



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

YOUR COMFORT ZONE

There is nothing like the comfort that “my chair” brings after a long day. On certain days, it is the perfect place to take a quick nap before dinner or an evening meeting. On other days, it is my spot to read the paper, hear updates from my family on the events of the day, or—and perhaps most especially—the best place to watch “America’s Team,” the Philadelphia Eagles, play on a Sunday afternoon. It is comfortable. It is familiar. It is *mine*—and everyone in the house knows it!

Comfortable is good, except when it isn’t. Outside of the confines of my overstuffed living room chair and ottoman, the same desire for comfort can be dangerous. At work, for instance, when the “comfortable” thing to do is settle for the status quo rather than risk innovation, we’re settling for less than what is possible. In our personal lives, settling for what’s comfortable, while not always bad, can often lead to stagnation, boredom, or worse.

Journalist Jonathan Look, as he approached his own retirement, began to search and study the lives of people who reported “fulfillment” in their retired years. What he discovered these older adults had in common was, “They all intentionally lived (at least a portion of their lives) outside of their ‘comfort

zones’—mental boundaries constructed to keep themselves content, provide a sense of security and keep their anxieties low.” He pressed further and concluded, “Learning new and demanding things outside of our comfort zones (and maintaining a social network) is key in keeping us sharp as we age.”

Psychologists agree with the importance of stepping outside of our comfort zones, particularly in our seasoned years. In a 2018 study published in *Psychological Science*, researchers point to the importance of mature adults stretching their perceived limitations in order to keep their minds active and engaged. Psychological scientist and lead researcher Denise Park of the University of Texas at Dallas elucidates her research: “It seems it is not enough just to get out and do something—it is important to get out and do something that is unfamiliar and mentally challenging, and that provides broad stimulation mentally and socially.” She goes further, “When you are inside your comfort zone you may be outside of the enhancement zone.”

So, the question looms in front of all of us: What will you do in the month ahead to get out of your comfort zone, expand your circle, and challenge yourself

to explore a new horizon? Certainly, PSRC has many offerings that can help you answer that question. Peruse the pages of this newsletter or browse our website to discover the myriad of programs we offer to help you reach that goal. But beyond that, I simply want to encourage you to take one small step into the unknown—because there are new challenges, new friendships, and new opportunities for growth waiting for you.

“My chair” is comfortable. It is familiar. It is safe. And I will continue to enjoy every minute spent in that old leather chair. But I also know that, in order to live a fulfilling life, I have to be willing and able to move beyond what is safe and comfortable. In order to live in “the enhancement zone,” I have to step out of my comfort zone. Will you join me?

Best,
Drew A. Dyson, PhD
Executive Director

