

Collaborating *in the* Workplace

A Guide for Building Better Teams

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Part I



Foundations

What happens for you when you are in a difficult conversation? How aware are you of your triggers, and what happens physiologically for you when you are stressed? What can you do to stay present when this occurs?

Most people are not trained to be able to respond well when triggered. They get angry, go into their habitual reaction pattern, and then berate themselves (and/or others) afterward and vow to change and be more in control the next time. Then another trigger arises, and the pattern repeats.

In this section, you'll learn how to break that pattern. Recognizing when you are in a stress response and how you normally react, you'll be able to apply two key components of your experience—feelings and needs—using the Self-Connection Process to reconnect to yourself and be able to act in a way that more accurately reflects your values. In other words, instead of reacting, you will be present enough to act—to choose how you respond.

This simple (yet not always easy) skill is a first step to being able to be in disagreement and difficult conversations with teammates and coworkers without being in conflict. Let's get started.

Fight-Flight-Freeze (The Stress Response)

All too often in modern day-to-day interactions, people react to what is happening around them as though their physical well-being is being challenged. The human body only has one way to respond to perceived challenge, regardless of whether it is an actual physical threat or simply an unwelcome comment at the water cooler. The way the body reacts to both is by releasing stress hormones such as adrenaline, norepinephrine, and cortisol into our bloodstream.

This process is referred to as the Fight-Flight-Freeze response, or alternatively, as the Stress Response.

The Stress Response serves you when you need to protect yourself from physical danger, like when a lion on the savanna is attacking you. Nonetheless, in work and home environments, triggering the Stress Response because you are dreading an upcoming conversation or because you are upset by an interaction with a colleague not only serves to reduce your effectiveness, but also is harmful to your health.

Once the deeper parts of the brain are triggered into the fight-flight-freeze survival reaction, it's difficult to think clearly and sequentially, and the conscious mind tends to be flooded with thoughts about who is right, who is wrong, and who deserves punishment. In addition, people will tend to respond to similar situations according to habitual patterns of thoughts and actions that they have developed over the course of their life, and it becomes very difficult to apply the language and communication skills they possess.

As a consequence of the release of these stress hormones, peripheral vision narrows, and blood is shunted to the muscles for flight or to fight and away from reproduction and immune function. The hands moisten and you are likely to feel shaky.

If you do not do something to stop the release of stress hormones, it's less likely you will be able to think clearly, sequentially, and logically, and you will tend to act in ways that are contrary to your values.

Finally, as you come down from the Stress Response, you may experience an adrenaline hangover, the symptoms of which are lack of motivation, fatigue and weakness, thirst, headaches and muscle aches,

nausea, vomiting or stomach pain, poor or decreased sleep, increased sensitivity to light and sound, dizziness or a sense of the room spinning, and shakiness.

EXERCISE



Think through a recent interaction with someone that was difficult for you. What was your experience? Consider each of the following and see if you can identify how the stress response shows up in your mind, body, and behavior:

1. What sensations did you experience? (Where were you tense or holding, how was your heart rate and breathing, what changes in temperature did you experience, what other sensations and feelings were present?)
2. What was happening in your mind? (What were you perceiving about the situation, what beliefs or judgments did you hold about yourself or the other person, what thoughts were present?)
3. What was your behavior? (Did you go into fight, flight, or freeze? What did you actually say or do, and how was that behavior similar to or different from how you normally respond in similar situations?)

Being able to recognize when you're in the stress response is the first step to being able to change it. Next, we will look at two building blocks that will support you in reconnecting to yourself when you're triggered—needs and feelings.

Universal Human Needs

The term *needs*, as used here, refers to the motives for conduct. For instance, all humans need water, air, touch, connection with others, fun, play, meaning, care, intimacy, etc. Everyone wants these needs met in order to survive, and more than that, to have satisfying and meaningful lives.

All too often, people become fixated on a *particular way* of meeting a need—a specific *strategy*. This fixation can become the source of conflict within oneself and with others. Yet a need is never tied to one single strategy—there are always multiple ways to meet a need. Knowing what you need (and what others need) from moment to moment helps you find strategies that will meet your needs and theirs. And, knowing the needs you are seeking to meet with a particular strategy can help expand the possibilities that might meet those needs.

