

# A HEARTY LIFE

**Using Stress, Anxiety & Discomfort  
For Growth, Wellbeing & Fulfillment**

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# WELCOME!



For many years I have been speaking and coaching using the principles and practices that follow. I have written this ebook and made it available for free because people have told me that they find the approach helpful. That is enough for me to keep at it.

As long as we have been given the gift of life, I feel that we may as well support each other through the challenges that come with it.

We can practice feeling deeply, acting wisely & living fully right in the midst of challenging, uncomfortable & uncertain circumstances.

We don't have to wait for things to get better - the opportunity to be kind, loving, helpful, purposeful, grateful & joyful exists right here, right now.

I sincerely hope that you find something useful in these pages.

# IN A NUTSHELL

**Discomfort is not an obstacle to the life you want.**

Discomfort is a powerful opportunity to increase your wellbeing and fulfillment.

You can use discomfort to:

**Accept** life on life's terms.

**Trust** your ability to deal with whatever shows up.

**Cultivate** awareness, compassion, connection, gratitude and love.

**Focus** on what really matters

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**You are not supposed to be happy all the time.** Rather than striving for the impossible goal of being constantly happy or comfortable, you can live a life that is based on wellbeing and fulfillment.

**You have powerful internal resources.** Calm, confidence, compassion, gratitude, wonder, love, and joy are all emotional states that can help you live wisely and fully. You can learn to access, strengthen and apply these resources in even the most challenging circumstances

**It takes practice, not magic.** The promise of instant transformation is a compelling marketing strategy, but it is not grounded in the reality of how human beings gain skill. Lasting change requires a willingness to keep at it, to learn from the results you get, and to incorporate new insights into your practice. Over time, you will find that you will be able to work peacefully and powerfully with uncomfortable or overwhelming circumstances that you used to avoid or resist.



# **This ebook is presented in five parts:**

## **Part One: A Hearty Life**

**The Human heart**

**The Questions**

**The Unwinnable Game**

## **Part Two: A Hearty Mindset**

**Discomfort is inevitable**

**Struggle is added**

**Love is available**

**Everything is practice**

## **Part Three: A Hearty Skillset**

**Being with what is**

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**Connecting with compassion**

**Cultivating what you seek**

## **Part Four: Hearty Distinctions**

**Comfort & fulfillment**

**Circumstances & practice**

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**Preference & purpose**

## **Part Five: Hearty Practice**

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**Unstruggling**

**Trusting Your Wise Self**

**Supportive Communication**



# PART ONE: A HEARTY LIFE

**The human heart is an enduring metaphor** for traits such as courage, compassion, confidence, kindness, toughness and tenderness. Hearty also means wholehearted, heartfelt, warm-hearted, joyous, spirited, healthy, strong, resilient, complete, wise, sincere, genuine, faithful and supportive.

**Hearty means nourishing.** This is first definition in the dictionary. I believe that it is a beautiful aspiration to live a life that is nourishing for you and for others.

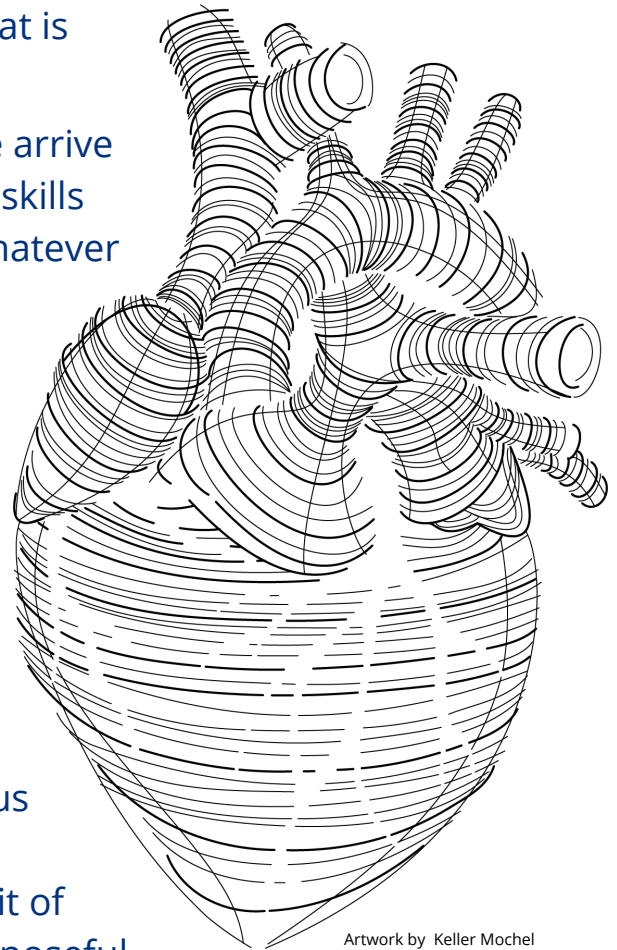
**A hearty life is a practice.** There isn't some place we arrive or goal we achieve. We are continually cultivating the skills necessary to respond peacefully and powerfully to whatever shows up in life.

**A hearty life is not about perfection.** The reason I like the image of the heart to the right, rather than the simple outline that we see at Valentine's day, is that the heart is complicated and messy. There is plenty of room in this practice for missing the mark, taking responsibility, gaining insight, and beginning again. We can do all of this without harsh self-criticism or judgment.

**This practice leverages our human capacity** to focus on fulfillment, wellbeing and connection. Rather than being driven by the avoidance of discomfort or pursuit of comfort, we can live a rich, deeply connected and purposeful life in the presence of all kinds of internal and external challenges.

**This is not the "the truth"** or the only way to approach life. The hearty life is a set of perspectives and practices based on scientific research, lasting wisdom, and lived experience. Do not take my word for any of this. The only way to find out if it works for you is to try it and pay attention to what happens.

**Practicing these skills requires that we embody them.** Doing and feeling is different than thinking and talking. At first, many of these practices can seem abstract and conceptual. The more you practice, the more you will feel it in your body. Any resistance or skepticism you feel about this kind of practice is completely normal. Most of us were not raised with instructions on how to work with what goes on in our own nervous system.



Artwork by Keller Mochel



# THE QUESTIONS

***How do we thrive in the presence of uncertainty & discomfort?  
How do we experience & express our humanity deeply & fully?***



**It began as a personal quest.** I have been seeking answers to these questions for as long as I can remember. Offering what I have discovered has become my life's work. As a coach and facilitator, I get to work with children, professional athletes, corporate leaders, educators... people from just about every vocation and stage of life.

**Humans care about their future** - and it is impossible to know exactly what that future will be. We want things to be the way we want them to be, and we cannot always make it so. The path forward is not always clear, and even when we know what we need to do, we often feel uncomfortable doing it.

