*How to Grow Yourself and Lead Others*

*The Success Zone*

*5 Powerful Steps to Growing Yourself and Leading Others*

A summary of the book *The Success Zone* by Mowat A, Corrigan J and Long D published in 2009 by the Global Publishing Group

*Introduction*

The authors describe a 3-part brain model: Reptilian, Mammalian and Human.

*Reptilian Brain*: Associated with survival, habits, automatic processes. This brain is very efficient, instinctive and impulsive. It will act outside our control.

*Mammalian Brain*: Associated with emotions, emotional memories; Also known as the limbic system.

*Human Brain* (or Neocortex): Associated with rational thought, intention, imagination, planning, empathy, powerful but inefficient. The human brain includes the prefrontal cortex responsible for:

- Reflection and mindfulness;
- Considering options;
- Imagination and creativity, including future thinking;
- Monitoring errors;
- Understanding, monitoring and labelling emotions in self and others;
- Managing impulses;
- Affiliation, generosity, and goodwill;
- Integrating emotional, rational and intuitive processes;
- Core personality;
- Moral framework and resultant behaviour.

The authors describe two mind states: The Blue Zone and The Red Zone.

The Blue Zone primarily engages neocortex and the mammalian brain processes.

The Red Zone primarily engages the reptilian and mammalian brain processes.

Both Blue and Red Zones cannot fully operate simultaneously due to the limited bandwidth of our thinking processes.

*Comparison between the Blue and Red Zones*

| Blue Zone | Red Zone |
|---|---|
| High self-awareness | Low self-awareness |
| High self-management | Low self-management |
| Strong social interest | High self interest |
| Free from anxiety | Driven by anxiety |
| Locus of control is the neocortex | Locus of control is mammalian or reptilian brain. |

### How to Activate the Blue Zone – Building Attention

- Talk about your passions, goals, future;
- Write and read  your goals daily;
- Affirm the future you seek to create; and
- Read about your preferred field, then write and speak about it from a learning perspective.

### Triggers for Blue Zone Brain Activity

- Generosity
- Vulnerability
- Inclusion
- Clarity and certainty
- Permission
- Acknowledgement
- Trust
- Safety (physical, professional, social, emotional)
- Being listened to
- Being believed in
- Being respected unconditionally
- Authentic and focused attention

Nevertheless, the Blue Zone is inefficient (slow to make decisions) and resource demanding.

### Triggers for Red Zone Brain Activity

- Fear, anxiety, guilt
- Perceived unfairness
- Rejection or exclusion
- Perceived lack of control
- Uncertainty and ambiguity
- Perceived or imagined loss
- Not being listened to
- Being judged
- Being told how to think, feel, or what to do.

The Red Zone is highly efficient (fast at making decisions and taking action, frequently beyond our conscious control) because its evolutionary role is to keep us safe.

Blue and Red Zone states are contagious due to mirror neurones. Red Zone emotions are more contagious than Blue Zone, especially when coming from leaders. Autistic people may have fewer mirror neurones.

### Red Zone Awareness

Use the following questions to explore the impact of your Red Zone on yourself and others:

- What do you predominantly feel when you are in your Red Zone?
- What are the main physical signs that indicate that you are in your Red Zone?
- What are the major and consistent triggers of your Red Zone? (think of when you are most under pressure)
- How often do you notice that you are in your Red Zone?
- How often do others notice that you are in your Red Zone?
- How long do your Red Zone moments persist?

- When you are in your Red Zone, what is it most of all that you take from your close relationships?
- When you are in your Red Zone, what is it most of all that you take from the team that you are a member of or lead?
- How easy or difficult (1 = difficult, 10 = easy) is it for you to abandon a Red Zone reaction?
- How easily do you adopt the Red Zone of other significant people in your life? (loved ones, bosses, direct reports)

Keep a log or journal over a 3-month period to map your current Red Zone activity.

### Shifting from the Red Zone to the Blue Zone

1. Live in the Blue Zone: This is about moral intelligence, or knowing what to do and having the will to do it;
2. Manage your emotions. The following suggestions vary in their effectiveness, but are commonly used.
   a. Situation selection – seek those people or situations that give you rewards and avoid those that give you pain or loss;
   b. Situation modification – change the circumstances to reduce anxiety;
   c. Distraction – acknowledge the Red Zone trigger then intentionally focus on not engaging by giving your attention to something else;
   d. Cognitive modulation (this is the preferred method) – think about your feelings. Thinking moves your brain processes to the Blue Zone;
   e. Suppression – this is counterproductive because it make the Red Zone more active.

### How to Think about Emotions

The act of thinking about emotions shifts mental resources from the Red Zone to the Blue Zone.

