



Mental Self-Care Toolkit

Contents

Mental Self-Care Toolkit

How to Use This Toolkit	3
-------------------------------	---

PART ONE: YOU

You and Your Emotions	5
You and Your Mind	6
You and Me	8

PART TWO: FRAMEWORK

7 Steps to Better-Feeling Thoughts	10
Basic Mindset Model	11

PART THREE: TOOLS

Flip Your Story	14
Hidden Benefits	15
Swap Out the Chew Toy	16
Benefit of the Doubt	17

PART FOUR: RESOURCES

Additional Resources	19
Participation Policy	20

How to use this Toolkit



Self-care for caregivers is so often focused on the physical things we can do to relax our bodies and calm our nervous systems – take a walk, take a bath, get a massage. That type of restorative care for our bodies is undeniably important, but it's also only half the equation.

The other contributor to your caregiver exhaustion is the amount of **mental** energy you are unnecessarily hemorrhaging each and every day.

Not being aware of these mental energy leaks is detrimental in two ways: **1)** you allow yourself to be drained of this precious resource, and **2)** all of that energy leaking away is energy you no longer have to put towards your self and your life and your goals.

That's why, as a coach to modern caregivers, I am focused on the self-care you can do inside your mind; the self-care of shifting your perspectives, choosing different stories, changing the tone you use to talk to yourself, and plugging your mental energy leaks. This is the kind of self-care you can do **while** you are folding the laundry, or in the waiting room at a doctor's office, or cleaning medical equipment.

The information in this toolkit will not only prepare you to request and receive mindset guidance during our group coaching sessions, but it will also teach you how to find and plug some of your mental energy leaks on your own.

Putting this material into practice will help you complete your caregiving journey without it taking **all of you** out of you.

Kristine



PART ONE

You

To help you begin this exploration.

You and Your Emotions

The mind is indeed powerful (and fascinating), but I don't want to dive into the realm of mental self-care tools before acknowledging the valuable role emotions play in our health, healing, and well-being.

Being "in touch with" my own emotions is not something that comes easily or naturally to me. Over this past decade I have had to learn how to listen to them for the messages they bring, learn to allow them to arise and flow through me despite the "inconvenience," and learn to welcome them leading me to places I didn't particularly want to go.

Our thoughts cause our feelings (more on that in a minute), but the goal, when we feel a feeling, is NOT to use these mental self-care tools to squelch the emotion or shove the emotion away by **immediately** trying to shift our thoughts.

The goal is never to **not** feel.

Our feelings often serve as the **gateway** to our thoughts. We first notice we are feeling uncomfortable, pained, sad, frustrated, angry, etc. and **that** is what alerts us to examine what we are thinking.

And before we start shifting our thoughts, it's important to fully sit with our feeling – at least long enough to receive the message it is trying to deliver. (For example, tears – yes, triggered by a thought – are sometimes your whole system working together to try to get you to realize and surrender to the fact that you are overdue for a release of tension.)

Your feelings don't need to be labeled. They are not "good" or "bad." The same is true regarding your thoughts. (Reflexively labeling and judging your thoughts and feelings is a habit that creates a constant mental energy leak.)

In the pages that follow, I'll be focused on teaching you ways to manage your mind, but I want to impress upon you that "managing your mind" does not require or equate to "bypassing your feelings."

You and Your Mind

You are **separate** from all the stuff that's going on "outside of you" – life circumstances, occurrences, and people (a.k.a. the stuff you have no control over).

You are also **separate** from much of the stuff that's literally going on inside of you, too.

You are not your mind / thoughts. Just like you are not your heart. And you are not your lungs.

You are the one who **notices**...

...that your heart is circulating blood.

(without you consciously doing anything to "make" that happen)

...that your lungs are circulating air.

(without you consciously doing anything to "make" that happen)

...that your mind is circulating thoughts.

(without you consciously doing anything to "make" that happen)

Your heart is doing its job. Your lungs are doing their job. And we recognize those as **functions** of ourselves, of our body – as separate from our SELF.

We don't say: "I am pumping blood," or "I am weak." We say: "My heart is pumping blood" or "I have a weak heart."

But when it comes to our mind / our thoughts, we self-identify with them. We say: "I'm angry," rather than "My mind is thinking angry thoughts."

Your mind's **job** is to think and solve "problems." And your mind is very scared of being unemployed so it **looks for** and **creates** problems to solve.