**There is no magic bullet.** Quick fixes and lifehacks do not make the human condition go away. There is no epiphany, breakthrough, or weekend retreat that removes discomfort and uncertainty from life. Anyone who tells you otherwise is selling something - a product, a service, or a belief system. As long as you are alive, you will come up against all kinds of challenges that are baked into the human experience.



**The good news?** Thirty years of researching, reading, observing, discussing, practicing, coaching and teaching has convinced me that we can negotiate this human experience with grace, wisdom and joy. The better news? You already have what you need. It just takes practice.

# THE UNWINNABLE GAME

**When I was younger, I felt anxious - a lot.** Sometimes just being in my own skin felt like a challenge. Many of my attempts to escape the discomfort of my anxiety only led to more anxiety. When I finally acknowledged that my approach to life might be the issue, it freed me to look at things differently.

**We play hide, seek and tag with our feelings.**

We have all learned from a young age to play an unwinnable game. We obsessively chase after and cling to comfort while compulsively avoiding discomfort. Almost every product, service and life strategy is sold to us with the promise that it will make us feel better (or at least less bad).



We are encouraged to achieve, acquire, impress, adventure and/or earn our way to some blissful point on the horizon where we will no longer have to deal with fear, anger, sadness, restlessness, frustration, resentment, boredom... When we fail to escape the discomfort of being human, we often chalk it up to something that is wrong with us. We tell ourselves that if only we were smarter, harder working, taller, more beautiful, more kind or luckier...or if only life were more fair...



**Feelings are internal events that come and go.** This biological reality means that no matter how wealthy, beautiful, talented, smart, accomplished, or popular we are, you are going to experience discomfort. Despite the fact that "happily ever after" only shows up in fairy tales, we keep hoping...

**This escapist approach to uncomfortable emotions is taking a toll.** We have more ways to entertain and distract ourselves than at any time in human history. Many of our efforts to avoid normal human feelings are diminishing the quality of our lives and relationships. The way we eat, drink, work, sit, shop and scroll is making us increasingly stressed, anxious, lonely, exhausted, depressed and unhealthy. While we have access to more lifesaving technology than ever before, the children born today in the United States will not live as long as their parents.

**An alternative is to practice A Hearty Life.**



# PART TWO: A HEARTY MINDSET

It is helpful to start with some basic assumptions about the human experience. The easiest way to begin is with a simple example from daily life. When we are caught in traffic, we might feel some **discomfort** as we imagine being late. You may notice some tightness in your chest or a sinking feeling in your stomach as you see the red lights build up in front of you.



We often **struggle** with this discomfort. Perhaps you grip the steering wheel more tightly, clench your jaw, hunch your shoulders, or hold your breath a bit. Rarely in these situations are we feeling much **love** for the other drivers on the road. We tend to think of our struggle as a direct result of the circumstances we are facing. Generally we don't think of our experience in terms of what we are choosing to **practice** in that moment.

**How we relate to discomfort, struggle, love and practice is fundamental to a hearty life.** The four components of a hearty mindset are:

*Discomfort is inevitable Struggle is added Love is available Everything is practice*

**Discomfort is inevitable.** If you live inside a human body, you are going to experience uncomfortable physical and emotional sensations. Dissatisfaction, restlessness, frustration, overwhelm - these are very human experiences. Freedom comes from making peaceful and powerful choices in the presence of discomfort, not from its absence. Most of us were never taught how to work skillfully with discomfort. We were taught to avoid uncomfortable feelings and situations, to indulge and wallow in them, or to pretend that we are "fine" no matter what. Some of our efforts to escape discomfort (or rescue others from their discomfort) conflict with our goals and values - they leave us less healthy and fulfilled.

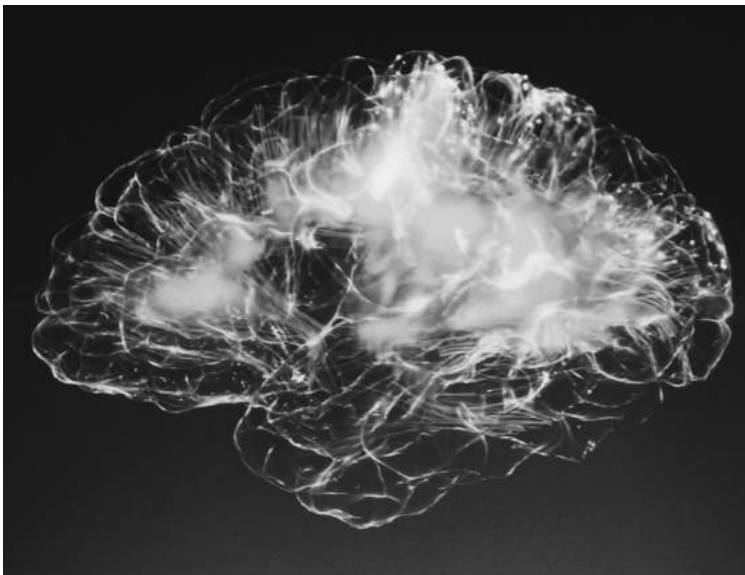






**Struggle is added.** In order to do anything, effort is required. We need to burn calories to live a life and get stuff done. Struggle is different than effort. Struggle is the energy we put into resisting or avoiding the way things are. Struggle consumes energy that might otherwise go into helpful action. Struggle includes tensing and contracting our bodies, ruminating, complaining and blaming.

**Love is available.** The challenging nature of life does not negate the miraculous nature of life - or vice versa. Love is available when we are stuck in traffic, waiting in line, on hold on the phone, or have just spilled coffee on our white shirt. We can access and experience love simply by being loving. We do not need to get our situation just right so that others will love us in hopes that this will cause us to experience love. Being loving is the greatest shortcut to experiencing love in any circumstance.



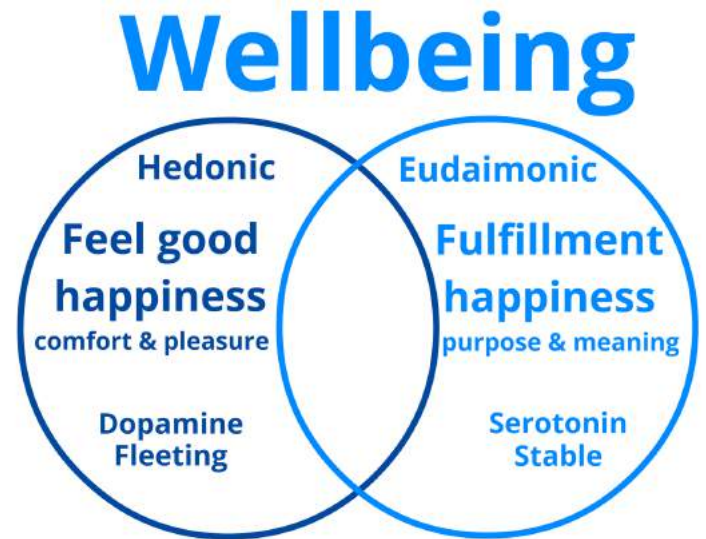
**Everything is practice.** Our brains are constantly rewiring themselves depending on how we use our attention and energy. Your brain monitors your behavior and then it builds or dismantles networks of neurons to make your behavior easier and more automatic over time. We get better at whatever we do - whether we want to or not. So, be careful what you practice, you are going to get better at it.

