout 4.4
Risk

Discuss Handout 4.4: Risk, drawing out experiences from the group, and giving examples from your own experience. Start by asking the group to consider the diving scenario as a metaphor for taking risks. It might also be a useful lead-in to ask them if they can remember the first time they prepared for a dive. Point out that where there is risk, there is doubt. Where there is doubt there is fear. Resolving that fear is part of making the decision.
Courage is about accepting fear as part of the process. It doesn’t mean ignoring danger signs, or pretending not to be scared. That’s recklessness.

Courage means taking into account emotional and practical considerations, then deciding and following the decision through. That process may or may not dissolve the fear. If it doesn’t, you have to ‘feel the fear, and do it anyway’. Go on to draw out personal experiences of the six fears that are listed in the handout.

Divide the group into groups of three or four. Give them the task of discussing significant changes in their lives, and ask them to answer the following questions:

- What were the risks you perceived at the time?
- What did you lose?
- What did you gain?
- What did you learn about your ability to let go and take risks?

Allow 15 minutes for discussion. Then bring the groups together and draw out the key themes, in particular that we all have choices when faced with significant change. We can stay where we are – doing nothing is a choice – or we can plan to move forward. Whatever we choose will involve losses and gains, fears and uncertainties. However, we can avoid becoming immobilized by our fears of change by imagining how we are going to deal with difficulties, thinking of obstacles as opportunities and choices, recognizing our emotions as normal reactions to difficult events, and expecting to succeed. Handout 4.5: Risk, Change and Choice, and Handout 4.6: The Self-Defeating Spiral of Risk Avoidance, summarize and illustrate these points.

Distribute Handout 4.5

Risk, Change and Choice and

Handout 4.6

The Self-Defeating Spiral of Risk Avoidance
Comfort Zones

Discuss the overhead, making the following points about change and letting go:

• every change involves some form of loss and letting go of something that is familiar
• moving from a comfort zone requires going from the known to the unknown.

Comfort zones are those areas in people’s lives (people, places, activities, beliefs and assumptions) where they feel comfortable, especially when the rest of the world is in turmoil. This is all right up to a point. The trouble is that people tend to assume that these comfort zones will always be there and then, when changing circumstances challenge this assumption, they react with stress and alarm, followed by the fight or flight response. They feel out of place, and might experience physical pain.

If we want to learn, grow and develop, we have to stay with this discomfort and be willing to let go of at least some aspects of our comfort zones.

Letting go is all about coping with loss. When we can’t accept a loss, we carry it with us, and we may become emotionally frozen. In a sense, in order to grow, we have to attend our own funeral from time to time.

If we can let go and work through the discomfort of change, and reach out to a new future, we give ourselves the opportunity to enter a new expanded comfort zone, with new resources and experiences for coping with change. If we have high self-efficacy and high self-esteem, along with realistic self-awareness, this will be much easier.
Write the words self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-awareness on a sheet of flipchart paper and ask the group what these terms mean to them. Define them as follows:

- **Self-esteem** is valuing yourself and your abilities.
- **Self-efficacy** is believing you can influence your own situation.
- **Self-awareness** is knowing your strengths and weaknesses.

Make the point that we are likely to move out of the comfort zone when we perceive the value of the status quo as significantly less than that of the proposed change. Value, in this context, means an assessment of the positives and negatives of ‘change and no change’, or the ‘blockers and drivers’. Overhead 4.3: The Motivational Balance, will help to explain this.

**The Motivational Balance**

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Describe the motivational balance as weighing the blockers and drivers to change. This will take about five minutes.

- **When the blockers feel stronger than the drivers.** People resist change and stay in the comfort zone.

- **When the drivers feel stronger than the blockers.** People are more likely to leave the comfort zone and make the change.

- **When the weights are equal or uncertain.** People feel ambivalent. This leads to procrastination about change or the feeling of going around in circles.

Ask the group to form pairs.
Go through the instructions in Handout 4.7: Blockers and Drivers. Give each person 10 minutes to talk in their pairs about an important life and career change that they have considered. Ask them to note the strength of the blockers and drivers.

After the 20 minutes, bring the group together. Tell the participants that our view of blockers and drivers isn’t always rational. We usually overestimate the risks of change, and underestimate the risks of staying in our comfort zones. We need to be able to challenge our assumptions about the blockers and drivers.

Run a 10-minute discussion around the following questions:
• How do we know our fears of change are real?
• How do we know that the status quo is safe?
• How do we know we have fully appreciated the benefits of change?
• What insights have you gained about your ability to let go and move out of your comfort zones?