Just as you are the one who **notices** the functions of your human body, you can also notice your mind doing its job. **And you can learn to consciously regulate your thoughts.** Just like you can learn to consciously regulate your heartbeat and your breathing, for example.

Your conscious thoughts are easier to notice than the unconscious thought patterns that are influencing you “behind the scenes,” but even your unconscious thoughts can be brought to light with a bit of dedicated excavation.

Your thoughts are triggered by circumstances.

Circumstances are just neutral, factual events that occur. Yes, even, “*She hit me*” is a neutral, factual circumstance.

Your feelings are triggered by the thoughts you are thinking.

Facts like: “*she hit me*” or “*that bill is due*” or “*I didn’t get the job*” only make you feel a certain way because of how **you decide** to think about them.

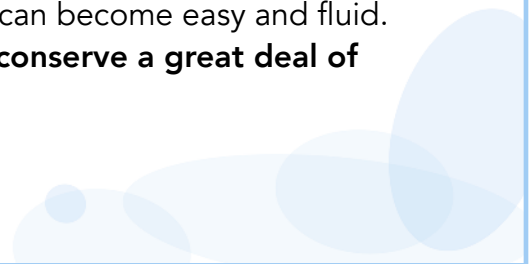
Changing your thoughts about the circumstances will change your feelings.

Every. Single. Time.

Your thoughts are just stories you are telling yourself. And all stories are fiction. A story that makes you feel good is just as “true” and just as “false” as a story that makes you feel bad.

So why not choose to tell yourself a story that makes you feel better? Or more courageous? Or more calm?

With some attention and practice, shifting your thoughts can become easy and fluid. **Cultivating this level of mental flexibility will help you conserve a great deal of your energy.**



You and Me

Our group coaching sessions offer you the opportunity to be coached directly by me. You will be able to ask me questions and I will be able to work with you, live, to explore the issue and offer you my guidance. You are welcome to ask a question at every session if you want to. (I will address as many as time allows.)

Participation at our sessions is completely voluntary – I will only call on you if you raise your hand. You are not required to be on camera to participate and you are welcome to simply come and listen as I work with other members.

The dates of our sessions and the links to join us (on Zoom) are in the **EVENTS** section of our You First online platform.

These are just **some** examples of areas that we can explore during our time together:

- “If this person would just _____, I’d be happier.”
- “If this circumstance was different, I’d be happier.”
- regrets about the past
- anxiety about the future
- frustrations in the present
- thoughts that seem stuck in a mental “spin cycle”
- emotions that feel overwhelming or unshakeable
- impulses to manage other people’s feelings or “people please”
- decisions that are vexing you
- feeling trapped, defeated, stressed, or confused
- scarcity about anything
- any of the tools in this tool kit
- material from the Reflection Guidebook
- etc.



