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THE “WOO WOO” PRIMER Creating a Grounded Foundation

*“You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave,
and find your eternity in each moment.”*

– Henry David Thoreau

Okay, this is the “woo woo” chapter! Consider yourself warned! Living on the West Coast assumes that our more laid-back lives will naturally include some “woo woo” alternative thinking practices. In actual fact, principles such as awareness, mindfulness, centering, grounding and energy work are quite mainstream and have been practiced for years in other arenas, most notably in competitive sports.

Admittedly, I was not convinced of all of this “woo woo” stuff until I saw the results of it evidenced in a dramatically enhanced performance of the 120-voiced championship Lions Gate Chorus, and at the same time felt it working internally with me. I began applying and transferring these “woo woo” principles to other parts of my life. It makes infinite sense and is actually quite simple when you think about it. If you could do anything that would help you feel more grounded, connected, confident, present, open and stress-free, wouldn't you consider it? If you could harness the invisible, yet all-powerful forces of energy within and around you, wouldn't you? Performers, if you could create that magical audience connection that stems from “presence” wouldn't you do it?

NBA's all time greatest basketball coach, Phil Jackson, introduced the concept of “mindful basketball” to many all-stars such as Michael Jordan,

Kobe Bryant and Shaq O’Neill. Jackson wrote a book about his concepts, called *Sacred Hoops*, with techniques that focus on the power of awareness and mindfulness both on and off the court. “When players practice what is known as mindfulness – simply paying attention to what’s actually happening – not only do they play better and win more, they also become more attuned with each other. And the joy they experience working in harmony is a powerful motivating force that comes from deep within, not from some frenzied coach pacing along the sidelines, shouting obscenities into the air.”¹⁴

When you are playing at a high level of competition or wanting to “play big,” it is critical that you are completely present and aware of everything around you. Just as you can’t give a “star” performance on the basketball court if your mind is thinking about past or future events, neither can you give a fabulous connected performance if you are not completely in the moment.

I had the honor of hearing Matthieu Ricard, a Buddhist monk and the French interpreter for the Dalai Lama, speak on our state of consciousness at the 2008 International Coach Federation conference in Montreal. When I contacted Ricard for this book, he generously expanded his words:

“The primary quality of consciousness is simply knowing, pure awareness. This faculty of knowing underlies every mental event; it is not itself affected by any of these events. This permits us to understand that it is possible to transform the content of our thoughts and experiences.”

Ricard left a promising career as a cellular geneticist nearly 40 years ago to study Buddhism in the Himalayas. As a trained scientist and Buddhist monk, he is an active participant in the current scientific research on the effects of meditation on the brain. Mental work, meditation and cultivating inner peace can have incredible clinical implications and Ricard said:

“The primary goal of meditation is to transform our experience of the world, but it has also been shown that meditation has beneficial effects on our health. For the last ten years, major research centers have been conducting studies on meditation and its long and short-term

14 Phil Jackson, *Sacred Hoops* (New York: Hyperion Books, 1995) p. 5

effect on the brain. Experienced meditators are able to generate precise targeted mental states that are enduring and powerful, such as loving-kindness, compassion and emotional balance. A growing number of studies also indicate that meditation considerably reduces stress, anxiety, the tendency toward anger, and the risk of relapse for people who have previously undergone at least two episodes of serious depression. It also significantly strengthens the immune system, reinforces positive emotions, the faculty of attention, and reduces arterial pressure in those suffering from high blood pressure. The study of the influence of our mental states on our health, which was once considered a purely eccentric notion, is now becoming more and more the mainstream approach in scientific research.”¹⁵

Not only will the techniques outlined in this chapter enhance the performance of your group or team, but you can also use this information personally and professionally to make a profound difference in your life.

This “woo woo” chapter is a hybrid compilation of many teachings I have learned in doing my “inner coaching” work with singing groups. I had the good fortune to have had two women in Lions Gate Chorus introduce and teach me many of the principles we will be discussing: Bea is an amazingly spiritual and ageless eighty-three year old woman (just looking into her eyes gives one a sense of solidity and presence), and Vi is a trained Jin Shin Do practitioner and a lifelong believer in the power-of-energy work. Both of these women were talking about this “woo woo” stuff and teaching these concepts to Lions Gate Chorus long before it became fashionable.