When people are not aware of their own needs, they tend to spend more of their time reacting to one another, and this often creates havoc in their lives. The core needs (on pages 15 and 16) are grouped into three main categories and nine subcategories.

EXERCISE



Using the list of needs below, see if you can identify your needs in each of the following:

1. You are reading this book right now, what need are you seeking to meet in reading it?
2. Think of one action you took earlier today. What need were you acting from?
3. What needs are you meeting with the work that you do? What additional needs would you like to be met in your job or career?
4. Consider the situation you used in looking at your stress response. What needs of yours were not met in that situation?

WELL-BEING

Sustenance/Health

abundance/thriving
 exercise
 food/nutrition
 nourishment
 rest/sleep
 relaxation
 shelter
 sustainability
 support/help
 wellness
 vitality
 energy

Safety/Security

comfort
 confidence
 emotional safety
 familiarity
 order
 structure
 predictability
 protection from
 harm
 stability
 trust
 faith

Beauty/Peace/Play

acceptance
 appreciation
 gratitude
 awareness
 balance
 ease
 equanimity
 humor
 presence
 rejuvenation
 simplicity
 space
 tranquillity
 wholeness
 wonder

CONNECTION

Love/Caring

affection/warmth
 beauty
 closeness/touch
 companionship
 compassion
 kindness
 intimacy
 mattering
 importance
 nurturing
 sexual connection
 respect
 honoring
 valuing/prizing

Empathy/**Understanding**

awareness/clarity
 acceptance
 acknowledgment
 communication
 consideration
 hearing (hear/be
 heard)
 knowing (know/be
 known)
 presence/listening
 respect/equality
 receptivity/openness
 recognition
 seeing (see/be seen)
 self-esteem
 sensitivity

Community/**Belonging**

cooperation
 fellowship
 generosity
 inclusion
 interdependence
 harmony/peace
 hospitality/
 welcoming
 mutuality
 reciprocity
 partnership
 relationship
 support/solidarity
 trust/dependability
 transparency/
 openness

SELF-EXPRESSION

Autonomy/ Freedom	Authenticity	Meaning/ Contribution
choice	adventure	appreciation/
clarity	aliveness	gratitude
congruence	discovery	achievement
consistency	honesty	productivity
continuity	initiative	celebration/
dignity	innovation	mourning
freedom	inspiration	challenge
independence	joy	efficacy
integrity	mystery	effectiveness
power	passion	excellence
empowerment	spontaneity	growth
self-responsibility		learning/clarity
		mystery
		participation
		purpose/value
		self-actualization
		self-esteem
		skill/mastery

Feelings

Feelings are bodily sensations that signal whether your needs are being met by what is going on around you as well as inside you. Positive feelings tend to indicate needs met, and negative ones, needs not met.

Paying attention to your feelings when asked (by yourself or someone else) about a particular need, you are able to identify which needs the nonverbal parts of yourself interpret as met or not met. With practice, you will learn the signals from your body that tell you if the need you have guessed or your practice partner has guessed is accurate at that moment in time.

Feelings give you important additional information with which to navigate your internal and external worlds. When you have this

additional information, you do not have to react to your feeling states out of habitual patterns of action, the early versions of which were learned in childhood and typically have been built upon and reinforced. Instead, you can examine your life with an eye to how you can better meet your needs and the needs of others.

For example, if you feel angry, instead of reacting as you normally would, you can inquire into what needs aren't met and then choose to try something different than your patterns would dictate. Choosing responses that are different than your habitual patterns allows you to learn how to free yourself from the mindlessness of these habits. This process of personal learning gives you insight not only into yourself, but also into the interior lives of others. So, feelings can be seen as a doorway to learning deeply about yourself and others.

The feelings on the next page are a selection of the hundreds of feeling words that exist in the English language.