PART TWO

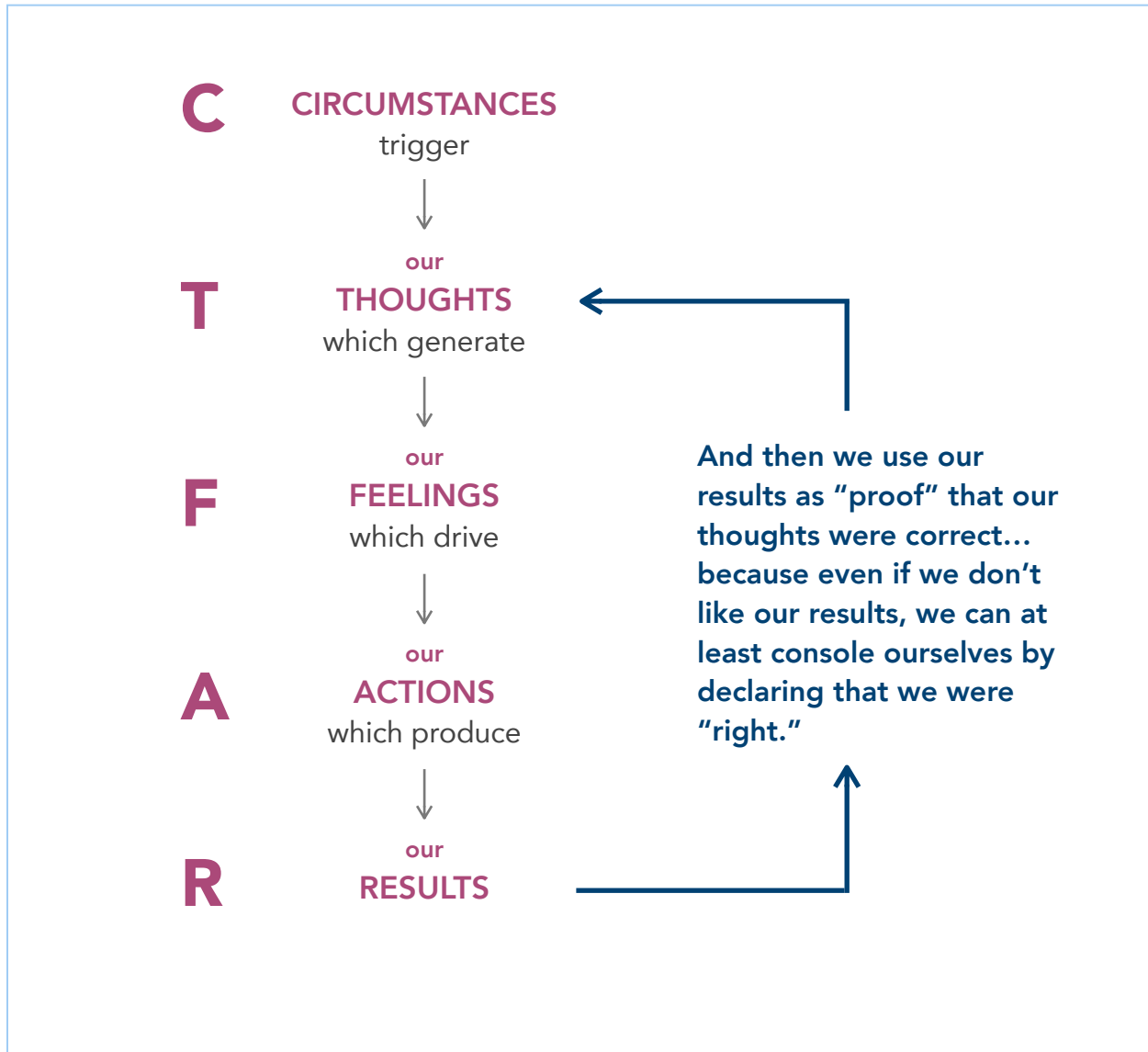
Framework

To help you examine your thoughts.

7 Steps to Better-Feeling Thoughts

- 1) Notice what you are feeling.** Stay curious and non-judgmental about your emotional state... just become more aware of whatever is currently paying you a visit: despair, agitation, anxiety, doubt, worry, frustration, outrage, irritation, longing, etc.
- 2) Allow yourself to process it (even if only a portion of it).** This can take many forms – you can vent it physically or verbally (but always safely and maturely), you can sit with it and ask what it has to offer, you can journal about it, you can simply accept it and let it wash over and through you in the moment.
- 3) List the thoughts you are currently thinking – the ones that are generating your feeling – down on paper.** Writing them out helps you clarify them, examine them, and begin to energetically detach from them.
- 4) Pick one of your thoughts and run it through the Basic Mindset Model (as described on the next two pages – 11 & 12).** Doing this enables you to see what's going on in your body and mind from the Big Picture Perspective.
- 5) Play with that thought.** Use any of the tools described in Part Three of this packet to help you gain some mental flexibility around your thought by forcing yourself to consider the circumstances from alternate perspectives.
- 6) Shift that thought.** The goal is **not** to force yourself to “think positive” or “look on the bright side.” The goal, at first, is simply to find a more neutral-feeling thought that your mind can accept as true so that your emotional state can lighten and relax a bit. And when you feel grounded and connected to the more neutral thought, you can then shift to a thought that feels a bit better... and then to one that feels even better.
- 7) Experiment with your new thought.** What do your circumstances look and feel like when you think this new thought? (And, when the old thought pops back up – which it will – drag your mind back over to this new one... again and again, and again.)