This chapter contains a lot of information and exercises to provide you with a broad sampler. I encourage you to experiment with several of the principles to find the ones that make a difference for you. For more in-depth learning, I recommend you consult the resources listed in the reference section at the back of this book.

15 Matthieu Ricard www.matthieuricard.com

THE BODY CHECK-IN

Purpose:

To become aware of what is happening with your body, which will help ground you and focus your energy.

Some of you may be quite tuned in to your body and some of you may never have stopped to consider what your body is doing, until you have overtaxed it in some way and are feeling the effects. To get a barometer of how tuned in to your body you are, take a moment to breathe deeply and observe what is happening. How open does your body feel? How is the energy moving? Where you are feeling tension? Could you describe those feelings in detail to someone?

When you are fully aware of your body, you literally open yourself up to a feeling of closeness with all of the people you encounter in the world. Energy follows awareness. It is easy to bring awareness to your body with a very simple technique called a "body check-in" or "body scan." No matter where you are reading this right now, I want you to take a moment and literally "check-in" with yourself. You can do this anywhere, anytime, to bring awareness back to your body, which will ground you and focus your energy. A simple two minutes in the car (while parked!) before you head into a meeting will do wonders for focusing and grounding yourself.

THE BODY CHECK-IN EXERCISE

Close your eyes. (Oh, how can you read this if your eyes are closed?) Okay, read this and then close your eyes and continue. You may want to have a friend read this slowly while you scan your body, or alternatively, record it and play it back.

While you are doing a body check-in, or scan, breathe deeply. Start at the top of your head and work down through your body. Notice where you are holding any tension; feel any discomfort or constriction of your breathing. Breathe deeply. As you exhale, let any constriction leave your body with your breath. Does your scalp feel tight? Massage your temples. Are your eyes tired from perhaps too much computer work? Scrunch them together tightly and then release them. To release any tension in your facial muscles

(of which there are 53!), scrunch your entire face together, hold for three seconds and release. If your face and jaw and neck are feeling any tension, massage them and the area around them gently. Move your attention down the body to the shoulder area. Many of us hold the cares of the world in the neck and shoulders. To release the tension, gently move your neck from side to side. Lift your shoulders up to your ears, hold for three seconds and release. Keep checking in as you scan down the body, into your chest area and heart. Inhale deeply. Exhale any tension you are feeling. Feel the sensation of opening up your heart and expanding it and opening your chest cavity. Check-in to your stomach – is it quiet or churning, full or empty? Just notice and breathe; then focus down to the core area, your power center and down your legs to your feet. Unlock your legs, bend your knees slightly and shake out your legs if you are feeling glued to the ground. Feel the power of the earth below your feet and feel the tingle of energy as you receive it from the ground.

Your Body check-in will show you what you are bringing into any situation or conversation, and by focusing on breathing and being mindful of what is happening with your body, you will begin to still your racing mind and refocus yourself to be open and present. Experiment with self-observation in different situations. Notice when your heart begins to race, when your breathing gets shallow or deeper or if you are holding your breath. Feel when your shoulders tense, your jaw clenches. As you notice physical sensations, take your attention back to the breath and breathe through those sensations to release them.

BREATHING BASICS

BREATH AWARENESS

Take a moment to notice your breathing. Watch and feel the movement of the breath, do not attempt to change it in any way. Focus on inhaling through your nostrils and exhaling through your mouth. Focus on breathing deeply right down to your belly area. Find the stillness within (tune in to your inner radio station frequency). Notice where you have any resistance in the body and consciously breathe into that space. Focus on your breath, and then focus again. Opening your physical being opens you up to possibilities.

BREATHING FROM THE CORE

Your physical center is approximately two inches below your navel, deep in your body, between the front of the abdomen and spine. According to Zen Buddhists and Japanese belief, it is in the center (the Hara) where vital forces reside, and it is also from this point where deep breathing must be originated. I refer to this area as your "Core." When you do breathing or grounding exercises, you may want to put your hands on your core area to remind you to breathe deeply into your Core rather than taking shallow breaths that originate in your chest.

