

SESSION TWO

THE NINE BASIC TOOLS

- The Ten-Second Solution.
- Three Body Tools.
- Three Mind Tools.
- Three Life-Design Tools.



SESSION TWO THE NINE BASIC TOOLS

In this session, I will share nine ways you can begin interrupting the stress response. First, we'll review the three steps of The Pressure-Free Method.

This is empowering: from a resting heart-rate, you have around ten seconds from the time you first feel an emotion to prevent the release of stress hormones.

If your heart rate is already elevated, you will have less time, but still plenty of time, once you begin playing with your tools. I use the word "playing" very purposefully, because if you try too hard, you will more than likely trigger the stress response.

When you give yourself permission to play the long game, to play, to explore which tools work in your particular situations, you

will make progress. You are most likely a high-achiever, a Type-A personality. You'd love to learn a method that is on-the-go, and doesn't require you to slow down or take time off.

Step 1: Each day, take time to identify your Targets. If you have your Pressure-Free Planner, you'll see the place to list your top-of-mind targets for the day. And in Tool 9, we will talk about this at length.

Step 2. Identify your triggers. What makes you feel annoyed or angry? Anxious or afraid? Ashamed? Argumentative?

Step 3. Use a tool in the ten-second window to interrupt the stress response and prevent the release of the cocktail of hormones.

The Nine Basic Tools to Stop Stress

These tools can help you take control of your emotions, your decision-making, and the direction of your life. Try them out, play with them, and figure which ones belong in the front of your toolbelt for a fast and stress-free response to life's challenges.

Tool 1: Relax your abdominal muscles.

Tool 2: Curves of Life perfect posture.

Tool 3: Take a 15-second belly breath.

Tool 4: Smile!

Tool 5: Say your slogan.

Tool 6: Interrupt negative thoughts with empowering questions.

Tool 7: Snap your rubber band.

Tool 8: Enter the Spirit of Contribution.

Tool 9: Write your future every day.



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Tool 1: Relax your abdominal muscles.

In stressful situations, the abs are often the first place we get tight. Let your belly relax and expand freely as you inhale. Don't force it out, just gently let it relax and expand.

Relaxed abdominals prepare you for perfect posture and open up your belly for deep breathing. Practice relaxing your belly before you inhale every day.

For years I walked around with my abs pulled in to look trim and fit. Let's see how well this works. First, it forces you to breathe shallowly only into your chest, reducing your oxygen intake.

Second, it flattens out the lumbar region in your lower back, reducing nerve flow. Third, your shoulders tend to roll forward, putting you into a slouch.

To naturally tone your abs and breathe well, relax them just before every inhalation and slightly tighten them at the end of exhalation.

Your ab muscles are like body armor, and when they are tight, they signal your brain to prepare for fight-of-flight. So by relaxing them, you can send a signal to your brain that you are just fine.

Having a softer belly will allow the rest of your body to relax more easily. And people (animals, too) will feel a deeper connection with you if the front of your body is more relaxed. Your voice may even improve!

Tool 2: Perfect posture with Curves of Life

Four simple steps, the H's from session 1, will help improve your posture, maintaining healthy lumbar (lower back), cervical (neck) curves, and lifting your thoracic (middle of the back) curve.

1. **Open your heart space.** Imagine your shoulders and ribs opening wide. Don't push your shoulders back, instead, go wide. This will open your chest and lift your thoracic area.
2. **Sit on your hamstrings.** Grab your butt, your gluteus muscles, and pull them back so that you sit on your hamstrings, your femur bones. This instantly improves your lumbar curve!



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3. Head to the Horizon. Lift your head so that you are looking level with the horizon. If you need to elevate your computer screen, get a free-standing keyboard for your laptop, use a standing desk with optional heights, it is worth the investment!

Your head in a down and forward position chokes off air flow, nerve flow and blood flow. Having your cervical curve in a healthy position will help you in so many ways.

4. Turn your thumbs out.

This instantly opens your chest and lets you breathe better. Humans used to walk with their thumbs turned more out because they were carrying buckets and other items from place to place. Their spines were more erect than ours today. And in places in the world where people have little back pain, they still do.

Tool 3: Take a long, slow, belly breath.

You've probably heard that a long, slow breath will help you reduce stress. The key is to start your long, slow breath in the first ten seconds that you feel a trigger starting to affect you so that you can keep your heart rate low.

First less assess how you breathe. Place a hand on your chest and a hand on your belly and breathe normally. What do you notice? Is your chest hand moving? Your belly hand? Both?

Ideally, your belly hand is moving the most, and your chest hand is relatively still.

