

# FROM REACTING TO RESPONDING IN TIMES OF CHANGE

Fostering Self-awareness and Resilience



# Dr Mendy Neralic

- Clinical psychologist in private practice
- Holistic counselling and coaching
  - Integration of somatic / body-based, cognitive psychotherapies, self awareness, mindfulness and spiritual practices
- Making the unconscious conscious
  - active agent in your own life
  - choosing how you respond to life's challenges
- Healing and overcoming old hurts and traumas – taking responsibility, changing life-long patterns, and self-empowerment

***“Between stimulus and response  
there is a space. In that space is  
our power to choose our  
response. In our response lies  
our growth and our freedom”***

Victor Frankl



- **What's your attitude toward stress?**
- **Understanding your Window of Tolerance (WOT)**
- **Foundation skills to help you move from reacting to responding**
  - **Build your repertoire of RESOURCES**
  - **Skills for growing self awareness, regulating stress, navigating change while staying calm and centered – widen your WOT**
- **What's at stake? Contacting the “why” – INTENTION is everything**
- **Why boundaries are important**

*“Stress is what arises when something is at stake”*

Kelly McGonigal PhD

**“Stress is what arises when something is at stake”**

\*Physical /Physiological / Body-  
based reactions,  
Thoughts,  
Beliefs,  
Emotions,  
Actions

Stress and Meaning are linked!

*“You don’t stress about things you don’t care  
about, and you can’t create a meaningful life  
without stress”*

# WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

**HYPER-AROUSAL**  
High Energy

**HYPO-AROUSAL**  
Low Energy

Alert Engaged  
Calm Centred  
Comfortable  
"smooth sailing"

REACTIVE - UNCONSCIOUS

Stress "sweet spot"  
Change happens here  
Engage **RESOURCES**  
to keep mind "online"

RESPONSIVE - CONSCIOUS

Anxiety, Panic, Rage,  
Overwhelm, Hypervigilant  
"ON" "out of control"  
Fight, flight, freeze