"Your center is your bodily and energetic "base camp" that can be used as a way to focus, learn and move through transitions. It helps you to feel bodily present to yourself and your situation. The state of center is a doorway to begin feeling your possibilities in the world, not as a rigid quality, but as a state to help you develop and access other parts of yourself. You can tap your belly to shift your attention (to center) quickly, bringing you to an openness and greater willingness to see and sense what is happening without the distraction of your automatic ideas and opinions."¹⁶

16 Suzanne Zeman, *Listening to Bodies: A Somatic Primer for Coaches, Managers and Executives* (Shasta Gardens Publishing, 2008) p. 79

Your center is essentially the starting point, the focal point where you can always return. In a sense, your center is like “home,” a safe place to anchor yourself and from which to operate.

YOGA NOSTRIL BREATHING

Purpose:

Yoga nostril breathing is a beautiful technique to use if you are nervous, tense, worried, and/or having pre-performance jitters. According to a study in *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback*, this breathing technique can actually lower your blood pressure.¹⁷ Do this anywhere, anytime, to calm yourself, empty your mind and focus.

Try it:

Hold your right nostril closed and inhale through the left. Close the left nostril and exhale through the right and then inhale through it. Close the right and exhale through the left. Inhale through the left and continue alternating. Focus on the Breathing.

THE NOW EXERCISE¹⁸

Purpose:

To clear your mind, relax, become present. Breath counting is a Zen practice – it is a deceptively simple technique with meditative benefits.

Try it:

1. Count your breaths from one to ten. As you do this, mentally focus on the numbers and on saying to yourself IN-one, OUT-one; IN-two and OUT-two, IN-three and OUT-three, etc.
2. If you lose count before you get to ten (and pretty much everyone does lose count at first), simply begin again at one.
3. When you get to ten, smile down into your heart.

¹⁷ *Women's Health Magazine*, June 2009 p. 28

¹⁸ The NOW exercise copyright Michael Neill from his book *Feel Happy Now* www.geniuscatalyst.com

FOCUSING: KEEPING THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING

"The successful man is the average man, focused."

– unknown

One of the biggest things standing in the way of living into our performance potential, either on or off stage, is the challenge of being present and 100% focused on the now. Our swirling world-in-a-New-York-minute lifestyles and our obsession with multi-tasking has created a huge challenge for us to focus on one thing and ever really simply "be". To really achieve a peak performance in anything, however, you absolutely must have laser focus on the task at hand and be completely present. We discussed strategies for reducing mental interferences in more depth in Chapter Two. Being aware and present in the now is critical to maintaining 100% focus. Strategies to empty your mind of the myriad of thoughts crowding in and allowing yourself to be completely present in the now will open up your intuition, creativity and inspiration.

GETTING PRESENT

Purpose:

To empty your mind, become aware and truly be present in the now.

1. While Sitting

Put your hands on your desk or the arms of your chair or somewhere that they are supported. Close your eyes. Focus all of your attention on your hands. You may begin to feel a warmth or tingling sensation in them. Now focus intensely on the inside of your hands, feel the energy moving through your hands, feel the blood coursing through your veins. Soon you feel the palms of your hands begin to tingle. This is the energy working. Continue to focus all of your attention on your hands and the energy being generated. Take a deep breath and open your eyes. You are present.

2. Anywhere, Anytime

Mantras are a technique I use to redirect and open my mind to bring me back to the present anywhere or anytime. Mantras are energy-based tools of power or phrases of energy that can change a state of consciousness.

This is my favorite (Recite and repeat several times): *I AM PRESENT*
**THIS IS NOW* I AM HERE.*

CENTERING

Purpose:

To become more “present,” more mindful and more aware.

“Center is a state of being that is not confined to certain posture... ultimately, center is an inner subjective state that is manifested through the body. In other words, we can relate to center from any number of positions or actions. Lying down, sitting, carrying a sleeping child, washing the dishes, or driving a car can all be done from center. Being with center is an attitude toward oneself, and this attitude... is one in which we feel bodily present to oneself and our situation. Center is a state where we come into relationship with our bodily self in a way that is balanced and present.”¹⁹

Try it:

At any point in the day when you feel yourself getting overwhelmed, or just plain running around without thinking, take a moment to center yourself, to breathe into your heart, soften it and fill it with love. This “being” with the world will allow all of your action to flow more consistently and be more connected.

