

FEAR OF BREATHING



I'm in a corporate training room in London. The organisers have gone out of their way to find an inspiring space with lots of natural light, colourful, funky décor, and plenty of room to move around in for 25 magnificent women participating in a leadership programme.

It's been a lively day so far of storytelling, sharing challenges, crafting action plans. Through the course of the day we've done wild card ice-breakers to uproarious laughter, high energy warm ups and brain gym moments to stimulate mind and body and integrate right and left brain.

The day is coming to an end and I introduce the wrap-up 'Valuing Ritual' as I call it. It consists of standing, taking some very deep slow breaths with hands on heart and taking a moment for appreciation of the day and love of self. As I look at this room full of women standing in their full integrity and dignity, taking a moment to breathe in some self-acknowledgement I see so many eyes welling up in tears, faces holding tight against the dam of emotion wanting to spring forth.

Breathing is our great tour de force of being, the story of our life cycle. Breathing makes us possible and fuels our presence, energy, voice, thinking, and feeling. It is in that last domain, where breathing beckons feeling, that leaves not a dry eye in the house so to speak.

In the rush, autopilot and action-driven day to day of life, particularly corporate life, our breathing is too often high in the chest, superficial and thin. It's stingy ratio can feed only monotone voices, or talking that is far too fast to really connect, multi-tasking and partial attention, and often anxiety. The deeper we breathe the more we have to slow down. The more we slow down the more wholly present we are to sensation, to the moment, and to feelings.

Our broken hearts, elations, loves, losses, fears, dreams, courage, failures, triumphs – our very life stories – are written on the breath. When we breathe deeply, literally taking our breathing to heart we honour ourselves.

So here's to the welling up of eyes, the flow of tears, nervous laughter. Fear not. Touching that core of vulnerability for a moment through the power of breathing doesn't mean you'll have a meltdown at the office or be too emotional in your next presentation (genuine fears often expressed). It just means that you have a powerful resource whenever you want it, to value who you are and give the gift of compassion to yourself and to others. In the words of Walt Whitman "I am larger than I thought, I did not know I held so much goodness."

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