

Somatics in Coaching

Coaching Training



We Are What We Practice

A Few Underlying Principles

Our practices:

- Are often historical
- Are based on survival patterns we learned as children
- Do not allow for innovation
- Betray the future we say we are committed to producing
- Are automatic and invisible to us

We are a living system, a structure

- Structure shapes behavior
- Practice alters structure

Energy follows awareness

- Choice follows awareness
- Power and effective action follow choice

From Absence to Presence

The word **presence** comes from the old Latin term *praesentis*, which has several meanings amongst them being powerful, efficacious and resolute. We can think of being present as a way to deepen personal empowerment.

Source: Paul Dunion

Presence to Personal Power

We can think of *personal power* as deepening a capacity to identify and manifest our desire.

Being present through mindfulness can yield information coming from my body telling me that I am either comfortable or uncomfortable, a desire to move, a desire to protect, a desire to rest, a desire to touch or be touched, etc.

Mindfulness about my emotions (mad, sad, glad, scared, lonely, shame) offers me options to express these emotions in ways that being me in integrity and support my connection to others.

Mindfulness of my stories (thoughts) can greatly support my empowerment as I check my stories out with the reality of other people.

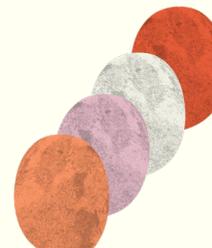
"He who aspires to govern the city needs to learn to govern himself."

– Socrates



The Power of Intention

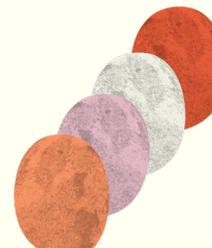
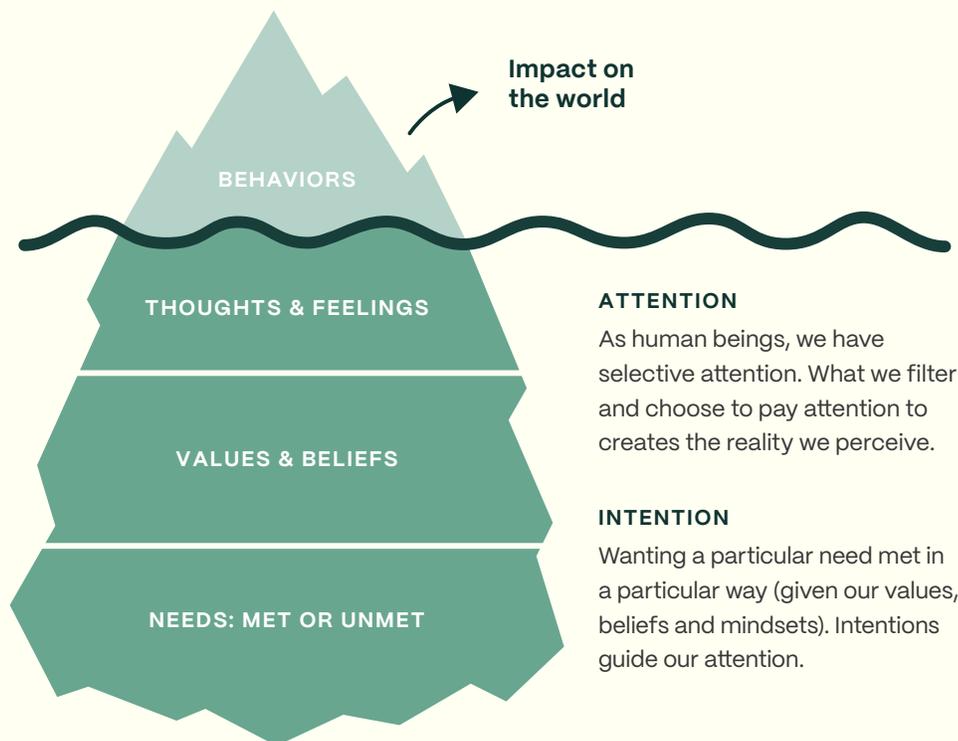
- **Often we reduce the notion of intention** to goals and overlook the opportunities that become available if we explore intention further.
- **Intention is a deliberate decision to create** that sets a context for creative action to occur.
- **Intention allows us to harness creative energy** and by focusing our attention, allows us to notice opportunities that we would have missed without intention in play.
- **Intention involves knowing what you want** and exactly why you want it.
- **Intention includes the setting of goals** as a way to measure the power of intention in our lives; however, intention is a more powerful and subtle force than simple goal achievement.
- **Many of us are operating in life with “Intention Deficit Syndrome.”** Without clear and purposeful intentions, life can feel meaningless and lack direction. It is easy to understand how we may begin to feel helpless to create change.
- **When we take action and produce results based on a set of unconscious intentions**—intentions hidden within our mindset—we produce results that seem different than what we think we intended. We find ourselves operating below the line because we fail to recognize our part in the outcome and refuse to be accountable.
- **As leaders, understanding and setting powerful intentions** for ourselves and others, allows us to generate work environments where we automatically operate with intentionality above the line, aware of what we want to create and willing to be accountable for our individual and collective outcomes.



Being Present

When you are fully present, you bring your whole self to situations, and are able to be truly authentic.

- Our intentions are what we (consciously or unconsciously) desire in a particular situation.
- Intentions shape our behavior.
- Behavior is *always* intentional. We can consciously choose and create our intentions.
- When we are fully present, we are consciously able to set intentions that are consistent with our 'personal values', allowing us to be authentic. These intentions then guide our attention to pick up on necessary clues in the environment and behave in a productive and appropriate way.



Somatics

All mental phenomena and all action in the world happen in the context of a physical body.

Generally, we are unaware of how the physical body is informing, shaping and altering our thinking, our mental maps, our moods and our actual behavior in the world at large.

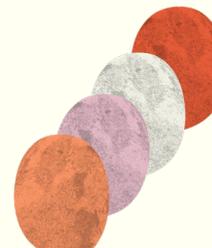
We are first and foremost biological beings who eat, sleep, reproduce, fight, run and freeze all in an effort to survive. Under pressure any biological organism responds in certain ways. The human organism is no different. For instance, you walk into the board room for a meeting with your executive team and the CEO. Within the first several minutes of the meeting the CEO fires someone in front of the whole group. Every organism in the room is instantly perturbed: blood pressure changes, heart rate speeds up, hormones are released and the reptilian brain registers this experience as one of immanent danger. The room is so quiet you might say everyone is frozen in their seat, and from a physiological perspective you would be accurate. Any biological organism would either fight, freeze or flee in the face of this kind of danger.

Though not a tiger on the tundra, this scenario is our modern day equivalent. Most people are likely to take no action (i.e. freeze) rather than confront the CEO or leave the room. What the most recent neuroscience is illuminating is that when a human being alerts to danger

they lose their capacity to think creatively and quickly and to act nimbly and flexibly. When perturbed in this way any organism has its attention focused firmly on its survival. Innovation, strategy and reflection all happen in the neocortex of the brain to which we have limited access when in this agitated state.

Somatics teaches people how to work with the physical body in order to mindfully focus and pro-actively return to a physiological state where they are once again capable of effective action and to condition themselves to operate with ease, grace and efficacy under pressure or perceived conflict. As with any top performing athlete, we offer clients a range of practices that build stamina, presence, focus, empathy and integrity so that mind and body are operating in concert and on command.