CENTERING YOURSELF WHILE STANDING

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and balanced slightly on the balls of your feet.
- Knees should be unlocked but not too bent.
- Your spine is upright, but not rigid. Visualize lengthening your spine from the inside.
- Relax your shoulders. If you feel tension in them hold them up to your ears for three seconds and then release.
- Drop your head onto your chest; feel the weight of it.
- Let the weight of your head take your upper body over, so you flop from the waist.

19 Richard Strozzi Heckler, *The Anatomy of Change*, (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books 1984) p. 82

- Shake your shoulders out while bent over.
- Check that your knees remained unlocked and the back of your neck is released.
- Curl up slowly from the base of spine.
- Let your shoulders fall easily into place – avoid the temptation to place them.
- The head is the last thing that should come up.
- Keep breathing, jaw should be free.
- Allow yourself to relax into your centeredness.

CENTERING YOURSELF WHILE SITTING

- As you sit, feel how you are holding your body, what is supporting you – where you feel the weight.
- Put your feet flat on the floor and sit upright, hands resting comfortably on your upper thighs. Let them fall to where they naturally drop.
- Lift your shoulders up to your ears and hold them for three seconds, then release them and allow them to relax.
- Breathe deeply into your core area.
- Rock yourself gently from side to side and front to back until you feel a place where you feel most balanced and just relax into it.
- Breathe into your heart and feel the warmth as you imagine a pink light fills and expands it.
- Take your attention down to your core. Continue to breathe from the belly area.
- Take three deep inhalations and exhalations.

GROUNDING

Purpose:

To focus our energy for more power, effectiveness and stability.

In my youth, I don't remember ever understanding what being "grounded" might mean except maybe with some vague reference to electrical terms – having heard when some electrical wiring shorted out that it wasn't grounded. Later on I intellectually understood that those solid, stable, salt-of-the-earth people who I knew, were grounded. Indeed, "grounding," in the sense we are talking about, is the process of connecting ourselves to the earth's energies.

First, observe your posture and your breath. Before starting movement – take your attention to the heart. Open the heart – visualize a pink light filling your heart and softening it.

INDIVIDUAL GROUNDING EXERCISE

- Sit (or stand) comfortably, and then close your eyes.
- Breathe slowly and deeply from the core, counting down from ten to one.
- Continue to breathe deeply as you imagine that you are on the top floor of a tall building and there is a long cord attached to the base of your spine extending down through all the floors and way down into the earth.
- Visualize this cord being like a root grounded deep into the earth, so strongly connected to the earth that it gathers all of the energy of the earth.
- Now imagine the energy of the earth is flowing up through this cord; up through all the floors, then bursting through your floor and up the cord into your spine.
- Feel this spread up your spine and through all of your veins and arteries up to the base of your head, and then into your head until you feel your whole body filled with this energy.
- Feel the flow of the energy go right out the top of your head. Picture this flow of energy until it is well established.

- Now imagine the universe's energy flowing back in through your head, down that long cord down your spine and through your feet into the earth. The two flows are mixing harmoniously. The earth's energy and the energy of the universe are flowing through you.
- Continue to breathe. Open your eyes and smile!

CHORUS GROUNDING EXERCISE

(easily adaptable for any group or team situation)

- Close your eyes. Inhale and exhale deeply: in through your nose, out through your mouth.
- As you do this, imagine with each successive breath that you are drawing in good energy and focusing your mind on the present. Exhale all of the thoughts about the stuff that happened before you got here tonight – your bad day at work, the traffic...
- Exhale all of the stuff you are thinking about that you didn't do today and have to take care of when you get home. For the next three hours, you are here: 100% present.
- Breathe. Take two deep belly breaths.
- Focus on the bottoms of your feet. Take all of your conscious awareness to the bottom of your feet.
- You will begin to feel a tingling. Feel the tingling.
- Visualize yourself walking into a forest, a beautiful forest with sunlight streaming through the trees.
- Pick your own beautiful tall tree.
- Put your arms around it. Feel the strength your tree holds and the energy it contains.
- Bend your knees slightly.
- Feel the energy of the tree merging with your energy, traveling down through your legs and feet and into the earth.
- As the energy descends, your energy is traveling with it, meshing with the tree roots. Your energy is completely connected – connected right to the magma – the fire in the center of the earth. You are completely connected to the core of the earth. Allow it to flow.
- Feel the fire. Feel the warmth begin to spread throughout your body and settle in your belly – the core – your base camp.

