**Attitude to challenge**

Once you have built your confidence in your own success, you are ready to set yourself greater challenges. This can also mean looking at your approach to challenge itself. Do you welcome challenge? Are you prepared to take on goals that will stretch you?

The greatest barriers to success are usually those that derive from our attitudes and fears. The challenge may simply be too great for us at that time. The challenges we set ourselves should be appropriate for our current coping skills, support networks, and emotional well-being. The activity below gives an indication of the ways in which you currently cope with challenge.

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| Activity | Attitude to challenge |
| Indicate how important each of the following is to you achieving well. |
| (a) I achieve best when I … | *Very important* | Important | *Quite important* | *Not very important* | *Not at all important* |
| * can see some results quickly
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * have feedback from others so I know how well I am doing
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * receive guidance or suggestions from other people
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * know I am heading in the right direction
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * have planned out the whole process in advance
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * set short-term targets that I know are achievable
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * set goals that I am certain I can achieve
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * plan each step closely so as to avoid setbacks
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * have a clear vision of where I am going
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * have a safety net to fall back on if things do not work out.
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| Indicate how far each statement below is typical of you. |
| **(b) I am able to motivate myself to work towards a goal even if …** | Very typical | Typical | *Sometimes the case* | *Not very typical* | *Not typical at all* |
| * I have to wait a long time to see the results
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * it takes years to reach the ultimate goal
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * nobody else is available to tell me what to do
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * there is a really difficult challenge
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * it is not clear that the outcome will be successful
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * the eventual goal is rather vague
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * the plan has to evolve slowly over time
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * I have to work hard for something that I may not achieve
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * there are many setbacks
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
| * other people think I am aiming too high.
 |[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

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| Using your responses for (a) |
| * Highlight all the answers to which you responded with a ‘Very important’ or ‘Important’.
* Write these out in your reflective journal, starting: ‘To cope with a new challenge, it is important for me that …’.
* As you write, add details or examples from your experience to illustrate how you know this is really true of you.
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| Using your responses for (b) |
| * Highlight all the answers to which you responded with a ‘Not very typical’ or ‘Not typical at all’.
* Write these out in your reflective journal, starting: ‘I am unlikely to keep going with a new challenge if …’.
* As you write, add details or examples from your experience to illustrate how you know this is really true of you.
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Interpreting your responses

Your answers to (a) provide you with a summary of the approaches that increase your chances of success with new challenges. For example, you may have indicated that you need support in order to achieve. If this is true of you, you are more likely to be successful if you remain open to guidance from others, plan carefully and set manageable targets. However, see ‘The comfort zone’ below.

Your answers to (b) provide you with a summary of how highly motivated you are likely to remain even in high-risk contexts. If you indicated many ‘Very typical’ and ‘Typical’ replies here, your responses suggest you are likely to respond well to challenge and risk. You appear to be highly motivated and able to manage your own path to success very well. However, see ‘The comfort zone’ below.

If your responses to (b) were mostly ‘Not very typical’ or ‘Not typical at all’, set yourself challenges that avoid most of those circumstances. Your ‘edge’ is likely to be working on developing your motivation so that you can achieve your goals even when conditions are not ideal.

The comfort zone and ‘the working edge’

When we only work to our strengths and preferences, we run the risk of not setting sufficient challenges for ourselves. The ‘comfort zone’ is where we operate when we are running no risks, setting ourselves no challenges, ensuring we always have a very strong and wide safety net, ensuring we always have more than enough support. A good personal development plan will include areas for improvement that challenge us to work at our ‘edge’.

‘The edge’ is the boundary between the comfort zone and unnecessary or inappropriate risks. It is different for everybody. For one person it might be learning to take advice from others; for another person it may be learning to work more independently of others. For people who avoid risk, the ‘edge’ might be in learning to set more adventurous challenges. This might entail developing related skills, qualities or attitudes such as managing change, seeing mistakes as opportunities to learn, developing emotional coping strategies, and so forth. For those who take high-risk strategies, the ‘edge’ might be in developing ways of coping with stress, or developing trust in other people, or in living without high excitement.

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| Reflection: Working at the ‘edge’ |
| * What do you feel is the ‘edge’ you need to work at next?
* What makes you feel that this is your ‘edge’? Who could you speak to about this?
* How will you take on this new challenge?
* What support or guidance do you need?
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Sometimes it is hard to acknowledge where the edge lies. For example, the kind of advice we dislike the most is often an indicator of where our personal ‘edge’ lies. We may need guidance on how to work at our edge. As with the ‘edge’ of a cliff or precipice, we should approach our personal limits with due caution and the right support. It is good to set challenges – but not to go over the edge without good support!