Triggering event

Depression, Unmotivated  
Lethargy, Chronic Fatigue, Burnout,  
"OFF"  
Collapse

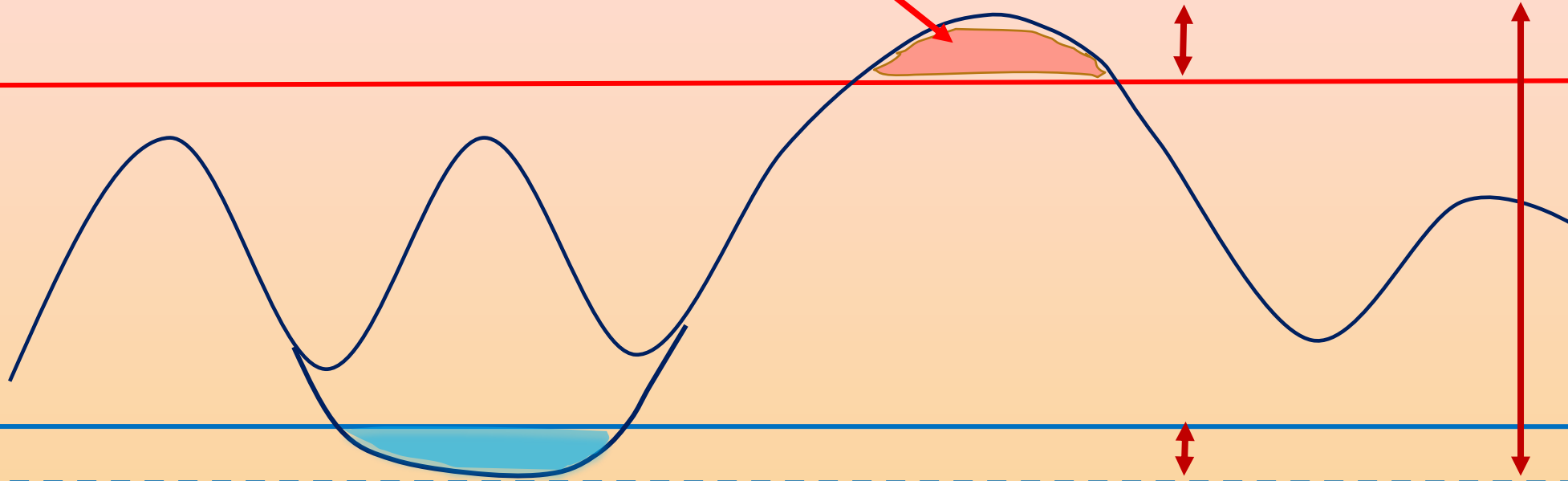
NON-RESPONSIVE - UNCONSCIOUS

## HYPER-AROUSAL High Energy

Intentional "DOING"

Window of Tolerance widens  
Confidence is boosted  
You can handle more challenges  
Self empowerment  
Brain is being re-wired  
Less likely to react in the future

Alert Engaged  
Calm Centred  
Comfortable  
"smooth sailing"

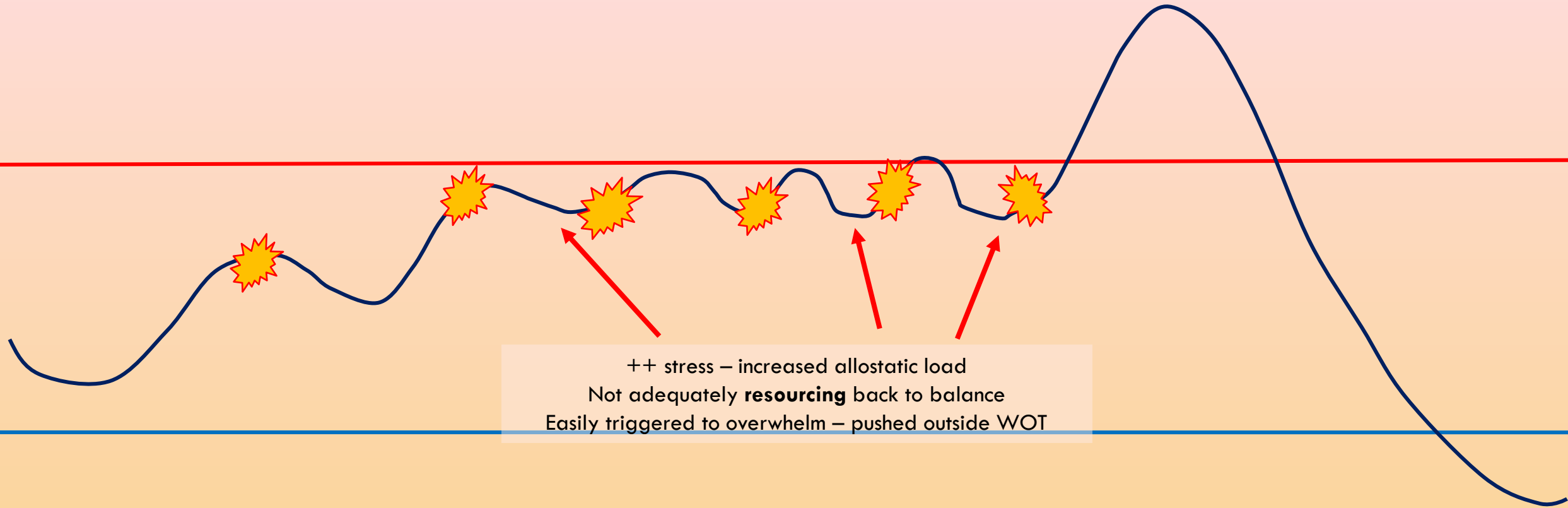


## HYPO-AROUSAL Low Energy

Intentional "BEING"

