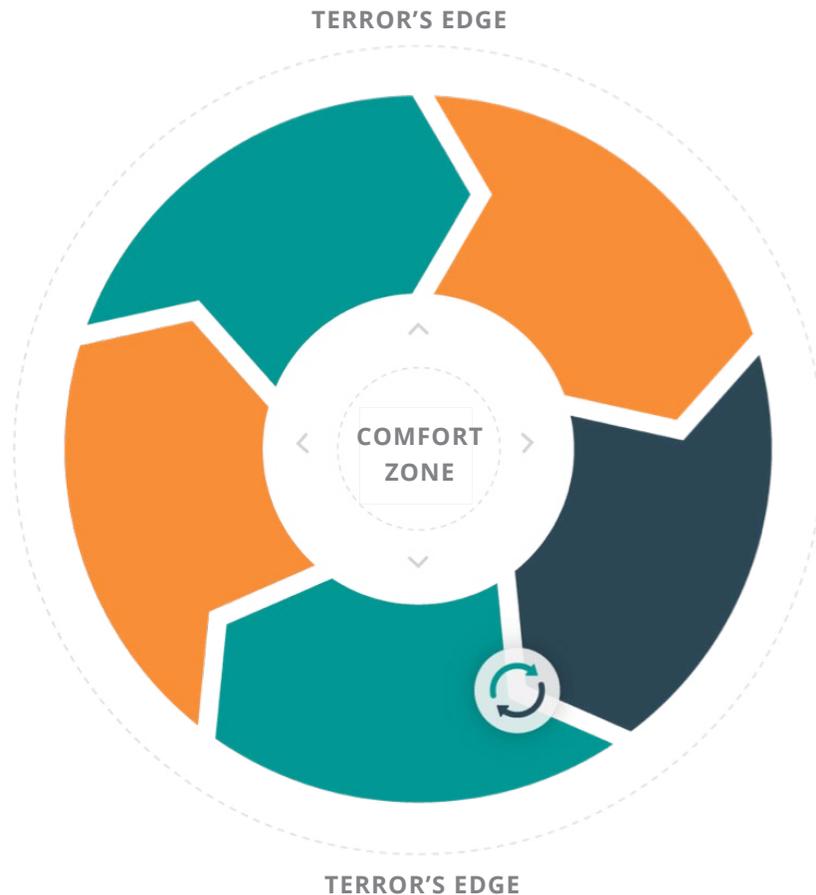


Research shows that when we are growing, learning, and stretching ourselves, we are more engaged and fulfilled. The challenge is to find just the right balance of struggle and comfort. After all, you want to push beyond your comfort zone while carefully avoiding terror's edge and its associated burnout.



## The Donut Metaphor

The donut metaphor is a simple, easy (and calorie-free!) way to understand how to get into that sweet spot where you are truly engaged and challenged but not overly stressed.

-  **Life *inside* the donut** hole is our comfort zone. It is safe, familiar, comfortable, and potentially a little boring.
-  **Life *on* the donut** is our learning zone. This is where we grow, stretch, and experiment. This is where we feel awake, inspired, engaged, and truly alive. This is also where we struggle, learn new things, and grow.
-  **The outer *edge* of the donut** is the outer edge of the learning zone. If we spend too much time on the outer edge of the donut—what one might describe as “terror’s edge”—we feel stressed and potentially begin to burn out. This is where our greatest fears reside. Some of us never go there, but many of us do. The trick is to minimize the amount of time we spend on this out edge without avoiding it entirely.

## Creating More Flow

Creating more flow hinges both on the capacity to embrace a growth mindset and to spend intentional, purposeful effort to live on the donut or within the learning zone. We cultivate flow by intentionally building the skills, discipline, and grit needed to pursue growth and to stay in the learning zone as often as possible. In the learning zone, there is a sweet spot where we are performing at our peak.



## Scaling the Donut

Think about the different parts of the donut on a scale from 1–5. 1 and 2 are within the comfort zone, 3 and 4 are in the learning zone, and 5 is outside terror's edge. Flow triggers are associated with challenge and happen in the learning zone (at 3 or 4) When you hit 5, however, you are so terrified, you often can't go on. Also, when you spend too much time at 5, your performance quickly begins to dwindle.

Great leaders develop self-awareness to tap into and then gauge stress or arousal. They understand where they are on the donut, and then push or pull back to achieve the right level of stress to achieve what they need to achieve in the moment.



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