

## *How to centre yourself*

Centering is a technique which enables you to stay more responsive (rather than reacting or being taken aback/ off balance). At work, we can be taken off guard and can be triggered into the threat response quickly (causing us to be defensive or even launch a counterattack). You'll know how unhelpful that is. Centering helps you remain stable and grounded – something you would no doubt appreciate when you're in a stressful situation. It's also a practical technique that gives you more choice in moments when you risk being 'triggered' by what someone says or does.

Actors and dancers use approaches drawn from Alexander technique and many martial arts practices (such as Aikido, Tai Chi, Chi Gong) have different ways of doing this. Centering is designed to bring you back down to earth. It helps you focus on the here and now, so that you don't allow outside concerns to intrude on your inner strength and calm.

When you see a dancer with good posture – what do you think? Often, we see someone who is 'standing tall' as being dignified, calm or even having presence or gravitas.

If you Google 'How do I centre myself quickly' you'll see many variations. I notice 3 things that are common:

- Bringing your attention to yourself
- Paying attention to your breath
- Aligning your body

In his book Embodied Leadership, Pete Hamill offers a step by step approach which you can use sitting or standing. Here's a short version that you can practice this on your own.

1. **Lengthen** – imagine someone is pulling a hair on the top of your head and that your spine is lengthening with more air between the vertebrae. At the same time relax downwards – have a sense of gravity. If it helps, imagine tree roots extending from the bottom of your feet deep into the ground. Allow your body to lengthen.
2. **Relax your body** (across horizontal bands). Scan your body from top to bottom. Notice where you are holding tension and allow this to release (forehead, eyes, jaw, neck, shoulders, chest, stomach, buttocks, knees, legs, feet, toes). As you do this you will become familiar with where you hold tension and may only need to focus on a few areas when you need to do this.
3. **Widen and balance between left and right**. We tend to have a dominant side. Take a moment to balance your weight between your feet (or on your sitting bones), move your head into an upright position. Relax and allow yourself to take up more space – doing this can have the impact of giving yourself permission to reach out and connect more with others.
4. **Depth** – balance between front and back. If you are standing balance your weight between your heels and the balls of your feet. Rock forwards and backwards and find a centre point. Often, we lean back slightly or push our weight forward (as if hurrying into the future). Notice your depth – and (if it's right for you) imagine you have a large tail extending out along the floor behind you – supporting you (it could be a dragon or dinosaur tail). If you can, have a sense of all the people who have got you to where you are (it could



be teachers, mentors, fans, friends, family, ancestors). Sense them at your back supporting you and encouraging you to be the best you can be.

5. **Breathe** – bring your attention to your physical centre of gravity (about 2 inches below your navel). Take a deep breath in (imagine it coming in through the top of your head, down into your centre and out through the centre as you breathe out). Notice how you feel. If you are experiencing strong negative emotions, it can be helpful to imagine breathing them out through your centre. If you have a clear sense of purpose (why you do what you do and in service of what) bring it to mind and if it's right for you, speak it out loud.

With practice you will be able to do this very quickly. As with any technique, you will be more skilled if you practice it. I suggest starting with a time of the day or a regular prompt which reminds you to do this (for example when you come back to your desk after a meeting). See if you can use it to help you prepare for meetings/ events which you think could be stressful.

Once you have established your way of doing this, it will be easier to do it when you need it most – in those moments where someone says or does something that knocks you 'off balance'.

More useful links:

<http://tinybuddha.com/blog/5-ways-to-find-your-center-when-life-feels-overwhelming/>

[http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS\\_83.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS_83.htm)

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