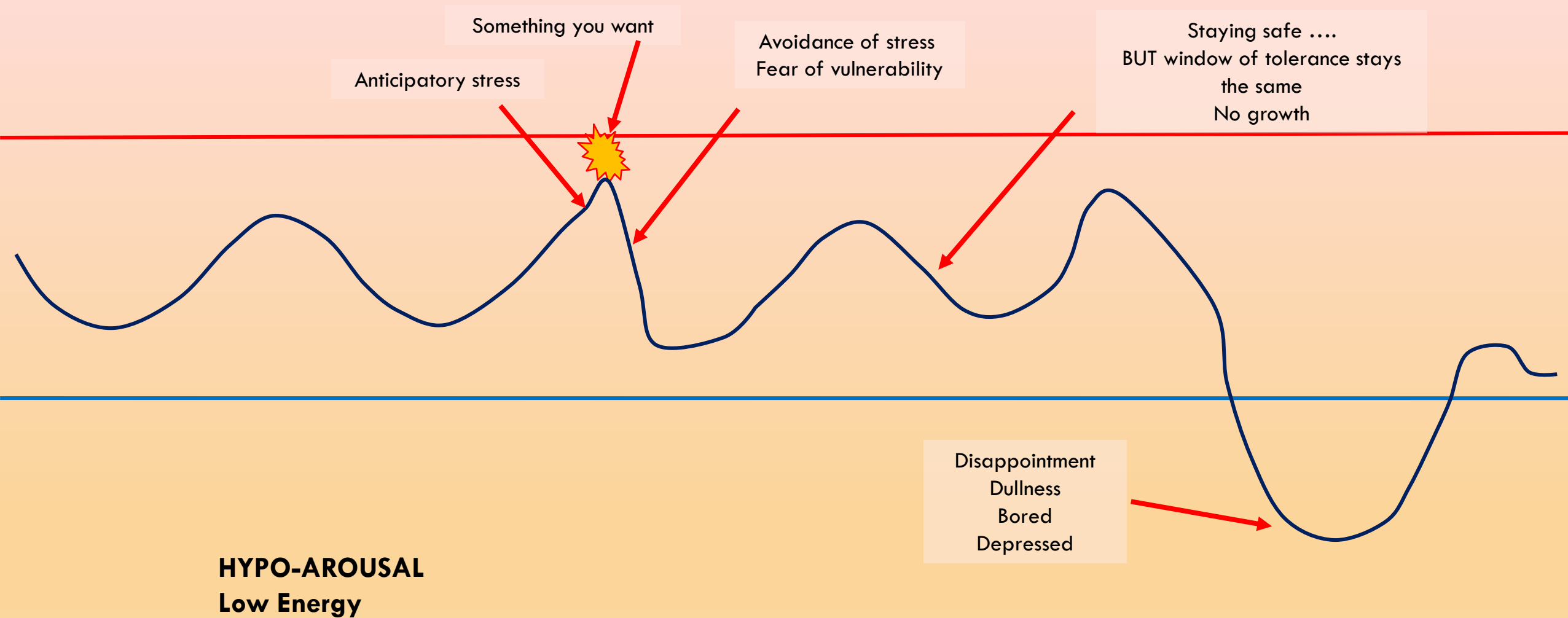


## HYPER-AROUSAL High Energy



## HYPO-AROUSAL Low Energy

## HYPER-AROUSAL High Energy





***“If our edge is like a huge stone wall with a door in it, how do we learn to open that door and step through it again and again, so that life becomes a process of growing up, becoming more and more fearless and flexible, more and more able to play like a raven in the wind”***

Pema Chodron





## RESOURCES

***“RESOURCES are skills, abilities, objects, relationships and services that provide support for maintaining a self and differentiation from others, regardless of what is occurring in the environment. When individuals are resourced, they are able to adjust to and respond in a balanced and creative way to a wide variety of events and interactions ... sustaining autonomy in the face of stressful situations, such as strong criticism, intense emotional expression, or potentially disturbing behaviour coming from others”***

