

3 QUALITIES FOR PEAK PERFORMANCE ON THE JOB AND IN LIFE:

Safety, Choice, Presence

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I. SAFETY: Create a *Psychological Safety Net* to Stop Unnecessary Stress

To gain a physical sense of how providing yourself with a psychological safety net shifts you from fear, stress, perfectionism, and procrastination to the safety necessary to *perform optimally*.

Read this exercise and imagine or visualize – with your eyes opened or closed – what it feels like to be in each scene. Then notice how you respond.

Scene 1. Imagine that your job is to walk a board that is one-foot-wide, thirty feet long, and four inches thick and that you have all of the ability necessary to complete this task.

Can you take the first step without fear or hesitation? Let's assume that you say "yes."

Scene 2. Imagine that your job is the same and that your ability is the same, only now the board is 100 feet above the ground suspended between two buildings.

Can you do the task now? If not, what's stopping you? How safe do you feel?

Most people answer that they're afraid of falling, or making a mistake that could cause serious injury and probably death.

Scene 3. While you've been paralyzed by fear and are hesitating on starting and completing this task, your boss, friends and family – who know you can do it – are accusing you of procrastination and advising you to "just do it." But you know it's not that easy.

With so much at stake, you feel you have to do it perfectly – no room for mistakes – or else you'll die or feel like you're dying.

Suddenly everything changes. You can feel heat behind you and can hear the crackling sounds of fire. The building supporting your end of the board is on fire!

Can you overcome your hesitation and paralysis now? How did you break free of fear?

How important is it now to do the job perfectly? Are you still worried about falling?

Do you tell yourself you work best under pressure and deadlines or do you just do it?

Scene 4. In this scene, imagine that the task and your ability remain the same, that there's no fire or deadline, but, just four feet below the board, there's now a strong net.

Can you walk the board now? If so, what has changed for you? Note that you can still make a mistake, fall, and not do it perfectly.

Notice and write down the words and feelings that come with having a safety net under your board. You might say, "I won't die." or "It won't be the end of the world if I make a mistake." or "I'm still afraid of heights but knowing there's a safety net allows me to think about just doing the job instead of worrying about falling."

Make yourself safe with yourself and you will diminish most of what stresses you in life. However, you choose to say it, make this message of safety the *psychological and emotional safety net you give to yourself*.

Write down and keep handy your personal message of Safety, Worth, and Presence.

II. CHOICE: Break the inner conflict between "You have to" and "I don't want to"

Between stimulus and response, there's a space. In this space lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In [choosing] our response lies our growth and our happiness.

--Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*

Exercise: Acting from Choice

1. Notice and listen for the words and feeling that accompany strong wants, resistance, and dictatorial "shoulds." Consider most of these reactions to be "messages" from primitive aspects of yourself that require your Leadership Self to make an executive decision.

Notice which thoughts and feelings precede ambivalence, resistance, indecision, and procrastination.

2. Notice if you first hear the authoritarian "you should" voice of the six-year-old or the rebellious "I don't want to" voice of the two-year-old. This will let you know which side of the inner conflict you identify with most.

Remember that, even when you're aware of only one voice, the opposing voice is still there, holding onto the other end of that tug-of-war rope. You must address both sides.

3. Observe the tug-of-war between voices, parts, and wants, and provide a leadership direction and choice that is consistent with your adult objectives. You are using your human brain whenever you make a *choice*.

Remember, you don't have to want to do the activity you're choosing. "Choice" is a third place that is neither "want to" or "have to." It only functions in a very different and new part of your brain.

4. Give yourself what you *need*, to paraphrase Mick Jagger, not necessarily what you *want*. By providing all parts of you with a leadership presence in the real world, you are "hearing" archaic reactions and connecting them to a flexible brain that can adapt to what's needed now. You don't always get what you want, but when you get what you need--to feel heard, validated, and connected to a larger, stronger Self--you'll find that your wants are more than satisfied.

5. Notice how leading from your Leadership Self, and its ability to choose, quickly frees you to follow through on achieving your goals without resistance or self-sabotage.

You can expect a feeling of empowerment as you break through inner conflict and gain the cooperation of all parts of you in moving forward on the path that you have chosen.

III. PRESENCE: You Must Be Present to Win

Only in the present can you focus your energy to do your best.