# PART THREE: HEARTY DISTINCTIONS

In practicing a hearty life, there are four useful distinctions:

*comfort & fulfillment, circumstances & practice, events & stories, and preference & purpose.*

**Comfort and fulfillment** both contribute to our wellbeing, but they are not equal. Comfort and pleasure (hedonic wellbeing) are fleeting states controlled by short-lived neurotransmitters. Fulfillment and purpose (eudaimonic wellbeing) are more durable states controlled by longer lasting neurotransmitters. Maximizing comfort (or minimizing discomfort) is not the same as maximizing fulfillment. In fact, the more we focus on the pursuit of comfort, the more we will diminish fulfillment. The sweet spot is maximizing behaviors that are both pleasurable and purposeful, being aware of behaviors that are merely comfortable with no other purpose, and accepting that many purposeful activities will not necessarily be comfortable.

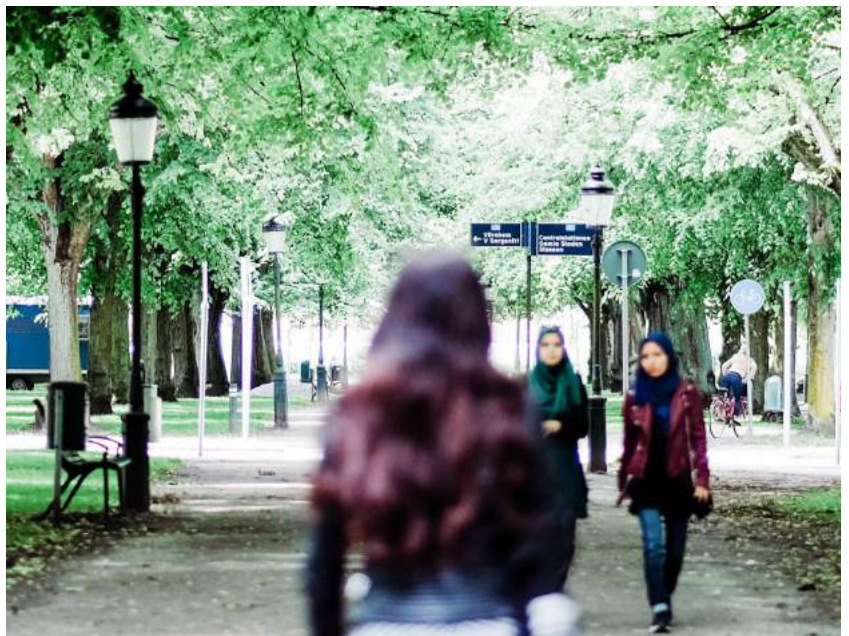


**Circumstances and practice** both influence your wellbeing. However, you can't really choose which events, people, moods, thoughts or feelings show up in life. Sometimes these things show up the way we want them to and sometimes they don't. Because circumstances are generally outside our control, the more we use them to determine the quality of our lives, the more we will struggle. On the other hand, we can choose what we practice - where we focus our attention and energy. We can choose which skills and internal resources we build and how we respond to what shows up. The more we use our practice to determine the quality of our lives, the more we thrive. A hearty life is practiced by acknowledging and accepting circumstances and focusing on purposeful practice.





We are always working with both **events & stories**. Have you ever walked by someone, greeted them, and gotten no response? Our brain can immediately come up with all kinds of explanations for why it occurred - stories about the other person, stories about ourselves, stories about modern society and the human condition... With every situation, there is what happens, and there is what we feel and think it means. The human brain is



constantly assigning meaning to everything and everyone. We tell stories about external events and internal feelings. We have thoughts about whether what is happening is right or wrong, good or bad. We have stories about how it should be different or better. We get very attached to our stories and we often defend them vigorously. We cannot keep these stories and judgments from showing up, but we can step back and find a little space for curiosity and flexibility between what is actually happening and the story we are telling about it.



In any moment, we are faced with both **preference and purpose**. We know it isn't good for us, but we want the donut anyway. We know it is good for us, but we do not want to go for a run. Because we are human, sometimes we feel like doing what is important and sometimes we don't. This is not moral weakness or a lack of character - it is a skill to choose purpose over preference when they conflict. At the heart of successful self-regulation is the ability to acknowledge that we do not feel like doing what we have committed to and then taking the next action that is needed. We do not have to wait until we feel like it.



## PART FOUR: A HEARTY SKILLSET

In practicing a hearty life, there are four skills we are building and strengthening:  
*Being with what is, Choosing on purpose, Connecting with compassion, Cultivating what we seek*

### Being with what is:

We can meet life with awareness, acceptance and clarity. This is the skill of stepping back and observing what is happening without resisting, avoiding, or reacting compulsively.



### Choosing on purpose

We can anchor our action in valued goals, commitments and relationships. This skill gives us direction when we are on autopilot, overwhelmed, or uncertain of next steps.

### Connecting with compassion:

We can take compassionate, understanding and supportive action without seeking anything in return. One of the greatest things we can do for our wellbeing is to be of service. Opportunities for kindness are endless.



### Cultivating what we seek:

We can access compassion, gratitude, wonder and love. Rather than hoping that the right set of circumstances will lead to the kinds of internal experiences we want to have, we can practice accessing the internal resources that make life rich.

# BEING WITH WHAT IS

**There are two critical elements to being with what is:**  
*Accepting awareness and compassionate confidence*

**Accepting awareness** is a conscious knowledge of where your attention is combined with an openness to how things actually are.

**Developing a conscious relationship to thoughts & feelings is incredibly helpful.**

You can build powerful awareness for the impulses and urges that show up inside you. You can gain insight into your automatic responses to life. Awareness is the foundation for effective choices that are aligned with your values and goals.

**Acceptance is not the same as giving up or giving in.** It is the simple acknowledgment of what is actually happening - whether you like it or not. Acceptance puts us on the path to a solution much sooner and with less wasted energy going to resistance or avoidance. Acceptance allows us to use failure, setback, and the resistance of others as feedback that informs our strategy and our efforts moving forward.

**Compassionate confidence** is a combination of acknowledging that what we are feeling is human and trusting that we are up to working with it.

