



# **GETTING UNSTUCK FROM TRAUMA WHEN STUCK AT THE CONSOLE**

Stephanie M. Conn, PhD, ABPP  
Licensed Psychologist

# TRAUMA & RESILIENCE ARE....

Bio

Psycho

Social

**The best prediction of how you'll be two years after a major disruption, whether as an individual or as an organization, is how you were doing two days before.**

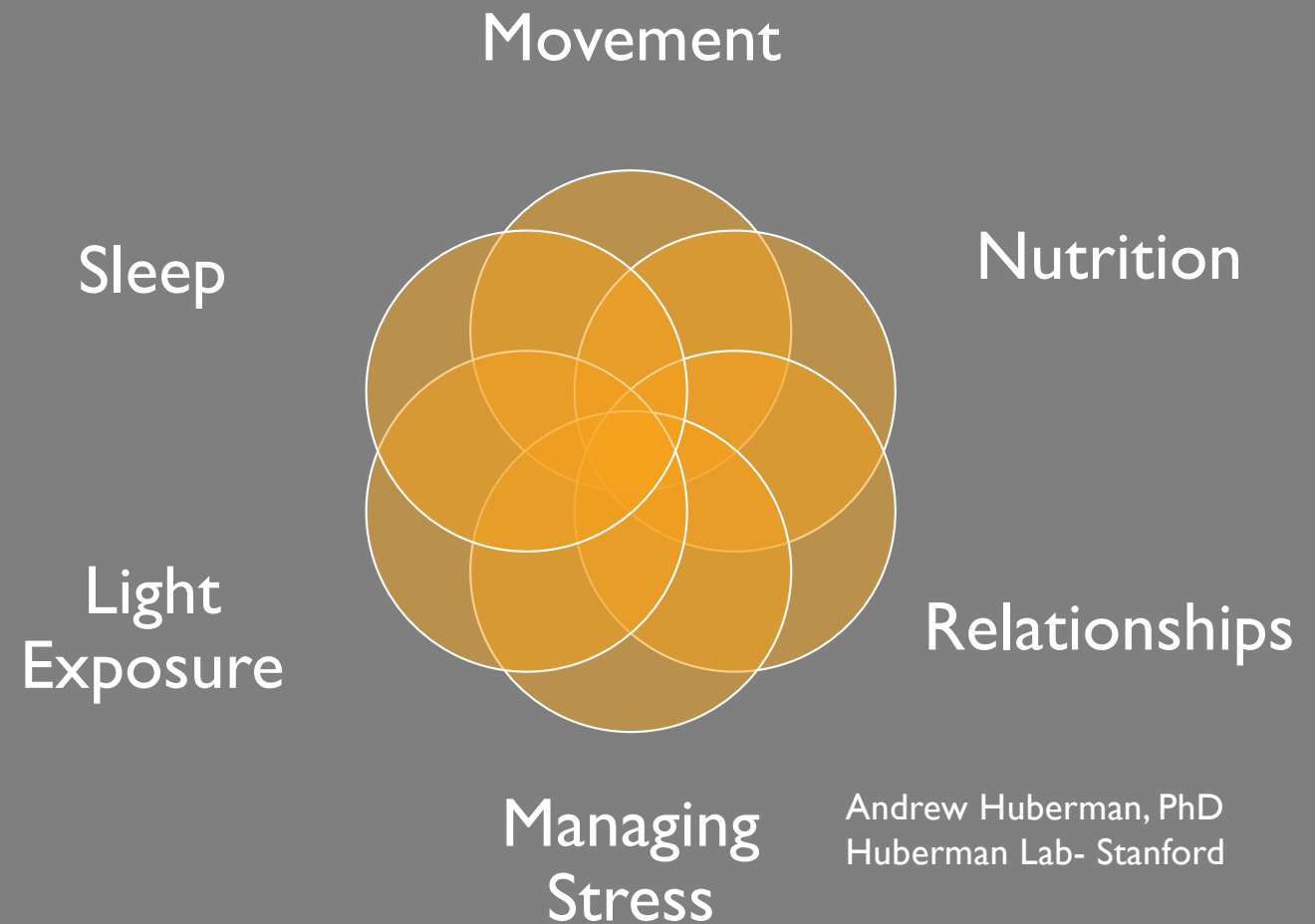
**Build on the basics.**

~Gist, Taylor, Watson & Leto (2019).  
*Understanding Suicide & Fire Service.*



So....

What are  
the basics?



Andrew Huberman, PhD  
Huberman Lab- Stanford



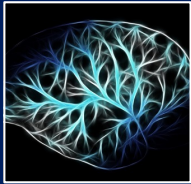
A person with curly hair, wearing a headset, is seen from the side, working at a desk with multiple computer monitors. The scene is dimly lit, with the light from the screens illuminating the workspace. The person appears to be focused on the work.

## DISPATCH WORK REQUIRES...

- **Focusing on 10 things at once**
- **Fast & ongoing judgments relating to harm, danger & deception**
- **Remembering & planning for danger, problems, etc.**
- **Chronic exposure to stress, dark side of humanity**

# RESULTING IN “DYS-EVOLUTION”

*Adopting & passing on traits that are  
damaging to our health*

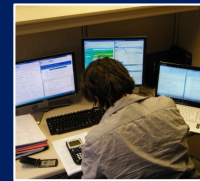


**Neuroplasticity +/-**



**Too much**

Breathing, eating,  
stressing, negativity, etc.