1. Re-frame – observe potential triggers as information or data and remain open to a wide range of explanations. Exclude analysing them as a personal attack or affront. Re-framing is a process best modelled in Edward de Bono's book *Six Thinking Hats.* Humour can also be used as a means of re-framing;
2. Acceptance and permission – Based on Buddhism, this technique uses mindfulness to accept what is (including my own feelings):
   - I'm not defined by how I feel;
   - What I now feel is transient;
   - I have a choice about how I might feel in any given situation.
3. Impartial observer – This is also known as the "balcony view". Re-tell the event from another person's perspective, and as an observer of your own response.
4. The 4 I's model – analyse the situation in terms of:
   - *Issue*: Current reality, what happened, my observations, what did I do, what did others do?
   - *Insights* – what emotion did I feel, and what did I learn from this experience?
   - *Implications* – what does the learning lead to?
   - *Intentions* – what do I do next?
5. Another similar analysis model provided by the authors is REACH:
   - **R**eality
   - **E**motions
   - **A**cquired learning
   - **C**onnections
   - What **H**appens next?

6. Affect labelling – name your emotions. This process forces the use of the neocortex and moves mental resources to the Blue Zone.

### Emotional Word Families

One constraint in talking about our emotions is having a vocabulary to attach to the feeling that captures both the intensity and type of emotion being experienced. Paul Ekman, in *Emotions Revealed* lists 7 distinct and unique emotions, each with its own physiological, neural, and physical manifestations. These seven emotions are fear, anger, sadness, joy, contempt, disgust, and surprise. Of these, the first 3, anger, fear and sadness are the most common challenges in our personal and workplace relationships.

To talk about emotions accurately, develop a series of words that are synonyms for each of fear, anger, and sadness, and learn to recognise your own physiological, neural, and physical sensations when you experience each.

- *Anger*: angry, frustrated, annoyed, displeased, hostile, vexed, irate, exasperated, incensed, irritated, cross, enraged, riled, provoked, furious, wrathful, put out, pissed off.
- *Fear*: fearful, anxious, frightened, awestruck, alarmed, threatened, dreadful, nervous, apprehensive, concerned, worried, petrified, panicy, agitated.
- *Sadness*: blue, glum, heavy-hearted, dejected, despondent, gloomy, downhearted, mopey, unhappy, down, doleful, low, depressed, melancholy, mourning, morbid, sorry, sad.

### Clearing the Space

A process recommended by David Rock to enable a coachee to use mindfulness to identify the key issues and manage them.

1. Create an inventory of your key issues;
2. Attach an emotion to each issue (anger, fear, sadness, joy);
3. Park each issue after acknowledging the emotion associated with it.

### Questioning

A key skill for effective relationships is how to ask great questions. The premise of the following approach is that the responder to the questions owns the problem and the possible solutions. Powerful questions elicit reflection, clarity, and insight. Most questions become trapped in assumptions and detail.

Assumption questions are those that pre-judge that we understand the other person's problem, and what they want from the discussion: your advice and information to solve the problem. If this assumption is wrong the respondent will often experience a Red Zone response.

Exercise in questioning

1. Imagine your friend or colleague comes to you with a problem. After they describe the details of the problem you want to help them as best you can.
2. Make a list of all the questions that you would like to ask them in order to help them with the problem.
3. Remove from the list all the questions that suggest advice or action;
4. Exclude questions asking why;
5. Exclude questions that dig into the problem or possible solutions;
6. Exclude questions that are based on the assumption or premise that you are seeking information in order to help them by solving their problem;
7. What questions are you left with?

An example of a no-assumptions (Blue Zone evoking) question is:

"If things were perfect tomorrow in relation to your issue, what would be different for you?"

Reflection, clarity, and insight are provoked when the Blue Zone is activated.

### The High Rise Model

Imagine that a problem and its resolution can be represented by the metaphor of a high rise building. Clarity and insight are achieved by moving upwards for a better view. The alternative is down in the dark where it's easy to get bogged down in the drama, emotions and detail of the problem.