**Sometimes we feel that we can't take it.** We often want to figure out a way to bypass pain or discomfort. Compassion is the willingness to be with whatever is being felt without fixing it or rescuing. Confidence is the trust that we can deal with whatever we are facing or will face. We can extend compassionate confidence to others. We can be with them when they are struggling and we can trust that they are up to feeling it.





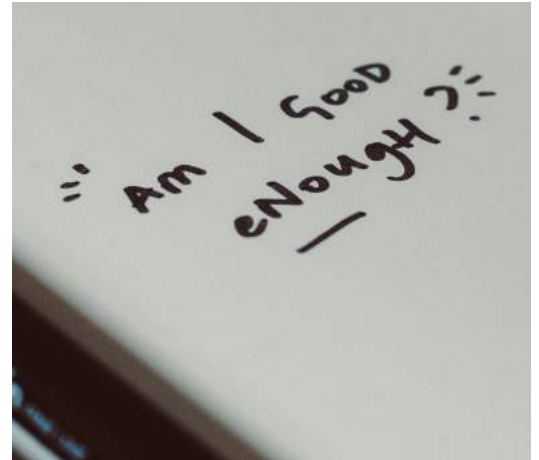
**Clarity** comes from the willingness to acknowledge that you have a subjective view of the world that is unique to you. Your experience of the world is internally created by your nervous system - there is no way to have an objective view of reality. However, you can develop the ability to acknowledge your subjectivity and be more open to considering other perspectives.

**Thoughts are events.** Each of us experiences thousands of thoughts every day. Many of them are just random gossip between neurons. You cannot control automatic thoughts, but you can choose which ones you let pass and which ones you listen to. Many thoughts include harsh negative judgments and rigid certainty that lacks factual support. The time we spend spinning in our negative thoughts can keep us from being present or productive.



**Feelings are information** - they pose no threat and are not commands to be followed blindly. Sensations are inherently neutral and we can learn to see them this way. We can watch how we give meaning to our feelings and how the reflexive avoidance of some feelings and pursuit of others can lead to ineffective behavior.

**Beliefs can be limiting.** In an effort not to miss a potential threat, your nervous system is constantly seeking patterns around you. From a survival perspective, it is better to make false negative associations than it is to miss something dangerous - this is where superstitions come from. This process leaves us with beliefs that feel true. Bringing awareness, acceptance and clarity to our thoughts and feelings allows us to challenge our limiting beliefs.





# CHOOSING ON PURPOSE

**We can live with purpose.** We are constantly bombarded by external demands and distractions as well as internal impulses and urges. Most of our behavior can easily run without conscious control. Our ability to be on autopilot can help us be efficient, but it can also lead us to engage in habitual behavior that is not effective or purposeful. Doing what is familiar or popular is often the most comfortable choice. In light of all of this, we need access to something more enduring than our temporary circumstances, thoughts, & feelings. Having consistent connection to enduring values, goals and commitments helps us choose meaningful and effective actions. In addition, focusing on what we value most is strongly associated with physical and psychological wellbeing.



Photo by Ahmed Zayan

**What is most important?** Connecting often with what you value and what is needed by others is at the core of self-regulation and fulfillment. The goal is to embody what matters so that you can return to it in a powerful way throughout your day. Of course, your understanding or clarity about what is important to you may evolve over time with further insight. Using the questions below, write for at least 10 minutes without stopping. You don't have to answer each question – instead use them as prompts to help you keep writing for the entire 10 minutes.

***What do you want to have at the center of your life?***

***What kinds of relationships do you want to have?***

***How do you want to experience the world?***

***To what are you most deeply committed?***

***How do you want to help others?***

***What do you want to achieve?***

***What are you grateful for?***

***What needs to change?***

**We can feel what matters.** After you have finished writing, look over what you have written. Work to distill your response into 3-5 words that represent what is most important to you. As you identify these words, pay attention to how you feel. Spend some time asking yourself why the 3-5 things above are important. If you put your time and energy into these things, what would that get for you? Why do they matter? What is beneath them? What is at the very heart of your life?



**Anchors keep us from drifting.** Connecting a memory, image to the feeling of what is most important can be very useful. We can connect an action – such as smiling, putting your hand on your chest, or taking a deep breath – this gives us a powerful anchor that we can return to repeatedly throughout the day. The more frequently and deeply we connect to a sense of purpose during each day, the more fulfillment we will experience. With practice, we can find purpose in whatever is happening. This allows us to use any situation as an opportunity to act on our principles and values.

**What does your schedule say?** If someone looked at your planner or followed you around during the day, would they know what is most important to you? When you consider how you commit your time, it is powerful to reference the goals, relationships and commitments you value most. The more your schedule is aligned with your sense of purpose, the more fulfilling your days will be.



**We always have a choice.** Even in extremely difficult and limiting circumstances, we always have choices. When we find ourselves in a "spin cycle" in our head, we have three choices: we can keep spinning, we can take some action, or we can let the issue go. Sometimes the consequences of an action are greater than we are willing to deal with and the only choice that makes sense in that moment is to let go and put your energy elsewhere. Letting go of something you are spinning about always begins with noticing you are spinning and then bringing your attention to something that is present - the sensations of your feet on the ground, the sights or sounds around you, the sensation of the breath in your body...

# Three choices



**Spinning**



**Taking Action**



**Letting go**

**The practice of letting go begins by bringing attention to the present**

**Every choice and action includes intent and consequences.** In order to evaluate the effectiveness of our decisions & behavior, we need to consider both the intent behind the choice and the actual results of the choice. By acknowledging that well-intended choices can have unintended consequences, we can gain greater clarity and humility. Rather than defend our choices, we can simply learn from them.



**Accepting responsibilities for our choices is a source of freedom.** One of the most powerful things we can do is simply accept responsibility for the choices we make. We do not need to apologize if we do not get the results we were expecting. We can acknowledge that we made a choice and there were consequences that followed. When we accept responsibility for our choices, we put less energy into self-defensiveness, we experience more freedom, and we can grow more easily. When we hold others responsible for the choices we have made, we are more a victim of circumstance. This can also make it more difficult for others to trust us.



# CONNECTING WITH COMPASSION

**Connection matters.** There are few things more powerful in the human experience than our connection to each other. Research suggests that positive relationships may be the single greatest predictor of health, happiness, and longevity. We are biologically designed to seek belonging and to support each other. We can practice connecting with others in small ways throughout the day. We can even practice connecting with people who we don't know, don't like, or don't agree with.



Photo by Christin Hume

**Kindness is good for everyone.** Modern research supports what sages have been saying for thousands of years – that acts of kindness are good for the person who is doing them, good for the person who is receiving them, and good for the people who are observing them. The human brain has a bias toward finding what is wrong. This can lead us to miss out on the wonderful little moments of simple kindness that are happening all around us in modern life.