**Multi-tasking**

Lowers IQ, increases  
stress & mistakes



**Focus on the negative**

Critical / evaluative of  
self & others

# POTENTIAL IMPACTS



**Habituating to the  
"new normal"**

Even if it is chaos  
Dis-ease with quiet



**Decline in health**



**"Acquired ADHD"**



# POTENTIAL IMPACTS



Relationship- disconnection/ conflict



Increased Injury/ Harm

Inappropriate use of force  
Driving decisions



Unhealthy coping methods

Substance use, avoidance,  
overwork



# TRAUMA: SIGNS



# BIO: TRAUMA & THE BRAIN

- Amygdala, hippocampus, prefrontal cortex, & thalamus
- Memories are fragmented, stored as fragments
- Brain (limbic system) believes event is ongoing & sounds alarm



### ZONE OF HYPERAROUSAL

- Hyperarousal - (High levels of arousal)
- Feeling overwhelmed, anxious, highly stressed, or angry
- Body wants to fight/flee
- Sympathetic Nervous System Activation
- Heart increase
- Ready to move away from what we perceive as dangerous
- Faster breathing, blood pressure increases

### WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

- Optimal Arousal Zone
- Calm, but not tired
- Alert, but not anxious
- Ventral Vagal Pathway
- Successfully able to manage the stressors and soothers of the day without maladaptive behaviors or excessive dysregulation
- Connected, flexible, relaxed
- Able to communicate
- Ready for learning & problem-solving

### ZONE OF HYPOAROUSAL

- Hypoarousal (Low levels of arousal)
- Feeling zoned out, spacey, numb
- Body wants to shut down/freeze/immobilize
- Parasympathetic/Dorsal Vagal Pathway
- Survival State
- Dissociative Collapse
- Shut down

@yesandbrain

Results in illness, injuries, & pain  
Increased threat perception  
Inability to filter out information  
**GO!!!!!!**

Sweet spot  
Expand here

Blunted feelings – lack of imagination  
Withdrawal & numbness  
Difficulty focusing, forgetful, etc.  
**SLOW!!!!!!**



## COMMON PHYSICAL SIGNS OF SYMPATHETIC OVERDRIVE

- Sewing machine leg issues
- Digestive issues
- Workaholic
- Headaches, chronic pain
- Hard-charging
- Difficulty being still



# FLIP-FLOP

## Hyperarousal

- **Conflict with co-workers / citizens**
- **Results in illness, injuries, & pain**
- **Increased threat perception**
- **Inability to filter out information**
- **Difficulty being still**
- **Quick to Anger / Emotionality**
- **Difficulty falling/ staying asleep**
- **Thrill-seeking behaviors**
- **Workaholism**

## Hypoarousal

- **Blunted feelings – indifferent, indecisive**
- **Withdrawn**
- **Avoiding calls**
- **Mistakes in paperwork, accidents**
- **Difficulty focusing, forgetful, etc.**
- **Sleeping often**
- **Zoned out- tv, internet, etc.**
- **Gilmartin's "usta syndrome"**

# PSYCHO: THE EMOTIONAL TOLL OF TRAUMA

Irritability to  
Anger

Lack of  
patience

Less  
compassion for  
self/others

Negativity bias  
expanded

Isolation

- Physical
- Mental/ Emotional

# STORY FOLLOWS STATE

***Pre-Annoyed***  
***(adj.)*** You know this  
person is about to piss  
you off even before they  
say anything.

Me to myself: This is annoying. This conversation is annoying, this person is annoying. I hope I'm hiding it well.  
My face:



## SOCIAL: RELATIONAL IMPACT

- Distance from others
  - Withdrawing/ Pushing Away
  - To avoid bringing others down
  - To avoid traumatizing others
  - Lack of energy
  - Decision fatigue



# TRAUMA: SCIENCE







## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE HAVE TRAUMA EXPOSURE?

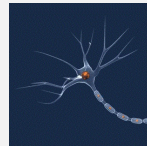
- Autonomic Nervous System
  - Parasympathetic system drops out
  - Sympathetic system kicks in



# THREE STRESS PROCESSES



*Habituation*



*Sensitization*



*De-habituation*

# NEUROPLASTICITY



HOW DO THESE  
PROCESSES AFFECT YOU  
PSYCHOLOGICALLY &  
SOCIALY?



**IF TWO PEOPLE LOVE EACH OTHER,  
NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE**

VIA 9GAG.COM

**EXCEPT DECIDING WHERE TO EAT**



**COULD YOU  
REPEAT THAT TRAFFIC**

**IN A LOUD,  
SLOW, SARCASTIC MANNER**



## DOWNPLAYING OTHERS' CONCERNS

**You are just as dead from  
drowning in 7 feet of water  
as 20 feet of water.**



**By replacing  
your morning  
coffee with green  
tea, you can lose  
up to 87% of  
what little joy  
you still have  
left in your life.**

**BREAK TIME**



# TRAUMA: STRATEGIES



## HOW DO DISPATCHERS TYPICALLY COPE?

- Exercise
  - +- (HIIT- in short doses, improves focus & mood) (too much/ too long = damaging stress)
- Avoidance
- Busyness
  - Distractions
  - Alcohol





Awareness & Reflection Practices

Sleep, Exercise, Healthy Eating & Hydration

Quiet Time in Nature

Talking to a Friend / Confidant

Getting Bodywork / Massage

Enjoying a Hobby

Shopping

Habitual Eating

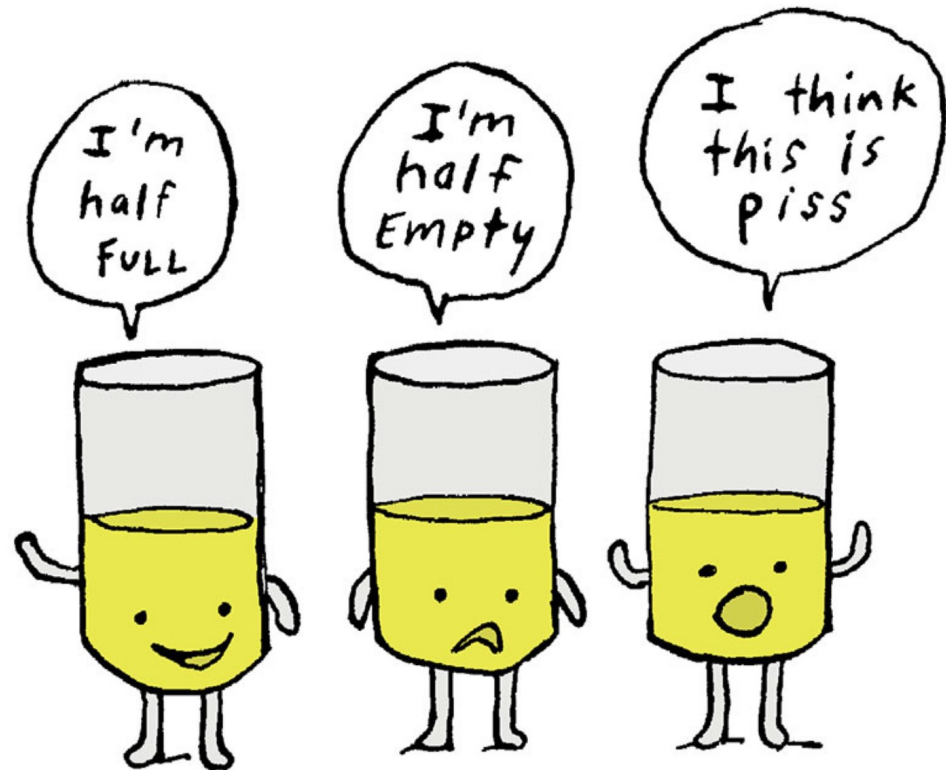
Binge TV Watching

Excessive Caffeine, Sugar, Tobacco, Alcohol or Other  
Substances

Adrenaline-seeking, violent or self-harming behaviors

**Elizabeth Stanley, PhD.**  
***Widen the Window***

# Mindset



## HOW DOES THE STORY END?

They met in a bar, where he offered her a ride home. He took her down unfamiliar streets. He said it was a shortcut.....