The OAR/BED model also works well here. Above the line or proactive Blue Zone behaviour is expressed by ownership, accountability and responsibility. Reactive below the line Red Zone behaviours are blaming, excuses and denial.
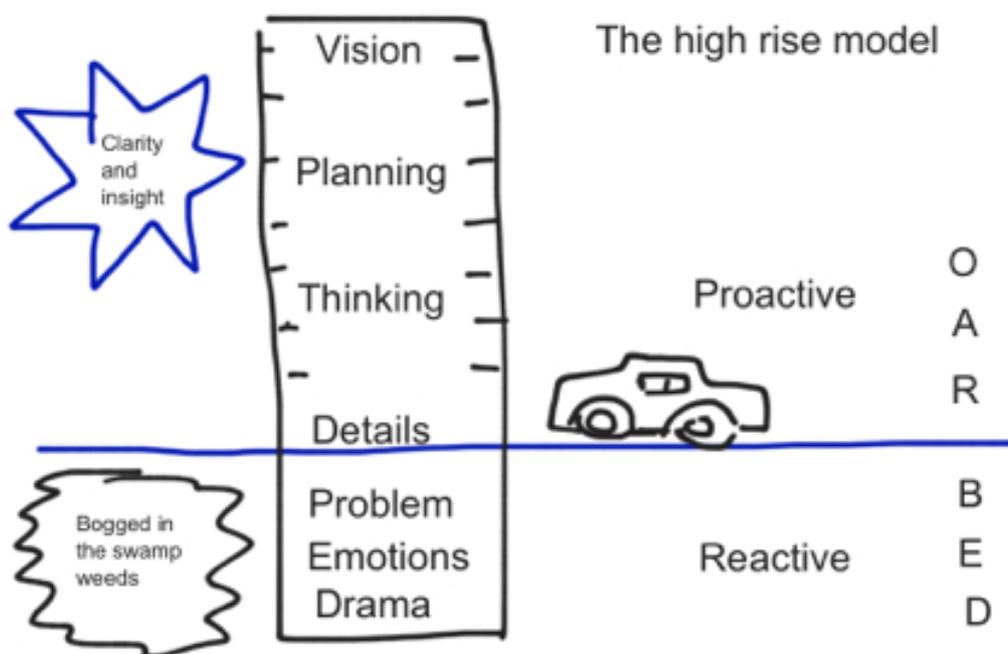


### Details

Questions about detail are the easiest. What you ask for is what you'll get. The best questions are about thinking, planning and ideal outcomes. If you ask attack questions you'll get defensive answers. If you ask about the problem and the drama, you can end up stuck in the dark, like being bogged down in the weeds.

### Growth Questions

1. What aspect are you happy with?
2. What did you learn?
3. How did you rate your effectiveness on a 1-10 scale?
4. What rating would you be pleased with?
5. What is needed to move to a higher rating?
6. What action will you take now?

### Thinking Questions

These are questions that move upwards away from the detail.

1. How important is this issue to you?
2. How does it rate in relation to your top issue?
3. How long have you been thinking about it?
4. How often do you think about it?
5. When you think about it, what insights do you have?

### Feeling Questions

The identification of a feeling or emotion associated with an issue is an important step in moving from the Red Zone to the Blue Zone. The danger is in allowing the discussion to go into too much detail about the emotion, re-triggering the Red Zone. Either ask them to rate the intensity if their feeling, or use a one-word description of it, then move on. An analogy or metaphor for the emotion can also work well.

Good questions once the emotion is identified are:

1. How would you prefer to feel?
2. How do you need to feel to be successful?
3. What do you need to do to be able to feel this way?

### Why People Listen

Most of us listen with our own needs and intentions in mind. How many of these reasons for listening do you relate to?

People listen:

- For opportunities to sound intelligent;
- For a chance to say something funny;
- For how I could sound important;
- For information I want;
- To external distractions – other noises, music;
- For what's going on for the other person;
- For approval;
- to my own thoughts, not listening to the other person at all;
- To be able to understand the problem;
- For how I can benefit;
- For the opportunity to one-up the other person;
- For the details so I can help solve the problem;
- For how I can undermine the other person's point of view or position;
- For how I can change or end the conversation.

Mostly we listen with strategic intent and for gaps in the conversation that will allow us to say something. Note that all of the above reasons for listening relate to the needs of the listener, not the speaker. When listening for our own needs we use most of our neocortex processing power to analyse what is being said, fit it to previous patterns and experience, and search for solutions. This takes bandwidth away from listening for the other person.

Some of the thoughts that we have while listening can include:

- Thoughts about judging what is being said;
- Thoughts about fitting or matching what is being heard with your own experience, including how you've managed such a problem in the past;
- Thoughts that are making assumptions about what is about to be said, motivations, intentions, preferences;

- Thoughts that trigger our own brain processing: solving the problem, being distracted, another train of thought.

The best listeners listen for the needs of the speaker.

### *Optimistic Listening*

Optimistic listening is about who is responsible for finding the solution to the issue under discussion. The default position for most people is the assumption that the listener is responsible for the solution to be found. Generally our approach, (especially men in leadership positions, including husband) is "give me the information so I can solve the problem".