EXERCISE



Using the list of feelings on the next page, see if you can identify your feelings in each of the following:

1. Think of a recent time when you had fun. What feeling arises in you now recalling that time?
2. Think of a meeting you attended recently at work. What feeling arises in you now recalling that meeting?
3. Think of where you are and where you'd like to be in your career. What feelings come up as you consider those?
4. Think of the situation you used in looking at your stress response. What feeling arises in you now recalling that situation?

PEACEFUL	LOVING	GLAD	PLAYFUL	INTERESTED
tranquil	warm	happy	energetic	involved
calm	affectionate	excited	effervescent	inquisitive
content	tender	hopeful	invigorated	intense
engrossed	appreciative	joyful	zestful	enriched
absorbed	friendly	satisfied	refreshed	absorbed
expansive	sensitive	delighted	impish	alert
serene	compassionate	encouraged	alive	aroused
loving	grateful	grateful	lively	astonished
blissful	nurtured	confident	exuberant	concerned
satisfied	amorous	inspired	giddy	curious
relaxed	trusting	touched	adventurous	eager
relieved	open	proud	mischievous	enthusiastic
quiet	thankful	exhilarated	jubilant	fascinated
carefree	radiant	ecstatic	goofy	intrigued
composed	adoring	optimistic	buoyant	surprised
fulfilled	passionate	glorious	electrified	helpful

MAD	SAD	SCARED	TIRED	CONFUSED
impatient	lonely	afraid	exhausted	frustrated
pessimistic	heavy	fearful	fatigued	perplexed
disgruntled	troubled	terrified	inert	hesitant
frustrated	helpless	startled	lethargic	troubled
irritable	gloomy	nervous	indifferent	uncomfortable
edgy	overwhelmed	jittery	weary	withdrawn
grouchy	distant	horrified	overwhelmed	apathetic
agitated	despondent	anxious	fidgety	embarrassed
exasperated	discouraged	worried	helpless	hurt
disgusted	distressed	anguished	heavy	uneasy
irked	dismayed	lonely	sleepy	irritated
cantankerous	disheartened	insecure	disinterested	suspicious
animosity	despairing	sensitive	reluctant	unsteady
bitter	sorrowful	shocked	passive	puzzled
rancorous	unhappy	apprehensive	dull	restless
irate, furious	depressed	dread	bored	boggled
angry	blue	jealous	listless	chagrined
hostile	miserable	desperate	blah	unglued
enraged	dejected	suspicious	mopey	detached
violent	melancholy	frightened	comatose	skeptical

Faux Feelings

Since most people were not taught much about feelings, it's important when considering them to distinguish between what is actually a feeling and words that people tend to treat like feelings but aren't. These "faux feelings" are words that actually imply that someone is doing something to you and generally connote wrongness or blame.

Below are just a few examples of faux feelings (see the Appendix for a more complete list) and examples of what a person might be really feeling when they use this particular faux feeling word. Notice that there are multiple feelings listed—this is a key way to tell if a word is a faux feeling. For example, if someone says, "I feel abandoned" they could conceivably be frightened, angry, or lonely. Using a faux feeling word doesn't actually give the information of how the person is feeling. The list below also includes unmet needs that might be motivating the use of the faux feeling word.

EXERCISE



Read through the list of faux feelings below and on the next page, along with the feelings and needs. Which ones have you used before? Start to notice in your thoughts and conversation when you are using faux feelings, and internally translate those into your feelings and needs.

FAUX FEELING	FEELING(S)	NEED(S)
Attacked	Scared, angry	Safety
Betrayed	Angry, hurt, disappointed, enraged	Trust, dependability, honesty, honor
Bullied	Angry, scared, pressured	Autonomy, choice, safety, consideration
Criticized	In pain, scared, anxious, humiliated	Understanding, acknowledgment, recognition

FAUX FEELING	FEELING(S)	NEED(S)
Insulted	Angry, embarrassed	Respect, consideration, peace
Manipulated	Angry, scared, powerless, thwarted, frustrated	Autonomy, empowerment, trust, equality, freedom, free choice, connection, genuineness
Pressured	Anxious, resentful, overwhelmed	Relaxation, clarity, space, consideration
Taken for granted	Sad, angry, hurt, disappointed	Appreciation, acknowledgment, recognition, consideration
Unappreciated	Sad, angry, hurt, frustrated	Appreciation, respect, acknowledgment
Wronged	Angry, hurt, resentful, irritated	Respect, justice, trust, safety, fairness

**These are selections from a list developed in April 2000 for the Wisconsin International Intensive Training, an NVC workshop, edited by Susan Skye.*

Now that you're familiar with your stress response, feelings, and needs, let's put it all together with a process that can help you reconnect in times you most would like to act from presence instead of react from habit: the Self-Connection Process.