- You are completely entwined, protected by and connected to the roots, feeling the fire of the molten rock at the center of the earth.
- Let the energy now ascend.
- Begin to bring the energy up from the roots through the ground – up through the bottom of your feet and into your toes. Feel them and feel your feet tingle. Make them tingle.
- The energy surges upward. Bring that tingle up into your legs, into your bone marrow, into your hips.
- Keep this connection from the core.
- Draw that energy up to the core where the fire of the earth is burning in your belly, your core: your source of personal power, and then to the heart where your emotion is.
- Focus on someone you love deeply. Feel their energy expand your heart.
- Feel the energy flow through your heart.
- Feel your heart bathed in the warmth of love.
- Up through the chest into your arms, hands and fingers, feel the tingle constantly.
- Take the energy up to your throat where your voice is. Feel that energy permeating the tissue of your vocal folds.
- Pass your energy up through your eyes and mind.
- All the while keep the fire burning in your core area.
- Feel yourself connected through to the earth.
- Rising away above your head the energy pours out. Raise your arms above your head. Feel the energy pouring out. Spread your arms to the sides. Feel the energy surround and envelop you and your chorus riser mates. Feel the universe return the energy through the top of your head and course through your body, mingling with the energy coursing up your body from the earth.
- You and your chorus are surrounded by unlimited energy. This powerful ball of unlimited energy is not just you, but your whole chorus. It is your chorus.
- You can access this energy at any time – in seconds. You are ready.
- Open your eyes. You are grounded and energized.

ENERGY

Now that we have gotten our mental and emotional mind-sets in order we are ready to harness the power of our own energetic connection to the universe. I am sure you have experienced the power of energy perhaps when meeting someone else: you are drawn into them with almost a physical pull. You might say they have charisma... or a certain “je ne sais quoi”... (I don’t know what)... a certain “something.” All you know is that you want it!

Have you ever experienced it for yourself, when you create a feeling of grounded connection with the world and it seems as if everyone is smiling at you as you walk down the street? When you give your energy in a way the world can receive it and then give it back to you, you have created an incredibly powerful vehicle. Once you become aware and grounded and present, you realize you are much more than just your human form or your thoughts, and you begin to understand the potential of the energy within you.

I am sure you have seen and experienced the power of grounded energy (or lack of it) in a performance setting many times. In the world of a capella chorus competitions, you will have heard choruses sing beautifully, even masterfully, looking great and with inventive choreography, but who are forgettable as soon as they leave the stage. Then there are choruses who blow your mind with their talented singing and dancing and their presence. Their performance seems to grab you from inside and pull you outward until you feel almost as if you are onstage with them. They take your breath away. They capture the mood and the enraptured attention of the whole auditorium and everyone seems to be engulfed in a big tsunami of energy. That is presence. Presence is energy. It is grounded energy that makes the difference. Grounded energy is very powerful. It can make every person in an auditorium sit on the edge of their seats barely breathing and so quiet that a pin could drop as they wait for the next note to be sung. It can make thousands of people jump to their feet simultaneously as the final chord is rung.

We can develop an awesome amount of energy when needed and it requires very little effort or time. All things arise from thought. Think of filling your being with energy. Your body is a perfect piece of equipment under your mind’s control. When you use this energy combined with your mind-set and skills, the world of possibility bursts wide open.

CREATING YOUR ENERGY BALL²⁰

Purpose:

To feel energy and expand it; getting in touch with your personal energy is the first step. (Remember our favorite word... awareness?)

- Sit or stand with your eyes closed, feet planted, knees slightly bent.
- Ground yourself, and when you feel fully connected to the earth, begin rubbing the palms of your hands together briskly, remembering to breathe deeply from your core. At the center of each of our palms, we all have a very high-energy point. Rubbing our palms together stimulates the growth of this energy.
- Within a short time, you will feel a slight tingling or warmth between your palms. This is the energy building.
- Stop rubbing your hands and cup them as if holding a softball.
- Concentrate on the feeling between your hands while you continue to breathe deeply.
- Start moving your hands in and out slightly and see if you can feel a slight resistance or sponginess between them. This is your energy ball. As you practice, you will find that you feel this resistance more and more strongly, even as you move your hands farther apart.
- See how large you can make your "energy ball." This is the energy of your own body, which is always available to you.
- Move your hands to your core, returning the energy to your body to revitalize and energize it.
- Open your eyes and feel exhilarated and full of power.

