

A woman with voluminous curly hair is sitting in a meditative pose on a purple yoga mat. She is wearing a black short-sleeved top and black leggings. Her hands are resting on her knees in a mudra. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the left. The background is a sunlit room with a blue jacket draped over a chair and a brick wall. The lighting is warm and natural, coming from a window on the right.

# An Introduction to Hacking Your EQ

Insights on holistic happiness at work

By Dana Svoboda

 **MAKERS**

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# Hi, I'm Dana.

I've worked in the tech industry for almost a decade. I have been with Makers (a coding bootcamp helping career changers move into tech) since 2014. At Makers, we believe that world-class developers are not only technically skilled but are also strong communicators and collaborators. This is why we have an emotional intelligence curriculum, which I've developed based on many of the ideas in this book.

I'm a Czech-South African, based in London for just over a decade. Along my own journey, I've moved through a variety of challenging chapters. This has given me a strong foundation to build upon. I'm a Holistic Coach, I've worked with hundreds of people, coaching them to improved wellbeing.

Consciously sifting through my experiences to heal, learn and continue enjoying life has meant that I'm usually the initial subject of my own 'Test Driven Personal Development'. Personally, I feel most aligned when I'm anchored in 'my truth' and moving with my heart, sharing love and fun with others.



**I became a coach because it's in my nature to connect, express, share knowledge and uplift others - it's a lot of fun! Also, the need for the 'human aspect' became so apparent in my time working in tech. I saw how necessary it was for people to bring their whole selves to work and feel like their work environment would nourish them, not deplete them.**

**Ultimately organisations are made up of people and people are emotional creatures - whether we like it or not. We're realising that it's smart to pay attention and navigate our inner workings consciously and skillfully.**



To be seen and validated with a safe place to learn and grow - these are key elements in creating a space for teams to thrive. This isn't unique to tech - this applies everywhere. Providing that space came quite naturally for me and I feel honoured to be at the leading edge of how human beings are conducting business and building their organisations.

This e-book was compiled from a series of blog posts I wrote for Makers, based on common issues students face.

The aim is to offer insights from my experiences as Chief Joy Officer to help our Makers learn, grow and thrive while they move through this transformative training.

My ultimate goal is to promote greater self-awareness. This is the cornerstone of emotional intelligence (EQ) and EQ is an essential component of being a successful developer in the world today. It's essential that we pay attention to this. More importantly, self awareness creates the conditions for inner joy.

I hope you enjoy this.

**Love, Dana.**

**Interested in joining our Makers community? Read more [here](#).  
If you'd like to come see our campus, [join us here](#).**

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SECTION 1

# If I'm kinder to myself, will I lose my edge?

Insights on improving your internal  
dialogue from my experiences as  
Chief Joy Officer at Makers



Many Makers students can be classified as 'over-achievers'. They're used to vigorously pushing themselves in pursuit of their goals.

Often they are too hard on themselves, which is accompanied by negative self-talk which is meant as 'motivation'. I see the toll it takes on them and am glad when they seek to relieve themselves of this pattern.

When I advise them to be kinder to themselves, a natural fear crops up in them that they'll become lazy, or complacent. They wonder:

“

**If I'm kinder to myself, will I lose my edge?**

”

Understandably, it can feel counterintuitive to stop pushing themselves with tough self-talk, but positive self-talk actually improves performance.

What is self-talk? Your self-talk combines your conscious thoughts with your unconscious beliefs and biases. I see when students practice kinder self-talk, they become more confident, more adaptable to the course, and perform better.

But why would you practice a positive relationship with yourself? Negative patterns are reinforced when, on some level, we don't feel worth the effort or deserving of the gains.

This isn't about fixing something that's broken or hacking yourself so that you can tick off a list of goals. This is about realising and committing to the knowing that you deserve to feel good and to thrive! A bonus is that others benefit from your thriving too.