The Self-Connection Process

When people perceive a challenge to their well-being, they're triggered into the stress response and typically are not able to act in ways that are consistent with their values, often later regretting their actions.

During the stress response, you can do specific things to become conscious of the needs you want to meet and how you want to meet them. As you become aware of how the stress response feels in your body, you will be able to use the Self-Connection Process to respond more effectively in these moments of stress. Thus, this process is a way

to return to presence and choice in times of stress so that you have access to and can act according to your values.

It's imperative to practice how you want to act when experiencing the stress response. The ancient Greeks knew this more than 2600 years ago:

In adversity, we do not rise to the level of our expectations. We fall to the level of our training.

—Archilochus, Greek soldier and poet, c. 650 BC

Training is thus essential to be able to act as you would like to when you are under stress. That is why first responders, military, medical personnel, and others have increasingly trained in simulated real situations. They want to be feeling the rush of the stress response when they are training. They want the pretend situation to “feel” like the real situation, so they can practice how to respond in the heat of the moment.

Both science and the wisdom traditions point to the benefits of focusing on your breathing and bodily experience in order to reconnect and return to presence. With regular practice of the Self-Connection Process, you will build the capacity to respond more effectively in the midst of situations you perceive as emotionally or physically challenging. In addition, daily practice of the Self-Connection Process will remind you of your needs and the benefit of seeking to better meet needs over focusing on avoiding punishment.

You are encouraged to set aside at least five minutes a day to practice the Self-Connection Process, and also to practice throughout the day in as many moments as you can. The more often you practice, the greater access you will have to this ability to be present in challenging situations.

Suggested times for the Self-Connection Process:

- Planned times you set aside each day, such as first thing in the morning
- During transitions between activities, for instance as you prepare for a meeting
- During activities throughout the day
- When you are experiencing intensity

EXERCISE



1. BREATH

- a. Focus attention on your breathing, while increasing your in-breath and extending your out-breath longer than your in-breath.

2. BODY

- a. As you continue to breathe in this way, focus your attention on your body. Bring yourself more fully into your experience by:
 - (1) Feeling what you are feeling as you scan all parts of your body, without talking to yourself about what you are feeling. Just experience the sensations.
 - (2) Next, talking to yourself about the sensations you are experiencing. For example: "I have discomfort in my shoulders, and buzzing energy in my stomach, etc."
 - (3) Then naming what you are feeling. For example: "I am feeling exhilarated," or "I am feeling sad."

3. NEEDS

- a. Finally, ask yourself, "When I have this feeling, what need of mine is the nonverbal part of myself signaling is met or not met?" As you suggest needs to yourself in answer to this question, pay attention to the sensations in your body that signal that you have correctly named the need.
- b. With this need in mind, imagine what your felt experience would be like if the need were completely met.

- c. Ask yourself, "How can I get this need met now and in the future?"*

**Note: By doing 3b and 3c, you have given your brain a way to work "behind the scenes" to strategize how to get that need met. This is similar to how people can create thoughts that lead to depression by asking questions like, "Why did I screw up?" rather than, "How can I do this better next time?" If I ask "why" in this context, I will get an answer from the brain and it will probably reflect my core beliefs of inadequacy and deficiency. Whereas, if I ask "how," I set the mind to looking for solutions that are likely to generate hope. "How" typically puts you into action, whereas "why" tends to stall you into perseverating on a self-judgment that keeps you from taking action. You can use this tendency to your advantage in asking how to meet the need and imagining it being met.*