Summary
Summarize by saying that letting go has both cognitive and emotional elements. The first step is when people believe that there is a gap between where they are now and where the change will take them. They have to feel that the positives of change are greater than the positives of no change. This will lead to frustration, and might motivate them to move out of the comfort zone.

Once out of their comfort zone, they need to live with the discomfort, to experience the sense of loss and resist the urge to return to the status quo. This can sometimes feel scary, but as Susan Jeffers says in the title of her book, we need to Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway.

Thank everyone for their participation.
A beautiful butterfly flies over the garden.

A caterpillar looks up and says: ‘You’ll never get me up in one of those.’
Comfort Zones

4.2

Starting anew

Comfort zone

People
Places
Activities
Beliefs
Retreat

Reaching out

Letting go Coping with loss

DISCOMFORT
The Motivational Balance

Positives of no change
Negatives of change

Positives of change
Negatives of no change

AMBIVALENCE
Risk

You are on a diving board, much higher than any diving board you’ve been on before. You’re going to dive, or jump, or not.

‘What if I do, what if I don’t?’
How do you decide? How do you feel?

continued …
What are you afraid of?

Typically, there are six main fears:

1. **Failure** – we might not get what we’re hoping for; but we haven’t got it now, so why should we fear failure? If we don’t try, we can’t succeed.

2. **Exposure** – if it doesn’t work out, it might reflect on our abilities. We get confused between the failure of something we try to do, and being a failure ourselves. One certain way to fail is not to try.

3. **Embarrassment** – if we try something, and it doesn’t work, we might feel others are judging us. An emotionally unintelligent way to solve this is to keep things the same, but feel sorry for ourselves.

4. **Conflict** – if others don’t share our opinion on something, it may feel as though they are hostile toward us. The emotionally unintelligent give hostility in return. They waste valuable opportunities to share views.

5. **Rejection** – if risks go haywire, could you lose friendships or even your job? People often think this is likely to happen, without thinking about the actual people involved. It’s better to talk things through than to assume the worst.

6. **Loss** – any change means loss. The familiar may have disadvantages, but being with what you know creates a comfort zone. To progress, we have to be willing to walk out of these comfort zones.
Risk, Change and Choice

When you are faced with change and uncertainty, remember:

You usually have several choices, one of which is to leave things exactly as they are. This might mean taking a risk; for example, not going to the doctor about something that’s worrying you. Doing nothing is a decision to do nothing.

Other choices involve making plans, including finding out what’s needed, taking steps to fulfil those needs, and moving towards the decided goal. There will be other choices before the goal is achieved, which will bring new discoveries and new ideas. Other people may be involved and be part of the goal-seeking process.

Remember, any personal change you make will usually involve:

- **LOSS** - changing in any way involves losing something of the self. It’s almost as if you periodically have to attend your own funeral, to say goodbye to certain aspects of yourself.
- **FEAR** - that comes from the supposed negative effects of the change.
- **DILEMMA** - the ambivalence of not knowing whether the pros or the cons are more important.
- **GAIN** - the benefit from going forward with the change.

*It isn’t healthy to stay stuck on the diving board.*

You can prepare yourself for change by:

- Thinking about the worst possible result. How would you deal with that?
- Talking to people who’ve done something similar
- Thinking of dilemmas as choices rather than problems
- Running a pilot, if you can, before you do the real thing
- Recognizing your emotional reactions – don’t pretend you’re a purely logical being
- Expecting to succeed; optimistic people succeed more often, because they don’t see setbacks as decisive and keep trying
- Remembering that no risk = no change = stagnation. See Handout 4.6: The Self-Defeating Spiral of Risk Avoidance, for a diagram illustrating the spiral of risk avoidance.
The Self-Defeating Spiral of Risk Avoidance

I can’t risk anything unless I already know I can do it

NO GROWTH

SELF-DEFEATING SPIRAL

MORE ANXIETY

RISK AVOIDANCE

Underestimate of ability to cope

Overestimate of how bad it will be
1. Choose an important life and career change that you have considered or are considering but that feels a little risky.

2. First, discuss the blockers with your partner for about five minutes.
   The blockers consist of:
   a) What I would be sorry to lose if I changed.
   b) My fears about change.

3. Now discuss the drivers with your partner for about five minutes.
   The drivers consist of:
   c) The benefits I would gain if I changed.
   d) The things I would be glad to leave behind if I changed.

4. Now rate how strong the blockers and drivers feel by putting a line on each of the scales.

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What are your thoughts and feelings now about the change?