Our somatic discourse draws most specifically on the latest Neuroscience and quantum physics; on the work of somatic trauma expert Peter Levine and on the pioneering teaching of Dr. Richard Strozzi-Heckler, Ph.D. who has single-handedly championed the relevance of the body in coaching practice. His teachings have infiltrated, in limited form, many coaching schools including The Newfield Network and elsewhere.



Sample Somatic Distinctions

Centering

The ability to manage one's own reactions, and to recover from or avoid strong automatic reactions, and sustain or return to physical, emotional, and intellectual states that enable design and choice of action, rather than reaction.

Extension

The ability to project awareness and presence into situations, particularly stressed or triggered ones, and to engage with and influence what is happening with others.

Blending

The ability to distinguish the energy states of others and engage with them in ways that avoid triggering resistance or conflict, and match their physical, emotional, and intellectual states in a way that produces connection, trust, and willingness to respond in positive a productive ways.

Grounding

The ability to orient in situations where one is clear about what one cares about, it committed to, and has configured one's somatic presence to be fully present, definite, and committed—people are clear what they stand for, and their bodies are grounded in their stand, not in reaction to their surroundings.

Contraction

The tendency to tense up: eliminating flexibility, extension, and connection—often a posture of withdrawal.

Dynamic Relaxation

The physical state of relaxation that enables a body to be most ready for any possible action, and able to move into action the most quickly.

Samples of Somatic Exercises

Present or Not Present, Open or Not Open and Connected or Not Connected

Face to face exercise to experience the difference of the somatic characteristics of levels of presence and connectivity to others and the impact on you and the other in these differentiated states.

Grabs

A paired exercise to produce the physical experience of breakdown, triggering, or surprise, where one party grabs the wrist of the other, and the person grabbed can practice calming, centering, and facing the one grabbing—this is combined with conversations between the parties that can be practice mocks or practicing of actual conversations to enable the managing of reactions.

Two Step

An individual practice of turning 180 degrees in two steps. This move is borrowed from the martial art of aikido, but

is extremely useful for people to see they can practice calming and centering even with making such radical movement.

Blending

Physical paired exercises where two people engage in a paired two-step, where the intent is to produce the sense of close coordination and flow, and noticing what interferes with that. The physical experiences develop the ability to distinguish feelings more clearly in other situations whether blending is occurring or not, and what self-management is necessary to produce it.

Facing the Approaching Arm

A paired exercise where one person approaches the other with an arm outstretched, aiming for the chest of the other. This provides the triggering of facing an intent, or determined energetic assertion by another. The person being approached is coached to notice how they



can respond, from resisting, collapsing, withdrawing, to blending and producing collaborative action.

Unbendable Arm

A classic martial art demonstration of the power of configuring energy and attention in a relaxed body. One person hold their arm straight out, and a partner tries to bend the arm down. If the extender tries to hold the arm up with direct counter effort, it will be exhausting and ineffective. If the extender relaxes the arm, but orients it to be connected to the rest of the body and center, they can hold the arm extended in spite of the efforts of the per-son trying to bend it with little effort. A dramatic example of effective somatic action and presence does not require effort or strain, but the relaxation and clear direction of intent and energy are more effective and potent.

Randori

One person enters a circle of other people, who all approach and try to shove the person with an outstretched arm—the person in the center must move in this chaotic swirl of approachers in a way to maintain calm, effective movement, and avoid contracting or collapsing. This is an effective exercise to show people how managing their body

in stressful and overwhelming situations enables them to take effective action.

Mindfulness practice

Periods of reflective silence, meditation, or guided visualization to increase concentration, awareness and relaxation.

Other somatic exercises

There are many more exercises that enable participants to learn somatic self-awareness and self-management, somatic observation and assessment, and how to affect the somatic dimension of an interaction or even the somatic disposition of another, including exercises in:

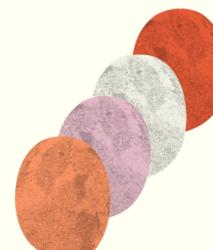
- Connecting to Others
- Breathing
- Centering
- Grounding
- Declining
- Insisting
- Awareness
- Attention

And many others ~

Cartesian Rationalism Declares:

Our Practices

- There is an objective knowable observable truth
- There is a reality that can be observed, described and not influenced by the observer
- Freedom from religious dogma and the elevation of western science
- That mind and body are separate. The body is a machine designed to house the mind (brain)
- "I think therefore I am" is the primary declaration of this paradigm.



Costs of the Paradigm

- Human beings are machine
- Environmental destruction is permitted in objectified world
- Denial of body and spirit as integral part of self
- Fear of loss of control
- Crisis of Meaning
- Disease is tolerated
- An unbalanced view of the Self

The World of Quantum Physics and a "New" Paradigm

- The observer and the observed interact to create a world.
- The body and the self and the spirit are a unified field of awareness.
- Nothing is fixed; everything is malleable.
- There is no objective reality separate from the observer of it.
- Language does not just describe the world; it produces the world and has the power of creation in it.
- There is no truth. Things happen, we make meaning and story and interpretation from the happening.
- Our interpretations are determined by the structure we are. We often forget they are interpretation and begin to think of them as truth.

About Finding Center

"Center" is a balance of:

