

The subtle art of being uncomfortable

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Clare Trafankowska-Neal, managing director of [iProspect South Africa](#), shares a professional collection of invaluable lessons, spanning more than a decade of experience and a decade to learn.



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1. Lead by example:

Our parents often used to say: “Do as I say and not as I do” and though this statement has its place, with the increasing need for a more empathetic and authentic leadership style, today, it is simply not enough. Looking back, I was always ‘proud’ of being the early bird/all-nighter and you would often hear me say: “It’s okay, I love what I do.” And I do, I really do, but all work and no life, is well, no life at all.

What I mean by ‘lead by example’ is an increased effort in developing a conscientiousness around the necessity of instilling balance. The occasional late night, early morning and/or weekend work is woven into the fabric of the marketing and advertising industry, but practising these unsavoury habits should be facilitated within your own sanctity to protect the team around you – protecting them from subconscious biases such as inferiority and imposter-syndrome (feelings around being less-committed or less hard-working) for not behaving the way that you do.



2. Don’t shy away from the hard conversations

Learning to become comfortable with 'feeling uncomfortable' is an imperative. The ability to tackle the hard conversations head-on, not only makes the 'easier' ones more enjoyable but also fosters trust, accountability and responsibility – leading into an action-oriented and highly tangible leadership style.

As with most lessons (and life), I have learnt this the hard way. Hours of deliberation later, complete with knotted nerves, I have never looked back. Now, whether it be a co-worker, client, employee or even family – I do not hesitate to pick up the phone and am the first to offer up making the tough call. Since then, this has equipped me well in boardrooms, having developed an innate ability to make swift, yet still considered, decisions on the fly.



3. If it makes you feel uncomfortable, do it

Lesson three is an extension of lesson two. No one ever learnt anything new by sitting on the side lines and anything worth something will never be easy. Say yes now and worry about it later.

Being comfortable with feeling uncomfortable, is something that I have been consistently putting into practice over the last 18 months. It began with saying 'yes' to a global travel opportunity: to an unknown country, with people I didn't yet know, to speak on a panel and in front of even more people that I didn't yet know! How did it make me feel? Terrified, challenged, nervous and, at best, invigorated and energised.



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Amidst the rollercoaster journey through these emotions, I discovered some beautiful self-truths: That I have opinions, I am willing to share them, people are even willing to listen to them and that I love the delivery process.

Within the last 18 months, I have participated in multiple panel-discussions; contributed to multiple thought-leadership/perspective pieces; delivered my first solo keynote; become an [#IamRemarkable](#) facilitator (which is a self-improvement workshop series encouraging people to push beyond glass ceilings); and have facilitated several incredible workshops since then.

It all started with a single word:



4. Remove yourself from the drama

Navigating internal, family, professional and/or industry politics is never easy. When in doubt, choose Switzerland - always be Switzerland.

You will find that it is harder to remove yourself from the drama, than it is to partake. The art of neutrality is one worth mastering as once wielded, will allow you to navigate most circles and circumstance.



Creatives on lockdown

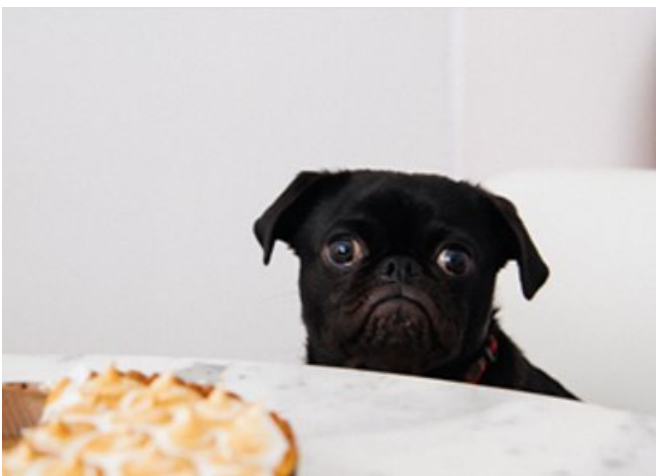
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5. Develop a taste for (humble) pie

Being comfortable with feeling uncomfortable provides a solid foundation for the humble apology – which is as hard, if not harder, to accomplish professionally as it is personally. To apologise is to admit some form of fault or failure – but to apologise in the right context, without solicitation and, more so, without an excuse can take the wind out of even the most furious sails, diffusing many an uncomfortable situation in the process.

Eat humble pie as often as necessary as life is too short to exist without authenticity and humility.



6. Listen attentively and speak liberally

By definition: Hearing is simply the act of perceiving sound by the ear. If you are not hearing-impaired, hearing simply happens. Listening, however, is something you consciously choose to do. Listening requires concentration so that your brain processes meaning from words and sentences.

Not actively listening to feedback, directions – you will be surprised at how appreciative people are if you listen correctly the first time.

As important as listening is, so too is using your own voice. Many a mistake has been made and an opportunity missed, within deafening silence.



7. It's not bragging if it's the truth

Self-promotion is critical for success. Self-promotion — the act of making people aware of your skills and achievements — can make most people feel uncomfortable.

I would like to pose a challenge to you, my valued reader. How did you feel when reading 'lesson three: if it makes you feel uncomfortable, do it'?

Being on the receiving end of someone's self-promotional activities is another breeding ground for subconscious bias but research suggests that it's crucial to succeeding at work. Researchers have also found that, contrary to what we might like to think, good work doesn't speak for itself and as difficult as it may feel, both to deliver and receive, self-promotion is a dormant muscle worth flexing – repeatedly!



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In summation, get comfortable with feeling uncomfortable; decide what it is that you believe in; stand for it; be it; do it and the people who surround you, will feel it.



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