Pain does not result in suffering.  
Thinking about pain repeatedly  
results in suffering.

GREITENS, AUTHOR OF *RESILIENCE:*  
*HARD WON WISDOM FOR LIVING A BETTER LIFE*

*You'd rather feel  
guilty than  
helpless.*



# FAULTY THINKING

(KIRSCHMAN, KAMENA & FAY, 2013)



## Incident Envy

Downplaying own  
incident / needs  
problems

You're just as dead  
from drowning in  
7ft of water as 20



## Curse of Omnipotence

Not  
recognizing  
own limits

*"If only I had  
..."*



## Rescuing Others

Don't want  
to "burden"  
others with  
their  
problems



## Myth of Uniqueness

Comparing  
their insides  
to other's  
outsides

# THE STOCKDALE PARADOX

“You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end — which you can never afford to lose — with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”

— Adm. James Stockdale



# HARDINESS

## Challenge

- Adversity is not a threat

## Control

- What is/isn't in your control

## Commitment

- Active, persistent, goal-oriented

# WHAT DO FIRST RESPONDERS THINK WHEN YOU TELL THEM TO IMPROVE THEIR SELF-TALK?



# PERFORMANCE LANGUAGE

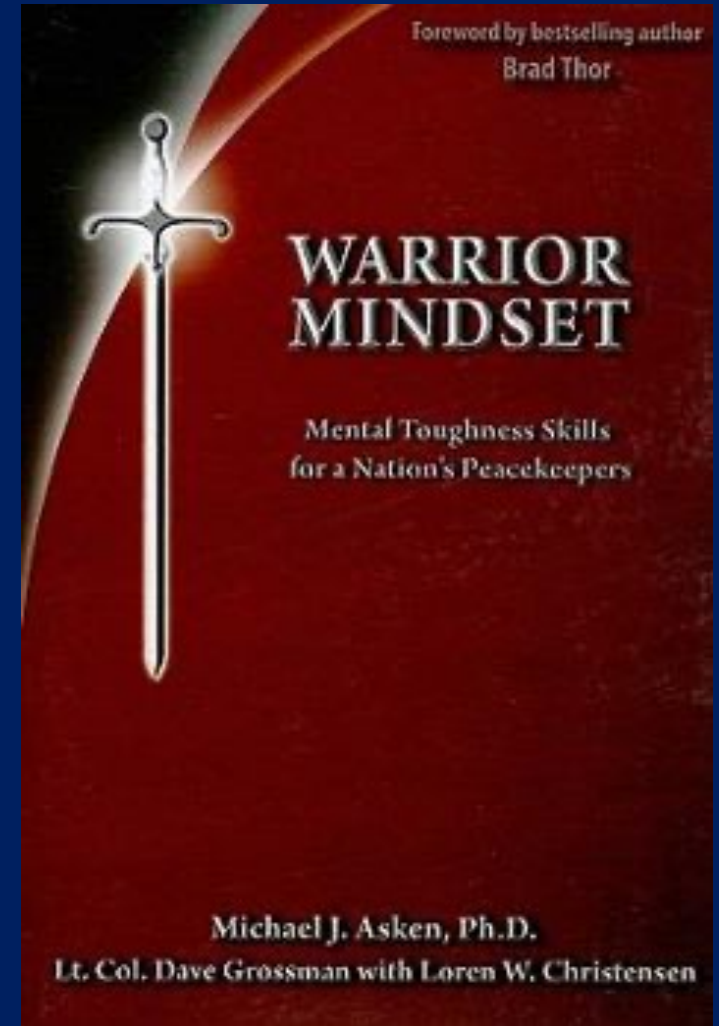
I do hard  
things.

Work it,  
step by step.

# SELF-TALK FOR ENHANCED PERFORMANCE UNDER PRESSURE (STEP-UP)

~Dr. Michael Askin

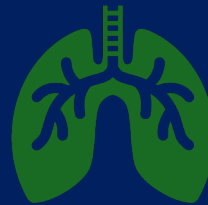
Instructive: Focus. Breathe.  
Affirmative: You've got this.



## ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES



Good job, do it again



Concentrate. Breathe.



You've got this.

