

The Aliveness CODE First-Aid Kit

**How to Bounce Back
When Your Day Goes Splat!**



Curt Rosengren

The Aliveness CODE™ First-Aid Kit

from

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Introduction

You may have been drawn to this ebook because you were looking for ways to manage your stress. Or maybe you wanted to learn some tips for coping with difficult situations, or your fears about what's happening in the world.

If so, great! Because this ebook is packed with insights that will help you deal with all of that. I am continually amazed and inspired by how much we can do to feel more at peace internally, even when nothing around us changes. In the pages that follow, you'll find a framework and specific techniques to help you escape the grip of challenging emotions like stress, worry, and fear.

But I want to let you in on a little secret. *That's not the only reason I wrote it.*

I also wrote it as a toe in the water for a vision that won't let me go, a vision for "changing the world from the inside out."

In a nutshell, changing the world from the inside out is an idea that integrates your inner work and your work in the world. It recognizes that:

- 1) Any positive impact you have starts with *you*. So if you want to maximize your potential to make a difference, it has to include the inner game.
- 2) The more fully you show up, and the more energy you have to put into what you do, the greater the impact you have the ability to make.

There's a line from a poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes that goes, "*Alas for those that never sing, But die with all their music in them!*" That one simple line captures so much of what inspires my work.

Too many people plod through life, singing a song that might best be described as the musical equivalent of a paint-by-numbers kit. Maybe humming a few bars here and there of the song they are uniquely gifted to sing, but by and large leaving it dormant and unexpressed.

How is that relevant to bouncing back when your day goes splat? Because part of letting that song emerge is about finding ways to clear what blocks it. It's about freeing the flow.

And that's exactly why I developed the foundation of this book, a framework I call The Aliveness CODE. Its goal is to help you move away from feeling drained and constricted (e.g., stressed, angry, worried), and towards feeling more energized and open. Put another way, it aims to help you step more fully and more consistently into your groove.

When you're in your groove, you have more inner resources to put into anything you do. You have more energy. There's more room for your own unique genius to emerge. You have a bigger emotional buffer to cushion you from the inevitable challenges you'll face. Your fullest self is able to show up more of the time. Oh, and life is just a lot more fun!

On top of that, when you're standing on a solid foundation of inner well-being, how you show up in your everyday life inevitably has a more positive impact on the people around you.

In the pages of this book, you'll find tools for breaking free of life-constricting states like stress, fear, worry, and doubt. Simultaneously, those same tools help you cultivate more equanimity and a greater sense of peace.

I truly believe that most, if not all, of the seemingly insurmountable problems facing the world today are an external expression of our collective inner turmoil.

So if we want to create change that sticks, it has to start from the inside. We can't realistically expect to hand down a peaceful, compassionate world to our children if we don't do the work to create a peaceful, compassionate world within ourselves. We have to change the world from the inside out.

Lofty ideas, but it's the vision that drives everything I do.

This ebook aspires to help you feel better, yes, but it also aspires to play a supporting role in maximizing your potential to make the world a better place.

I hope this ebook offers you some valuable tools to navigate the bumps and bruises of life. But more than that, I hope it plants the seed for a way to “be the change you want to see in the world.”

Enjoy!

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Part One: Overview

"If you can sit quietly after difficult news, if in financial downturns you remain perfectly calm, if you can see your neighbors travel to fantastic places without a twinge of jealousy, if you can happily eat whatever is put on your plate, if you can fall asleep after a day of running around without a drink or a pill, if you can always find contentment just where you are...you are probably a dog."

- Jack Kornfield

Let's face it. Life happens. And when it does, it's not always pretty. And – assuming you're not a dog – when life goes sideways it can be all too easy to go right along with it.

Regardless of how much inner work you do and how much inner peace you cultivate, there will inevitably be those times when life upends you.

I put this ebook together to help you find right side up again when it does.

CODE Continuums and the Aliveness Zone

Before I dive into the first-aid kit, let's take a look at an overview of how it's presented. The overarching structure is based on The Aliveness CODE™, a framework I developed to help people:

- Feel more energized and alive.
- Feel less stressed.
- Be more resilient in the face of life's challenges.
- Step more fully into their potential.
- Make a greater impact with their lives.

The framework is based on two continuums along which life is constantly in motion. CODE is an acronym from those two continuums:

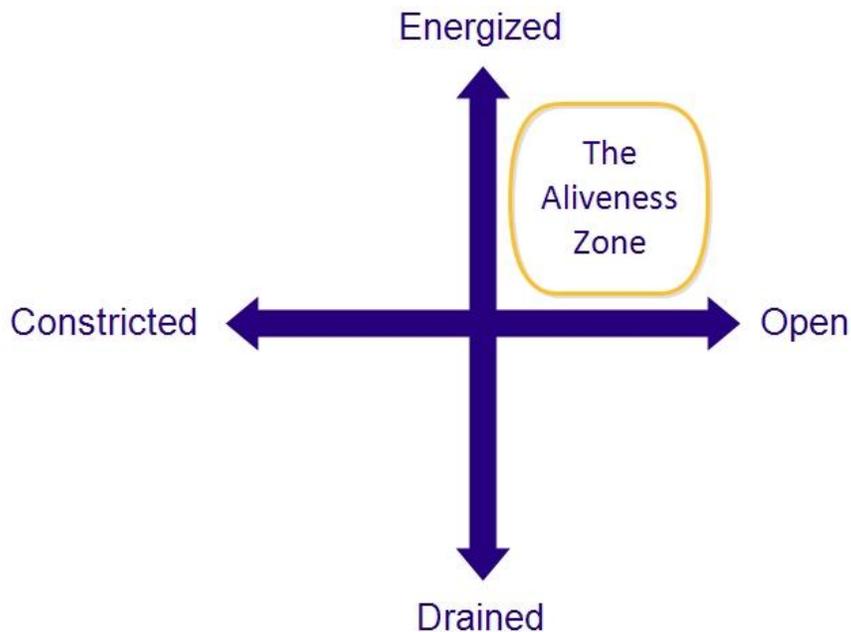
- Constricted – Open

- Drained – Energized

Drained and Energized are fairly self-explanatory, but Constricted and Open could use some clarifying. On the constricted end of the spectrum are experiences like stress, anger, anxiety, and fear. On the open end of the spectrum are experiences like a sense of flow, an openness to the new, curiosity, joy, and compassion. Constriction is often accompanied by a constriction in the body, like a tension in your abdomen, tightness in your shoulders, or a clenched jaw.

The goal is to spend as much time as you can towards the open and energized ends of those continuums, and as little time as you can towards the constricted and drained ends. Simple, right?

The graphic below gives a handy way to visualize it. I call that energized and open space the Aliveness Zone. The Aliveness CODE offers an approach to moving consciously and intentionally towards the energized and open ends of those continuums into The Aliveness Zone.



The Aliveness CODE unfolds on two time scales:

1. **Foundation building:** Over time, regular application of Aliveness CODE practices can help you build a foundation that allows you to naturally spend more time in The Aliveness Zone. Increasingly, it becomes your home state of being. This is where a lot of my coaching work is focused.
2. **First-Aid application:** Life isn't a static event. You can be in The Aliveness Zone one minute and knocked out of it the next. When that happens, The Aliveness CODE offers tools and techniques you can use as first-aid to move you back towards The Aliveness Zone. Part two of this document focuses on First-Aid tips you can apply on the fly.

The Seven Pillars of Aliveness

The Aliveness CODE uses the simplicity of the two continuums as a base, then builds on seven core pillars to help you start crafting a life that feels more energized and open, more meaningful, and more engaged. The pillars are:

I. Energy Management

II. Grounding & Presence

III. Story Management

IV. Focus Management

V. Heart Engagement

VI. Meaning & Purpose

VII. Social Engagement

The First-Aid Kit below offers tips and techniques in each of those areas to help you feel less constricted (e.g., stressed, fearful, or angry) and more open (e.g., in the groove, happy, and expansive), less drained and more energized.

Building the foundation

In section two, you'll find a wide variety of exercises and techniques you can use on the fly when you get knocked out of the Aliveness Zone.

If you want to go deeper into building that inner foundation for well-being so you naturally spend more time in that energized and open space, as well as develop greater proficiency at applying first-aid techniques like the ones in the pages below, I would love to explore how my coaching can help. Please contact me at curt@curtrosengren.com for a free test drive.

Part Two: First-Aid Kit

As mentioned above, The Aliveness CODE plays out on two time-scales. One involves building a foundation, which has a longer term impact. That foundation helps you spend more time in the Aliveness Zone naturally.

The second is an in-the-moment application. You can think of it as first-aid for when you get knocked out of the Aliveness Zone and sent headlong down one or both of the CODE continuums.

When that happens, it's handy to have a first-aid kit, packed with tips and techniques for moving back into the Aliveness Zone in the moment. That's what you'll find in the following pages.

Each of the pillars below will be explored in three parts.

Key question: This is the nutshell of what the pillar is all about.

Awareness: Any potential to put positive change in motion depends first on awareness. This section looks at some of the questions you can ask for the awareness you need.

Practices: This is the nuts-and-bolts of the first-aid, actions and techniques you can use to help you move back towards the Aliveness Zone.

ENERGY MANAGEMENT

Energy Management is about consciously:

1. Increasing what energizes you and facilitates a feeling of flow.
2. Reducing what drains and depletes you and blocks that feeling of flow.

Key question

How can I increase the amount of what gives me energy and reduce what drains my energy?

Awareness

At its simplest, Energy Management is about finding ways to bring more of what energizes you into your life and reduce what drains your energy. The questions below can be applied at both the macro scale (the overall picture of your life) and the micro scale (what's happening right now?). The micro scale is where you apply the first-aid.

- On a scale of 1 – 10 (1 = completely drained, 10 = completely energized), how energized do I feel right now?
- What is energizing me here? What is fun, interesting, uplifting, engaging, etc.?
- What is draining my energy? What is boring, disheartening, out of sync, etc.?

Energy Management Practices

From a first-aid perspective, energy management is about injecting some immediate energy into the picture when you're feeling drained and depleted.

Exercise

Even a short burst of exercise can help you feel more energized and alert. Go for a short walk. Jump up and down. Do some calisthenics. Take a dance break. However you do it, get your body moving.

Stretch

Especially if you sit all day, stopping and stretching can be an important part of staying energized and alert. Your body was made to move. So move it.