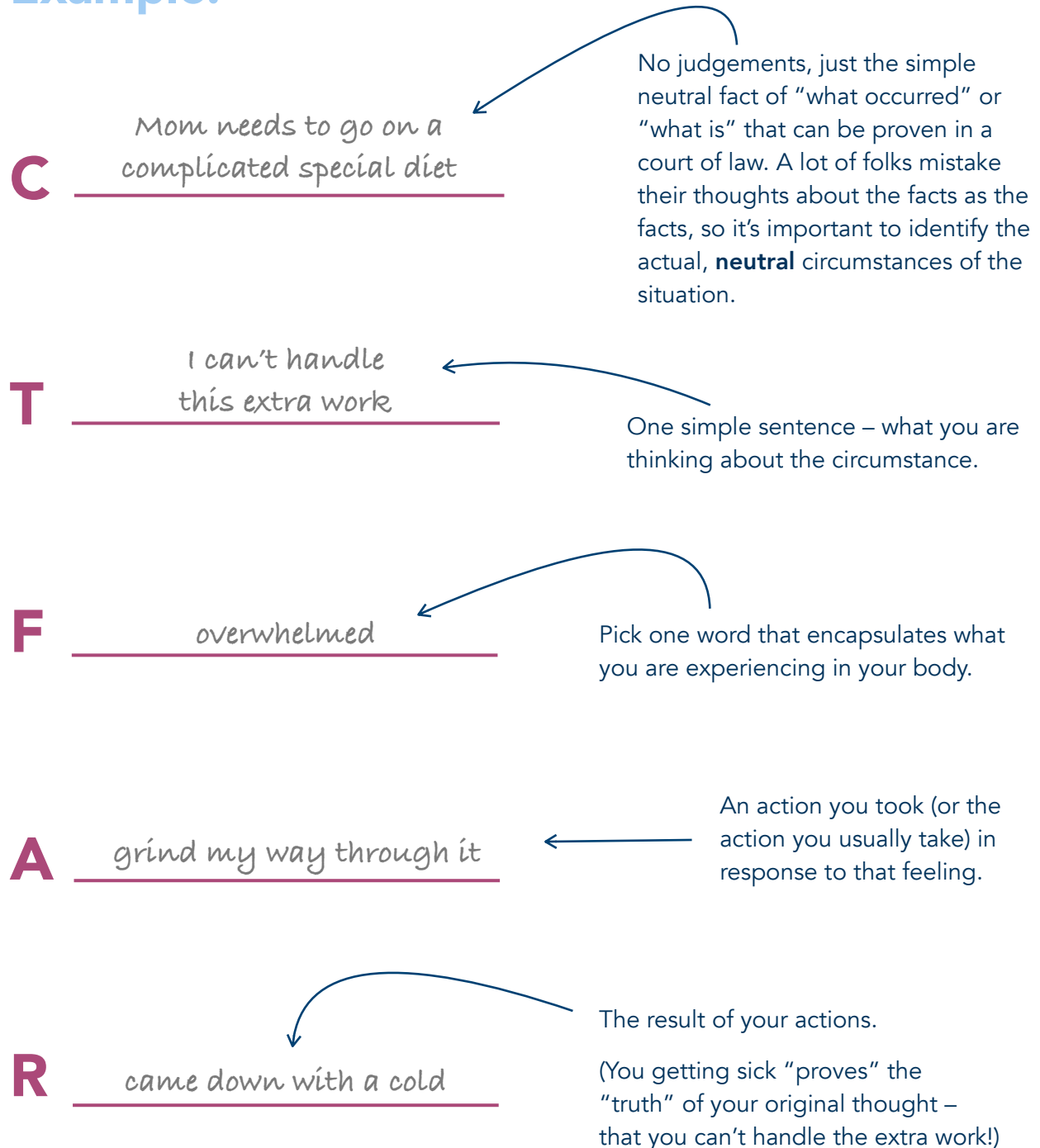
The Basic Mindset Model



NOTE: Mindset work is at the core of the approach of pretty much every experienced coach – with roots that can be traced back to the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. The Basic Mindset Model above was not “created,” per se, by coach Brooke Castillo, but she put it into this particular framework.

To run a thought through the Mindset Model, you can start with any line, and fill out the other lines from there. Sometimes, in the moment, it's easier to identify what you are feeling rather than what you are thinking. Other times, you can clearly see the results you are getting, so you can work backwards from there.

Example:





PART THREE

Tools

To help you play with your thoughts.

Flip Your Story

The reason your story of “*I can’t handle this extra work*” seems like it’s the “truth” is because you have spent time sending your mind out to collect pieces of “proof” that it is true (so you can feel **right** – which, to us humans, is a wonderful, self-soothing feeling to feel).

However, if your mind can collect pieces of proof that this current story is true, it can also collect proof that the **opposite** of that story is true: “*I **can** handle this extra work.*” Your mind may not **want** to do this, but it **can**, because ALL stories are fiction – they are all fabricated (as in: completely made up) in your mind.

