SOBER Breathing Space*

This is an exercise that you can do almost anywhere, anytime because it is very brief and quite simple. It can be used in the midst of a stressful situation, when your mind is revving like an overtaxed engine and jumping from thought to thought to thought. It can help you step out of “automatic pilot”, becoming less reactive, and more aware and mindful in your response.

A way to help remember these steps is the acronym SOBER.

S – Stop. When you are in a stressful situation, or even just at random times throughout the day (It is good practice), remember to stop and do this exercise. This is the first step in stepping out of automatic pilot. Whether sitting, standing or walking assume an erect, attentive, and dignified posture. Allow your eyes to close or take a soft gaze with your eyes open.

O – Observe. Observe what thoughts that are going through your mind. As best you can recognize these thoughts as mental events and if you wish put them into words. Also notice any emotions, or bodily feelings such as tightness or clenching you may be having in the body. Just notice as much as you can about your experience.

B – Breath. Direct yourself to your breath. Follow your in breath with its expansion of the belly and notice your out breath and the deflation of the belly.

E – Expand. Expand your awareness to include the rest of your body, to your experience, and to the situation, seeing if you can gently hold it all in awareness. Gently see if you can follow your breath as it ebbs and flows into your body. You can use your breath to invite you to stay in the present moment. If you notice tension or resistance gently
breath into these areas with your in breath and out from them on your out breath perhaps experiencing a release or softening with your out breath. On your out breath you may want to say, “It’s already here ... whatever it is, it’s already here: let me feel it”

**R – Respond.** Respond (versus react) mindfully, with awareness of what is truly needed in the situation and how you can best take care of yourself.

*Adapted from Bowen et al (5) and combined with Zindel Segal’s 3 minute meditation (15). References to urges and cravings appropriate to working with people in recovery in the Bowen(5) meditation have been dropped in this modified version. Wording in the Segal meditation has been incorporated where it seems appropriate and strengthening of the SOBER meditation.