Here is an easy breathing system:

1. Place a hand on your belly.
2. Breathe out slowly through your mouth, and gently tighten your abs as if you expelling all the air you can.
3. Relax your belly muscles and let your belly relax out into your hand.
4. Now, breathe in slowly through your nose.
5. Hold for a moment, and take an additional sniff or two to expand in all directions.
6. Slowly exhale through your mouth.

This easy breathing system will expand your lung capacity, bring more oxygen in, release more toxins, lower your heart rate, and help you stay Pressure-Free!

Tool 4: Smile!

A simple smile keeps dopamine flowing in your brain, and dopamine is the neurotransmitter required for your brain to work well! Then you can use that 10-second window to think logically instead of over-reacting. And smiling is contagious!



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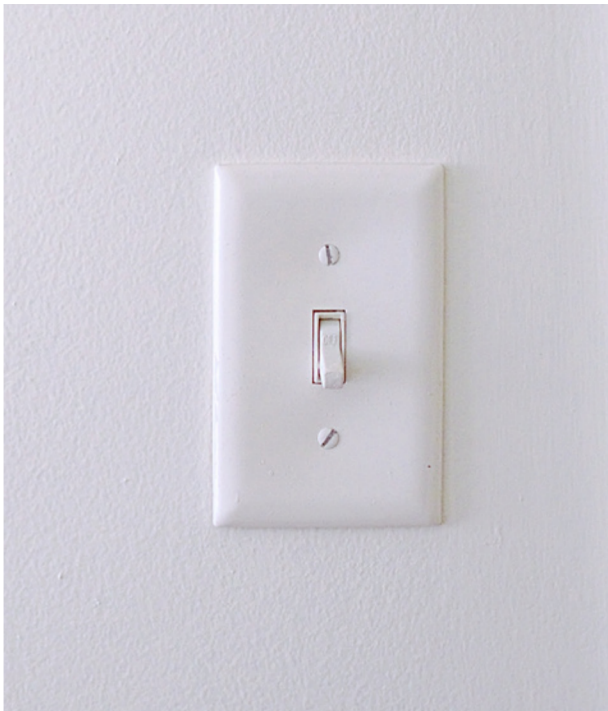
Tool 5: Slogan

Create some phrases that are easy for you to remember and empower you to stay up, above the stress. Phrases like:

Just do it! Stay UP! Let it go! I can do this!

Whenever negative thoughts and chatter intrude, say your slogan to return to a more powerful and productive state of mind. You can use slogans to reconnect with moments in your life when you felt remarkably successful or powerful or calm or full of love and peace.

If I'm experiencing anxiety before an event, I use Nike's *Just Do It! Or Be fearless! Or Be outrageously courageous!*



If I am interacting with someone, and I feel my energy turning negative, I relax my abs, pop into perfect posture and tell myself *Stay Up!* or *Let It Go!*

You can develop slogans for your golf swing, your important meetings, and your household chores. You may have a unique slogan for steering clear of an argument or annoyance.

The words you say to yourself are important and can instantly change your state and keep you free of stress hormone release.

Tool 6: Flip the Switch.

Words are powerful, but questions have even more of an ability to change your mindset, because your brain loves to answer questions.

Unfortunately, it's easy to be in the habit of asking questions that are not helpful like, "Why am I so stupid? Why can't I do this?"

Pretend there is a light switch on the side of your head, and when your thoughts are starting to go in a direction you don't want, pretend to flip the switch! A physical motion, like the celebration Ferris wheel, helps your brain create a new habit faster.

When you Flip the Switch, you can smile, then add a slogan, and immediately ask an empowering question that moves you faster toward solutions.

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When we feel like things are going wrong, our thoughts gravitate toward worry and speculation. And you're a great fiction writer, creating stories in your mind that will most likely never come true!

Take a few minutes to really listen to the voices in your head. Most of have a few different kinds of voices chattering in our minds! You may notice a nice voice, a neutral voice, and a nasty voice.

Sometimes you will recognize a voice as your own. Sometimes you will hear an echo of a parent or another influential person in your past. You may use the pronoun *I* or you may use the pronoun *you*. When the voice is not helpful, you can Flip the Switch, and ask questions that help rather than hurt. Here are examples:

Situation: Your having dinner with your partner and you start arguing about money.

Empowering questions:

- How can I stay present and calm?
- How can I keep my heart-rate low?
- What tools should I use?
- How can we have a nice dinner?
- How can we talk about this and remain Pressure-Free?



Stressed responses:

- My heart rate increases, my face turns red, and I get upset.
- We stop talking to each other.
- We pile on and add things we are mad about.

Situation: You are home and running late for an important meeting. Now you can't find your car keys.