Pat Ogden



## RESOURCES

### **BREATH WORK**

- **Balancing:**

- natural breath awareness / noticing the breath
- EVEN breath in and out – 4:4 up to 8:8
- alternate nostril breathing, victorious breath, stair step breath

- **\*Calming:**

- longer breath OUT – 4:8
- forced exhale out through mouth “Ha!”
- Lower lung/abdominal breathing
- 4:4:4:4 up to 8:8:8:8 count pattern
- Left nostril breathing

- **\*Activating:**

- more active breath IN
- active breath IN & OUT
- mid-upper lung/chest breathing
- stomach pumping breaths
- Right nostril breathing

\* You often need to “meet your mood” first before you try to bring it to balance

## RESOURCES

### SOMATIC / BODY BASED

- **\*Calming:**

- awareness of body sensations
- grounding/centering “feel your feet”
- pushing against resistance
- Containment- squeezing, hugging in
- hand to heart, rubbing body, forward fold
- relaxation practices (PMR, guided relaxation)

- **\*Activating:**

- noticing impulses to move
- moving the body (walk, stretch, sway, push, pull, reach, twist, back bend, jump, run)
- core work, weight lifting, resistance, HIIT

- **Balancing:**

- awareness of body sensations / urges / **boundaries**
- Grounding/ centering
- commitment to regular movement/exercise to develop a connection to body

\* You often need to “meet your mood” first before you try to bring it to balance



# RESOURCES

## COGNITIVE / PSYCHOLOGICAL / EMOTIONAL

- Mindfulness, Meditation, Journalling
- **Self awareness “wise mind” - check into inner world / external world through senses**
- Attention to dreams
- Awareness of thoughts – capacity to observe these without getting “hooked”
  - habitual thinking patterns (eg. ruminating, judging criticising, worrying, analysing, past/future thinking , deeper core beliefs, typical narrative/grievance story)
- Can communicate thoughts and emotions to self and others *“I’m having the thought that ...”*
- Willingness to question beliefs, explore their origins, let go of / dismantle/ restructure beliefs
- Develop a language for body sensations (tight, heavy, buzzing, pulling, pressure, twisting, hot, cool, sharp, prickly, blocked, flowing ... )
- Have a sense of Self, of being “ok”, of deserving/ worth, Positive self statements, take in the good, turn to gratitude, being vulnerable, set **intentions, setting boundaries**

# RESOURCES

## **OUTER / EXTERNAL RESOURCES**

What can help outside the individual, in the community, socially, materially, spiritually

- “Healthy brains”, Close friends, partners, mentors, support groups, sporting teams, spiritual community
- Access to health clubs, yoga/dance/martial arts classes, art classes, special interest clubs
- Access to nature and leisure activities
- Access to the arts and culture, education, sources of information (libraries, internet)
- Access to medical/health practitioners, body workers, psychotherapists
- Capacity to earn an income, savings, budget, pay bills





***“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way”***

Victor Frankl



## VALUES GUIDED ACTION

- Guiding principles – **ATTITUDES** to help orient your attention toward conscious choices that guide your actions and how to “be
- Things you WANT to live by, not what you think you SHOULD do or are OBLIGATED to do - **INNER GUIDANCE**
- Sensed and felt – arrived at through **INTUITION** vs analytic thought
- **Competing values** – one may over-ride or come into focus more in different situations, or learn to hold them in the same space e.g. Peace + Justice, Freedom + Discipline, Joy + Activism
- Hold your values but hold them lightly (vs righteousness, fixed)

*Remember, “stress is what happens when something is at stake”*

Acceptance  
Accountability  
Adventure  
Athletics  
Animals  
Art  
Authenticity  
Celebration  
Challenge  
Collaboration  
Commitment  
Compassion  
Competence  
Courage  
Creativity  
Curiosity

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Discipline  
Efficiency  
Enthusiasm  
Equality  
Ethics  
Fairness  
Faith  
Family  
Freedom  
Friendship  
Fun  
Generosity  
Gratitude  
Harmony  
Health  
Helping

