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, 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. You now 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].
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