**It is a very powerful skill to give without seeking to get.** Being of service without expecting anything in return is one of our greatest opportunities for growth and wellbeing. When we do something in an effort to get praise or acknowledgment, it can easily lead to resentment or frustration if we do not get the response we are hoping for. When we experience the chance to be serve - to express compassion and kindness through action - as a gift, then we do not have to keep score.

**The more we serve, the more connection we experience.** Disconnection is an illusion. Nothing we do happens in a vacuum. Everything we eat, wear, or use depends on the efforts of countless others. This is true no matter how we behave. When we practice serving without condition, then we experience the connection that is always present.

**We can default to support.** We don't need a compelling reason to be supportive of others - we can simply be of service in large and small ways with family, friends and strangers everyday. We all have a desire to be right or to be liked. Sometimes acting on this desire can get in the way of serving a relationship or a valued commitment because we are reflexively pursuing a hit of dopamine rather than considering what is really needed.



**Understanding is not agreement.** We do not have to agree with someone, or even like them, to practice being understanding. It is difficult to keep someone at arms length when we know their full story. It is a powerful practice to consider that other people's confusing or frustrating behaviors are driven by motivations that we can understand. We all see the world differently, so disagreement is a natural outcome of human biology. It is human to feel threatened or defensive when others express their disagreement. In the presence of fear or anger, it is possible to hear someone and appreciate that they have a particular view of the world. It is possible to learn something in these situations without sacrificing our principles. When we become aware of disagreement, we can work with it even when it triggers discomfort.

**We can be assertive and kind.** Supporting someone else does not mean that we swallow or diminish our viewpoint. It also does not mean that we ram our perspective down their throat. There is a vast space between being passive and being aggressive. In this space, we can express ourselves authentically, kindly and assertively while still honoring the other person.





# COMPASSION

**Compassion means "being with or feeling with."** It is the embodied understanding that every human, no matter how different their life may seem, experiences discomfort and struggle just like you do. Moving your attention away from your own concerns to a larger sense of humanity is a great practice for gaining perspective and reducing struggle. We can practice compassion by honoring our own heart and by extending our heart to others.



**Look around with your heart.** Walk into a coffee shop, grocery store, or any other place where people gather. Take a moment to really see the humans in this space. Sense the struggle and the joy each person carries with them daily. Wait until you can feel the humanity around you.

**Take it in and give it away.** Take a moment to breathe in the reality that everyone struggles. No matter how shiny and perfect their lives look, everyone worries about whether they are enough or worthy of love or whether their future will work out as they wish. Some of us are unsure about their next meal, healthcare, or a place to sleep. Get a sense of how universal and how large human suffering is. On the out breath, send an unconditional wish for peace, love, and courage in the face of struggle. Feel your ability to meet suffering with compassion.





# SELF-COMPASSION

**“Love thy neighbor as thyself”** is a phrase many of us are familiar with. In practice, many of us just ignore the second half of this wisdom. Self-compassion is the experiential understanding that who you are – right here, right now – is just as deserving of your own love and kindness as anyone else.

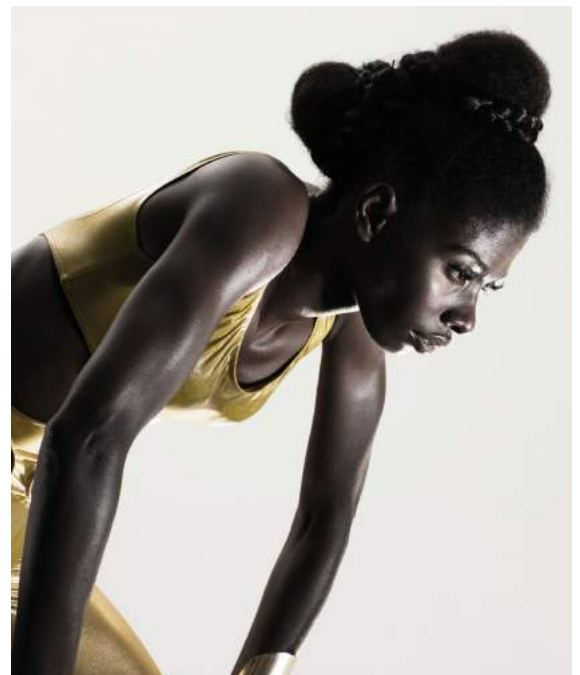


## **Self-compassion is not the same as self-indulgence.**

Many people shy away from the idea of self-compassion for fear of "going soft." This is based on a misunderstanding. Being kind to yourself does not mean that you do whatever you feel like and then give yourself a pass on the consequences. Self-compassion includes kindly holding yourself accountable for keeping your commitments and taking full responsibility when you don't. If we don't treat ourselves with kindness, we are left to seek validation from others - pursuing praise or becoming self-defensive or defeated in the face of any feedback that is not positive.



**Self-improvement without self-compassion can become self-bullying.** There is a difference between pushing yourself and punishing yourself - growth does not require that you beat yourself up. You can practice new skills without the assumption that there is something wrong with you. The self-improvement voice tells you that the person you want to be is always waiting for you on some imaginary horizon that never seems to get any closer. This is the voice that won't let you forget that there is something wrong with you and that you need to fix it to have the life and love you seek. You can recognize this voice without believing it.



**You may experience considerable internal resistance.** Self-compassion is a new practice and many of us are conditioned to believe that we need to prove that we are deserving of love and kindness. We might even believe that being harshly critical and unkind to ourselves improves the quality of our lives or performance - there is no research that backs this up. Self-bashing just takes attention and energy away from healthy growth.



**Make a mental list of the people in your life that you love.** Go through them one at a time, focusing on the feelings of love as you bring each person to mind. Then slip your name in at the end and see if you can find a bit of that feeling for yourself.

**Look in a mirror with kindness.**

Experiment with a gentle smile for the person looking back at you. You can do this when you brush your teeth or wash your face. Look at your reflection until some of the awkwardness passes and you feel some kindness for the person looking back at you.



**Bring to mind the person you care most about in the world.** Put your hand on the area of the body where you feel sensations of warmth or kindness for others. As you do this, imagine sending those feelings of kindness to your self.

**Remind yourself to have your own back.** When you wake up in the morning acknowledge that life is often unpredictable and that things may go sideways. Assure yourself that you will be kind to yourself even if the day does not go as you hope.





# CULTIVATING WHAT WE SEEK

## **Positive emotions are powerful resources.**

To be human is to have a range of feelings. Positive internal states are valuable resources that allow us to be with life when it is challenging. Over the course of the day, the demands you face can lead your body to reflexively tighten and close in order to protect itself from perceived threats. One of the ways we can balance this tendency is by connecting with confidence, gratitude, wonder and love.



