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The 3 C's of courageous leadership: how to connect to your body, connect to your creativity, connect to your inner revolutionary, Connect to your body

In all that you do, in all the environments you operate in, your “first environment” is your body, the source of balance in all the flux and complexity around you. Connecting to yourself before stepping into action is key to your well-being and therefore key to your performance.

How can you possibly connect with the world—the external environments and the people in them—before you have connected with the immediate environment of you? Here is a mantra I want you to make your best friend: *Stop. Breathe. Take a moment. Connect.* Stopping and taking a breath and tuning into your breathing is one of the most powerful tools for self-mastery and it is utterly portable and accessible at all times.

You may play many different roles in your work, but you have only one body, and it is the gateway to all your experience. Your mindset, your power, your beliefs, your decision-making, your risk-taking, your acts of courage, your vision, your presence—this extraordinary palette of expression of *you*—is located in your body. You do not *have* a body; you *are* a body. The more you take the time to listen to your body, the more you can maintain your centre, and feel present and grounded, the more effective choices you have for responding versus reacting. Ever notice what is happening in your body when you feel under pressure? Perhaps your jaw clenches, your shoulders tense or your arms cross tightly when you feel defensive or resistant. Perhaps you slump or lean to one side when you feel defeated, bored or resigned. Whatever the challenge or pressure you are feeling, your body itself takes on an attitude. It is speaking to you! When you notice it, you can shift it and feel the difference immediately. One small moment of physical awareness and response can shift you into a much more effective state. As a corporate athlete, your fitness and well-being are critical to your performance so please connect to your body, listen to your body and take care of your body.

Starting right now Stop! Breathe! Take a moment to get clear and connected, to go towards your agendas with intention. *Or* you can continue to rush past, rush over or rush headlong through your days as one meeting leaks into another, draining your energy and back-footing your effectiveness. You become what you practise. Your energy is your “response-ability”. Enough said.

Connect to your creativity

In the everyday performance of your job and responsibilities, you can easily forget parts of yourself. Most often it is the creative part of yourself that can go dormant: the piano not touched for a decade, favourite poems not read again since school, the voice that once loved to sing now damped down into workplace jargon or hiding behind power point. The sketchbook replaced by spread sheets.

But when you **do** connect to your creativity—in whatever form that takes—you capture a state of joy, of power and flow. When you connect to your creativity you open your body, mind, heart and senses. You are spontaneous and agile. You tap into your imagination and your intuition. You are physically and energetically released, liberated, unlocked and focussed. *You are warmed up to yourself.* It is time to connect to your creativity again, to stoke that fire. Your creativity, whatever it may be, is a profoundly powerful resource for connecting to your best

self and getting into the high performance zone. Make creativity dates with yourself: step inside that art gallery you pass every day, register for that workshop, join that choir, take out the sketchpad, lift the lid on the piano—Start today! Make your creativity a habit.

Connect to your inner revolutionary

In the wake of events celebrating the women's vote centenary in the UK, I enjoyed an opportunity to choreograph a new play called *The Cause* about the suffrage leaders Emmeline Pankhurst and Millicent Fawcett. The legacy of those very different styled revolutionaries, one a militant activist and the other a strategic diplomat, lives on shaping the lives of women today.

Revolutionaries are the stuff of big visions and irrepressible spirits. They do not retreat from the phrase "this can't be done", do not collapse in the face of "no." They change mindsets and cultural norms. They awaken the world with "the shock of the new". They change the status quo.

There are revolutionaries all around us—from Malala to Greta, in the arts, science, industry and spiritualism. We all have our personal procession of revolutionaries who inspire awe, gratitude and humility in us. No matter how iconic their status or epic their visibility and impact their paths began with an experience, a sense of purpose and a first step, an action.

Within you is your own revolutionary, poised for acts of courage, risk-taking, standing up and being counted, speaking up, initiating, moving and shaking—whatever these acts may be for you that help create a more meaningful story for your life and your organisation. You do not have to be epic or iconic. You can start by being a legend in your own lunchtime.

Activating your inner revolutionary might begin by questioning the status quo, the "*this is the way we do things around here*" mindset as your default setting. Questions like "Why am I perpetuating models of practice that are not as effective as they could be?" (those terrible slide decks in the power point presentations, for example) or "What can I dare to do a bit differently that would create more engagement and value for myself and others?" (our meeting environments are not very conducive for creative thinking, for example) or "How can I role model something else?" (stop hiding behind "we" and claim the "I" with presence, for example).

Questioning and reflection can help break through the habit of obedience, or what Nancy Kline calls the *epidemic of obedience*. One small step of personal activism can liberate you from the atrophy of conformity:

- initiating more courageous conversations;
- taking a visible stand on an issue that is important to you;
- calling something out when you see it, such as an unconscious bias in operation;
- dressing outside the unspoken company conventions;
- owning and leveraging your ethnicity, your difference, your *otherness* in a more visible and influential way;
- making a simple change in the way you conduct meetings;
- getting to know the stories of those you lead;
- sharing a personal story and increasing your humanity factor;
- speaking first in the meeting where you have always held back;
- developing presentations that inspire rather than inform; and
- creating something you want to see in your organisation – be it a choir, a book club, or a crèche.

What is something you want to dare to do differently that speaks *to* you and speaks *of* you? Most critically, what is the consequence of *not* doing this?

My mentor, the epic and iconic revolutionary choreographer, Martha Graham, reminds us all that we have everything we need to express our own inner revolutionary for good purpose:

There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening, that is translated through you into action and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. If you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost.

The call of the revolutionary within you, whether gentle or gigantic, silent or seismic, diplomatic or disruptive, is your unique energy and gift that must be expressed. Drop the corporate mask; allow yourself to express emotion rather than damping it down; share your vulnerability rather than blockading it; speak language that conveys your meaning effectively rather than speaking in the shorthand company jargon; harness your animated, passionate, energised self and do not let it atrophy under conformity and conventions that may be long out of date.