Bellows breath

With your mouth closed, breathe rapidly in out through your nose (aim for three breaths per second – one breath = in + out). Do this for ten breaths, then pause and let your breathing return to normal. Repeat the entire cycle two more times.

Music

Put on some energizing music. Even better, put on some energizing music and take a dance break.

Healthy snacks

When you're dragging, it can be a sign that your body isn't getting the kind of fuel it needs. Keep healthy snacks on hand to give your energy a life.

Rest your brain

Sometimes the best thing you can do to feel more energized is absolutely nothing. Take a five minute break and just let your brain hang out and do nothing. Give it some space. Let it rest and relax.

Help someone

The simple act of doing something good for someone else can have an energizing effect. There is even a name for the feeling you get when you help – the helper’s high.

Laugh

Gut busting belly laughing can be a great energizer. It doesn’t even need to be real. Just laughing, even if there’s nothing funny, can both energize you and improve your mood. There’s even a practice called laughter yoga that builds on this very idea.

Reach out and connect

Reach out to someone you find energizing and uplifting to be around. Spending time with people who have that effect on you can shift your energy.

Treat yourself to a pleasure break

Take a break and indulge in something pleasurable. Life doesn’t have to be a long, grinding forced march. Let yourself incorporate pleasures into your day. It could be a wide variety of things, like reading, or drawing, or engaging the senses.

GROUNDING & PRESENCE

The grounding component of this pillar helps you create a more solid ground to stand on through practices like meditation, breathing practices, yoga, etc.

Presence is about mindfulness – experiencing the present moment more fully, without judgment.

Together, grounding and presence do two things. First, they work on the Open / Constricted continuum, helping create more space and reducing constrictions like stress. Second, they enable you to be more aware of, and experience more deeply, the good things in your life. That has an energizing effect.

Key Questions

How can I slow down and come back to center?

How can I come back to a non-judgmental present-moment awareness?

Awareness

- On a scale of 1 – 10 (1 = completely grounded and centered, 10 = energy spinning frantically off in all directions), where am I right now?
- Where are my thoughts right now? Have they left the present moment, focusing instead on:
 - Ruminating on what has happened in the past
 - Worry about what might happen in the future
 - Other people (what they have/haven't done, should/shouldn't do, etc.)
 - Yourself (self-criticism, etc.)
 - How your current situation doesn't measure up (e.g., this should/shouldn't be happening)

Grounding & Presence practices

You can use grounding and presence exercises as first-aid when you notice yourself constricting (with stress, fear, anger, etc.) or spinning out of control with your energy flying unproductively in all directions (like when you're going Mach 10 and can't seem to catch your breath).

Meditation practices

Five minute meditation

Pretty simple. Stop whatever you're doing and sit in silence for five minutes. When your mind wanders, just note it and bring it back.

Guided meditations

There is a wealth of guided meditations of various lengths available that you can use to feel more grounded and relaxed. Do an online search for "guided meditation" and take your pick.

Breathing practices

60-second breath break

This is just what it sounds like. For sixty seconds, or for a count of ten breaths, focus on your breathing. Place your attention wherever you notice it most. That might be inside your nose as the air comes in and out, your throat, or your belly as it expands and contracts with each breath.

4-7-8 Breathing

- Exhale completely through your mouth with an audible strong outbreath
- Place the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth
- Close your mouth and breathe in for a count of four through your nose.
- Hold the breath for a count of seven.

- Breathe out audibly through your mouth for a count of eight.
- Repeat the 4-7-8 cycle three more times.

Breathing in / Breathing out

Breathe deeply and slowly. With each breath, play with some variation of “Breathing in, I _____. Breathing out, I _____.” For example:

- Breathing in, I take in peace. Breathing out, I send out love.
- Breathing in, I take in calm. Breathing out, I let go of stress.
- Breathing in, I smile. Breathing out, I relax.
- Breathing in, I notice beauty. Breathing out, I feel gratitude.

Breath counting

Count each breath up to five, and then start over again. 1. 2. 3. 4. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

This simple focus technique will make it abundantly clear when your attention has wandered. 11. 12. 13...oops! 1.2.3.4.5...

Mindfulness practices

Surf the sensations

One of the challenging things about difficult emotions is our tendency to get caught in a loop as we feed those emotions with our thoughts about what sparked them in the first place. Maybe someone said someone unkind to us, and we respond with anger or hurt. And then we start chasing our tail, thinking about how they shouldn’t have said that, and what a jerk they are, and how upset we are about what they said.

A great way to short-circuit that vicious circle is to step back from those thoughts and focus instead on the bodily sensations you’re experiencing.

If you examine the experience of challenging emotions, you will find that there is actually a physical component as well as the emotional and mental aspect.

Maybe it's a clenched abdomen, or a constriction in your chest, or a tension in your shoulders.

From the perspective of first-aid, this is pure gold. Why? Because physical sensations never, ever, ever happen any time but "right now." That loop keeps getting fed by your thoughts about something that happened in the past, or something you're worried might happen in the future. Directing your attention towards what your body is currently feeling brings you smack dab into the present moment and breaks that rumination loop.

Three-minute breathing space

This is one of my favorite mindfulness techniques. It's short, it's easy, and it's impactful. Again, if you want a guided version of this, you can do a search on three-minute breathing space and find several options.