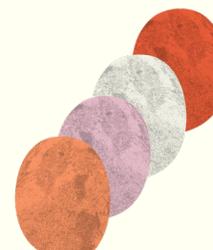
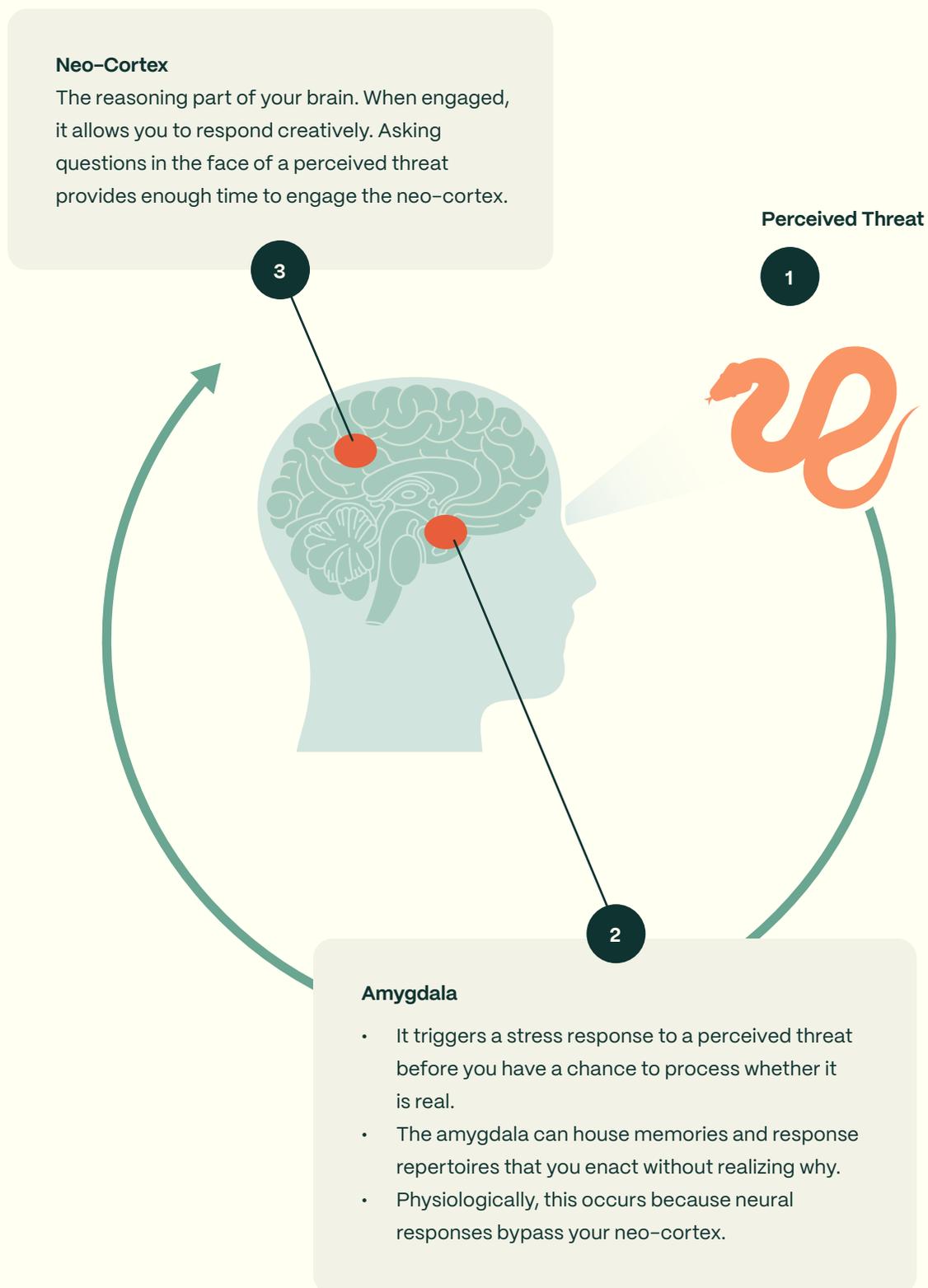
- Effective Action
- Emotional Presence
- Mental Alertness
- Spiritual Vision

"Center" increases our ability to:

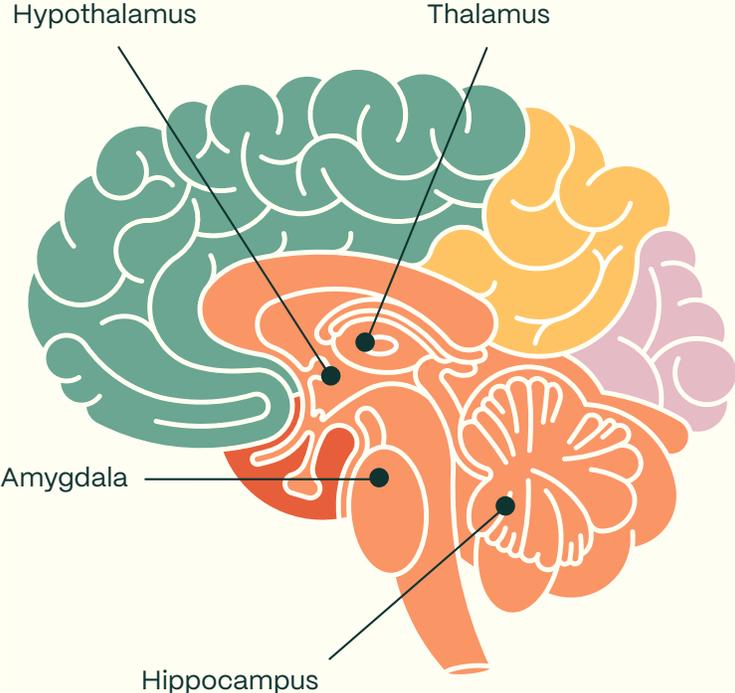
- Tolerate Uncertainty
- Listen Compassionately
- Align With What You Really Care About
- Be Effective
- Access Our Own and Other's Wisdom
- Produce Integrity



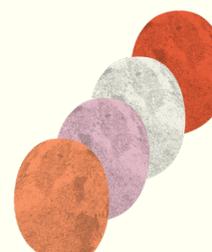
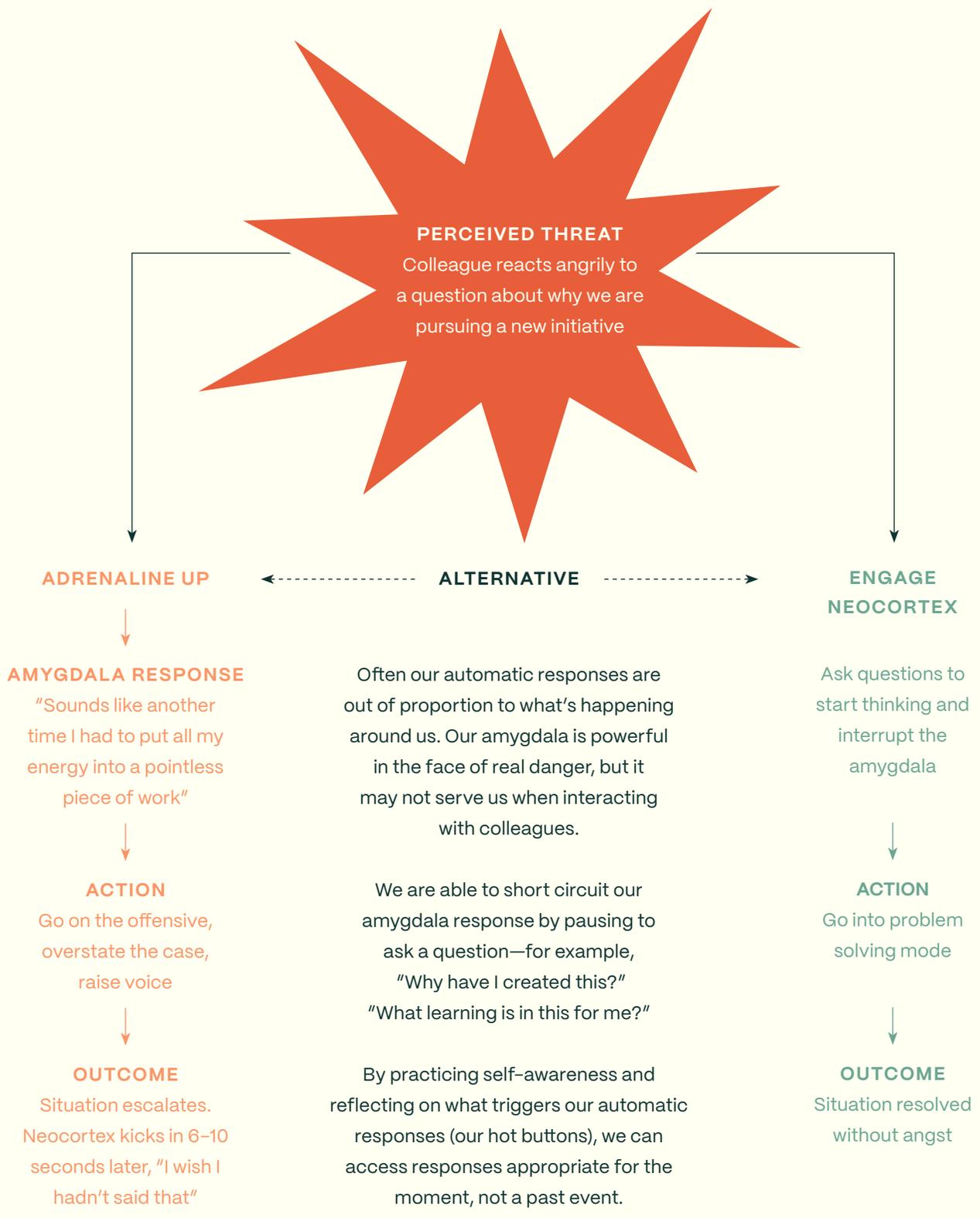
The Amygdala Hijack