Greitens, 2015, p. 177

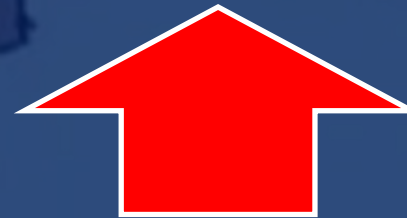


# A CALM MIND REQUIRES A CALM BODY: THE FIRST RESPONDER NERVOUS SYSTEM



**Parasympathetic**  
(rest-digest)

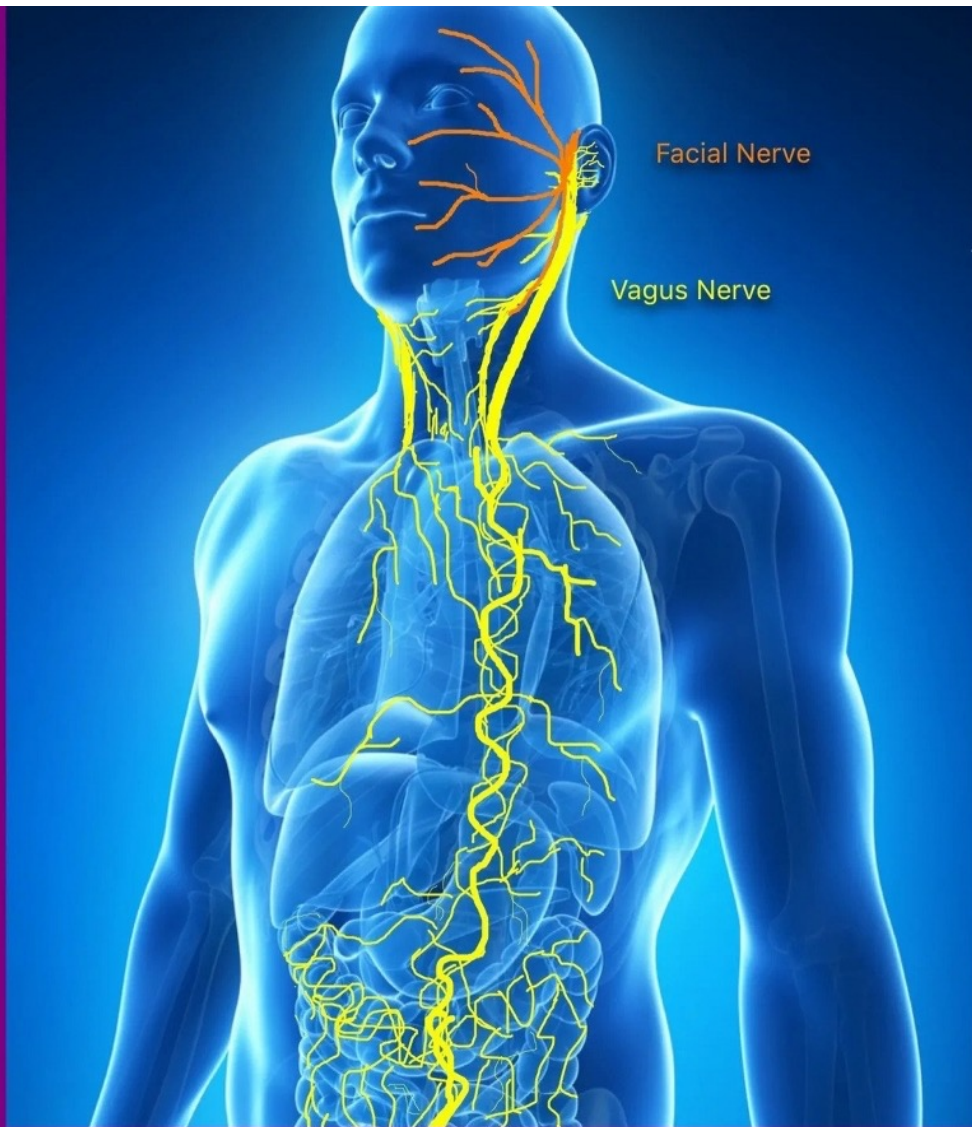
**Sympathetic**  
(fight-flight)





55 Strategies Online Article  
Dr. Linnea Passaler  
Heal Your Nervous System

STRENGTHENING THE PARASYMPATHETIC



## ACTIVATE YOUR VAGUS NERVE TO EASE STRESS

- Regulates HR, breathing, blood pressure, digestion & immunity
- Communicates from body to brain
- Humming
  - Humming increases the release of nitric oxide in the nasal passages 15-fold.
- Singing
- Gargling
- Neck turns w/ eye turns
- Ear pulls/ Ear Bone

# CULTIVATE INTERNAL SITUATIONAL AWARENESS



Breathing rate/ quality



Muscle tension



HRV (watch trackers, etc.)



Thoughts



Frankl's "*Inner Hold*"- rigorous control of his own inner state, a disciplined defense of his own integrity\*

Where our  
mind goes,  
blood flows.

# WHAT'S HEART RATE VARIABILITY (HRV)?

*“ . . . a measure of neurocardiac function that reflects heart–brain interactions and autonomic nervous system (ANS) dynamics.”*

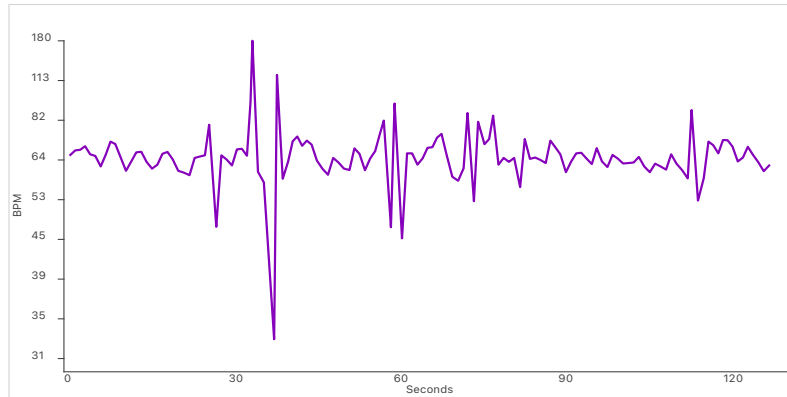
(McCraty & Shaffer, 2015)



#### HRV Assessment

Name Class Demo Date February 13, 2024 9:44:01 AM PST  
Gender Female Duration 2:05 Minutes  
Age 51

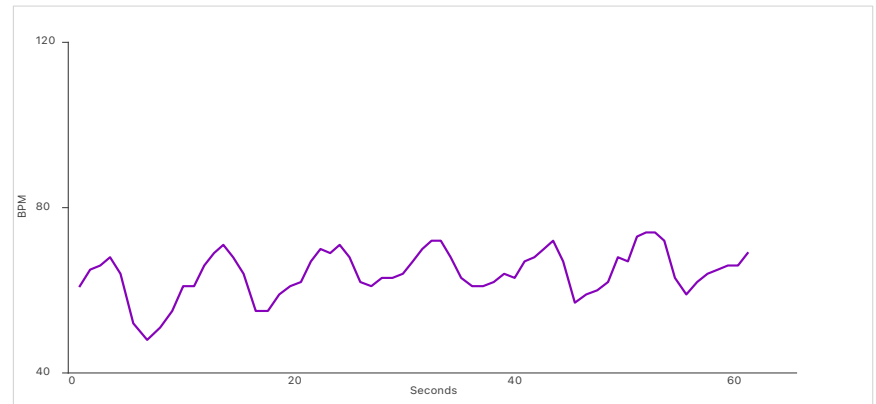
HRV



#### 1-Minute HRV Deep Breathing Assessment

Name Class Demo Date February 13, 2024 9:47:04 AM PST  
Gender Female Duration 1:00 Minute  
Age 51