Empowering questions:

- How can I stay present and calm?
- How can I keep my heart-rate low?
- What tools should I use?
- Whom can I call to say that I'm running late?
- When did I last have my keys, and what happened after that?
- Is there an alternate solution? Can someone help me?

Stressed responses:

- Crap. Everyone is going to be mad at me at work.
- I am so disorganized.
- Who is the idiot who moved my keys?
- Why is everything in this house a mess?



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Tool 7: Snap your rubber band.

A loose rubber band around your wrist is one of the great innovations for breaking a habit. You can snap your rubber band to stop negative thoughts and keep stress from triggering. Or you can use a bracelet or ring and simply touch it to remind yourself to stay Pressure-Free. Sticky notes can help, too: on your refrigerator, your computer, your bathroom mirror.

In 2006, I found a gem of a book called *A Complaint Free World* by Will Bowen. Bowen challenges us to break the habit of complaining by going 21 days without complaining, gossiping or negatively criticizing. You put a rubber band on your wrist, and every time you say something negative, you switch it to the other arm. The majority of us complain nearly every other sentence.



Bowen warns that you may realize that certain friends or family members drag you down with their complaining. It can be a good idea to inform those closest to you that you are trying to reduce your negative talk. This will explain why your behavior has changed.

Could I go 21 days in a row without complaining? I hoped that wearing my heirloom rings and switching them if I slipped up would help motivate me to stay out of the mental mud. I started my 21-day program at one of my son's hockey games. I had to switch my rings more than 20 times during that game alone!

I learned a lot doing that experiment. I became so much more aware of all the little things I would complain about. And gradually, I made progress!

Tool 8: Enter the Spirit of Contribution.

When your focus is on a simple goal, to contribute your best to make things better for yourself and others, your outlook and your relationships can become more positive and clear.

We have all encountered people in the throes of competition, who try to one-up you or put you down in subtle, almost imperceptible ways. Or perhaps they put themselves down and act ashamed or insecure.

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In their minds, they are constantly comparing themselves to you and to others. We have all been there, with our imaginations caught in the threatened world of the stress response. We have felt jealous, envious, embarrassed, ashamed. We have gloated in victory, argued, and bullied.

Parents, teachers and other authority figures can inadvertently promote this negative mindset when they try to motivate with comparisons: *Why don't you act like Saul over there? You're better than him.*

When people you care about act in difficult or unproductive ways, ask yourself what problem they are trying to solve with their behavior. How can you contribute to a solution? Or is your best choice to stay clear of them?

Competitive dramas play out every day in sports, in offices, in families. When a member fails, the group may boo, blame, even banish that member. Then nothing grows but negative energy.

In *The Science of Being Rich*, author Wallace Wattles shows how people find ways to turn benign incidents into competitive controversies. We do this often on a daily basis. At home, we insist that our way of doing the dishes is the best and only right way. If our child fails to make the team at try-outs, we rationalize excuses or denigrate the coach or the kids who did make it. We try to control conversations and the actions of others to fit our personal beliefs.

Approaching situations as a contributor is always win-win. In sports, work, and relationships, when you can view yourself as contributing to success - your own personal success, the team's success, even your competitor's success, you will instantly lower your anxiety and begin to perform at a much higher level. Plus, the negative approach that you may see others take does not need to change you. You can stay strong, Pressure-Free.

I habit-stack the thought *How can I contribute* with walking through doorways: the doorway to an office, to my home, to a different room, to any building. This powers me up to be my best self which brings a great deal of joy and happiness.

How can you contribute? How can you be *your* best rather than struggling to be *the* best?

Tool 9: Write your future every day.

Take time to imagine in detail the life you desire. What are your Targets? Dreams? Goals? Visions for your life? What do your relationships look and feel like? What does your ultimate daily life look and feel like?

Is it hard to envision your future? Several studies have shown that it can be difficult to envision the future if you are stressed, anxious, or depressed. This tool is to get you started with a daily routine of creating your future, your life, day-by-day.

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This 3-step system can help you get started.

1. Every day, I encourage you to write down your targets, dreams, goals, and visions. I like to use paper and pen to do this because it feels more tangible than doing it electronically. You can also do it both ways.
2. Write down two or more actions for any of the targets you've listed that you are committed to do today to help make any of your targets become a reality.
3. Take out your calendar, and next to each item for the day, write down a word that describes how you want to feel while you are doing that particular activity. An empowering word like *amazing, fabulous, fantastic, powerful*.



Your unconscious mind works for you around the clock, solving problems and making decisions based on the future you imagine for yourself. Most of us approach daily life without clearly imagined ultimate outcomes. We don't have consistent goals and visions that our unconscious mind can fixate upon and generate strategies to reach.