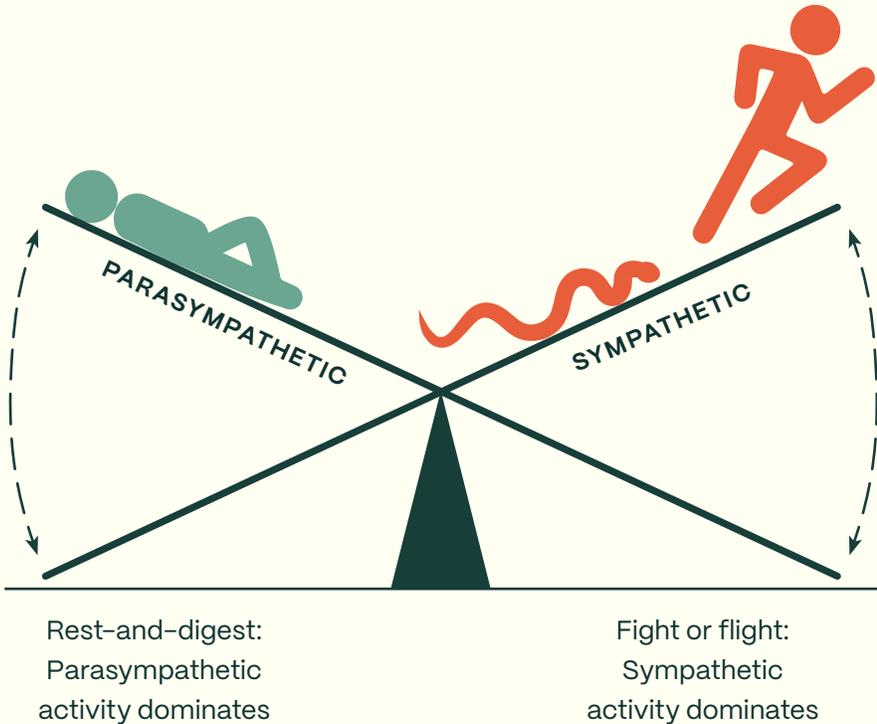
The Limbic System



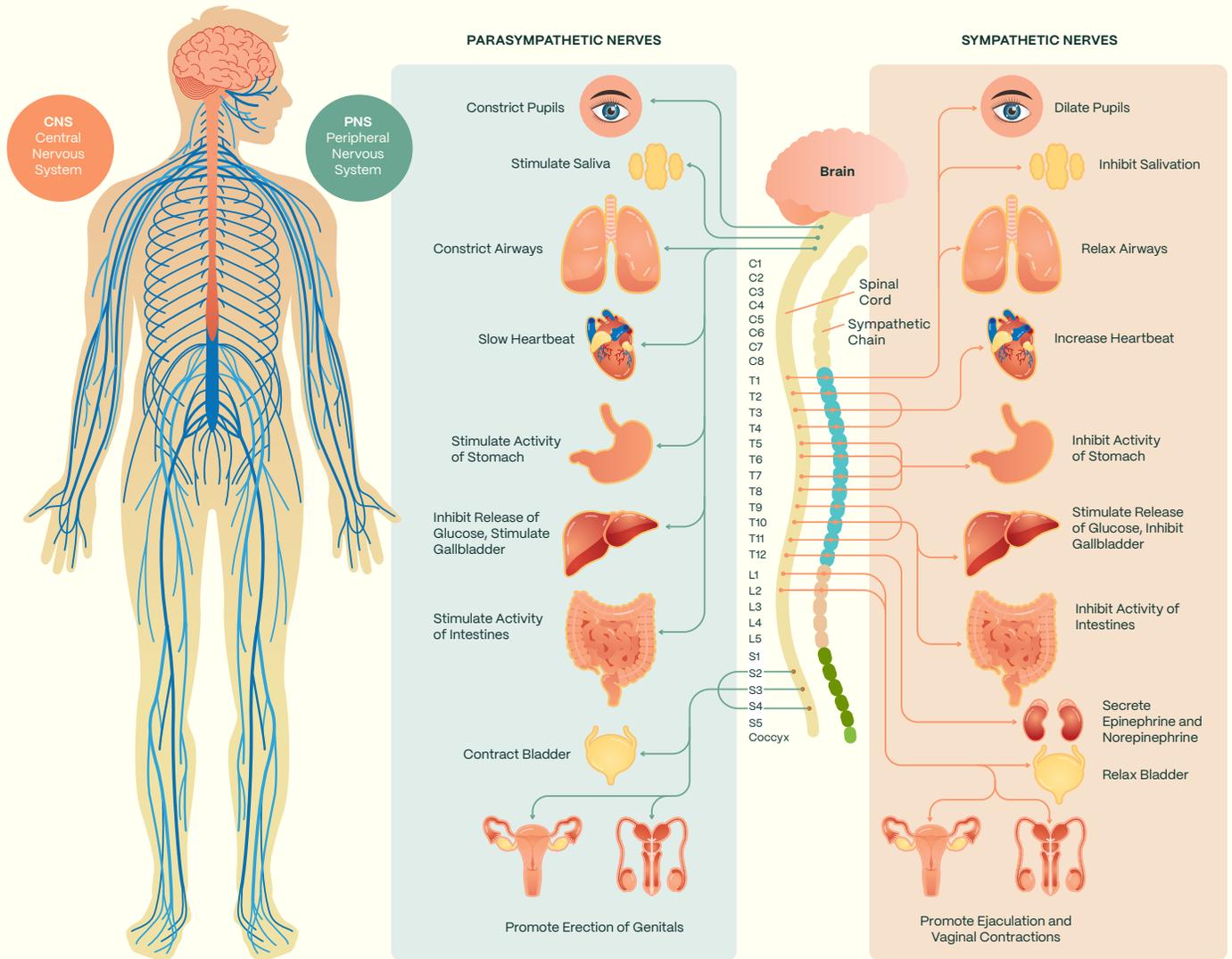
The Amygdala Dynamic in Action



Homeostasis is a dynamic balance between the autonomic branches



The Nervous System



Moving from below the line to above the line: Flight, fight, flow

Flow

Assertive behavior (I win/you win)

Expressing your feelings, needs, and ideas. Standing up for your legitimate rights in ways that do not violate the rights of others:

- Expressive and self-enhancing
- Results in confidence, self-esteem

Belief: We matter.