HRV



## INCREASING HRV LEADS TO...

- Less physical pain
- Improved cognitive performance
- Improved focus
- Improved health (reduces 5 leading causes of death)
- Improved relationships via better communications



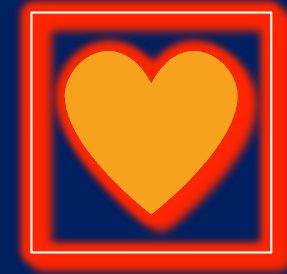
# HEARTMATH BREATHING TECHNIQUE



Clear the heart

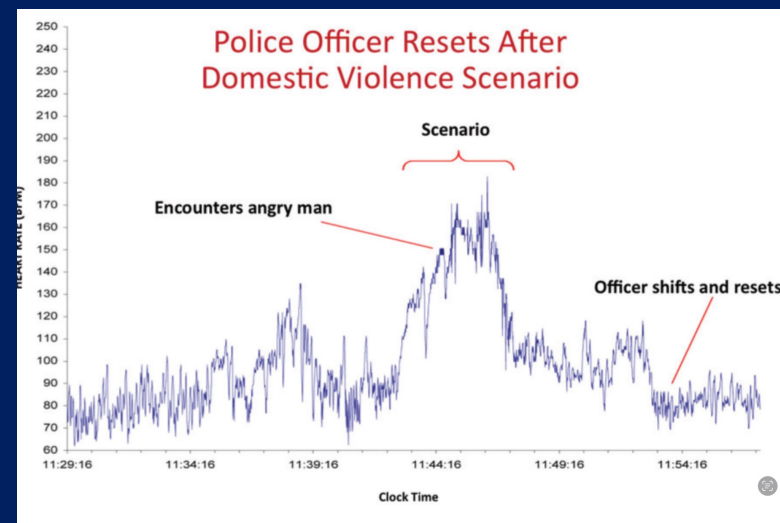
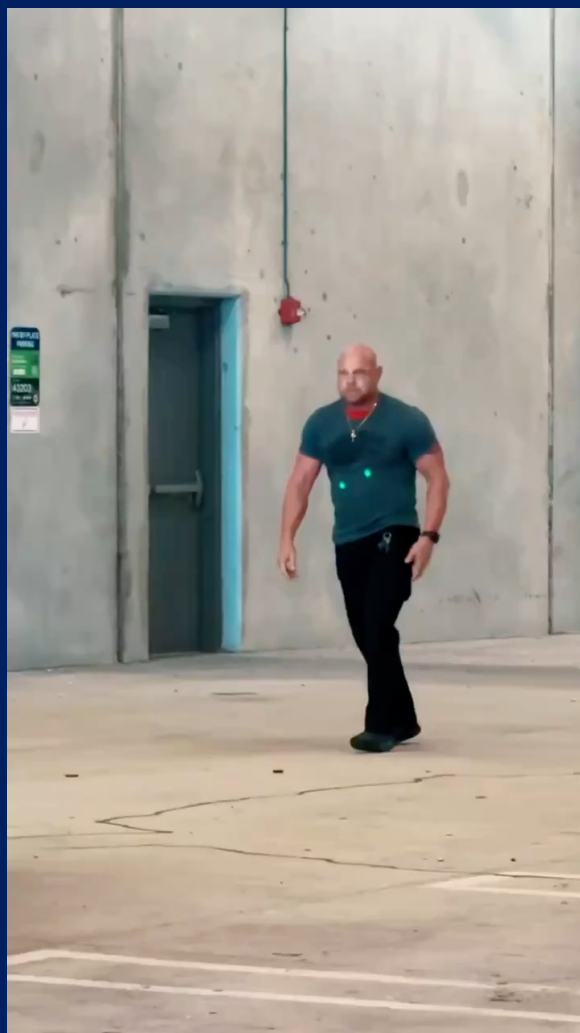


Clear the Mind



Shift the heart

Dr. Leah Lagos, Heart, Breath, Mind



NEUROSART



## CONNECT WITH ANOTHER

- When safe, social engagement portion of the vagus nerve suppresses the fight/flight & the immobilization response
- When not safe, it disappears & fight flight/mobilization occur

# Downshifting Your Nervous System



- Music
- Breath
- Mental imagery
- Savoring
- Yoga
- Meditation
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Tension Releasing Exercises (TRE)



# STRATEGIES FOR BEING STUCK ON HIGH

Physiological sigh

5-second breath  
(10)

4x7x8 breathing

Non-sleep deep  
rest (NSDR)  
(AKA Yoga Nidra)

Left or right  
nostril breath



Huberman  
NSDR Video

A silhouette of a man with a beard, looking out at a sunset over the ocean. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm orange glow. The man is in the foreground, and the ocean and sky are in the background.

# NON SLEEP DEEP REST

10 MINUTE

HUBERMAN LAB



BREAK TIME



# PHYSICAL DOWNREGULATION



**Cold  
water**

**Shaking/  
TRE**

**“Basic  
exercise”**



# EMOTIONAL STABILIZATION

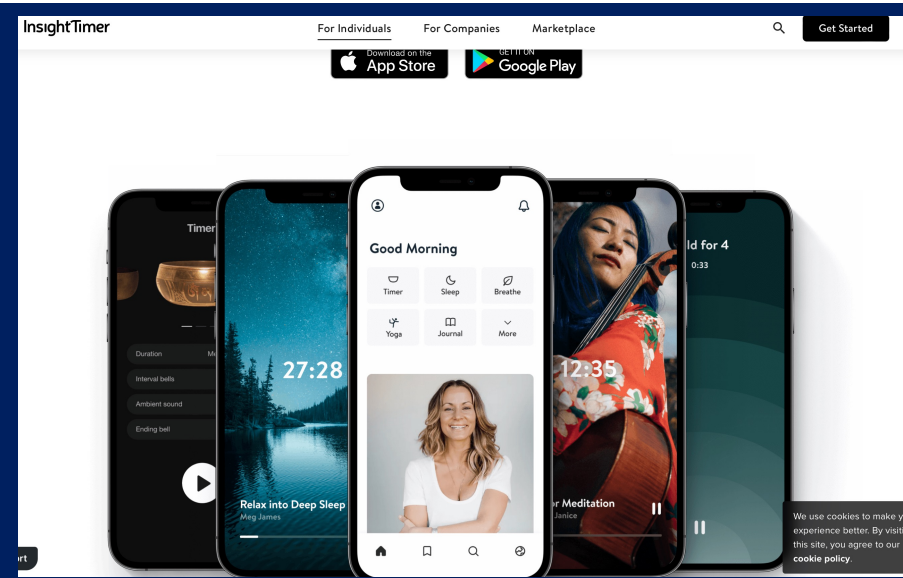
Immediate Stabilization Protocol  
(ISP)  
(Quinn, 2018)

