



*Sandy Dow: Author, Performance Coach, Stress Management Specialist*

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Welcome!

I can't tell you how thrilled I am that you are about to take a few minutes to explore some chapters of my book.

I hope you have fun with these exercises and keep them tucked away for when you need a moment of calm. Because some days it can feel like we live in a world gone crazy, it becomes critical to take a "me minute," pause and remind ourselves that things really are ok.

Hugs,  
Sandy



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Fight, flight and freeze. Chances are we have heard all about those uncomfortable responses that happen in our bodies, when our nervous system decides we are under threat. The physiology of stress impacts everything from our energy and health to our ability to make a decision or think clearly. In this section, I include exercises that I use myself, and with my clients, to help get frayed nerves back in order.

My suggestion is to do them in this sequence, and if your anxiety is strong, do them all again. Assign your stress level a number from one to ten before you start, then check it again when you are done. In this way you can track changes and learn which exercises your body responds to best. Often when we're feeling anxious, it's difficult to notice when we have de-escalated the panic, and by seeing those numbers go down, it provides a real reminder that the fear is abating.

Knowing you have some strategies tucked in your back pocket, for times you are ready to throw in the towel, can be a lifesaver. However, it is also important to know that there is no one-size-fits-all. For every tool in this book, make it about what feels right for you and the unique needs of your own nervous system.

## **Become Curious**

When we experience anything from shock to chronic stress, we can become disconnected from the world and our bodies without even knowing.

When you are anxious your nervous system will be on high alert. However, what's important to know is your eyes have the ability to send a signal to your brain that you are safe. When ever you drop out of your mind and put your awareness on the environment you can give your body a chance to settle. Your breath will ease. You will arrive back in the present moment.

### **Try this:**

*Stop what you are doing, and look straight up with your eyes for three breaths (don't change your breathing, just track it) which can help to interrupt your pattern of thinking.*

*Then, drop your eyes and ask yourself "What do I see?"*

- Let your gaze slowly wander around the room, and allow your attention to follow your eyes as you drop out of your mind and connect with your immediate environment. What is the quality of the light? Do your eyes want to look far away or close by? Is there something pleasant you are drawn to look at? Stay curious and focused on your environment for as long as feels comfortable, from 15 seconds to a minute.*

*Then, ask yourself "What do I notice inside?" and see where in your body your attention is drawn.*

- Are your shoulders tight? Is your stomach in a knot? Do you feel connected to your body or like you are floating above it? Do you feel a bit frozen or are you itching to move? Do you notice you have bounced back into your thoughts? Is there a part of your body that feels relaxed? Again, stay curious as you are scanning, there is no right or wrong way of doing this and no right or wrong way to feel.*

*When you are done, take note if your lungs are taking in a bit more air, your shoulders have dropped or you have a different sense of your body or the room.*

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**Don't let the simplicity of this exercise fool you.** It is at the top of my list for a reason; it is powerful anti-stress training for our over-worked nervous systems, and I would love this to be the practice you incorporate the most from this book. Do it often. Just like the gym, regular workouts are going to make a difference.



For some people, feeling “inside” the body can be very overwhelming and unsettling. If this is you, try to stay curious and don’t pressure yourself to feel anything. It’s ok to focus on the outside world rather than the inside one until it all becomes more comfortable.

I coach my clients to slip this in before nerve-wracking events – anything from that first date to their on-camera interview. Because I still spend way too much of my day multitasking, I will take a break by orienting often. And the bonus I enjoy from having deeper awareness? I get to experience the fragrance of my morning tea and the comforting sound of rain on the roof.

## **Time for a Hug**

Don’t we all wish we had a nice pair of arms to hold us when we are feeling rattled and stressed? Adapted from Dr. Peter Levine’s Somatic Experiencing training – this is a way to supercharge a hug from someone who is always available: you.

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### ***Try this:***

*Place your right hand over your ribs on the left side under the breast area. Next, move your left hand above the elbow on your right arm close to the shoulder. Now, give yourself a gentle squeeze, and stay like this for two minutes. See if you can sense a relaxation as your arms hold you tight. Keep your awareness on the sense of containment you’re offering to yourself – you might feel bundled, hugged or comforted.*

*Then, imagine you could put your attention on what spiritual traditions refer to as your “aura” or a bubble of energy that surrounds you. Visualize pulling it in closer to you. When you are feeling scattered and spread too thin, this field can be spread far and wide, causing you to feel “caught” or stuck in past situations. This now allows you to hold yourself together, physically and energetically, helping to you feel centered and calm.*

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Your energy will become balanced as your left hand holds the acupressure points, on the area above the elbow, which can help with overwhelm.

Your right hand will be giving direct support to your spleen, a hard working organ, that is connected to your vitality. When your spleen is low on energy, you will be too. And as with any tool in this book, if it doesn't feel good when you try it out, give it a pass.

Many of my clients are performers and know how much the stage can tax their courage. They appreciate how this posture is discreet, powerful and perfect for grounding and soothing pre-performance jitters. This one is subtle; it looks as if you simply have your arms crossed, so there won't be anyone noticing you bolstering your inner fortitude before your moment in the spotlight.

## **Sing Your Stress Away**

Have you ever wondered why your yoga instructor chants an “Om” at the end of class? Believe it or not, there are many health benefits to be experienced from the vibration of the human voice, and the deep, low tone used in this exercise, enhances those benefits. The stimulating effect on your vagus nerve, can help ease everything from that knot in your stomach to your racing heart.

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### ***Try this:***

*Inhale deeply through your nose and exhale through your mouth making a deep “foghorn” sound for as long as you can. Feel free to give it some good volume (try this in the shower!) and allow the sound to come from your lower abdomen. Place your hand on your belly to feel the vibration. Continue in this manner, with a sustained tone on your extended exhales, for two minutes. You could also try a gentler, low-volume version of this by humming a low tone with the mouth closed. Try both and see which one feels best for you. For more vagus-nerve benefit, squeeze your lower abdominal and pelvic floor muscles as you hum.*

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Because the vagus nerve connects to all of your survival organs (now you know why when you are stressed you can't digest well, your heart rate increases and or your breath gets tight), doing this can, aid in lowering your blood pressure, regulate both your heart and digestion and help you sleep like a baby.

The other juicy benefit is how powerfully this practice stills the mind. Toning and chanting have been used since ancient times to help quiet thoughts before meditation. Now proven by science, your choir practice and shower singing will ease the stress in your body; though depending on your singing talents, your partner may not be receiving the same benefit.

I hope you enjoyed taking a few minutes for yourself to try these tools.

Ready for more?

## **Thriving in Chaos**

What other's have to say...

**In my life as a busy author, business executive and international speaker, I live in perpetual chaos and Mrs. Dow has hit the nail on the head for busy people everywhere. She delivers easy to use techniques to boost your energy, focus attention, recharge after a crazy day or instantly relieve stress. I love the tips that I can use while I am sitting in a meeting room or on a stage in front of hundreds of people – without the audience even know I am doing it! This book is definitely a must have for busy, stressed people everywhere.**

**Robert Murray**

Best-Selling Author, Global Speaker, Business Strategist

**“Thriving in Chaos by Sandy Dow is the missing link I’ve been searching for as an executive coach, for helping myself as well as my clients integrate the mysteries of mind, body, and heart. Sandy’s unique blend of ancient wisdom and intellectual inquiry into the science of trauma, has resulted in a book that is the perfect antidote for living in increasingly stressful times. Her Two Minute Tools are designed to help tune into the innate wisdom and healing powers we all possess.”**

**Kathy Dailey**

Creative Consultant, Executive Coach

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