PAYOFF Achieves goals mostly. If this does occur, there are feelings of self-worth, which result from being straightforward. Self-confidence improves and relationships become open and honest.

...TO ACCOUNTABLE

FROM DEFENSIVE...

Fight

Aggressive behavior (I win/you lose)

Expressing your feelings, needs and ideas at the expense of others; standing up for your rights but ignoring the rights of others; trying to dominate, even humiliate, others:

- Hostile and self-defeating
- Results in anger, self-righteousness, possible guilt later

Belief: You don't matter.

PAYOFF Vents anger and achieves goals in the short-term.

PROBLEM Alienation from others; feelings of frustration, bitterness, and isolation

Flight/Freeze

Passive behavior (I lose/you win)

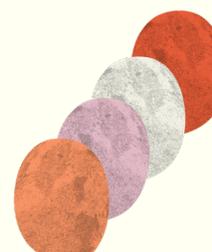
Not expressing your own feelings, needs, ideas; ignoring your own rights; allowing others to infringe upon them:

- Inhibited and self-denying
- Results in anxiety, disappointment, anger, and resentment

Belief: I don't matter.

PAYOFF Avoids unpleasant situations.

PROBLEM Needs are not met; anger builds up; feelings of low self-worth arise



Limbic Regulation

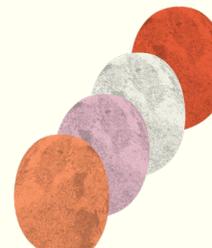
"Human physiology finds a hub... in the harmonizing activity of nearby limbic brains. Our neural architecture places relationships at the crux of our lives, where blazing and warm, they have the power to stabilize... People do not learn emotional modulation as they do geometry or the names of state capitals. They absorb the skill from living in the presence of an adept external modulator, and they learn it implicitly... A spontaneous capacity germinates and becomes a natural part of the self, like learning to ride a bike or tie one's shoes."

Limbic Resonance

"Every person broadcasts information about his inner world... If a listener quiets his neocortical chatter and allows limbic sensing to range free, melodies begin to penetrate the static of anonymity... As the listener's resonance grows, he will catch sight of what the other sees inside that personal world, start to sense what it feels like to live there... The first part of emotional healing is being limbically known—having someone with a keen ear catch your melodic essence..."

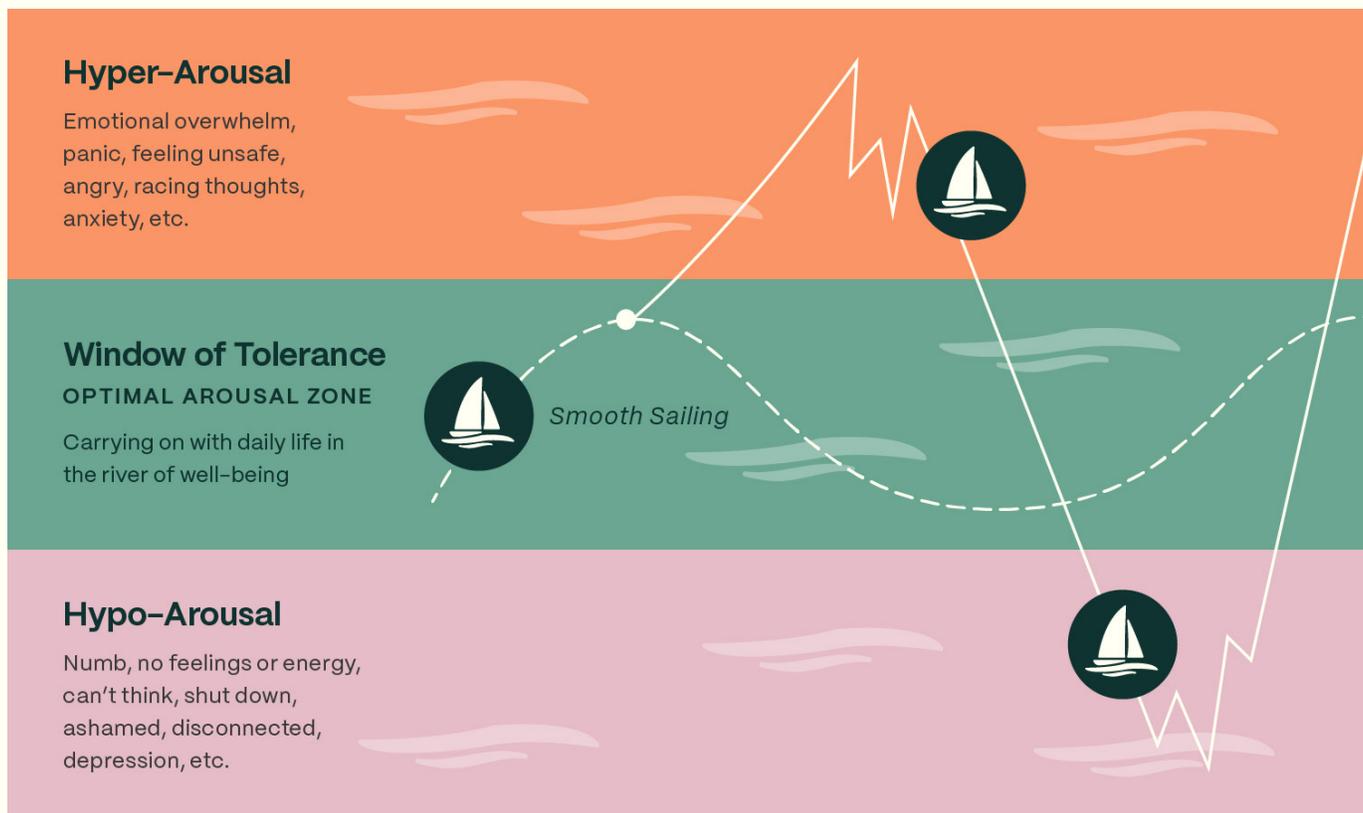
Limbic Revision

"...Revising the neural code that directs an emotional life... Somewhere in a person's brain lie the myriad connections embodying his limbic knowledge—the strong Attractors that end emotional perceptions and guide actions in love... The neocortical brain collects facts quickly. The limbic brain does not. Emotional impressions shrug off insight but yield to a different persuasion: the force of another person's Attractors reaching through the doorway of a limbic connection... Psychotherapy changes people because one mammal can restructure the limbic brain of another... When a limbic connection has established a neural pattern, it takes a limbic connection to revise it."



Window of Tolerance

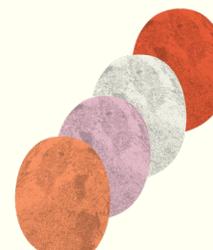
When we are able to widen our window of tolerance, we can enjoy more smooth sailing regardless of the waves, obstacles and adventures we encounter.



Credit: Mindful Awareness Stabilization Training Program at St. Michael's Unity Health Toronto

"He told Joe there were times when he seemed to think he was the only fellow in the boat, as if it was up to him to row the boat across the finish line all by himself. When a man rowed like this he said, he was bound to attack the water rather than to work with it, and worse, he was bound not to let his crew help him row."

