



Andy Molinsky: Why You Should Step Outside Your Comfort Zone

Interview by Dan Schawbel, Jan 29, 2017

I spoke to [Andy Molinsky](#), a Professor of **Organizational Behavior** and **Psychology** at Brandeis University, and the author of the new book *Reach: A New Strategy to Help You Step Outside Your Comfort Zone, Rise to the Challenge and Build Confidence*. In this interview, he talks about how we can more successfully step outside our **personal** and **professional** comfort zones.

Dan Schawbel: Why should **professionals** step outside of their comfort zone? Is it worth the effort?

Andy Molinsky: In an ideal world, no one would have to stretch beyond their comfort zone to succeed at work, and all the tasks and responsibilities we need to perform would fit perfectly with our personalities. But unfortunately, this isn't usually the case. **Conflict-avoidant** managers need to embrace **conflict**—or at least learn to tolerate it. **Timid** entrepreneurs need to be able to pitch and **promote themselves**. . . **introverts** need to **network** . . . **self-conscious** executives need to **deliver speeches** . . . and **people pleasers** need to deliver **bad news**. As we grow and learn in our jobs and in our careers, we're constantly faced with situations where we need to adapt our behavior. And without the **skill** and **courage** to take the leap, we can **miss out** on important opportunities for **personal growth** and **career advancement**.

Schawbel: What are the five key challenges underlying our avoidance tendencies as outlined in your book?

Molinsky: The first challenge is what I call the **authenticity challenge**, which occurs when acting outside your comfort zone feels fake, foreign, and false. The second challenge—the **likeability challenge**—occurs when, as a result of the behavioral stretch you have to make, you fear others won't like you. The third challenge—the **competence challenge**—occurs when you feel you don't actually have the skills or knowledge to perform the new task successfully. The fourth challenge—the **resentment challenge**—happens when you feel frustrated and annoyed that you have to adapt behavior in the first place. Finally, the fifth challenge is the **morality challenge**: the feeling—logical or illogical—that when stretching your behavior, you will feel inappropriate or perhaps even unethical. As you can imagine, any one of these challenges can be burdensome when attempting to reach outside your comfort zone. But when you experience **more than one challenge**, which is often the case, it can be **paralyzing**.

Schawbel: How can your three C's help bridge the gap in these tendencies?

Molinsky: In my research, I found that people used three tools to step outside their comfort zones successfully. The first was **conviction**: the deep sense of purpose that it's actually worth it to do the hard work entailed in stepping outside your comfort zone (and where conviction came from was very different for each person). The second resource was **customization**: the ability to tweak or adjust in an often slight, but meaningful way how you perform a task to make it feel more comfortable and natural. Finally, the third critical resource was **clarity**: the ability to develop an even-handed, reasonable perspective on the challenges you face; In other words, to not succumb to the distorted and exaggerated thinking so many of us do in very stressful situations.

Schawbel: What are the first steps that people can take to fight their fear of discomfort?

Molinsky: The first steps, I believe, should be **small** and **doable**. Instead of jumping right into speaking at an industry event, sign up for a public speaking class. Instead of speaking up in the boardroom, start by speaking up in smaller meetings with peers to see how it feels. You may stumble, but that's OK. In fact, it's the only way you'll learn, especially if you can appreciate that missteps are an inevitable — and in fact essential — part of the learning process.

Schawbel: What are your top three pieces of career advice?

Molinsky:

1. Don't be **boxed in** by **conventional career paths** and **choices**. I never thought that I'd be a Professor, author, keynote speaker and consultant. Frankly, I didn't know that combination existed.
2. Don't worry about finding the one perfect mentor. However, do **look for mentoring** wherever you can find it.
3. **Say yes**. You'll be offered opportunities, especially early on, that might feel outside your comfort zone — where "no" might be a perfectly reasonable answer. But instead of saying no — try yes instead, despite how uncomfortable it feels. You'll be surprised by the results.

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<https://www.forbes.com/sites/danschawbel/2017/01/29/andy-molinsky-why-you-should-step-outside-your-comfort-zone/>

Questions

1) Andy Molinsky is a “Professor of Organizational Behavior and Psychology”. In simpler language, what does that make him an expert in?

2) What exactly is a person’s “comfort zone”?

3) Fill in the following table with examples from the article:

Typical personality	Going outside the comfort zone
Conflict-avoidant manager	Embrace or at least tolerate conflict

4) Now see if you can think of some other examples from your own knowledge and experience:

Typical personality	Going outside the comfort zone

5) If we never go outside our comfort zones, what does Andy Molinsky think we’ll miss out on?

6) Look at Molinsky's "5 key challenges" below and see if you can think of examples of jobs/tasks/activities that are outside **your** comfort zone that you can relate to each of these challenges

(e.g. Authenticity: Being a car salesperson would feel fake for me because I hate cars!)

Nature of challenge	The job/task/activity that's outside your comfort zone
Authenticity (this feels fake)	
Likeability (people will dislike me)	
Competence (I don't know enough)	
Resentment (why the hell must I do this!?!)	
Morality (this feels wrong)	

7) Molinsky identified 3 'C's for getting out of our comfort zones: **conviction** (I've just got to do this!), **customization** (ok, but I'll do this *my way*) and **clarity** (come on, it won't be so bad). Describe an occasion when you used one or more of these 'C's to do something new.

8) Finally, Molinsky talks about small and doable steps you can take to get outside your comfort zone. What small, doable steps can you take here in Hagabergs Folkhögskola to get outside your comfort zone?