This style of listening is perfect when the outcome is informational, such as the location of something, or how a device works. Where the outcome intention is growth in the capacity of the other person, this listening style is a very poor choice because is actually prevents growth.

Start with the assumption and belief that the responsibility for finding the solution is with the speaker, not the listener. The listener may provide information and data that the speaker can use, but does so in a non-judgemental way: the time of arrival, the number of re-drafts, the costs accrued, the number of hours required. Hold the expectation that the solution will emerge at any moment, but from the speaker, not the listener.

### *Great Questions for Optimistic Listening*

Its important to be aware that using questions like these when its not your usual approach may feel strange, and you may arouse suspicion in the responder.

In any event, its vital that you seek permission to ask these types of questions before you start. An effective approach is to ask "can I ask you some questions that will help my listening skills and will increase my understanding of what you are saying?"

After you ask the question it is really important to listen with your whole being. The central assumption of the questions and the listening is that the responsibility for resolution of the situation rests with the respondent.

### *The REACH Model*

The following questions are a sample from *The Success Zone's* **REACH** model. This model is suitable for a situation in which the respondent is reflecting on an issue, action or event from which they might gain some developmental insight.

*Present **R**eality*

1. How did [the action] go for you? What did you notice or see as a result?
2. How would you relate the effectiveness of your actions (say out of 10)?
3. What happened for you?
4. What stands out in the feedback for you?
5. What did you find challenging or unexpected in the feedback?

*Emotions*

1. What emotion did you notice in completing the action?
2. What emotions arose when hearing/reading your feedback?
3. What emotion stands out for you?

*Acquire*

1. What have you learnt from doing this?
2. What insights have you gained from the feedback?
3. What awareness do you now have that you didn't have before?

*Connections*

1. What are the implications of what you have learnt?
2. What possibilities arise from what you have learnt?
3. What seems to be missing as a result of your learning?

*What **H**appens Next*

1. What will you do next?
2. What could you do now that you know this?
3. What conversations do you now need to have as a result of this learning?

### The DREAM Model

Another model in The Success Zone has the acronym DREAM. This approach suits situations in which the respondent wishes to develop a stretch goal for their development.

***D**efine the Issue*

1. What do you want to explore today?
2. What change do you wish to make?
3. What will be the benefit for you in making this change?
4. How is this issue/change important to you?
5. What will success look like?
6. How will things be different once you've made this change?

*What is the present **R**eality?*

1. How do you see the current situation?
2. Are you in a Blue Zone or Red Zone state on this issue?
3. On a scale of 1-10 how anxious are you feeling about this issue?
4. How would you rate your current level of performance, satisfaction or effectiveness on a scale of 1-10?
5. How would someone else describe the situation?
6. How do you feel when you think about this issue?

***E**nvision the future state*

1. If things were perfect tomorrow, what would you see/feel that is different from today?
2. What rating on the Blue Zone would you like to experience?
3. How would you rate your ideal level of performance/satisfaction/effectiveness?
4. How would you like to feel/think/act in this situation?

***A**lternative courses of action*

1. Imagine you have reached your goal. Looking back, what steps did you take to get here?
2. What action/thinking/feeling would most move you toward your goal?
3. What would the person you most admire do in this situation?
4. What would be the most conservative course of action?
5. What would be the most outrageous course of action?

*Making it Happen*

1. What do you need for clarity about your next steps?
2. What barriers might you anticipate?
3. What assumptions or arrangements might you need to abandon in order to take action?
4. What steps will you take? When will you take these steps?
5. What assistance might you need?

## How to Improve Your Conversations

1. Be aware of your Red and Blue Zone states. Being aware of your Red Zone allows you to notice when it is activated, and enables you to allow it to pass like a train in the night.
2. Listen more than you speak. Optimistic listening assumes that the speaker is responsible for the solution and it will emerge at any time through reflection, clarity and insight. Abandon assumptions and judgement about what the speaker is saying;
3. Observe and ask more than you tell. Listening to observe includes noticing what is said and how it is said, along with associated body language. The balance should be around 70/30. ;
4. If you have to "tell", follow it immediately with "ask". Give required information then immediately attach a question such as "What thinking emerges for you now that you know that?";
5. Use questions that focus on the present and future rather than the past.
6. Acknowledgement of the speaker's emotion or their dilemma, such as: "I can see the emotion there…" and "So you feel stuck…?";
7. Permission to ask about an issue that may evoke a Red Zone response. This provides clarity and perceived autonomy for the speaker;
8. Use silence to move the conversation forward, especially in situations where you find that you are listening for yourself rather than for the speaker. Indications can be that you are interrupting the speaker, you are exceeding 30% talk.

## References

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