

Compose Yourself under Pressure -the Navy Seals Way

Many say it's harder to get into the Navy Seals than Harvard and MIT. The requirements are so daunting I knew I'd never make it. Staying under water for 20 minutes? No way! But my potential failure did not quell my curiosity after seeing a History Channel program on the brain. I knew there was something important about composing yourself and handling pressure for regular folks who are not fighting terrorists.

About ten years ago, the Seals had a 48% failure rate, even after their heavy vetting process. This was very bad news, given the time and expense involved. The Navy also suspected that the United States would require future increased security (which proved to be true). Thus the Seals embarked upon a study to improve the graduation rate. The goal: to have more Seals capable of handling the extreme pressure of dealing with terrorist and extremist groups across the planet.

Using recent neuroscience research, based on new MRI technologies, they came up with a four-step process that reduced the failure rate to 38% over a four year period. Given the rigors of the program this was a remarkable improvement of about 20%.

The process they designed helped many more Seal aspirants successfully finish the program. The new program helped them stay composed, focused and capable of taking right action. Fortunately, the new Seals program can also be used for those who experience pressure to perform in their personal and business lives.

The tools developed by the Seals:

- Can improve our emotional intelligence or EQ,
- Permit us to stay calm and centered under stress,
- Help us manage our emotions and become less reactive to those attacking us, being unreasonable with us or just not being clear.
- In short, these tools when skillfully applied can help us manage our reactivity and increase our composure.

While each of the 4 steps is useful by itself, the potency increases tenfold when you use the four core components together. Also, just as

learning to play the piano or golf provides better results when you engage in deliberate focused practice, the Seals process also yields better results with focused practice.

The Navy Seals 4 Step Process for Business People:

Step 1: Sit quietly and close your eyes. (This reduces distractions.) Focus your attention just below your navel and observe your breath going in and out. Thoughts will come to mind and distractions will inevitably pop up. This is just your mind doing what it does- it generates thoughts. This is normal. Simply stay focused and pay attention to your breath. It will get easier to stay focused the more you practice. Keep at it until you feel more calm and centered. Try starting with 5 minutes so you can become more comfortable with sitting quietly. You can extend the time later if that seems helpful.

Step 2: Identify a specific upcoming scenario or situation. In the beginning, focus your attention on influencing just one person. Once you have learned how to deal with one person, you can expand your focus to a group if that is needed. Identify your personal/business goal (s) for the meeting. Be as specific and concrete as possible. For example, you may want: An agreement; the go ahead for a project; a commitment to procure funding; a decision. Don't stop until your objective is clear.

Step 3: Focuses primarily on clarifying your intention with a specific individual. Your success depends on your ability to observe key behaviors (key phrases or statements, body language, tone of voice, gesticulations) of the other party.

How will you know that you've attained your goal with this person? Identify ahead of time your signposts for success. Here are some signposts: They reach out to shake your hand; they say, "I agree" or "good job"; they lean forward in their chair and smile. Each of us indicates agreement, or yes, in our own way. How will the person you're dealing with say yes? You need to know.

You can also use this step as a monitoring and tracking device. If you are not achieving your goal, you can stop and say something like. "We are not making progress. Is there something getting in your way, our way?"

Is there something I was not clear about?" Once you have clarified objections, confusion or resistance, you will be able to resume the conversation that you hope will lead to the success you desire.

Step 4: This step is called self-affirmation. This is the final practice required to complete your approach to remaining calm and composed under pressure. Originally developed by Claudia Steele, self-affirmation will help you to bring your best self forward in order to tackle a tough or challenging situation.

What I find works best is to discover a phrase or two that encourages you to access your best self and to bring that phrase and mindset forward into your current attention. There is no magic phrase that works for all of us- just choose the one or two that work for you. Remember: keep it simple, succinct and positive.

Here's the first phrase I typically employ. I found that I was often nervous and unsure when asked to make a big presentation to senior leaders. Because I can be confident and composed, but don't always show up that way, I developed this phrase: *I am cool, calm and confident.* It works every time to help me bring my best self forward.

A few years later I found myself in a very stressful personal situation. I was in the back row on an airplane sitting toward the outside, with no window. To make matters worse, the person next to me should have bought two seats. He was a very large man whose body extended into my seat. I was very tense and starting to panic. I said to myself: This is not good. What am I going to do? I thought immediately that I needed to access the complete Navy Seals process. When I got to the 4th step in the process, self-affirmation, my mind's eye saw inmates in solitary confinement. I said if they can handle solitary confinement I can calm myself down now while on the plane. My second phrase of self-affirmation "I can handle this" came to mind. This became my alternative phrase to use in my Navy Seals process. The next thing I knew my plane was landing safely at my destination.

Conclusion:

While there is no panacea for remaining calm under pressure, the Navy Seals 4 step process is a superior way to remain calm and effective in pressure situations.

In a world filled with ever increasing pressure it is a useful skill to have. The Navy Seals have done their homework and defined a best in class, integrated process for helping us remain calm and focused on our mission, regardless of circumstance. Based on contemporary neuroscience best practices, and crafted into an integrated 4 step process, this approach has helped the Seals make a significant increase in their graduation rate and enabled more Seals to remain centered and goal oriented while under extreme pressure. None of us is asked to do work as dangerous as tracking down terrorists. Fortunately, the Seals process is also very effective in personal and business situations. Let's use some of government's hard earned dollars to help us succeed in our personal and business lives