Photo by Zac Durant

**The goal of cultivation is not to avoid discomfort.** The goal is to be with discomfort more peacefully. Accessing these internal resources can be a powerful way to cope, and they can give us a useful perspective when we are challenged. However, we need to be careful that we are not masking uncomfortable feelings by trying to feel good.

## The opposite of anxiety is faith

"I know what's going to happen & I don't trust that I have what I need to deal with it."

"I don't know what's going to happen & I trust that I have what I need to deal with it."

**You are up to it even when you don't feel up to it.** We have no idea what is going to happen next, and we have very good reason to trust that we will be able to deal with it - because we have always dealt with whatever has shown up. We can cultivate the trust that no matter what is coming, we will adapt and grow.

**Conditional  
Confidence**  
"It will work out  
the way I want"

**Hearty  
Confidence**  
"I can work with  
whatever happens"

**Gratitude is one of your most powerful resources.** You can access it anywhere anytime. You can make a mental list of the people, blessings and opportunities you have in your life. Pause after each one and find the feeling of gratitude in your body. It can be helpful to smile and breathe gently as you do this. This is a great practice to engage in when you are falling asleep at night or waking up in the morning.



**Life is filled with small, inexplicable miracles everywhere you look.** Taking a moment to consider the ultimate source of anything - matter, insects, stars, language, babies, velcro - can change your perspective instantly. Allow yourself to take in the profound nature of existence. Where does it all come from? What does it all mean? Wiggle your fingers or take a deep breath and really consider how you are doing it. Let yourself be humbled by the immense mystery of it all. Let yourself be amused by your desire to have this miracle be just the way you want it to be.

**We all want more love in our lives.** There are many ways to access love. You can consider the people you care for and make a mental list of your favorite qualities of each person. You can sit in a room full of people and sincerely wish that each one of them finds peace and fulfillment in their lives. You can ask your friends and family what kinds of gestures feel loving to them and then find opportunities to carry these out. You can also cultivate unconditional love by bringing your attention to your heart and imagining it expanding as it takes in all the love that is always available. We can do these practices in traffic, before meetings or a challenging conversation, while waiting for our computer to start up, in line at the grocery store...





## PART FIVE: HEARTY PRACTICES

There are four powerful practices to build into our daily lives:

*Mindfulness. Unstruggling. Trusting Your Wise Self, Supportive Communication*

**Mindfulness** is the practice of committing our attention on purpose, accepting what we find, noticing when our attention wanders, and returning it where we choose.



**Unstruggling** is the practice of opening the body, releasing tension, and acknowledging the humanness of whatever you are experiencing in the present moment.

**Trusting your wise self** is the practice of accessing your wisdom and making it available when you need it most. Honest and kind self-evaluation combined with physical reminders leads to powerful habits of wellbeing.



**Supportive communication** is the practice of listening with the sincere intention to understand and support. You can express your perspective with humility, and you can accept complete responsibility for your choices.

# MINDFULNESS

**Getting distracted is normal.** It is a skill to notice when our attention has wandered, and make the choice to bring it back to what is happening in the present. Mindfulness practice is a great metaphor for life – we focus, we get distracted, we notice that we are distracted, and we bring our focus back. Over and over. That's all.



**Mindfulness is the conscious awareness & acceptance of what is present.** It is a practice for choosing where to focus attention, noticing when attention wanders, and bringing acceptance and compassion to whatever arises.

## **If you are human:**

- Attention wanders
- Thoughts and impulses just show up
- It is not useful to scratch every itch

Mindfulness facilitates connection with:

- Values, goals and commitments
- The miracle and the challenge of life
- Compassion for self and others

## **Mindfulness is not:**

- An escape: mindfulness is a way to encounter whatever is happening peacefully. Mindfulness is not a technique to avoid discomfort or to feel better.
- The same as relaxation: mindfulness is a way to be aware of tension that you may then choose to let go of.
- For stopping thoughts: mindfulness is about being a little less caught up in the busyness of the mind, not trying to suppress it.
- A big deal: practicing mindfulness is no more of a big deal than brushing your teeth. It is simple, daily, mental hygiene.



**Heartfulness is a significant aspect of mindfulness.** Mindfulness is not a cold, clinical practice - it is a practice for encountering the full range of our human experience. The greater our acceptance and compassion becomes, the more fully we can engage with whatever is happening. Mindfulness without heartfulness is an incomplete practice.

**Intensive mindfulness practice can be quite simple.** Set a timer for 10 minutes. Assume a sitting posture that is open and upright. Lift the chest and head, drop the shoulders, relax the jaw. Allow your eyes to close or look gently downward. Find the sensation of breathing in your body and rest your attention there. Inevitably, your attention will wander. This is normal. When you notice that it has wandered, simply bring it back to the breath. Feeling bored, restless, sleepy, or finding that your mind is racing is all normal. Simply notice whatever shows up, accept it as part of being human and return your attention to the breath. Sometimes this practice will be quite enjoyable and sometimes you will feel uncomfortable. Noticing and accepting all of it is the practice.