Step one:

In this first step, just take stock of whatever you are currently experiencing.

- Notice your thoughts
- Notice your emotions
- Notice the physical sensations you're experiencing

As best you can, let go of the desire to want anything to be different than it is. Just rest in the space of what is.

Step two:

Focus your awareness on your abdomen as your belly expands and contracts with your breath. Don't try to control the breath. Just be with it as you breathe normally.

Step three:

Expand your awareness to include your entire body, from the top of your head to the tip of your toes.

Five minutes / Five senses

Spend one minute simply being aware of what you notice with each of your five senses:

- Sight
- Hearing
- Smell
- Touch
- Taste

Mindful walking

This could be as simple as a walk down the hall. Focus your attention on the experience of walking. Feel the pressure on your feet. Feel the effects of gravity. Notice the rhythm of your walk. Feel into movement of your muscles as you walk.

Watch the physical sensation

When you are having a strong emotional surge like fear, or anger, step back from the thoughts associated with the emotion and simply focus on the physical sensation of it. If you feel angry, rather than following your thoughts over the cliff, check in with your body and ask, “What am I feeling? Where do I feel this in my body? What is the sensation?” Focusing on the physical sensations is a way to both bring you back to the present moment and help you refrain from feeding that negative emotion with your thoughts.

STORY MANAGEMENT

The mind makes sense of the world through the stories it tells about everything. Those stories create the lens through which you see the world. Some of them have an enhancing effect. Others have a limiting impact. That lens shapes your experience. Two people can have the exact same thing happen and, if they each interpret that event with different stories, will experience it completely differently. Change your stories, and you change how you experience life.

The work with this pillar is about helping you move you towards an interpretation of what you experience that is more open (or at least less constricted) and more energizing (or at least less draining).

Key Questions

What story am I telling?

How can I tell a more helpful story?

Awareness:

Pretty much everything you experience depends on the lens you're looking through, i.e., the story you're telling. And it's impossible to apply story management first-aid if you don't first recognize that there's an unhelpful story going on. Here are several ways to help you recognize the need for some story management.

Watch for friction and constriction

If you feel friction (e.g., a conflict with someone) or constriction (e.g., an emotional constriction like stress, or a physical constriction like a feeling of tension in your stomach), it's a good bet that there's a negative story there. Stop and ask, "What's my story here?"

Watch for the main story groups

It can be helpful to break the broad category of “stories I tell” down into smaller areas. These include:

- Stories about yourself
- Stories about others
- Stories about your situation
- Stories about the past
- Stories about the future

Watch for flag words.

Another good indicator that a limiting story might be at play is the use of words that paint a picture at the extremes.

For example:

- Must/Can't
- Always/Never
- Should/Shouldn't
- I am / am not (limiting identity)
- Others are / aren't
- Others will / won't (projecting expectations)

Watch for cognitive distortions

Cognitive distortions skew how you see the world. Some common examples include:

- **Black-and-white thinking:** Seeing things in either/or, all-or-nothing terms (e.g., “I always...” “They never...”).
- **Overgeneralization:** Extrapolating a single bad event or experience and seeing it as evidence of a broader trend (e.g., “This crappy thing happened – that’s the way it’s always going to be!”).
- **Catastrophizing:** Seeing and expecting the worst case scenario (“What if *this* happens to me?”).

- **Filtering:** Magnifying the negative aspects of a situation and filtering out the positive aspects.
- **Personalization:** Making everything about you (e.g., thinking someone must be angry at you because they're not their normal chipper self, when in reality their baby had kept them up all night the night before).
- **Mind reading:** Assuming you know what others are thinking (usually something negative, like "They think I'm an idiot.").
- **Emotional reasoning:** Mistaking how you feel for what's true. "I feel anxious, so I must be in danger."

Story Management Practices

Story Management first-aid can be applied any time you notice yourself reacting negatively to life, whether that is something relatively small like being stuck in traffic, or something big, like losing your job and being faced with unemployment.

Bigger issues may feel more difficult to navigate using Story Management because they are so much more loaded, but the basic idea behind it is the same – when you change your story, when you change how you interpret something, you change your experience. In a very real way, changing your story changes the reality you perceive.

What if it's OK?

Whenever you find yourself constricted (irritated, angry, resisting, stressed, etc.), simply ask, "What if it's OK?" What if it's OK that this happened? What if it's OK that this is the situation?

Sometimes you'll be able to just let it go. Other times it might need to just be a thought experiment. "I'm not willing to let this be OK, but if it *were* OK, how would that feel?"

Breathing in / Letting go

Holding in mind the negative story that is having a constricting effect, take a deep breath in and on the out-breath, let the story go. Relax into the space the story vacated. This could be as short as one breath, or it could be a meditation over a period of time.

Rose-colored glasses

If you had a pair of magic glasses that only allowed you to see the positive interpretation, what would that interpretation be?

Automaticize alternatives

Any time you notice a constriction-inducing story come up, it presents an opportunity to look for an alternative. It can be as simple as, “How else could I look at this? What other story could I tell?”

In the moment, finding a more helpful story can shift your experience. Repeated over time, this can become a habit where noticing the constricting story automatically triggers your exploration of alternatives.

