



CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

BREATH WHEN UNDER PRESSURE

Your free guide to tapping into the power of
your breath.

EXPLAINING ALL ABOUT US



Learn more at:
www.creativeleadership.co.nz
or find us on LinkedIn

WHO WE ARE ?

At Creative Leadership, we believe leadership isn't just about strategy, it's about people. With over 15 years of experience in coaching, leadership development, and consulting, we help leaders and teams navigate change, uncertainty, and complexity with confidence.

WHAT WE DO

We offer individual leadership coaching to help leaders gain clarity, confidence, and impact, along with team performance strategies to strengthen collaboration and resilience. Our leadership development programs provide real-world, actionable frameworks for busy leaders.

Our approach is practical, engaging, and results-driven, ensuring leaders don't just learn but lead effectively.

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

- Book a Spark Session to build your vitality plan
- Explore our Vitality Coaching program
- Tap into Penny's knowledge as a former sceptic and now recent graduate of Breathwork Training.

WHY BREATH MATTERS

In a world of unrelenting pace, your breath is your most accessible and underused leadership tool.

When we face pressure, like tight deadlines, emotional conversations, or constant pivots, the nervous system often shifts into fight or flight. This narrows perspective and compromises decision-making.

But the antidote is always available: breath for both us and those around us.

If you're sceptical about breathwork, you're not alone. Many high-performing leaders start there until they experience the shift for themselves.

Not Into Breathwork? Try these instead

- **Close your eyes. Breathe out slowly. Repeat twice. That's it. You've just given your nervous system a reset.**
- **In your next 1:1 with a highly stressed person, deliberately slow your breath and watch them fall into sync with you without even realising. You can calm them down without saying a word.**

DID YOU KNOW?

- We take around 20,000 breaths per day, yet most of them are unconscious. Bringing awareness to just a few can dramatically shift your physiology and focus.
- Breath directly affects the nervous system, helping you shift from stress to calm.
- Slow breathing at 5–6 breaths per minute improves heart rate variability and significantly reduces anxiety, according to a 2022 meta-analysis
- Harvard research found 8 minutes of focused breath reduced attention lapses and improved task performance
- Box breathing (used by Navy SEALs) slows heart rate and regulates cortisol
- Studies show slow, controlled breathing improves focus, emotion regulation, and recovery
- Neuroscientists call breath a "remote control for the brain"
- Controlled breathing increases oxygen delivery to tissues, including your brain, improving clarity, decision-making, and physical energy.
- Science is simply confirming the ancient wisdom in Yoga, Qigong and Buddhists and other cultural practices which have used breath as a tool for clarity and presence for centuries.

REAL WORLD EXAMPLES

Navy SEALs and Box Breathing

- Used under combat pressure to lower heart rate and enhance clarity.
- Journal of Clinical Psychology (2017) found this significantly reduces anxiety and improves focus.

Stanford's Physiological Sigh

- Dr Andrew Huberman's research found this method to be the fastest physiological way to reduce stress.
- Stanford study (2023) showed 2x reduction in cortisol vs mindfulness.

Google's gPause

- Staff at Google who participated in the internal mindfulness and breathwork initiative known as "gPause" reported greater presence and focus during meetings.
- Slow breathing improves cardiac response to stress and reduces anxiety. Published in Frontiers in Human Neuroscience.

Professional Athletes and Breath Control

- Elite athletes use breath control to manage stress, enhance focus, and accelerate recovery. Olympians use extended exhale patterns and breath holds to lower their heart rate and sharpen concentration before events.

Firefighter Training

- Nasal breathing helped reduce panic in high-stress simulations.
- Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback (2019) found improved emotional control and resilience.

PICK YOUR PRACTICE STYLE

BEGINNER: MICRO-REGULATORS

Quick resets you can use any time.

- **1:2 Breathing:** Inhale for 4, exhale for 8. Do 3 to 5 rounds. Use before tough meetings
- **5-5-5:** Inhale 5, hold 5, exhale 5. Use between back-to-backs
- **Email Pause:** Before sending a reactive message, take 3 slow breaths. In through nose, out through mouth

MID-LEVEL: RESET ROUTINES

Build breath into your leadership rhythms.

- **Box Breathing:** Inhale 4, hold 4, exhale 4, hold 4. Repeat 4 times Use before high-stakes conversations
- **Walk and Breathe:** Walk outside for 3 minutes, nasal breathing only Use to reset between tasks
- **Energise:** Breathe in, then at the top take another breath in and push breath out in one big push.

ADVANCED: STATE SHIFTERS

For leaders ready to go deeper.

- **Physiological Sigh:** Inhale deeply. Then take a second short inhale. Exhale slowly. Use to calm down quickly
- **Alternate Nostril Breathing:** Using your thumb and finger place them on your nostrils to alternately block and open them. First break in through one nostril only and breathe out through the other. Use to rebalance before decisions or after tension
- **Connected Breath:** Continuous circular breathing with no pause between inhale and exhale. Make every 5th breath a larger one. Use to release tension or interrupt habitual stress responses

WHAT YOU CAN GAIN FROM USING BREATH

- Lower your stress baseline in just 5 minutes a day with simple techniques like cyclic sighing (Stanford, 2023)
- Strengthen your nervous system's resilience, improving your ability to stay calm under pressure (Meta-analysis, 2022)
- Sharpen your attention and reduce mental noise with short, focused breath practices (Harvard, 2013)
- Activate your body's natural relaxation response through longer, slower exhalations (Frontiers in Psychology)
- Build the habit of emotional reset on demand, helping you lead with greater steadiness and clarity (Neurology Advisor)

FINAL THOUGHTS

Breath is fast, free, and always with you. Even one conscious breath can interrupt a reaction, reset your brain, and help you lead with clarity instead of reactivity.

When you slow your breathing down in conversation, it doesn't just calm you it often calms the other person too. Research shows that our nervous systems 'listen' to one another, and breath is a key signal of safety. Studies in interpersonal synchrony demonstrate that heart rate and respiration can align between people, especially in emotionally attuned or high-trust situations. The ability to calm others around you without even speaking, is a incredibly powerful gift to your team.