- Boys in the Boat



Somatic Practice

A path to mastery for 21st century leaders

In order to succeed and stay competitive in today's fast-paced business environment, organizations launch big initiatives, create high-profile goals, and reach for new outcomes on all levels.

An article by Jennifer Cohen and Jason Gore

In order to succeed and stay competitive in today's fast-paced business environment, organizations launch big initiatives, create high-profile goals, and reach for new outcomes on all levels. These initiatives stretch us, pushing us to innovate and use limited resources very effectively. They require everyone in the organization to

reach beyond their usual comfort level, embrace change, and navigate ambiguity.

To successfully meet these demands requires optimism, curiosity, a willingness to make mistakes, flexibility, and a long list of characteristics and skills that enable a leader to embrace change as an opportunity—to be able to move through the discomfort of uncertainty towards the future as an exciting possibility.

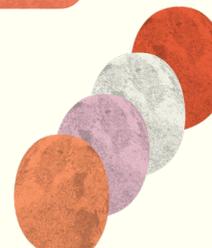
Sufficiency and scarcity mind/body

When leaders develop and adopt a particular mind/body alignment—one that we define as "being centered and in sufficiency"—we see a marked increase in the success of organizational efforts. With this mind/body alignment, a leader is oriented around what is already available as resources. It is founded on realistic optimism and a curiosity that prompts leaders to look at how to use what is presently available to them rather than focus on what is missing or the lack of what they need, such as time, money, talent, or buy-in. Because it's hard to consistently come from this mindset, leaders must also practice "coming back to center": the ongoing alignment of head, heart, and gut, as well as an alignment of values, mind state and behavior. From center, the leader is acting with his or her whole self, from a centered place, and can act coherently from a mind/body alignment of being centered and in sufficiency.

The sufficiency mind/body generally leads towards having the success of all stakeholders' in mind and finding ways to move forward together rather than fighting over limited resources. It also generates an environment of collaboration, creativity, innovation and productivity because leaders have an expanded viewpoint that allows them to see possibilities and options that are often overlooked when overly focused on lack or caught between seemingly polarized choices.

"Center is a basic bodily presence, and it is on this presence that the other bodily states are built."

– Richard Strozzi Heckler, *Anatomy of Change*



However, this mind/body alignment is not widespread. In fact, there is a fundamental tension between the organization's desire for growth and more typical human tendencies that tend to be based in scarcity—a risk-adverse mind/body state. Human beings are biological and neurological creatures. In today's world we often are in roles that require action contrary to some of our hard-wiring.

Case in point: David is a VP of Operations at a small, U.S.-based manufacturing company. He is in a meeting with the senior management team and the CEO is announcing his intention to pursue international expansion, starting with Mexico and Canada. Even while listening to the CEO explain the strategy, David becomes tense. His breath becomes shallow and his body contracts, although he doesn't notice. David's mind races as he anticipates the risks involved and all the possible ways the expansion could fail: the company has insufficient cash flow, people, talent, and expertise. He looks at the downsides: a failed market entry would be a disaster for the company and his individual career. He quickly arrives at the conclusion that the CEO's intention is simply a bad idea, and he decides to set up a meeting to persuade the CEO to move more slowly and stick to expanding domestically this year.

David is reacting to the situation, operating from a scarcity mind/body, which is primarily based in fear and survival. This mind/body creates a lack of willingness to fail or take risk, a discomfort around ambiguity, and a desire

to "know" prior to taking action. From this contracted mindset, David is likely to make less than optimal business choices and to potentially damage his professional relationships. So how does David get from his scarcity and fear to sufficiency and center?

Most often the leaders with whom we work already have some awareness of the habits and patterns that get them in trouble. They may even have had moderate success in modifying some of their less than optimal behaviors. That said, many leaders are still struggling to shift into a new way of thinking, being and acting that will serve them and their organizations more fully. We suggest that including the body in all of its wisdom will greatly enhance any leader's ability to shift to optimal performance.

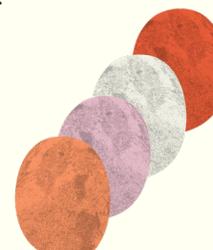
A Mind/Body Alignment

This particular mindset is a perspective based on being aware of and oriented around what is already available as a resource. It is founded on realistic optimism and curiosity that has leaders look at how to use what is presently available to them rather than focus on what is missing.

Creating change & embodying new practices

We are what we practice, and we are always practicing something. Often referred to as habits or behaviors, we repeat these actions over and over again. We practice breathing in certain patterns; we practice talking about ourselves in certain patterns; we engage with others in patterns; we move physically in certain patterns; we think in certain patterns; and so on. These patterns form the matrix we experience as our "reality".

Top performing athletes understand this intimately—the practice of self-doubt versus self-confidence can radically alter their performance in the game. Athletes learn to re-pattern themselves and their thoughts. In addition to being coached to shift their weights, do warm ups, and change their moves, they are also coached to shift their self-talk. They practice these moves over and over again until the new patterns become the norm.



That said, our bodies are optimized for physical survival.

When the stakes are high and change is on the table, there is a tendency to let our biology lead the way. We tend to operate from our past rather than embracing change from a place of creative, reflective thinking.

David, our hero, is engaging with expansion as a threat. His body tightens and his breathing shallows—reactions that were embedded during his childhood and are part of his legacy as a biologically-based organism. He immediately starts focusing on the risks and why the proposal is a bad idea. This is all automatic. He doesn't actively make this choice—it's just what arises because it's already embodied through past actions and experiences.

David's mind/body limits his ability to think creatively about the opportunity. The human organism is optimized for homeostasis and stability. As biological creatures we attempt to stay stable and resist change.

If something is not a threat to survival, it's better to keep everything as it is rather than take the risk of making a change.

"This condition of equilibrium, this resistance to change, is called homeostasis. It characterizes all self regulating systems, from a bacterium to a frog to a human individual to a family to an organization to an entire culture—and it applies to psychological states and behavior as well as to physical functioning."

– George Leonard, *Mastery*

Our somatic training becomes deeply embedded in our bodies, our breathing, and our patterns. Every interaction tends to reinforce the patterns so that they become unconscious habits. The word "somatic" comes from the Greek word soma, which means the unity of mind, body, and spirit. Embedded so deeply, this patterning shows up without thinking and most often when we are under pressure or threat. And we've been "practicing" these

"Under pressure we do not rise to our expectations; we fall to the level of our training."

– Bruce Lee

reactions so long that often we don't even know how to choose anything different, especially in the heat of the moment.

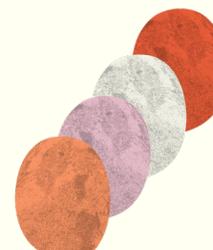
This poses a dilemma for leaders and organizations that want to create change. How does an organism that is designed to seek stability thrive in the face of constant pressure and growth-inspired change?

If David was in a mind/body of sufficiency and center, he would engage the CEO's request quite differently. Instead of trying to persuade the CEO to lower the goal, David would be more likely to use his time and energy to figure out a way to manage the risk while pursuing the upside.