To increase your mental flexibility, playfully send your mind out to collect five pieces of proof that the **opposite** story could be true. If your mind can find one piece of proof, it can find two, and then more. Stick with it (even if your mind moans and groans).

5 pieces of proof that the **opposite** version of my story is true:
“*I **can** handle this extra work.*”

1. I don't have to do ALL of what's needed myself – I can get help
2. Even though it will be a pinch to pay for it, I can get our groceries delivered to make the whole thing a bit easier on me
3. I'm pretty good at organizing projects like this...
4. ...and once I figure out a routine, it will feel less overwhelming
5. There are a few things I can say “no” to to free up some time

Hidden Benefits

When we are observing someone else, it can seem blindingly obvious that if that person would just make a few changes to their thoughts or behaviors or circumstances, they would be **far** better off. So why do we humans have such a difficult time implementing changes?

One of the reasons is because changing, shifting, or growing requires **giving up** the things we are **getting from** those seemingly negative or destructive thoughts, behaviors, and/or circumstances. I call these your “hidden benefits.”

We humans do not do **anything** – including holding onto a thought – unless we are getting some sort of gain or benefit from doing so. Sometimes you might not even consciously realize what you are gaining from telling yourself a particular story, but I guarantee there is some stuff below the surface that you will **have** to let go of in order to shift your mind towards a better-feeling thought.

But, in order to let go of that hidden stuff, you first have to utilize your mental flexibility to dig around and find it.

Reflect on the ways in which you are genuinely **benefitting** from holding on to the thought “*I can’t handle this extra work.*”
Look for emotional benefits, physical benefits, social benefits, ego-stroking benefits, etc.

If I believe that I can’t handle this extra work then I can indulge in that drama and get some attention and comfort from others. If I remain the one shouldering this burden by myself, the expectations others have of me – and my own expectations of myself – can stay low... and I have an excuse to get out of dealing with and doing some other things in my life that are uncomfortable / intimidating. If I give up my position in the family as “the one who is by mom’s side” will I also lose influence and love?

Swap Out the Chew Toy

Your mind's job is to think and solve problems. It's very afraid of being unemployed, so, if left to its own devices, it **generates** problems to solve by thinking negative thoughts.

Even when negative or useless thoughts are simply swirling around and around in a repetitive spin cycle of worry or stress or anxiety, your **mind** would say that it is being very productive and purposeful on your behalf. It's happily employed – even though these thoughts may be making **you** feel awful.

As coach Jess Lively aptly describes it, very often, your mind acts like a puppy with a chew toy – no matter how much you try to get it to release its grip on a thought, it holds on tight, wanting you to engage with it. One thing you can do to calm your mind is to get good at swapping out the chew toy.

You can distract your mind by giving it a healthier, better-feeling, more positive “problem to solve.” Ask it a higher-quality question and then send it off to search for the answer.

Here are some questions you can use as alternate chew toys for your mind:

What is the gift of the present moment?

This question redirects my mind to focus on my immediate surroundings and circumstances with gratitude and curiosity.

How did this awful occurrence unfold in the best, kindest way?

So often we are super-quick to label a circumstance or situation as 100% bad. Yes, it was gut-wrenching to put our beloved cat of 18 years to sleep, but focusing on the **many** ways that process happened in the smoothest, kindest way possible for us made us feel better than focusing **only** on our sadness and loss.

What advice would my future self give me right now?

This question requires my mind has to slow down and tune in to the whispers from my gut.

Benefit of the Doubt

When we humans tell ourselves stories – about **why** that person is acting that way, and **why** they are saying and doing those things that are churning up our feelings – all too often, we don't know all of the details and extenuating circumstances of their situation. (So, ya know, we make 'em up!)

And sometimes we decide that they are acting that way or doing that thing simply because they are an idiot. Or a liberal. Or mean.

To increase your mental flexibility, in that very first moment of annoyance or anger, **try to re-word your thought** to make the **compassionate acknowledgement** that the person annoying you probably has other facets to how they think and live their life and, in other circumstances, might be a lovely / thoughtful / cool / generous person.

Why take this small step? Because these types of little annoyances can add up to multiple trickles of energy leaking out on a regular basis. The sooner you can plug an energy leak – even a tiny one – **the more energy you save for yourself**.

So, instead of:

My brother is mean.

Switch it to:

My brother is being mean right now.

Instead of:

My brother snapped at me for no reason.