Psychological First Aid based on  
Adaptive Information Processing  
Model of EMDR



# STRATEGIES FOR BEING STUCK ON LOW

- Exercise
- Light therapy
- Alkaline breathing / Wim Hof breathing

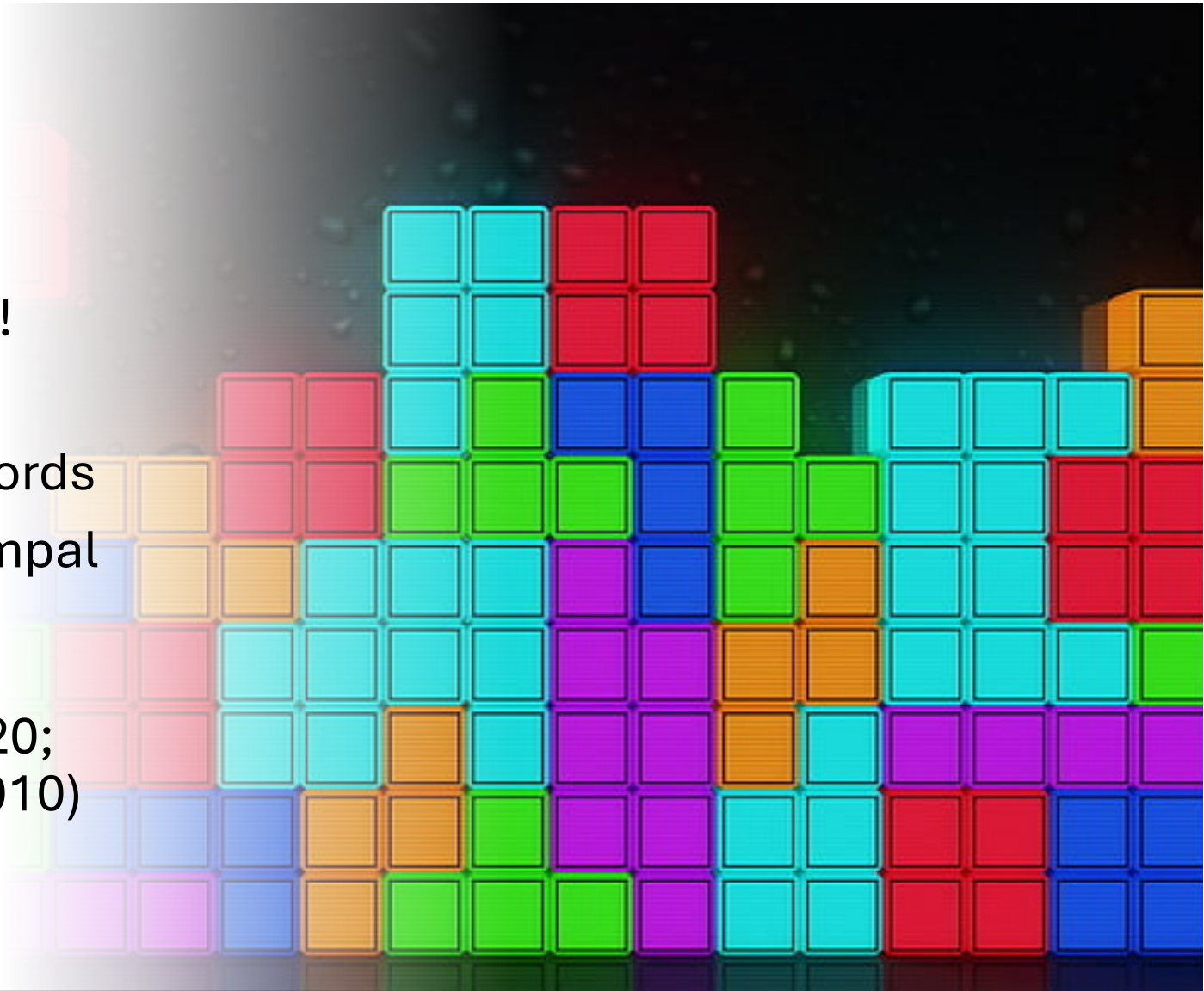


Insight Timer



# Mental: Tetris

- What the what?!?!?!?
- Within 6 hours
- Visuospatial, not words
- Increases hippocampal volume
  - Reduces PTSD  
(Butler et al., 2020;  
Holmes et al., 2010)



# AWAY FROM THE CONSOLE

## BEFORE SHIFT

- Set intention
  - Self-fulfilling prophecy
  - Compassion-recipient
- Set up nervous system
  - Hydrate, nutrition, exercise, breathwork

## AFTER SHIFT

- Balanced reflection of shift
  - Good, bad & values behaviors
- Shift & reset nervous system



# AT THE CONSOLE

- Bio
  - Breath w/ isometric movement
  - Cold
  - Touch lips
  - Yawn
  - Stretch
  - Draw/Doodle
  - Valsalva Maneuver
  - Smell (lavender, rosemary, bergamot)
  - View Fractals
- Psycho
  - Shift Focus
    - Cognitive
    - Emotional
  - Screen door imagery- Observe, not absorb
- Social:
  - Compassion to caller, peer, or officer/ FF



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# The three hardest things to say are:

- I was wrong.
- I need help.\*
- Worcestershire sauce

E.M.D.R.

## EYE MOVEMENT DESENSITIZATION & REPROCESSING

- Treatment of choice for trauma (police, fire, military, crime victims)
- Accelerated processing (faster /more effective than talk therapy)
- Integrates fragmented memories



# ACUTE STRESS ADAPTIVE PROTOCOL (ASAP)

Created FOR first responder BY a first responder (peer supporter, chaplain, even clinician)

After 3 sleep cycles

Can be incident-driven or offered on a “drop-in” basis

Can be done as a group or 1-on-1

50-66% reduction in distress score after 1 session

44-50% reduction in PTSD scores after 4 sessions



**6-Minute Video  
on ASAP**

# ALPHA-STIMULATORS

Mental sharpness and clarity are vital to the success of any job, but especially in the police world.