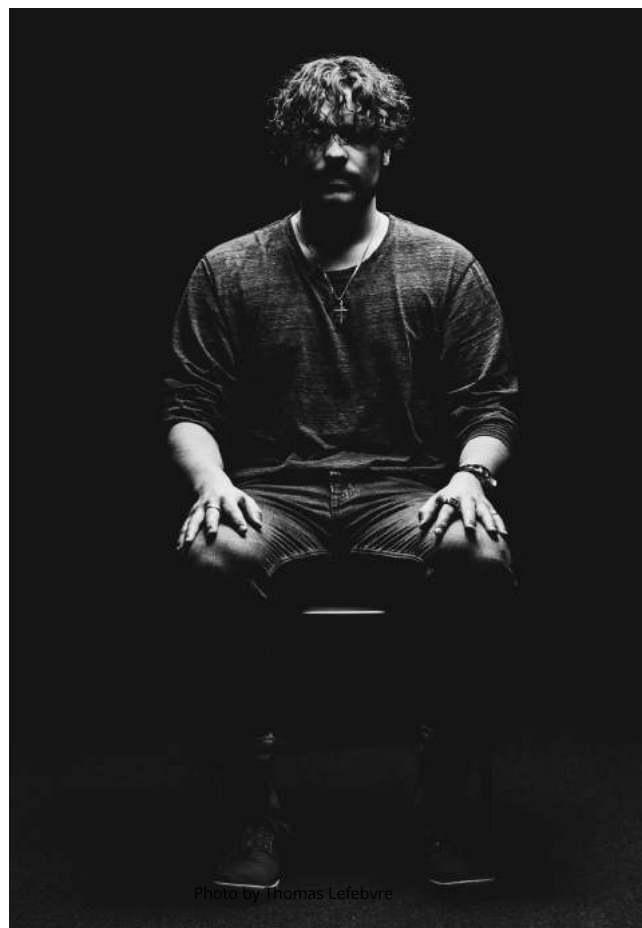


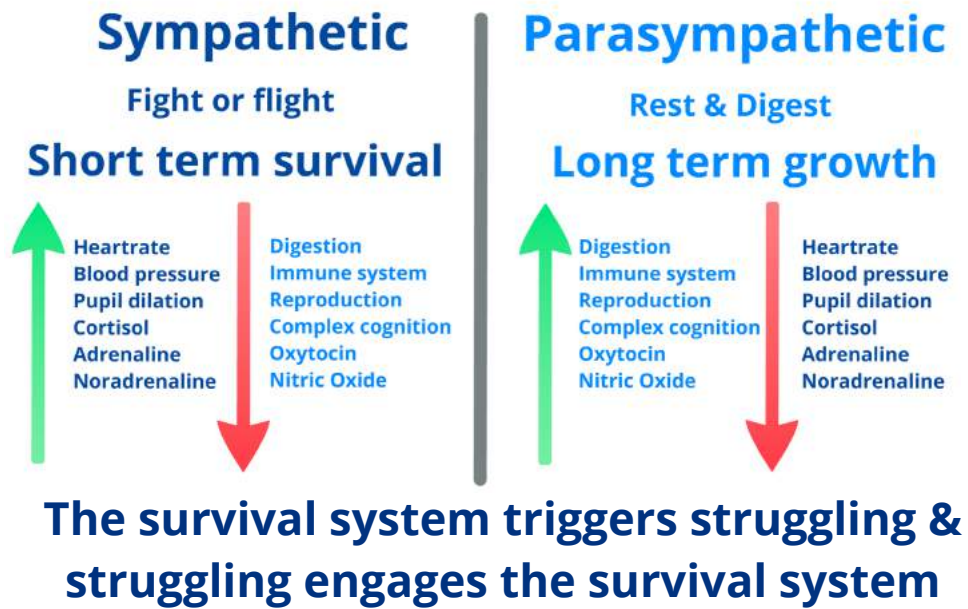
Photo by Thomas Lefebvre



**You can practice mindfulness in the midst of a busy day or bustling environment.** Begin by consciously standing or sitting in an upright and open posture. Bring attention to your feet on the ground and the breath in your body. Look around and place yourself in your environment. Finally, take a moment to connect with what really matters before you jump into the next task. All of this can take place in 30 seconds or less many times a day. In addition, you can practice bringing conscious awareness and acceptance to walking, eating, listening, brushing your teeth...

# UNSTRUGGLING

**You have two nervous systems.** Part of the human nervous system is for short-term survival and another part is for long-term growth. When we struggle against life by tightening our body and our breathing and ruminating about imagined threat, we increase activity in the survival system and decrease activity in the growth system



**An open posture helps.** Over the course of the day, the demands you face cause you to reflexively tighten and close your posture to protect itself. One of the ways you can balance this tendency is by opening your posture and connecting with positive internal resources. You can do this sitting up or standing. Lengthen your spine, lift and open your chest, roll your shoulders back and let them drop. This vulnerable and confident stance sends signals to the brain that you are safe and capable. Release tension in your jaw and hands. Next, close your eyes– this increases the feeling of vulnerability. Smile gently – this increases the sense of safety. Feel your feet on the ground and breathe deeply. If you are aware of discomfort, you can meet it with a sincere and compassionate "Of course I feel this way, I am human."

**Lift & open posture**

**Relax shoulders, hands & jaw**

**Close eyes & smile gently**

**Rest open palm on chest**

**Breathe into a relaxed belly**

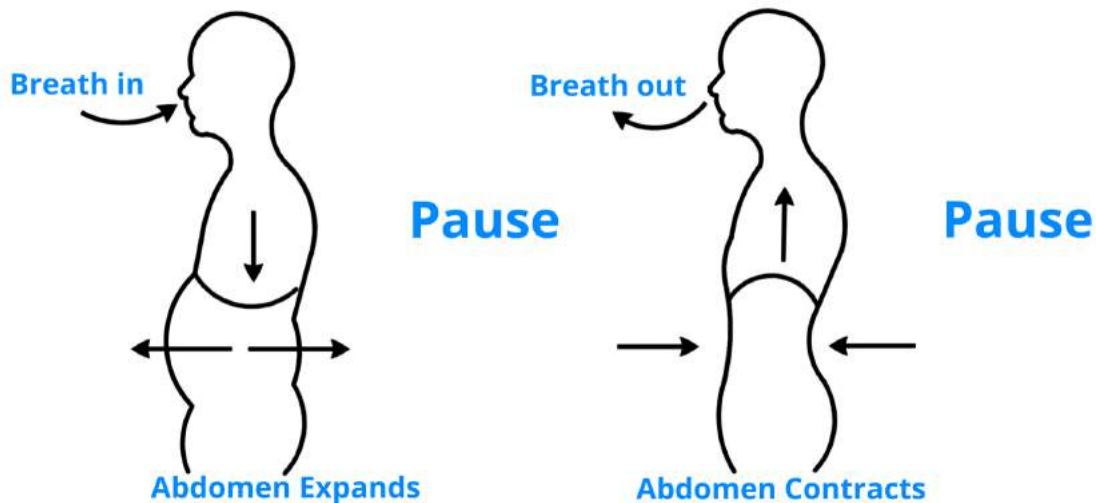
**"Of course I feel this way,  
I am human"**





**How you breathe affects your wellbeing.** One of the most effective ways you can self-regulate is with your breathing. By paying attention and breathing more slowly into a relaxed lower body, you can lower levels of stress hormones in your blood stream and reduce activity in the more reactive and self-defensive parts of your nervous system. This practice builds the skill of being alert and responsive without being vigilant and reactive.

## **Breathing is a powerful & portable practice**



**The key is slow and gentle.** Begin with an in-breath for a slow count of four. As you breathe in, allow your lower body to relax and expand as it fills. Wait gently for a slow count of four. The point of this is not to add tension, but to pause in a relaxed state. Breathe out for a slow count of four, bringing your lower body back together. Wait gently for a slow count of four. Begin another round by releasing your abdomen and breathing in for a count of four.



### **Breathing this way can become a habit.**

Many of us are used to lifting our chest when we breathe in, so it may feel a bit awkward to allow our lower body to expand when we breathe in. It is helpful to practice breathing this way throughout the day, whether you are stressed or not. If you wait to do this only when you are stressed or anxious, it is tough to get in enough practice, and it can feel like you are using the breathing to avoid or suppress difficult feelings. With practice, this will come more and more naturally.