The result is that new possibilities could emerge quickly. David might talk to his team members who know something about Mexico and Canada. He might begin looking for expertise, for possible expansion partners, or explore possibilities of a merger. When he sees it as an opportunity, he can use his energy first to explore possibilities, gather information, and take a moment before responding to his boss at all. He will have time later to fine tune all the details, and perhaps ultimately negotiate with the CEO an optimal solution.

This may not be natural for David, so to switch into this mind/body alignment, David would first need to recognize his automatic reactions and the context in which he is acting.

We are contextual beings. As human beings, context is always operating as the background of thinking, feeling, and doing. If the context is one of scarcity, change will be avoided. If the context is one of sufficiency, change is more likely to be embraced.



All external events are interpreted within one's context. These interpretations, in turn, drive our conversation and actions—and essentially cause us to shape our reality. It is indeed a self-fulfilling prophecy. We shape our world and are shaped by it simultaneously. The context we bring shapes both interpretation (how we see the world) and behavior (how we change and shape the world around us through our actions). For example, if we think someone doesn't like us, we start acting as if they don't like us. We may avoid eye contact, speak curtly, make assumptions, etc. Soon enough the person who we thought doesn't like us will indeed start not liking us. A feedback loop forms that creates a world fully consistent with our own context.

Science has proven over and over again that our mindset influences our body. The placebo effect, for example, is the most documented correlation in all of medicine. If you give someone an inert, inactive pill that the person believes will improve his condition, his or her condition has a high tendency to improve. We shape our reality in incredible ways that science can show, but not fully explain.

So, if we can learn to shift our context, we shift how we see and shape our world.

Most of us see our body as something we have. Our perspective is different: *we do not have a body; we are a body*. Even though the business environment and the daily actions required in business may seem intellectual or strictly mental exercises, our context and mindset arises in and through the body, shaping all of our decisions, actions, and interpersonal communications.

This idea might seem quite radical in a modern mechanistic worldview where we abide by Rene Descartes' words, "We think, therefore we are." Descartes' words were symbolic of the birth of rationalism and the subsequent divorce of mind and body. Ironically, modern science, a direct offspring of rationalistic thinking, is now definitively showing that all of our experience happens from within the framework of the body.

For example, in one research study, people were sitting in a waiting room and were asked to take a pill in preparation for the experiment. For some, the pill was inert (a placebo), but for others, the pill slightly increased their heart rate. People that were given the heart rate increasing pill had a much higher tendency to be anxious and report being nervous about the experiment. The sensations they felt in their body impacted how they were seeing and experiencing the world. The placebo group did not report anxiety.

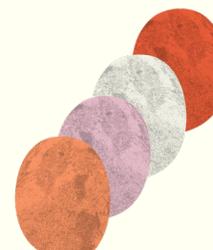
In another study, when participants hold a pencil in their teeth engaging the muscles of a smile, it increased their reported happiness. They comprehend pleasant sentences faster than unpleasant ones. And, it works in reverse: holding a pencil in their teeth to engage the muscles of a frown has them comprehend unpleasant sentences faster than pleasant ones.

We are "structurally determined" creatures. The shape of the body itself—posture, breathing, facial expressions, neuronal pathways, etc.—gives rise to our experience of life.

"The body is the living shape of the self."

– Jeffrey Maitlin, *The Spacious Body*

Renowned leaders often talk about leading "from their gut" and following their instincts. We now know that there is a reason that this is so effective: our bodies have information that we can access if we slow down and learn how to listen. Research suggests we have cells throughout the body that resemble human brain cells in shape, size and function. Biologist and researcher Dr. Candace Pert reveals that most of these cells are clustered in the gut and the heart and operate much like a second and third brain.



Our body is our primary context. All of our experience in this life is experienced through the body.

When we assume the body is simply a complex and perhaps even cumbersome transportation system, we are missing huge amounts of information—data, intuition, deeper knowledge, etc.—that is constantly being offered by the body.

When we take the time to get acquainted with our bodies, we get access to huge amounts of subtle but relevant and important data. This can translate to intuition, knowledge, and even wisdom that can be of great service to the wholeness of our self and of course our leadership.

Even though cognitive biologists like Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela will tell us we are structurally determined and limited, we are also tremendously elastic and malleable. We can and do change and this changeability is as much a part of our biological imperative as is stability. Knowing how to work skillfully with the dynamic tension between stability and change is a key ingredient to the art of embodied leadership and stepping into a mind/body of sufficiency and center.

It is important to become an observer of how we are participating in creating our world. That world—an amalgam of our structurally-determined bodies, our contexts, our thinking, and our feelings—impacts how we relate to our employees, and how we relate with managers, spouses and children. Once we can see and feel all the parts of the whole, we can learn to shift ourselves and leverage our elasticity. This gives us tremendous power in the face of being an embodied human. There are specific steps you can take to shifting your own mindset.



Six steps to shifting to a sufficiency mind/body state

1 Observe your patterns under pressure, in both your behaviors and in your body: Although you may be eager to create change, first you have to learn what you do when under pressure. Only by becoming aware of these patterns, can you change them. We distinguish this from learning about *why* you do what you do. That is the work of psychotherapy. In our investigation, we ask you to turn your attention to how you do what you do. And you can begin by being curious about your own reactions within the pressure of daily life, the modern day equivalent of the tiger chasing us in the tundra.

After something happens, ask yourself how you responded. How did you respond when asked to innovate, do more with less, were given bad news, or felt threatened? Did you:

- Move faster and make quick decisions?
Or hold off on important decisions?
- Get bossy and bark orders?
Or pull back with a wait and see attitude?
- Delegate more? Delegate less?

Although everyone's expression is unique, there are a finite number of patterned responses to the pressures we face. When the sympathetic nervous system is aroused, heart rate increases, respiration rate increases, and cortisol, a stress hormone, is released into the bloodstream. Essentially, the body prepares to react. What happens next varies by person, but almost always, people react in one of four ways:

- a. **Fight:** Push for what you want, often through attacks, getting bossy, etc.
- b. **Flee:** Although it might be "running away," flee almost always looks like someone trying to end the conversation quickly. They may make an excuse to end the meeting or may appease the other person so that they can leave.
- c. **Freeze:** This is when the brain responds by simply taking your thoughts away so that you don't act

or do anything to worsen the situation. You may find yourself speechless, unsure how to react, or caught like a "deer in headlights."

- d. **Flock:** You scramble to find other people that are in your "in group" and associate with them. In our experience, flocking is more often done by women than men.

Which of these do you most relate to? Where awareness goes, attention flows.

2 Catch yourself in the act. Be aware, in the moment, of how you are responding: Once you are aware of your pattern, you can see it in action—how it functions and how it hijacks your best intentions. In the beginning, you may notice the pattern long afterwards, then you'll get better catching yourself just a few minutes into the reaction, and then finally, you'll catch yourself just as the reaction is arising. Once you can catch your pattern in the act, rather than just react from within your pattern, you can use that awareness to shift your attention. Choice and power start by catching yourself in the act.

3 Center yourself: When you catch yourself in the act, you have the opportunity to choose a new behavior from a centered and powerful place. Instead of reacting from being off balance, center yourself first, so that you can move from a place of clarity, openness, strength, and determination.