Just 20 min a day can reduce anxiety and insomnia.

Alpha-Stim® works with the body to help it regain a healthy circulatory current, simulate endorphin release, and rebalance neural firing patterns.



DEVICES ARE AVAILABLE FOR USE AT NORTH, CENTRAL, EAST, TRAFFIC, AND DETECTIVES

AVAILABLE FOR USE DURING WELLNESS HOURS

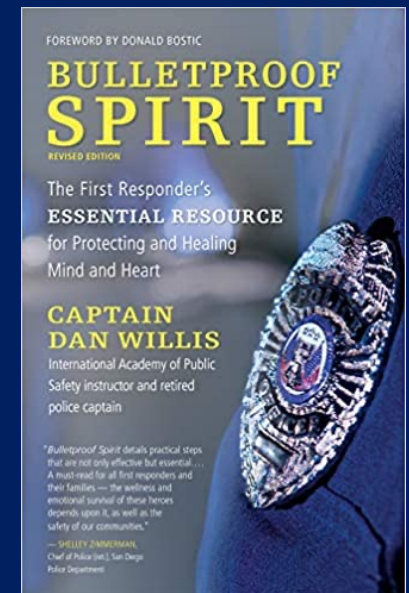
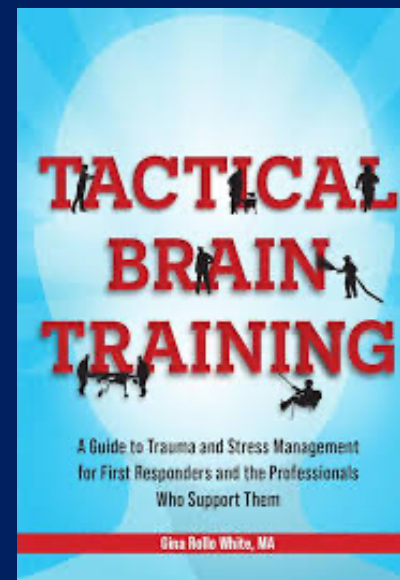
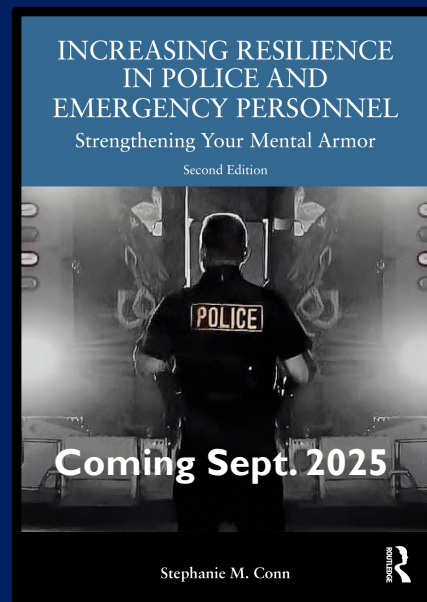
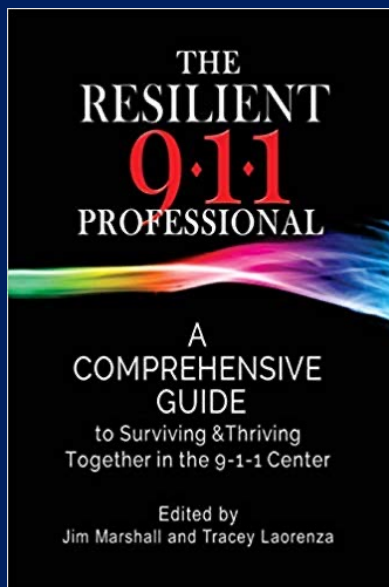
YOUR USAGE IS CONFIDENTIAL AND WILL NOT BE SHARED W/ SUPERVISORS OR WITH ANY PPB PERSONNEL.

CONTACT FIRST RESPONDER PSYCHOLOGY TO GAIN APPROVAL **BEFORE** USE

CRAIG DEARDORFF LCSW  
971-727-4197  
DR STEPHANIE CONN  
971-250-1519



# FIRST RESPONDER RESOURCES





# First Responder Family Handbook

*A Guide to Thriving on a Daily Basis*



Dr. Stephanie M. Conn





## Within the Trenches Podcast

Within the Trenches was born from my own struggles in 911. For a long time I buried my calls. No one was talking about mental health and wellness of 911 dispatchers back then. I was afraid that I would be seen as weak for talking about my calls or asking for help. When it became too much I decided to finally start sharing my stories.

It was therapeutic! I started blogging about my calls, and eventually the podcast was born. I thought, "If this is therapeutic for me, maybe it would be for others." I worked in dispatch for 13 years and it was the most interesting job I ever had. I started this to let people know what it's like to be in this profession. The stories involve all types of calls. The show is meant to be informative, humorous, serious and all around eye opening to the world of 911 dispatch. The idea for this started back in 2010 as a college project and the video that started it all can be seen [here](#).

Dispatchers from all over the United States including other areas such as Australia, Canada and Ireland have been featured on the podcast. Whether you are new to the profession, seasoned, or retired, I want to share your story! I have been doing this for over a decade. It is my passion mission to open the eyes of the world to what you do, daily. Thank you for the support and your trust in me to share your stories.

Listen below or



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Step into the world of RESPONDER RESILIENCE, an insightful podcast that sheds light on the challenges and triumphs of firefighters, EMTs, dispatchers, and law enforcement professionals. Hear firsthand accounts from our community's finest as they discuss critical issues on the job and explore mental and physical wellness topics with hosts Lt. David Dachinger (Ret.), Bonnie Rumilly LCSW/EMT and Dr. Stacy Raymond. Subscribe and watch it here on demand, with new episodes airing Wednesdays at 7pm ET on [YouTube](#) [Facebook](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Apple Podcasts](#) [Spotify](#)

## On Scene First with Tracy Eldridge Podcast

The "On Scene First with Tracy Eldridge" podcast will allow public safety difference-makers to share entertaining, educational and empowering information and resources. In addition, each guest will share stories of growth and perseverance.

Are you interested in being on the podcast?

