



TEN WAYS TO BE POWER POSITIVE

#3 PAUSING POWER PRACTICE

A pause is a conscious slowing down – a conscious space-maker between stimulus and response. Pausing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps us to become calm. When our nervous systems are calm, we have more capacity to avoid reacting out of habit, and instead, to choose a response that is more satisfying, effective and attuned to the situation at hand.

Learning to pause is powerful and also a personal gift of self-care. Pausing briefly throughout the day reduces tension. More space and less anxiety and rush, make much-needed room for pleasure and wonder. We can more easily work hard while being happier and more relaxed.

As I am teaching, I often invite my students to stop and take three breaths whenever we transition from one topic or process to another. The pause created by taking three breaths allows for a little clearing and a chance to make room inside for the next thing. I feel so strongly about this that I consider it unethical for people to be too busy to take three breaths. When we are moving too fast, when we don't take time to pause, we can easily misuse power because our habitual reactions overtake our ability to choose a more considered response. I tend to react to an issue with an immediate idea of how to fix it. When I take three breaths before responding, I make room for a more creative and inclusive unfolding of the resolution.

Pausing is also a powerful relationship tool, though pausing in the context of relationship is not as easy as it might seem. It takes a surprising amount of self-awareness: first, to be able to notice an automatic pattern that you habitually use in relationship and then, to make some space before reacting and choose a different response.

Skillfully using relationship pauses is a good leadership skill. One of my mentors once told me that it was very important not to rush in too quickly to solve a problem. "You could use up all

your time going from handling one crisis to another. Instead”, he said, “make some space to empower others to put in their ideas and let a creative and collaborative resolution emerge.”

Using pauses well is one of the great secrets of being power positive. Here are several specific experiments to try. For a week, do at least one of each experiment. Write down the results at the end of the day. Harvest your results.

1) Pausing in your personal world:

Consciously choose to make space between tasks.

2) Pausing in your relationship world:

Consciously choose to wait longer than usual before speaking.