If you want to super-charge the alternative exploration, challenge yourself to come up with three (or more) alternative stories that are more helpful and supportive any time you notice yourself feeling constricted.

Remember YOU are the meaning maker

Remind yourself that there is no fixed meaning to anything that happens in your life. The meaning everything has is the meaning you give it.

Challenge and shift your cognitive distortions

When you notice cognitive distortions, question them. Challenge their view and look for alternatives that are more accurate and that better reflect reality.

One way of challenging your cognitive distortions is through asking questions. For example:

- Is this story realistic?
- Is there solid evidence to back it up?
- Could this story simply be a habitual thought pattern?
- Is there any room for nuance here, or is it rigidly black-and-white?
- Am I seeing the whole picture, or only focusing in on the negative aspects?
- Does this story have an extreme or exaggerated view?
- Am I using extreme or exaggerated words to tell the story? (e.g., always/never)
- What are the odds this way of seeing things is 100% true?
- Might I be misinterpreting anything?

Make it a game

Turn your story management into a fun creative exercise. Whenever you notice yourself telling a limiting story, ask yourself, “How *could* I see this? What story *could* I tell?”

Take back control of your happiness

If you notice that you have outsourced your happiness by making it dependent on external factors – whether people or situations – ask, “What story would help me take back control?”

FOCUS MANAGEMENT

What you focus on plays a big role in what you experience. Focus management has three main components: 1) What you notice, 2) What you dwell on, and 3) What you feed your mind.

This pillar helps focus more of your attention and awareness on what is energizing and opening, rather than draining and constricting.

Key Question

How can I use my focus to create a more positive experience?

Awareness

Notice your current focus

When you notice yourself feeling constricted, check where your current focus is. Notice any opportunities to shift or expand that focus to include more of the positive.

Focus flavor check

When you notice a constriction, do a check on the “flavor” of your focus. Look at the last hour or day. Has it been positive, negative, or neutral?

Focus management practice

When you feel stressed, or negative about life, or overwhelmed by how the whole world seems to be going to hell in a handbasket, you can use focus management to balance out your perspective.

Constricting emotions like stress and anger give us tunnel vision. They make us more sensitive to what’s wrong, and make it harder to see what’s good. It’s not that the negative things in life aren’t there – it’s just that they’re not all there is.

Focus management first-aid is about blasting out of that tunnel vision and proactively sculpting your perspective with a more helpful focus.

What's good here?

Shift your focus to the positive by asking, "What's good here?" You can spin that question numerous ways. For example:

- What can I notice that is fun?
- What can I notice that I enjoy?
- What can I notice that is beautiful?
- What can I notice that is interesting?
- What can I notice that is _____? (whatever adjective speaks to you)

It can be hard to notice the good stuff when you're in negative tunnel vision mode. One way to counter that is to create a "cheat sheet" when you're feeling good. Look around and make a list of ten answers to each of those questions. When you're feeling constricted, you can pull out that cheat sheet to help you shift your focus.

What can I be grateful for?

Shift your focus to gratitude by asking, "What can I be grateful for right now?"

If you find it difficult to notice things to be grateful for, here are some questions to get your gratitude juices flowing (here again, preparing a cheat sheet before you need it can help you see opportunities to be grateful that might be difficult to see when you're in tunnel vision mode).

1. Who do I appreciate?
2. How am I fortunate?
3. What material possessions am I thankful for?
4. What abilities do I have that I'm grateful for?
5. What about my surroundings (home/neighborhood/city/etc.) am I thankful for?

6. What happened today/yesterday/this week/this month/this year that I am grateful for?
7. What opportunities do I have that I am thankful for?
8. What have others in my life done that I am thankful for?
9. What relationships am I thankful for?
10. What can I find to be grateful for about this very moment? (Challenge yourself. Make it a game.)
11. What is associated with something I'm grateful for that I can be grateful for? (For example, if you're grateful for the cup of coffee you're enjoying, there's the potential to be grateful for everything that went into it – the farmer who grew it, the earth it grew in, the sunshine and rain, the people who picked it, the business and people who involved in getting it from there to where you are, the roasters, etc.).
12. How have other people helped me that I'm grateful for?

Savor something good

When you find something good to focus on, don't just notice it. Savor it. If you just got a compliment about something you did at work, sit with it. Open yourself to letting it land, rather than just sliding off like water off a duck's back. If you notice something beautiful, like a flower or a sunset, stop and really experience that beauty. Take it in. Appreciate it.

There is so much good in our lives that we notice, but don't really register more than glancingly. Stopping to savor what's good helps you experience it in a more impactful way.

HEART ENGAGEMENT

Coming from the heart is a portal to feeling happier, more connected, less stressed, and more resilient when things go wrong. This section builds on ideas like compassion, self-compassion, and gratitude.

By its very nature this heart-centricity moves us towards the open end of the continuum.

Key Question

How can I come from the heart?

Awareness

Watch for invitations to more heart

Watch for flags that your situation could use a little more heart in the mix. For example, any time you are confronted with:

- Self-criticism
- Negative emotion
 - Anger
 - Sadness
 - Irritation
 - Depression
 - Anxiety / worry
- Failure or poor performance

Heart Engagement Practices

Heart Engagement is tailor made for both soothing the constricting emotions that come up when things go sideways and keeping you from sliding further down the rabbit hole.