So when we don't take time for our future, for how we really want our life to be, life just happens to us. Now is your chance to get intentional about what you want to see happen in your life.

In *What They Don't Teach You in the Harvard Business School*, Mark McCormack tells of a 1979 study that asked Harvard MBA students: "Have you set clear, written goals for your future and made plans to accomplish them?"

Only three percent of the graduates had written goals and plans; 13 percent had goals, but they were not in writing, and the remaining 84 percent had no specific goals at all.

Ten years later, the members of the class were interviewed again. The 13 percent of the class who had goals but not written goals were earning, on average, twice as much as the 84 percent who had no goals at all.

The three percent who had clearly written goals and plans were earning, on average, ten times as much as all of the other 97 percent put together! Wow!

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I started visioning and goal setting when I was a teenager. When I look at the goals I wrote years ago, I am astonished how much has come true, maybe not exactly when I thought it would or in the form I thought it would take, but there it is.

For example, in 1992, I wrote that I would create a music school by the time I turned 50. Well, on February 14, 1996, my husband and I co-founded the Community Music School of the Battle Creek Symphony, and I was 34 years old!

Here is a more detailed description of how I write my future every day:

Choose a time of day, and set aside five minutes. I do this right before bed. Some people do this first thing in the morning.

Gather the following items:

- Your calendar, whether it is hard copy or on your phone or computer.
- Your Pressure-Free planner if you have one. Or a blank book, notebook, paper of any sort, or a white board.
- Writing utensil.

Find a quiet spot and take a look at your calendar. What is happening over the next few days and months? Do you have any goals about your activities that you might write out? Do you have any major dreams about your future?

Step 1. Write out your targets, major goals, dreams, and visions either right in your planner for tomorrow's date (if it is

evening) or today's date (if it is morning), or write this in your journal, notebook, or whiteboard.

The first goal I write every night for the next day in my planner is "Stay UP, Pressure-Free, in my Genius Zone all day!"

Step 2. Create a short to-do list for tomorrow that includes the most important things you must accomplish, and then include at least two items that will start some energy flowing about your goals, dreams and visions. Here is a sample list from my planner:

- groceries
- laundry
- e-mail coach Smith about Pressure-Free create audio for website
- prepare for upcoming corporate training

Step 3. Now look at the items on your calendar for the day for which you are planning. Look at each item, and decide in your mind how great you want it to be. Write a word or two to describe the outcome you want. Here is what my agenda looks like.

10am Violin lesson with Rachael - fabulous!
11:30 Session with Tom – exquisite!
2:00 Meeting with nonprofit – amazing!
3:30 Dentist with boys – excellent!

I use a lot of superlatives! I want to! I really want all of those items to be fantastic.

These are your nine tools. Powerful ways to break the stress cycle and begin your Pressure-Free Life!



Session 2.1 The Basic Body Tools

Overall Stress Level

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your stress level?

	Very Stressed					Very Calm				
Week 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Week 6	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Tool #1 Relax Your Abs

On a scale of 1 to 10, how much tension do you hold in your abs?

	Very Tense					Very Relaxed				
Week 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Week 6	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Tool #2 Posture

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your posture?

	Very Poor					Excellent				
Week 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Week 6	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Tool #3 Long Slow Belly Breath

On a scale of 1 to 10, are you a chest or a belly breather?

	Chest					Belly				
Week 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Week 6	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10



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Session 2.2 The Basic Mind Tools

Overall Mindset

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your overall mindset?

	Very Negative					Very Calm				
Week 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Week 6	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Tool #4 Smile

Do you consider yourself a person who doesn't smile much or smiles a lot?

	Doesn't smile					Very Smiley				
Week 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Week 6	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Tool #5 Slogan

List some words or phrases that may work for you:

Tool #6 Switch

What situations may cause you to fall into a negative mindset? You can list these on worksheet 1.3, too.



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Session 2.3 The Basic Life Design Tools

Tool #7 Snap!

What habits would you like to interrupt and change?

Tool #8 Spirit of Contribution

How can contributing improve your life?

In what situations would like to switch from competing to contributing?

Tool #9 Write Your Future Every Day

List at least 3 Goals, Dreams or Visions you have:

List at least two action items you can commit to doing tomorrow to foster one of your goals, dreams or visions.

What are you doing tomorrow? For each item on your agenda, add a positive adjective to describe how you would like to *be* or feel while you are executing the task.

Presentation at 3pm Fabulous!



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Session 2.4 How to Use Systems of Tools

What systems of tools do you think might be helpful to you
You can list them here, and then assign them to various triggers on **worksheet 1.3** .