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Honesty  
Humour  
Independence  
Inner strength  
Innovation  
Integrity  
Joy  
Leadership  
Learning  
Love  
Loyalty  
Mindfulness  
Nature  
Openness  
Patience  
Peace

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Personal growth  
Politics  
Pragmatism  
Problem solving  
Reliability  
Resourcefulness  
Self compassion  
Simplicity  
Strong  
Teaching  
Tradition  
Trust  
Unique  
Willingness  
Wisdom

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# VALUES GUIDED ACTION

How do I want to represent myself in the area of \_\_\_\_\_ ?

What's so important about \_\_\_\_\_ ?

Deep down, what really matters to me?

What makes me feel alive and energised?

What do I want my life [in the area of \_\_\_\_\_ ] to be about?

## **Deeper Inquiry practices:**

**Write for 3 minutes, or tell someone about your value and why its important to you (Active Listening exercise).**

**How could you demonstrate in real actions or words this value today? tomorrow?**

## HOW TO DO VALUES GUIDED ACTION

***“It’s the heart that knows the path. The mind is just there to organize the steps”***

***Jeff Brown***

INTENTION : \_\_\_\_\_

CONTEXT : \_\_\_\_\_

CHOICE POINT (stress point) : \_\_\_\_\_



## HOW TO DO VALUES GUIDED ACTION

INTENTION : *I want to connect to a colleague who's interesting and smart, but also intimidates me*

(Value = CONNECTION / COLLABORATION)

CONTEXT : *Lunch Room*

CHOICE POINT : *Sit at her table and start a conversation, OR avoid her and sit by myself and wait for someone to sit with me (OLD PATTERN – isolation, self reliance, “I’ll look stupid” “I’ll be rejected”, risk shame – keeps me safe but .... 😞)*

INTENTION : *I want to start my day without rushing (Value = CALM, EFFICIENCY)*

CONTEXT : *Lying in bed in the morning – alarm has gone off*

CHOICE POINT : *Lay in bed answering emails, start to get “stressed” and lose time OR get up with the alarm and spend 5 minutes breathing and stretching*

***“We desperately need more leaders who are committed to courageous, wholehearted leadership and who are self-aware enough to lead from their hearts, rather than unevolved leaders who lead from hurt and fear”***

Brene Brown

# BOUNDARIES

- When we're not sure how to treat one another, relationships can be difficult and painful
- **Setting boundaries**
  - Allows for personal protection – assessment of what's ok and what's not ok - EMPOWERING
  - Protects against BURN-OUT – energy doesn't “leak out” for lack of containment
  - Makes room for deeper connection through feeling respected and safe – builds TRUST – you can set boundaries with people you like!
  - Especially important for highly sensitives / empaths / introverts, so they can enjoy the world without feeling violated

## BOUNDARIES

**“ \_\_\_\_\_ [this specific behaviour] \_\_\_\_\_ is not ok with me anymore. I'd like it if you would \_\_\_\_\_ [specific action] \_\_\_\_\_.**

**“ Giving me an urgent last minute task right before I go home is not ok with me anymore. I'd like it if you would give me these tasks much earlier in the day so I have time to finish it.**

**“Texting me about work after 6pm is not ok with me anymore. I'd like it if you would wait until at least 8 in the morning. My phone will be off and I won't be able to respond to you.**

***“She was of only herself, contained and powerful, and just out of reach in a right way”***

Dr Clarissa Pinkola Estes

## FROM REACTING TO RESPONDING

- Accepting stress as a part of life can build resilience and courage to take action
- Build up your BANK OF RESOURCES
  - Little and often
- Do something that's just a little outside your Window of Tolerance this week – widen your Window to build your capacity to handle more and more with calm, clarity and inner strength
- You have a choice – contact a value and intentionally bring this into your work/relationships/health/creative life – make a small (doable) promise to yourself