Self-compassion: Focus on the common humanity

It may feel like you are the biggest bozo on the planet, but the reality is that whatever difficulty you are facing is likely shared in some way by millions – billions even – of people across the world. Such is the human experience. Remind yourself that you aren't the only one who feels like a loser because you just screwed up. Or feel fear because you're worried about losing your job. Or said that thing to your partner that you really wish you hadn't.

You can even do a little judo by taking the energy of that self-criticism, shining a light on the common humanity of the situation, and focus compassion on all the other people in the world who are experiencing that same thing.

Self-compassion – kindness and encouragement

We can be brutal to ourselves in a way we never would to other people. When you notice the self-critic rearing its head, take a step back and look at the situation objectively. Imagine treating a dear friend who is going through something similar with kindness and compassion. What would you say? How would you practice kindness in talking to them? What words of encouragement would you have?

Now direct that to yourself.

Write a self-compassion letter

For many people, it can feel challenging to even know how to approach self-compassion. One way to explore it is to write a self-compassion letter. Again, imagine you're writing to a friend you care about who is encountering the exact same problem or challenge. Direct the words at them. When you're done, go back through and try directing them at you.

Be the scientist

Take a step back and look at yourself from an objective perspective. Pretend you're looking at someone else's life (that by some strange coincidence happens to look just like yours). Start by simply observing. You can ask questions like:

- What are the facts of what is happening? Not the story about what those facts mean, but the actual facts.
- How is this person responding to those facts? What is she saying to herself?
- How would those things make you feel if they were directed at you?
- What would feel better?

Compassion for suffering

You can pull out compassion in any situation. As discussed above, you can direct it to all the people around the world who are sharing your pain or difficulty. Or someone you know who is having a challenging time. You can even use it to shift your perspective of someone who is abrasive or downright nasty. (Recognizing that underneath behavior like that there is usually some kind of pain, you can focus your compassion on the pain they feel.)

Loving-kindness meditation

Focus your awareness in your heart area. Think of someone you care about deeply, for whom it's easy to experience compassion and deep wishes for their well-being and freedom from suffering. It could even be a pet. The key is that it's easy to generate that feeling.

Feed that feeling for a while, and then repeat the following phrases, one by one.

May they be happy.

May they be healthy.

May they be safe.

May they live with ease.

The words aren't as important as the feeling. If those words don't resonate, you can come up with your own phrases that help you feel the wishes authentically.

Kindness

Look for opportunities to actively practice kindness as you go through your day. Even small acts of kindness can shift how you feel.

MEANING & PURPOSE

This section taps into the potential for a feeling of meaning and sense of purpose to help you feel more engaged, motivated, and happy. This applies at both the day-to-day level and the long-term vision level.

When we are tapped into meaning and purpose in our lives, we experience a greater intrinsic motivation, helping us feel more energized and alive.

Key Question

Where can I find/create meaning here?

Awareness

If you want to get the most out of this pillar, you'll need to do some work up front (preferably when you aren't in the midst of the tunnel vision of constriction). Even having a preliminary picture of what meaning and purpose means to you can give you tools to apply when your reaction to life is constricting.

Map your meaning

To start with, create a foundation by exploring what makes life meaningful for you. Think of it as creating your own personal meaning map. To begin your exploration, consider the following categories. Each of them offers a potential vehicle to experience meaning in your life.

- **Making a difference:** Having a positive impact in the world.
- **Connection to others:** Relationships with other people.
- **Connection to something greater:** Feeling connected to something beyond your own self, whether that is a movement, a cause, or a spiritual connection.

- **Authentic living:** Making your life an expression of who you are and what makes you tick.
- **Passion:** Doing work that leaves you feeling energized and alive.
- **Values alignment:** Living your life in alignment with your core values.
- **Creative expression:** Giving your creativity a vehicle to express itself.
- **Vision:** Working toward a vision that inspires you.
- **Achievement (goals, challenges, mastery):** Reaching for things beyond your current reach and achieving them.
- **Learning and growing:** Expanding in your knowledge, capabilities, and awareness.
- **Love:** Coming from a place of love and engaging the world from the heart.
- **Make life a spiritual practice:** Using the events of life as a way to embody your spirituality.
- **Awareness and focus:** Keeping what feels meaningful in your awareness and intentionally focusing on it.

Which ones resonate most? There is no right answer. It's completely individual.

Once you identify your strongest sources of meaning, spend some time brainstorming ways you could either notice where they already exist, or create opportunities to bring more of them into your day.

Meaning & Purpose practices

Do a meaning check

While “meaning” is a highly individual thing, there are some common themes. Until you create your own meaning map, you can start by doing a meaning check with any of these that resonate with you.

Making a difference

How can I make a difference today? How can I make a difference in this situation? How can I make a difference with this person?

Most days are chock full of small ways we can make the world a better place.

Connect

Opportunities to connect with others beyond a superficial level abound as well. Ask questions. Be interested. If you’re at work, get beyond your professional roles and get to know the person behind the role. Look for opportunities to create and contribute to community.

Contribute to something bigger

Find ways to get beyond your individual story to see how you are contributing to something bigger than yourself. This might be recognizing how what you do already impacts the bigger picture. Or it might be seeking out ways to make a contribution.