# TRUSTING YOUR WISE SELF

**You have the wisdom you need.** Each of us has ineffective beliefs and behaviors that we go to when we are stressed, anxious, overwhelmed, or just on autopilot - AND, when we get quiet and honest with ourselves, we know what is working and what isn't working in our lives. We know which strategies it would be helpful to let go of or to adopt. However, we don't always access this wisdom when we need it.



**It all goes back to comfort.** We do many of the things we do because they are familiar and comfortable in the moment. They are wired into our brains as habits. We feel attached to them even when they aren't working.

**We often beat ourselves up with the truth.** Instead of using our wisdom to create effective change, we often use it as fuel for harsh self-judgment. We tell ourselves that we should know better and we bury any useful insights under a mound of denial or shame.

**The key is accessing your wisdom when you need it.**

What if you always had access to a wise, kind voice reminding you of what you are really capable of and nudging you in that direction? Good news - you do! What if you could remember the things that really work for you in those moments when you are spun out, overwhelmed, unmotivated, aimless, anxious, stressed, frustrated...? Or, what if you could remember the things that really do not work for you and choose differently in those moments when you are on autopilot? Good news - you can! The key to this practice is to spend a little time each day in some kind and honest self-evaluation. This discipline can lead to some powerful insight and shifts in behavior.





# THE PRACTICE OF TRUSTING YOUR WISE SELF

**Dedicate a journal to this practice.** Find a notebook or journal that you only use for this practice. Keep it in a place where you can do this practice regularly.

**Get quiet and present.** It is best to do this in the evening or before you go to bed. Settle down in a quiet space and bring your attention to your body. Unstruggle and connect with compassion.

## **Kindly and honestly self-evaluate.**

Reflect on the day with as much acceptance and compassion as you can. Focus on your practice - where you put your attention and energy. What did you do today that worked? What did you do today that didn't work? The key here is to be honest with yourself. You can be clear and direct about the strategies and behaviors that are effective or ineffective while still treating yourself with respect and kindness.

## **Reminders:**

*"You feel better when you exercise first thing in the morning."*

*"Stand up and take a deep breath"*

*"Reaching out to a friend calms you down"*

*"When you take a short walk, you think more clearly"*

*"Checking the news makes you anxious"*

*"Tackling small tasks that you have been putting off is a relief"*

**Anchor in what really matters.** Bring to mind what is most important to you and take some time to feel how much you value these relationships, goals, principles and commitments. Write these on the top of the page in your journal.

**Date:**

**Most important:**

**What's working?**

**What's not working?**

**Write wise reminders.** On a small note card that can be folded to fit into your pocket, write down the things that it will be most helpful to remember the next day. Make the reminder present and practical. The reminders should help you direct your attention and energy. Avoid promises about the future or philosophical statements. Keep the card with you and consult it during the day - especially when you are feeling aimless, overwhelmed, anxious, stressed, bored, restless, or unfocused.

# SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION



**What is supportive communication?** This type of communication focuses on giving and receiving information in the most kind, helpful and effective way possible. The goal is for everyone involved to have what they need. Supportive communication is always rooted in values and goals, and it happens independent of comfort and agreement.

## Some realities of human relationship:

***Disagreement is inevitable:*** All human beings have different realities. Eventually these realities will conflict.

***Understanding is not agreement:*** We can get clarity about someone else's view even when we see it differently.

***Resistance is normal:*** Change and conflict often trigger the survival mechanisms of our nervous systems which leads to resistance to new or different ideas.

***Being universally liked is impossible:*** No matter what you do, you are going to trigger some people.



## Some strategies for communicating supportively.

***Assume different realities:*** Begin with the premise that conflicting perspectives exist and invite them openly.

***Approach resistance:*** When tension or disagreement arises, go right to it and attempt to understand it.

***Listen for values:*** Complaints and arguments have values behind them - investigating and uncovering these before responding is incredibly helpful.

***Check for understanding:*** Make sure you heard what others intended and others heard what you intended



**Listening may be the most important aspect of communication.** We can meet people's needs for safety, belonging, & mattering simply by listening. If you are human, your attention will wander & thoughts & impulses will be triggered by what you are hearing. When you notice the urge to interrupt, change the subject, or offer a solution, you can practice using "Tell me more." When you notice your attention has wandered, you can simply return it to the speaker. After someone has told you something, a powerful way to make sure you heard them is to simply repeat what you heard - "Let me see if I get this."



**Focus on being helpful rather than right.** The intention behind communication is to create community. If you are trying to "be right," that is very different than trying to connect & build relationship. It is always helpful to assess whether you are trying to be supportive or trying to win - this distinction is critical to relationships, culture, & leadership. When we have behaved in a way that is not helpful, we can simply accept responsibility without apology.

**Be clear about purpose and outcome.** It is really helpful to be able to answer some questions for yourself before the communication. *Why am I having this conversation? Why am I giving feedback? Why are we having this meeting? How will we/did we come to a decision?* Having clarity about the "why" before the communication gives an anchor to return to when conflict, discomfort, or challenge arises. A few minutes spent clarifying the purpose of the communication can make an enormous difference. At the end of a meeting/conversation where a decision has been made, always ask *What? Who? When? Who? - What have we decided? Who needs to know? When do they need to know? Who will tell them?*

### **Useful Language:**

***Tell me more    Is this a help you or hear you conversation?***

***Let me see if I get this    What is most important?    Help me understand***

***I get it, and...    I accept responsibility    Can you tell me what you heard?***

***What is needed?    I have a concern    I know this is challenging & I have faith in you***

***Of course & you are up to it    How can I support you?***

# FINAL THOUGHTS

**The trigger is not the source.** Circumstances can trigger strong emotions, but they can never be the source. The source of your thoughts and feelings is always your nervous system. People and events cannot create your anger, fear, sadness, frustration, joy, wonder, gratitude, or love. This also means that you can cultivate positive emotions independent of what is happening around you.



**Give your body and mind what they need.** This is foundational to a hearty life. Nourishing yourself allows you to be more resourceful under stress. The four areas of highest impact are: rest (sleep and relaxation), healthy diet (high in fresh veggies and low in processed foods), movement (exercise and activity) and social connection (face to face, heart to heart). We can easily confuse entertainment and distraction with relaxation and nourishment - they are not the same thing. While it is not always convenient or easy to nourish yourself, it is always worth it.

## **Balance is not a static state.**

Balance is a dynamic process of continual small adjustments. We don't have to wait until the end of the day or the weekend to find balance. A big part of hearty practice is integrating it into moments over the course of the day. Another critical feature of hearty practice is that when you realize you have forgotten or failed to practice...you simply begin again in that moment.





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