Consider:

Maybe my brother was venting some work stress that has nothing to do with me.

NOTE: This isn't about you forgiving this person or condoning their actions... this is about you creating a story from a more compassionate perspective so that you can create **energetic detachment** and use less of your energy in the moment. Being able to quickly create and embrace these types of alternate, believable stories will help you increase mental flexibility.



PART FOUR

Resources

To help you explore this territory further.

Resources

If you are interested in doing a deeper dive on mindset, here are three excellent resources to start with:

Brooke Castillo / The Life Coach School Podcast

Start with episodes 1-10 and explore from there.

<https://thelifecoachschool.com/podcast/1/>
and on iTunes

This American Life podcast / episode 682

This episode takes you inside a series of 10 therapy sessions revealing the power of mindset in a truly remarkable way.

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/682/ten-sessions>
and on iTunes

The Art of Possibility

By Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander

A very practical and entertaining guidebook on shifting one's perspective written by a therapist and her husband, a conductor for the Boston Philharmonic.
(Friends have said the audiobook is excellent.)

<https://bookshop.org/books/the-art-of-possibility-transforming-professional-and-personal-life/9780142001103>

The Tools

By Phil Stutz and Barry Michels

An easy-to-understand handbook by two esteemed therapists who guide you through ways to manage your mind and process your emotions.

The book:

<https://bookshop.org/p/books/the-tools-5-tools-to-help-you-find-courage-creativity-and-willpower-and-inspire-you-to-live-life-in-forward-motion-barry-michels/10459137?ean=9780812983043>

The documentary Stutz: <https://www.netflix.com/title/81387962>

Participation Policy

We, the founders, coaches, and support staff at You First, are invested in upholding and exemplifying the following tenets so that we can provide guidance and foster community in an atmosphere conducive to positive personal growth.

Your payment for and participation in this group program signifies both your **willingness** to embrace and maintain all four tenets of the Participation Policy and your **understanding** that transgressions will be taken seriously and will likely result in a termination of your membership.



1) We are committed to maintaining supportive, safe spaces.

You are encouraged to **support** your fellow members by holding space for them, celebrating them, and sharing resources and ideas with them.

That said, you are required to help your fellow members feel **safe** by refraining from offering any type of **unsolicited** advice, tips, feedback, or coaching (on any topic, personal or professional). When you have the desire to share something that you think will benefit a fellow member, first **ask** if they are **open** to receiving your suggestion before you offer it – let **them** determine when the timing might be right for an exchange with you, and be gracious if they decline. Trust that everyone is on their own journey in their own perfect timing and it is not your job to fix or save or coach them.

With this commitment, you are helping to create a space where everyone can feel comfortable and at ease.

2) We are committed to preserving confidentiality.

Our coaching sessions and community connection platform are most powerful when members can be open, specific, and candid about their circumstances and challenges. To that end, you agree to keep the information shared by fellow members within our sessions and on our platforms **confidential**.

3) We are committed to communicating with emotional maturity.

We expect you to take responsibility for your own energy and emotional regulation while participating in our sessions and communicating on our platform – this applies to both written and verbal interactions, personal or professional.

Each of us has good days and bad days and you are always welcome to show up “as is.” That said, we ask that when you do show up, you contribute as much focus and presence as you can in order to create a positive learning environment for you and your fellow members.

Collect your thoughts before you speak. Take a breath before you react. Reflect for a moment before you press send.

Rudeness, inflammatory comments, hate-speech, threats, and harassment will not be tolerated. Also, this is not an appropriate forum in which to share your views on politics, religion, or medical theories.

If you ever have problems, concerns, or suggestions – regarding fellow members, the coaches, the staff, or the program materials – bring those issues to our attention so we can consider whatever may need to be addressed or altered.

With this commitment, you are helping to cultivate clear, empathetic connections.

4) We commit to fostering intersectional social justice.

The spaces we invite you to create and occupy with us are inclusive across ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, physical appearance, physical abilities, and cognitive differences. We are antiracist and we stand with movements aimed at dismantling the white heteronormative ableist ageist colonial patriarchy.

We are committed to learning and unlearning, which means we are committed to owning and rectifying – to the best of our abilities – the mistakes and missteps we will inevitably make. These are the standards we hold you to as well.

With this commitment, you are helping to create a more inclusive, fair, and welcoming world.

The following people acknowledge and agree
to actively support all of the above,

Kristine Oller, the support staff at You First, and **you**.