There is no stress when you make your life and work safe in the present moment; there is only an efficient flow of energy, experienced as excitement and effectiveness.

EXERCISE: Use the Centering Exercise [below] – take a few seconds to get in touch with your priorities and mission, and to choose the right action **NOW**. Use the word “Now” to focus.]

COGNITIVE STRESS/Anxiety is experienced when your mind is time-traveling and your body is providing energy to try to get into the VIRTUAL REALITIES of the past and future. To reduce anxiety, bring your mind into the present where your body always is.

Focused in 1 minute (12 breaths) [see attached handout on Centering Exercise]

- 1) 1-3 breaths to let go of thoughts & images of work from the past
- 2) 1-3 breaths to let go of thoughts & images of work in the future
- 3) 1-3 breaths to float down into the chair, feel it’s support, and choose to be in the present with this work
- 4) 3 breaths to count up curious and interested about working from Effective Self-Management, with more of your brain-cell power, eager and ready to begin

Centering Exercise: Shift to Optimal Performance*

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Use this exercise each time you start a project. Within just a few weeks your body and mind will learn to naturally let go of tension allowing you to focus on working efficiently and optimally free of stress and anxiety. Your energy is now available to be released in the present, making you a *peak performer*.

Centering is a 30-second to one-minute, six-breath exercise that shifts your mind from fretting about the past and future to performing optimally in the **present** – the only time you can be effective. Centering in the present clears your mind of regrets about the past and worries about anticipated problems in the so-called future.

As you withdraw your thoughts from these imaginary times and problems, you experience a stress-free vacation in the present. You naturally experience a form of centering when you engage in joyful abandon in play, the easy flow of creativity, or effortless performance in sports, music, or focused work.

THE CENTERING EXERCISE

Read the following to yourself or record it and play it each time you start a project.

1. Begin by taking one to three deep breaths, in three parts: #1 Inhale, #2 Hold your breath and tense your muscles, and, #3 Exhale slowly and float down into the support of the chair, floor, or bed. As you exhale let go of the last email or commute and become aware that the chair is holding you, freeing your body of unnecessary muscle tension. Let go of all thoughts and images about work from the past. Clear your mind and your body of all concerns about what you think “should have” or “shouldn't have” happened in the past. Let go of trying to fix old problems and other people. Let each exhalation be a signal to be free of the past.

Say to yourself as you exhale: “I release my mind and body from the past.”

2. With your next breath, let go of all images and thoughts about what you think may happen in the future – all the “what ifs” and goals. With each exhalation clear your muscles, your heart, and your mind of the work of trying to control the so-called future. Let go of struggling to be “done” or “finished” in the future. Say to yourself as you exhale: “I bring my mind back from the imaginary future.”

3. With your next breath, say: “I’m choosing to be in this present moment, in front of this project. I let go of trying to control any other time or striving to be any particular way. I notice how little effort it takes to simply breathe comfortably and accept the just right level of energy to focus on this moment and this task – in the only moment there is to be effective and productive, now.

Say to yourself as you exhale: “I bring my mind into the present.”

4. With your next three breaths count up from 1 to 3: “One, becoming more adequately alert with each breath; Two, curious and interested about going rapidly from not-knowing to knowing; and, Three, eager to begin, curious and interested about how much I will accomplish in such a short period of time.”

5. In just a few seconds you have shifted to a meditative sanctuary where your conscious mind can be safe from the past and worries about the future. In this quiet moment just allow the natural processes of your mind and body to provide you with focused concentration and creative solutions. Now you can more easily and rapidly access your inner genius and move quickly from not-knowing to knowing something you didn’t know a moment ago.

Say to yourself: “I am centered within my larger, wiser, stronger Self.”

*Adapted from Dr. Fiore's: *Awaken Your Strongest Self: Break Free of Stress, Inner Conflict, and Self-Sabotage* [McGraw-Hill, 2010]. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce or copy as long as this copyright notice and contact information are attached: © Neil Fiore, PhD, 1988-2015 Website: www.neilfiore.com neil@neilfiore.com Videos: www.youtube.com/fioreproductivity 1496 Solano Ave., Albany, CA 94706-2148 Voice Mail: 510/ 525 - 2673