Spiritual connection

This will mean different things to different people. Whatever spiritual means to you, ask yourself, “How can I actually live my spirituality day-to-day? What would living my spirituality look like right here, right now?”

Learning and growth

Even the crappiest of situations often bring an opportunity for learning and growth. But you have to be willing to capitalize on it. Explore how whatever is happening can be an opportunity to learn and grow.

You can also be on the constant lookout for new learning and growth opportunities, like learning a new skill, or taking on a new challenge.

Purpose

Finally, if you have a sense of what your “purpose” in life is, you can draw from that. That purpose might be about working towards a big picture vision, or it might be a way that you aspire to show up every day (e.g., as an embodiment of love).

You can ask things like:

- How can I put my purpose into practice here (if it’s a way of showing up)?
- How can this experience / this day / this job / etc. move me towards my vision?

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

We humans evolved to be social creatures. It's wired into the way our brains operate. Given that, it's inevitable that social engagement plays a key role in creating a life in the Aliveness Zone. We were born to engage and interact.

In this section, we'll take a look at some of the numerous ways you can draw on social engagement to help you navigate life's challenges.

Key Questions

What kind of social engagement do I need?

Where can I find it?

Awareness

Notice the need for support

Strange as it may sound, people are often so immersed in an independent, nose-to-the-grindstone, grit-your-teeth-and-suck-it-up way of living that they don't even notice – or at least acknowledge – that they need some kind of support.

The first step in taking advantage of Social Engagement as a tool to help you thrive is to build a greater awareness of when it's needed.

Understand what kind of support you need

If the first step is noticing that support is needed, the second step is asking the question, "What *kind* of support?"

You can get more clarity on that with questions like these:

- Am I upset?
- Am I confused?

- Do I need to figure out what my next steps are?
- Do I feel isolated, disconnected, or lonely?
- Do I feel flat and uninspired?
- Do I feel discouraged?
- Do I need specific help doing something?

The more awareness you have of what you're experiencing, the better equipped you are to reach out for the most relevant support.

Social Engagement categories

Social engagement can show up in a wide variety of forms. Below are some of the most common.

There isn't a "practices" component to this section, other than, a) notice the need, b) identify the type of social engagement needed, and c) reach out.

It's worth taking a look at each of these categories and making a list of people and groups you can reach out to when things get challenging (and adding to it on an ongoing basis). Think of it as preparing your "social first-aid kit" ahead of time.

Emotional support

When things go sideways, when you feel frustrated, or angry, or scared, or worried, sometimes all you need is somebody to be there for emotional support. That might look like someone holding space for you and listening as you vent, or reassuring you, or letting you know that you're not alone, or just giving you a hug.

Encouragement

When the chips are down and you feel discouraged, the encouragement of others can be vital. It's like outsourcing a positive perspective until you can hold it on your own again.

It can be helpful to identify people beforehand that you can reach out to for encouragement. That might be someone who knows you and what you're doing and believes in you. Or it might be people who simply have perpetually encouraging personalities.

Knowledge / Insight support

In the longer term view, this one involves reaching out to mentors and cultivating relationships with people who know more about a given topic than you. In the context of short-term first-aid application, it can be as simple as finding someone who can give you a missing piece of the puzzle, or even just a next step.

That might be someone with subject matter expertise, someone who is adept at what you're grappling with in their own lives (for example, someone who is really good at communication in their relationships), or simply someone who is good at helping you sort through things and find a little more clarity.

Connection and community

We have an epidemic of loneliness in this culture. And that sense of isolation can have a magnifying and multiplying effect on whatever challenges we're grappling with. One way to counter that is to reach out and connect with community.

Community can also offer a collective resource to draw on in times of need.

Inspiration

Sometimes the challenge is a matter of losing steam, feeling uninspired and stuck. When that happens, it's helpful to ask questions like, "Who inspires me? Who is uplifting to be around? Whose positive attitude is contagious?"

Practical / Tangible support

Trying to do everything ourselves can be overwhelming. Often the antidote to this is reaching out to someone and saying, "I need help on this."

Giving support

It might seem somewhat paradoxical, but giving other people support can be a form of receiving support.

When we focus on helping someone else, we experience a variety of benefits. First, it simply takes our focus off ourselves (especially useful if we're in a "woe is me" spin cycle).

It also feels good to give. Studies have shown that people feel happier after doing good. Researchers have even given that feeling a name – the helper's high. Helping people is thought to actually trigger the same reward centers in your brain that, say, chocolate or drugs do.

Helping someone can also play a role of positive self-reinforcement. That might be a reinforcement of your knowledge and skills, or it might simply reinforce your feeling that, "I'm a good person."

Part Three: Inner Well-Being

This ebook has been primarily focused on things you can do on the fly when you get knocked out of the Aliveness Zone. And while that's helpful, it's only part of the puzzle.

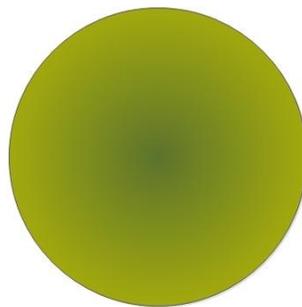
The real potential to change your life for the better comes from your ability to strengthen your inner well-being, that sense of well-being that is present regardless of what is happening around you.

