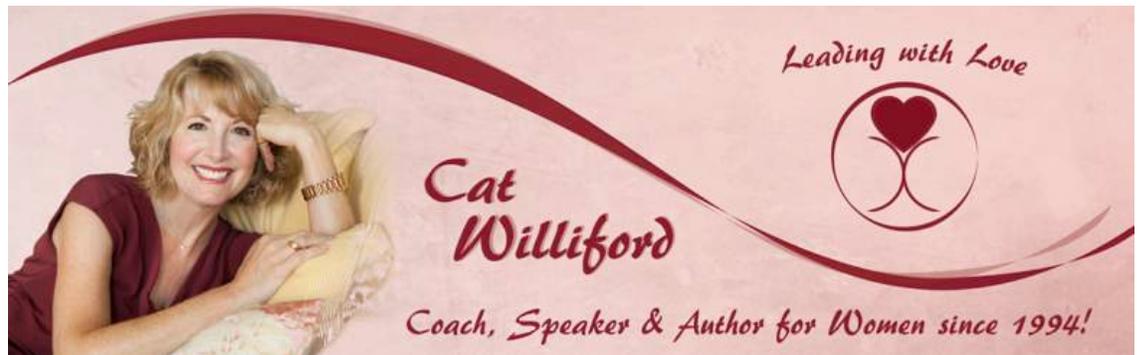


RELAX



Be Calm and Rock Your Business

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What is the simplest way to calm yourself on the go in a startup environment?

Just thinking about a startup environment has this entrepreneur's heart racing! Confession: I know all the things that will NOT calm you. Don't drink a pot of coffee each day or balance your lunch on your lap as you type fresh web copy. Checking email before brushing your teeth in the morning isn't a great path to calmness either.

Startup employees must be self-directed strategic thinkers, flexible implementers and quick

responders. Because almost everything in the startup environment feels urgent *and* important, it is easy to get sucked in. All of a sudden, you feel like you are pulling an all-nighter for finals ... every night.

Even if you work for a large company, you are no doubt feeling a sense of urgency. I keep hearing the new buzzword, "intra-preneur" from coach colleagues and executive clients alike. The idea is to think like an entrepreneur inside the company structure. (Hmm, don't people who choose to work

for large companies want to avoid that whole start-up, entrepreneurial thing?)

The simplest, short-term solution to calming yourself in any situation is to breathe deeply and rhythmically for a few minutes. Inhale slowly and imagine the word "calm" flowing through your body with your breath. Exhale slowly and imagine "stress" draining out of your feet. Typically, after the third deep breath, your heart rate reduces, your thoughts become less frantic and dramatic emotions recede.

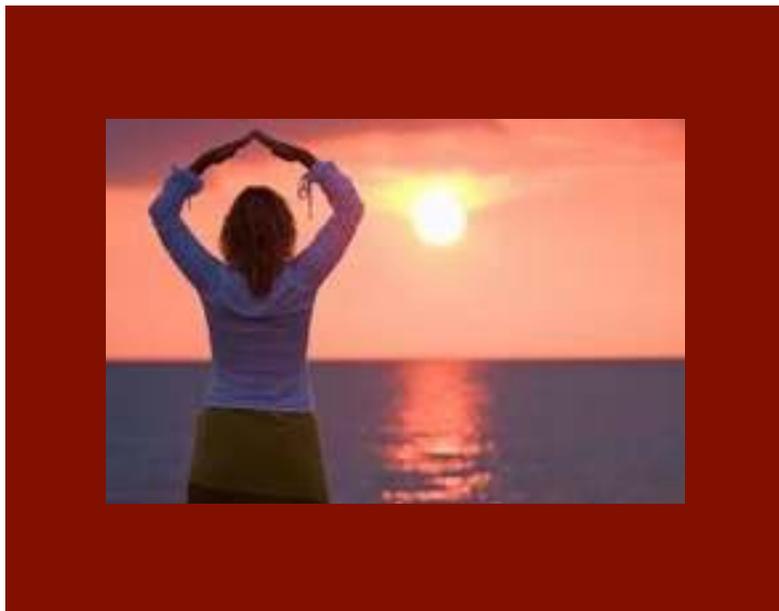
Short-term solutions like taking three deep breaths in the moment are great. But real power over stress comes from long-term strategies that keep you centered and calm, no matter what is demanded of you in the moment.

With the Holiday Hullabaloo upon us it is especially important to find ways to calm, soothe and be gentle with yourself. Study after study shows high levels of stress lead to health-related ailments and all manner of destructive coping responses, including that ill-advised third martini at the company holiday party!

Warning: The next few paragraphs are full of coach jargon, lingo and even a few touchy-feely terms! Play along anyway and answer the questions posed. As my grandfather used to say about soft-boiled eggs, “They’ll help you and do you good besides!”

When my clients come to coaching sessions with their version of the “I want to be more calm in the moment,” topic, here are a few questions I ask them – and now you:

1. What is the typical impact on your body of living with stress? (Ex: achy stomach, tight shoulders, shallow



breathing, etc.) Often, our body alerts us before our minds catch up and register stress. What happened to your stress level in reading this question? On a scale of 1-10, how stressed do you feel right now?

2. What is your coping response to stressful situations? Do you turn to caffeine, chocolaty sweet treats, shoe shopping, or mindless T.V. to check out from stress? My personal favorite reliever is a combination of snacking on salty blue corn tortilla chips while watching “The Closer” or “Bones” and shoe shopping on Zappos.
3. What are your core values? Which ones are being dishonored right now? When a coach asks about core values, we’re not asking about your morals or societal

mores. We’re really asking, “What makes your life liveable if not enjoyable?” Core values are like oxygen. We become pale and spacey when we don’t experience them. Honoring our core values day in and day out is one long-term strategy to feeling calm and centered in any situation, even in the chaos of a startup environment.

In case you are still a little fuzzy about that whole core values thing, I'll share my top five. They are love, connection, kindness / make a difference, passion, and fun. I even have pet names for a few of them. Connection is "Om" and kindness / make a difference is "pay it forward".

When I forget, or feel like I don't have time to honor my values, my stress level rockets. My shoulders look like earrings, I speed-dial my chiropractor for emergency visits and any sense of Om vanishes.

Then I practice the short-term solution of breathing deeply. Once my shoulders relax I can remember what my values are. When I'm really smart, I do what I request of my clients. I pull out my journal and write, or call my best friend to whine, I mean, talk about what core values are being stepped on.

One client discovered she was more anxious by the state of her

disheveled desk than by the chaos of her company going through a merger. She was dishonoring her value of order. Another client received feedback that she was being bossy rather than leading her team. She realized she hadn't been for a walk outside since the end of daylight savings time and her value of being in nature was being ignored.

As a result of writing this article, I am dedicating this December to experiencing my top five values every day.

I will honor my pay it forward value by letting the mom with kids in tow go in front of me in check-out lines, and smiling at store clerks while genuinely thanking them for helping me.

I will honor my Om value first thing in the morning with meditation and writing in my journal. I know this will make me more available to honor my pay it forward value with others.

If you see me in a checkout line tapping my foot, looking at my watch and sighing loudly when the clerk calls for a supervisor, you'll know I skipped my morning meditation. Hopefully, I'll remember to breathe deeply three times before making a snarky remark or gobbling a Milky Way candy bar while standing in line!

Now it's your turn:

1. What core values do you want to bring into focus?
2. What are two simple ways you can honor each of your core values? (Notice I said *simple*.)
3. Commit to honoring your values with simple actions each day.
4. Track your calm / stress level each day.
5. Practice breathing!

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