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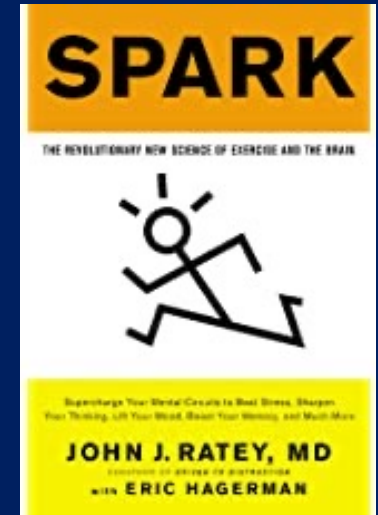
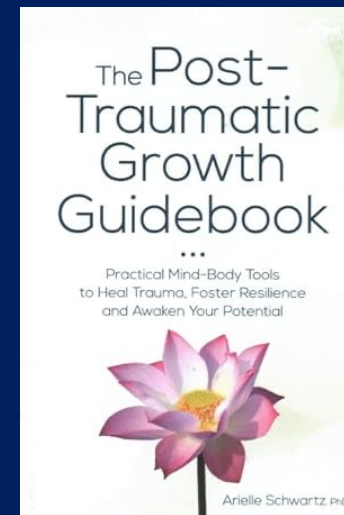
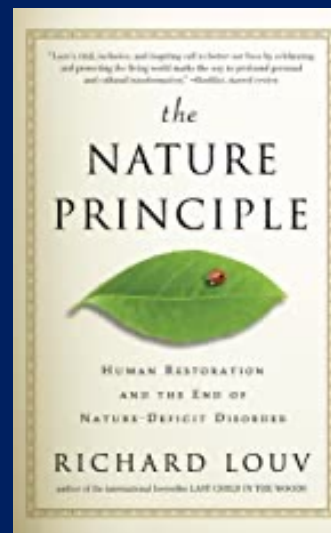
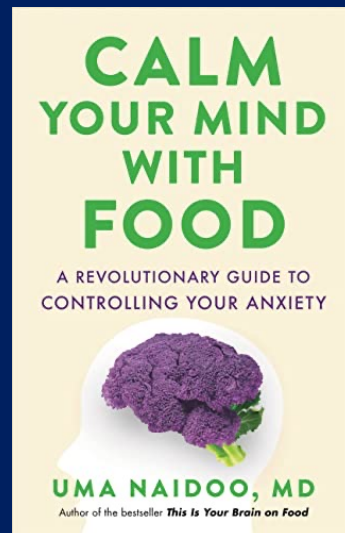
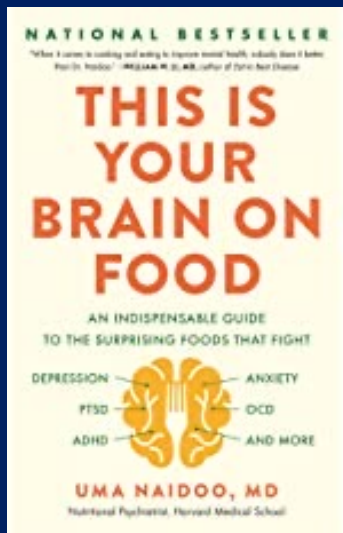
## First Responder Wellness Podcast

A podcast for first responders and the people who lead them. We focus on mental health, wellness, and leadership solutions within the first responder community.

Listen on:

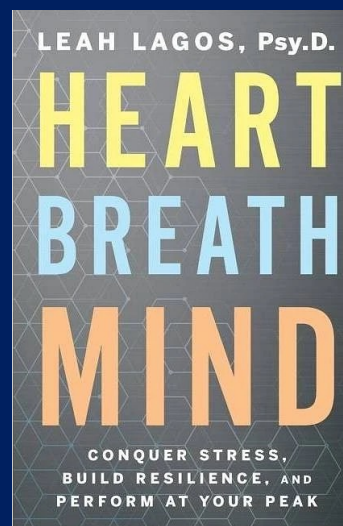
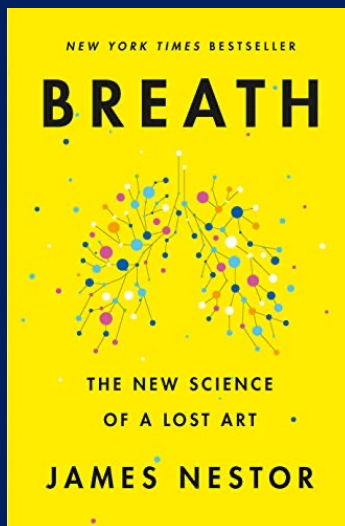
# PODCASTS

# HEALTH





# HEALTH



QUESTIONS?  
ASK ME  
ANYTHING





Then, I have a question for you!

You get 8 \$hitty calls in a row,  
**what** are you going to do?

**When** are you going to do it?



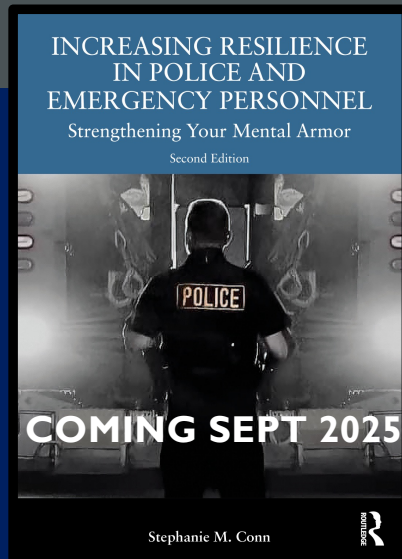
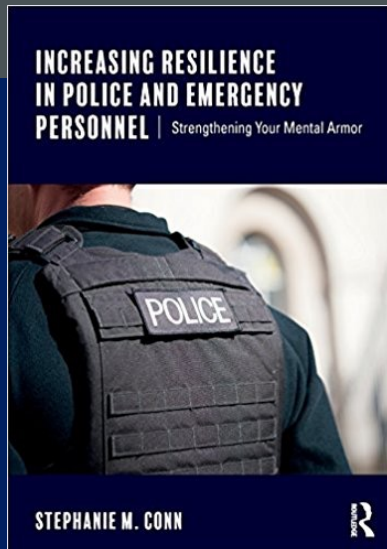
**Stephanie M. Conn, PhD, ABPP**

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**971-250-1519**



[Website](#)