Part of the goal of The Aliveness CODE is to liberate you from the rollercoaster ride that comes from hitching your well-being wagon to external circumstances.

Much as we would like it to avoid them, bumps and bruises, troubles and turmoil are an inevitable part of life. The Aliveness CODE helps reduce stress and builds your resilience by expanding your foundation of inner well-being.

Imagine everything is humming along perfectly in your life. An amazing job. Rich, fulfilling relationships. A great financial picture. The stars have aligned just right.

With everything being just right in your life, your feeling of well-being is at 100%. Think of that feeling of well-being as the green space filling this entire circle.

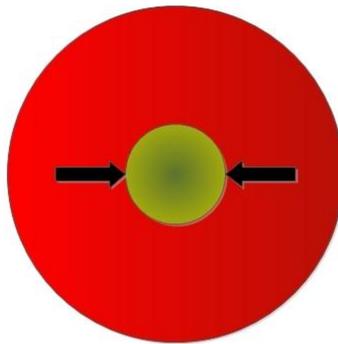


100% Well-Being

But then, as sometimes happens, your picture-perfect life gets shaken up. Maybe you get a new boss at work who is a complete jerk, and suddenly your previously

wonderful job is making you miserable. Or maybe a relationship goes south. Or an illness crops up.

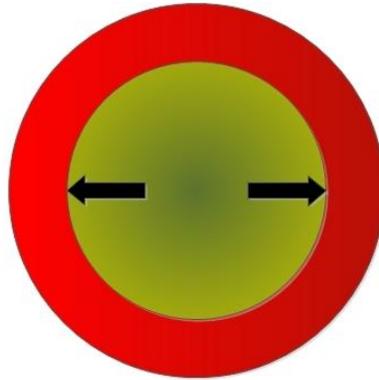
When that happens, your externally derived sense of well-being takes a nose dive. The sense of well-being shrinks down (you still feel good enough to get out of bed in the morning, so it doesn't disappear entirely) and the remaining space is filled with constricting emotions like stress or fear, the red space in this image:



Constricted Well-Being

When your sense of well-being is dependent on the circumstances of your life being just right, it's going to continually yo-yo as life gets good, then gets stressful. Good. Then stressful. Despite our best efforts, it's impossible to make the perfect situation a permanent state.

Fortunately, there's an alternative. Rather than relying on an external locus of well-being, The Aliveness CODE helps you build a strong *internal* locus of well-being. The stronger that is, the greater your sense of well-being is regardless of what is happening in your life. You can picture it like this:



Expanded
Well-Being Foundation

In the last two pictures, the life situation is identical. The same stressors are present. The difference is that you have built a foundation of inner well-being that leaves you less reactive and subject to the fickle winds of life. You still experience challenges. You still feel stress, or fear, or whatever else is creating that constriction, but it takes up a proportionately smaller percentage of your whole experience.

The less you experience the whiplash effects of an externally-based sense of well-being, the more potential there is for your best self to show up, and the bigger the impact you can have as an everyday changemaker.

Oh, and did I mention that life is just a lot more fun?

About Curt Rosengren

As a coach, author, and speaker, I have built my career around three simple questions:

- How can you feel more energized and alive?
- What difference do you feel inspired to make?
- And finally, how do you create a career and a life that weaves those two throughout?

Through my work as a coach, writer, and speaker, my mission is to help people step more fully into their potential to live a best-self life and change their world in a way that feels personally meaningful to them.

I have written three ebooks. The newest, "[The Drive to Inner Peace: How Your Commute Can Make You Happier & Less Stressed](#)", offers an approach to using your time at the wheel as a spiritual and personal growth practice. "[The Occupational Adventure Guide: A Travel Guide to the Career of Your Dreams](#)", takes the reader through the step-by-step system I developed to help people navigate the process, providing a simple, effective framework for finding passion. And "[101 Ways to Get Wild About Work](#)", blends insights and action steps in 101 bite-sized ideas to help people turn dreams into reality.

I have been quoted in newspapers throughout North America, including The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Boston Globe, and The Seattle Times, and have shared my career passion insights on radio shows across the US.

My first blog, The Occupational Adventure, was chosen by Forbes.com as one of the Best of the Web. For several years I blogged about career passion for U.S. News & World Report.

You can [read my Aliveness Bog](#) for more ideas and insights on feel more energized and alive and less stressed and depleted.

Prior to discovering my Passion Catalyst work in 2001, I was a “Professional Malcontent.” I was trading water as a self-employed marketing consultant when the dot com implosion happened. The resulting self-unemployment was the spark that led to a wholesale career change.

I am consistently inspired by people who are working to make the world a better place and having an amazing time along the way.

Based in Seattle, I have traveled to thirty-plus countries and lived in five (US, UK, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland). I speak reasonably fluent Swedish, functionally ugly Spanish, and can read French well enough to get myself into trouble at a French restaurant.

Take a test drive!

As I mentioned earlier, if you want to go deeper into building that inner foundation for well-being so you naturally spend more time in that energized and open space, as well as develop greater proficiency at applying first-aid techniques like the ones in this ebook, I would love to explore how my coaching can help. Please contact me at curt@curtrosengren.com for a free test drive.