BODY POWER TECHNIQUE

Purpose:

To stimulate your individual personal energy.

- Place your hands just below the navel at the core, your power center, your energy center.
- Close your eyes.

20 Energy-ball and body-power concepts are courtesy of Vi Feist.

- Visualize your core area, your energy center. Put your attention there. Feel the power and strength within that core area.
- Visualize a 1000-watt light bulb in your body, in your core. It is glowing and getting brighter. The warmth is filling your core area, and the energy is burning brightly. It is pumping energy and stamina through your body. Breathe from the core, the gut.
- Envision that light bulb: glowing, glowing. See the energy field around it getting brighter and brighter, spreading from your core throughout your body.
- As you continue to visualize this, the energy in your body is stimulated.
- Open your eyes.

Purpose:

To stimulate the energy for a group situation.

- Place your hands just below the navel at the core, your power center, your energy center.
- Close your eyes.
- Visualize your core area, your energy center. Put your attention there. Feel the power and strength within that core area.
- Visualize a 1000-watt light bulb in your body, in your core. It is glowing and getting brighter, the warmth is filling your core area, and the energy is burning bright and is pumping energy and stamina through your body. Breathe from the core, the gut.
- Envision that light bulb: glowing, glowing. See the energy field around it getting brighter and brighter, spreading from your core throughout your body.
- As you continue to visualize this, the energy in your body is stimulated.
- Continue taking the light inside you, the burning energy, and expanding it. Take it outside your body and expand it to the people standing beside you and in front of and behind you. Continue to expand your light to encompass the entire auditorium. The whole auditorium is bathed in and glowing with a bright ball of energy with you in the center of it. You are connected through your energy with the entire auditorium.
- Open your eyes.

THREE DIMENSIONAL ENERGY

I first heard about the concept of three-dimensional energy from Master Somatic Coach, Suzanne Zeman,²¹ who works from the body with coaches, executives and business teams to develop their presence, awareness and vision.

Purpose:

To add and connect with all three energy dimensions (length, width, depth). This will greatly enhance your grounded presence and effective being in the world. Just as in singing, where we want to access three dimensional vocal resonance and use three dimensional breathing, we can further enhance our performance possibilities in any area of our lives by accessing all three dimensions of energy.

Try it:

1. We already have had some time to practice accessing our *length* or vertical energy dimension by centering ourselves, grounding ourselves and connecting with the incredible energy of the earth. We feel almost as though our spine has lengthened from the inside and we can easily tap into the core of the earth to bring energy up into our body and outward to connect to others. The length energy dimension has grounded us.
2. The energy dimension of *width* is the embracing “social dimension.”²² As you expand your energy out to your sides, you naturally begin to include those people around you. This is a fabulous energy dimension to use to help connect with others. Consider adding this width dimension of energy whenever you need to connect to groups of people – if you are leading a workshop or a meeting, or perhaps going to a party you are nervous about. This is an extremely critical energy dimension to access in a chorus situation so there is a unified feeling with all of the chorus members.

To help access this width dimension, first make sure you are grounded and connected to the earth through your length energy dimension. As you bring the energy up your body, simply expand your arms from

21 Learn more about Suzanne Zeman's work at www.somaticbusinesscoach.com

22 Suzanne Zeman, *Listening to Bodies: A Somatic Primer for Coaches, Managers and Executives* (Shasta Gardens Publishing, 2008) p. 81

your sides and feel the energy extend outwards, filling in the space between your body and your arms. Get the feeling that you are physically opening yourself and expanding your energy to include others. Be sure to stay grounded with the length dimension of energy as you add the width dimension.

3. The dimension of *depth* extends behind you and in front of you. This energy dimension can provide support behind you as well as move you forward. To develop the depth dimension, make sure you are connected length-wise to the core of the earth and bring the energy up your body. As you do, put one hand on your lower back and gradually extend your hand behind you: breathe into that space. Once you feel that energy fill the space behind you to back you up, use your other hand to expand the energy forward to embrace your dreams and goals.

CHANGING ENERGY LEVELS

There are three types of energy we can choose to manifest at any time. We use a combination of all three types to varying degrees as we go through our daily lives. Our ideal is choosing to use “connected energy” as often as possible – this kind of energy ensures you are really present in the world.