We center ourselves by dropping our attention into our anatomical center of gravity, usually around the belly area. From center, we can generate momentum with ease, power, and economy of movement. In Aikido

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and in other Asian martial arts and traditions, the anatomical center—the *ki*, pronounced “key”—is where we have our greatest life force. Coming from the center or the *ki* opens up new possibilities that require less force because we can access our natural power. With practice, centering takes only a short moment, often with breath and attention. Over time we can become agile at shifting from a survival/scarcity/fear biology and mind state to a place of center and a mind state of sufficiency.

With training this becomes not just a good idea or concept but an actionable set of practices a leader can use to create the mood, direction and trajectory of a top performing team.

David reacted to the CEO’s response with a mild fight response—as a result, he was going to try to get the CEO to change his opinion. If he catches himself in the act, he will notice that he wants to push back. He will pause, center himself, and then decide what course of action is really best in the situation.

4

Open with width & a relaxed stance: Where our attention goes, our energy follows. Instead of focusing on the boundaries and constraints of a situation, start by focusing on the possibility and opportunity. Somatically, this is placing attention on your breadth and widening your physical frame and field of vision—literally relaxing your eyes so that instead of being narrowly focused, they are soft and you are able to take in a lot of peripheral information. Hunters use this technique so that they don’t spook their prey.

As you soften and release—opening instead of contracting—you are cultivating the leadership mindset critical for leading yourself and others through change. Relaxing under pressure opens up new actions and possibilities, and creates a wider perspective so that you can see the forest through trees, choose the best course of action, and then change direction whenever appropriate.

If David softens, he will start to see that there are many choices available to him. He could push

back, but there are many other actions he could take instead, including doing more research, engaging others, etc. With a relaxed, centered stance, David realizes that there is no need to resist the initiative immediately. Instead, he’ll collect more information and re-evaluate the situation when he knows more.

“Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.”

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

5

Connect: We are all connected already, but in times of crises, we often disconnect. Articulated so beautifully by Martin Luther King, Jr., even when we think we are not connected, we are deeply affecting one another.

In our leadership case, David’s mind/body will impact everyone on his team and the people around him.

Human beings are an “open loop” system, which means our nervous systems are greatly influenced and impacted by other people, and vice versa. We tend to mirror each other. Spouses’ heart rhythms start to match. And if two people are sitting in a room, the electromagnetic energy (as measured on an EKG) of one person’s heart impacts the other persons. Changes in one person’s EKG are seen and can be measured in the other person’s EKG.

Likewise, when a baby comes in contact with a primary caregiver, the baby’s heart rate changes, relaxation hormones are released, and blood pressure changes. This reciprocity in our regulatory systems does not change when we reach adulthood. While we do learn to self-regulate, we remain an open loop, influenced by the nervous systems around us.

This has huge implications for leadership. If your body as a leader is contracted, shaped by scarcity, fear or cynicism, how capable will you be of inspiring others to change? And if the leaders in your organization



“Adults remain social animals; they continue to require a source of stabilization outside themselves. That open-loop design means that in some important ways, people cannot be stable on their own—not should or shouldn’t be—but can’t be. The prospect is disconcerting to many, especially in a society that prizes individuality as our does. Total self sufficiency turns out to be a day dream whose bubble is burst by the sharp edge of the limbic brain. Stability means finding people who regulate you well and staying near them.”

– Amini, MD, Lannon, MD, and Lewis, MD, A General Theory of Love

have the mind/body of scarcity, the whole organization will mirror that mind/body.

To shift yourself most quickly from one mind/body alignment to another, we assert that the most effective and efficient way is through the body—by practicing something new and learning how to use the plasticity of our body/mind to access new mind states, new behaviors, and therefore new worlds.

Leadership at its best is with full awareness of this connection. By skillfully cultivating their open loop nervous system, leaders can inspire others, build trust, and move people into action in the face of ambiguity and challenge.

Even through difficult conversations, it is possible to maintain a connection with the other person while also being tough on the problem itself. David can push back on his CEO while maintaining his connection with him. This will generate an engaged conversation where both the CEO and David can learn together.

6

Investigate what is enough and where is enough already present: The art of leadership starts with relaxing under pressure and inviting leaders to investigate for themselves when there is enough:

enough change, enough pressure on the team, enough direction, enough empowerment, enough delegation, enough tough love, enough stretching and reaching forward. With too much of any of these, we flood ourselves and our team members, causing them to resist.

Too little attention or care or pressure and the system remains so stable that nothing moves forward. Just enough and we can maintain connection to ourselves and others, and invite them to shift with us.

As Buckminster Fuller suggested 50 years ago, if you stand in the reality that there is already enough—food, water, clean air, goods, etc., and you are already enough as an individual—many subtle and not so subtle shifts in body, mind, and behavior ensue.

If we could get inside David’s body/mind, we would see that the reason he thinks the company’s international expansion is a bad idea is partly generated from self-doubt. He wonders if he’s a good enough leader to pull this off. If David allows doubt and scarcity to prevail as his fundamental state, this will have tremendous impact on his approach. It will influence the questions he asks, and ultimately the mood of his whole team. He may go to one of his teammates and ask, “Do you think we can pull this off?” This very question is projecting his doubt. Instead, if David is standing in sufficiency and coming from a clear, connected, and open space, he would ask a forward-looking question, such as “What ideas do you have to successfully make this happen?” A question like that will generate a different mood—one of possibility, and a different response—one of new information, in the conversation.

If your body as a leader is contracted, shaped by scarcity, fear or cynicism, how capable will you be of inspiring others to change? And if the leaders in your organization have the mind/body of scarcity, the whole organization will mirror that mind/body.

Summary

These six steps are practical ways to find your center in the face of a difficult situation and have more choice. By practicing a sufficiency mind/body alignment in low stakes conversations, it is more likely you can generate that mind/body when the going gets tough. Identify your core pattern of relating under pressure, and design a regimen that cultivates a more desired pattern:

1. Observe your patterns under pressure—in your behaviors, thoughts, and in your body
2. Catch yourself in the act.
3. Center yourself
4. Open with width and a relaxed stance
5. Connect
6. Investigate what is enough and where is enough already present?

As the Zen master tells the student: "Not too much suffering so that the student is flooded and unable to learn and not too little so there is no incentive to practice. Just enough suffering so that the student may fully awaken."

Working through the body is a potent gateway to reshape your context and capability to embrace change, inspire others, and reach goals greater than you previously thought were possible. When physical patterns, mental clarity, emotional acumen, and spiritual connection are all lined up, you can increase your ability to produce results and inspire others to do the same. By practicing these steps, you will be able to stay centered, open, and connected in a much wider range of situations and engage with choice from a sufficiency mindset.

As with all arts, those who practice wholeheartedly and with rigor rise to the top of their game. Being masterful at leading others from a centered place is a task well worth the effort.

ABOUT SEVEN STONES

Seven Stones is a leadership journeys company founded by Gina LaRoche and Jennifer Cohen in 2009. Our learning programs, coaching practice, organizational consulting engagements and groundbreaking thought leadership work are all designed to help bring about a world that is loving, courageous and just. We pursue this vision primarily by shifting the paradigm from one of scarcity to one of Sustainable Abundance® in the individuals, organizations and communities with whom we work.

