

Your Body is Your Environment

What makes a fire burn is space between the logs, a breathing space...Judy Brown

You wake up and it all begins (ok maybe you set the snooze button for a few more minutes). Whether you're flying solo and breakfast means grabbing a coffee on the go or you're getting the kids off to school, your day begins like the clapboard on a film set that says "And... Action!"

You arrive at the office and before you've even removed your coat you've checked your diary, opened your email, hastily rattled off a reply and pressed "send," managed to get your coat off before making a call, then rushed to your first meeting of the day. On the way, you're ambushed in the corridor by a colleague, a direct report or boss who needs a decision now. You buy some time, promising to come back to her later and make a mental note to fit it in somewhere, which points to another quick sandwich at your desk.

Coming out of the meeting you're not sure what it accomplished. And so your day goes, juggling requests, making or delaying decisions, rushing to more meetings, presenting, pitching, phone conferencing, fire fighting, doing, doing, doing. Faster and faster you go, in a state of distraction and partial- continuous- attention, on the move, off-balance, and in auto - pilot or worse, survival mode.

Phew! Is it any wonder you feel blown in every direction by the winds of the world? Here's the thing: It doesn't have to be that way. With one simple practice you can take hold of that clapboard and be in charge of when to call "Action!"

The practice is called...drum roll.... STOP AND BREATHE.

In this fast world of constant change, a world that is always calling you outwards stopping to breathe is your pathway inwards. In the midst of constant flux and uncertainty in the workplace your breathing is one thing you can be sure of and certain of. So get to know your breathing as your key ally and wise companion.

Stop: Sit. Just for one moment enjoy the quiet. Just for one moment let go and enjoy the stillness. Just for one moment marvel at the miracle of your own breathing that fuels your life and is the cycle of your life story, first breath to last. If you enjoy visualising imagine that you are breathing into a landscape that you love like the mountains or ocean, a meadow or lush woods, a vast desert.

Breathe: Imagine blowing up a balloon – you take a gigantic intake of air and exhale as long and as hard as you can and repeat, ending with a few short sharp extra exhalations before tying the knot. Pay attention to its power.

Effective breathing really is the holy grail of gravitas and it begins in your body - your first environment. In the words of the somatic coach, Jennifer Cohen, "You don't have a body, you are a body!"

When you connect to your breathing body you connect to the world. How can you possibly leap into action and connect with others before you've connected with the immediate environment of you?

This simple act of Stop and Breathe gives you many gifts: It keeps you grounded and balanced. It gives you ballast. It clears your mind and sharpens your focus. It primes you for acting with intention and choices rather than reacting in a hurry. It helps you to be more resilient, getting back to your centre more quickly whenever you get knocked off it.

It is often said that you become what you practice. Practice Stop and Breathe by making it a personal ritual - conscious, systematic and on purpose – and practice it every day. Take your time in getting started. Don't rush it. It may take a few minutes the first few times to really slow down and create enough space in yourself to experience the sensations of being rather than doing. The rate of return on your initial investment will amaze you and in no time you'll be able to practice Stop and Breathe in any moment you have.

My clients fall into 2 categories – those who practice Stop and Breathe as a daily ritual and those who don't because they say they don't have time. The ones who practice unfailingly report back that they are more tuned in, more focused, and better managers of themselves – especially under pressure.

Stop and Breathe before meetings, important phone calls or conversations, and presentations. Not only will your performance improve you'll feel more open and alive!

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