1. Withheld Energy

Most of the people in this world go through their days keeping their energy close inside to varying degrees. You sense this especially in a big city, as on public transit where everyone is dutifully protecting his or her personal space. No one is sharing his or her energy. What happens when someone gets on the bus over the top with energy? Those on the bus look away. They do not engage. There is no energy exchange. Withheld energy is not expressed outwardly. Many times we are simply preoccupied, thus withhold our energy. This is introspective energy. Your energy barely extends past the boundaries of your physical body. If you are in learning or thinking mode, you are usually withholding energy. You can feel it when you walk into a room of people – some people feel closed and some you are drawn into because they are connecting and exchanging energy.

2. Imposed Energy

The polar opposite to “withholding energy” is “imposed energy.” Imposed energy is ultra exuberant, extreme, almost manic and ultimately alienating. It doesn’t feel authentic when received. It does not seek to connect to individuals. Usually it exists to try to “make” something happen in a situation. It is not energy that is exchanged; it is energy that is imposed. An example of “imposed” energy would be the super salesperson desperately trying to sell you a product you do not want, or perhaps a leader who is trying to get you motivated by aggressively whipping you into a frenzy.

Imposed energy is useful energy when you want to: get your family out of house so they aren’t late for school, organize a fire drill, or give instructions to a crowd to organize the line-up at the buffet table. Imposed energy is not an energy that seeks to connect with others.

3. Connected Energy

The third kind of energy is “connected energy” – your energy is going out, but it is also coming back to you. Connected energy is about being present with the world, and its people. It is energy that you might feel, for instance, if you walk down the street looking at people and smiling. Most people will smile back at you and suddenly everyone seems happier. Your energy is connecting with them and they are giving energy back to you. It is a feeling of awareness and of being 100% here, right now. You seem to be at one with the universe.

Think of the times this “connection” has happened for you, about the most profound moments of connection you have ever felt with someone. Perhaps it was a romantic love, or the complete connection you felt while looking into your baby’s eyes, or when you felt so connected with a performer or an audience that it was as though you were sharing their energy field.

This grounded and connected energy is called “presence.” Connecting your energy is the most powerful way to be really in this world during your day-to-day life or while onstage. It takes focus and openness to connect your energy, but you will find it to be a most profound communication connection.

INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE – Changing Energy Levels

Experiment with your three kinds of energy:

1. Walk down the street and “withhold” – what happens?
2. Walk down the street and consciously “connect” with the world, feel as one with the universe.
3. Get into an elevator and “impose” your energy on the people in the elevator. Be over-the-top energetic and perky and notice the reaction of the people around you.

CHORUS GROUP EXERCISE – Changing Energy Levels

Purpose:

To give the chorus and director a strong sense of how the different kinds of energy affect their performance. When we perform, we want to have complete grounded connected energy – we need to “be with” our audience.

Withheld Energy:

Do a run-through of a portion of a song asking the chorus to “withhold” their energy. For some, that may be a difficult task, as their default is to give it all. For those, a technique such as asking them to think of their shopping list, or think about the things they need to do at work the next day, will have the same effect – anything that preoccupies their minds, and takes them away from being truly present in that moment. Make sure the chorus is still performing; they are simply not focusing on performing. The effect of being on autopilot will cause them to withhold energy.

Debrief with the chorus and ask how that felt. Let them know how it felt for you in the audience.

Imposed Energy:

Sing the same portion again, this time giving the chorus the instruction that you want them to be “as hyper as possible, with as much over-the-top energy as they can give.” Have them think about when they have been really excited, as if they have just won a competition, and now they have to sing for an audience, when all they really want to do at that moment is scream and jump up and down. Ask them to “Make sure the audience knows how excited you are.”

Debrief with the chorus and ask how "imposed energy" felt. Let them know what you felt in the audience.

Connected Energy:

Finally, sing the same portion of the song again, asking the chorus to completely "connect" their energy to the audience. Their goal as a performer is to have the entire audience feel so connected to them that they are swarmed for their autograph as they enter the lobby after their performance.

Ground them, bring their energy up, and ask them to visualize a specific person in the audience to connect to and exchange energy with as they sing. Ask them think consciously of joining energy fields with the director, and through her, expanding their energy field to connect with the audience.

Debrief with the chorus and ask how that felt. Let them know what you felt in the audience.