**This isn't about fixing something that's broken or hacking yourself so that you can tick off a list of goals. This is about realising and committing to the knowing that you deserve to feel good and to thrive! A bonus is that others benefit from your thriving too.**

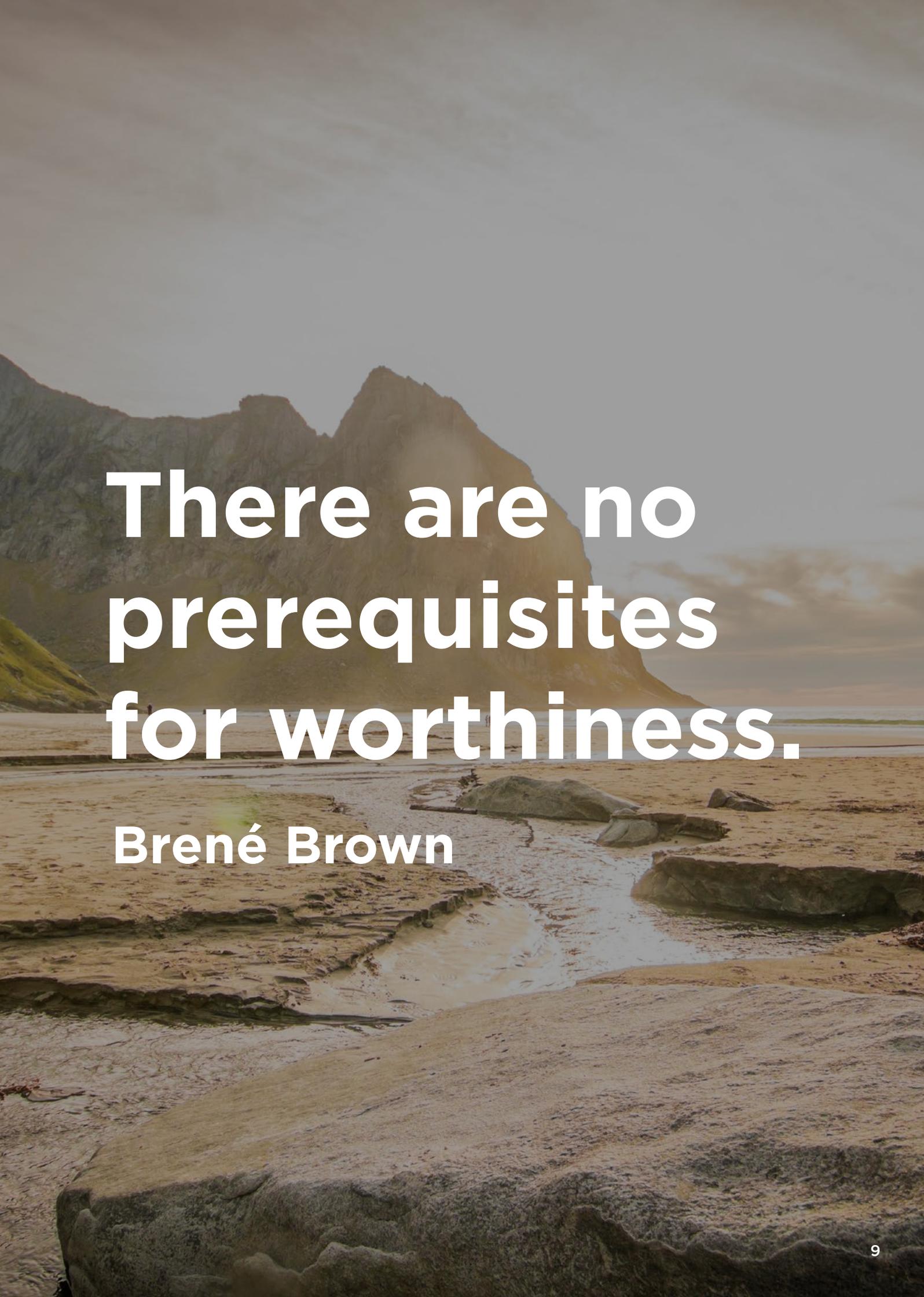


# **It doesn't matter who you are. Worthiness is inherent. That's it.**

**This is part of the effort: to practice going against the false belief that you have to earn your worthiness.**

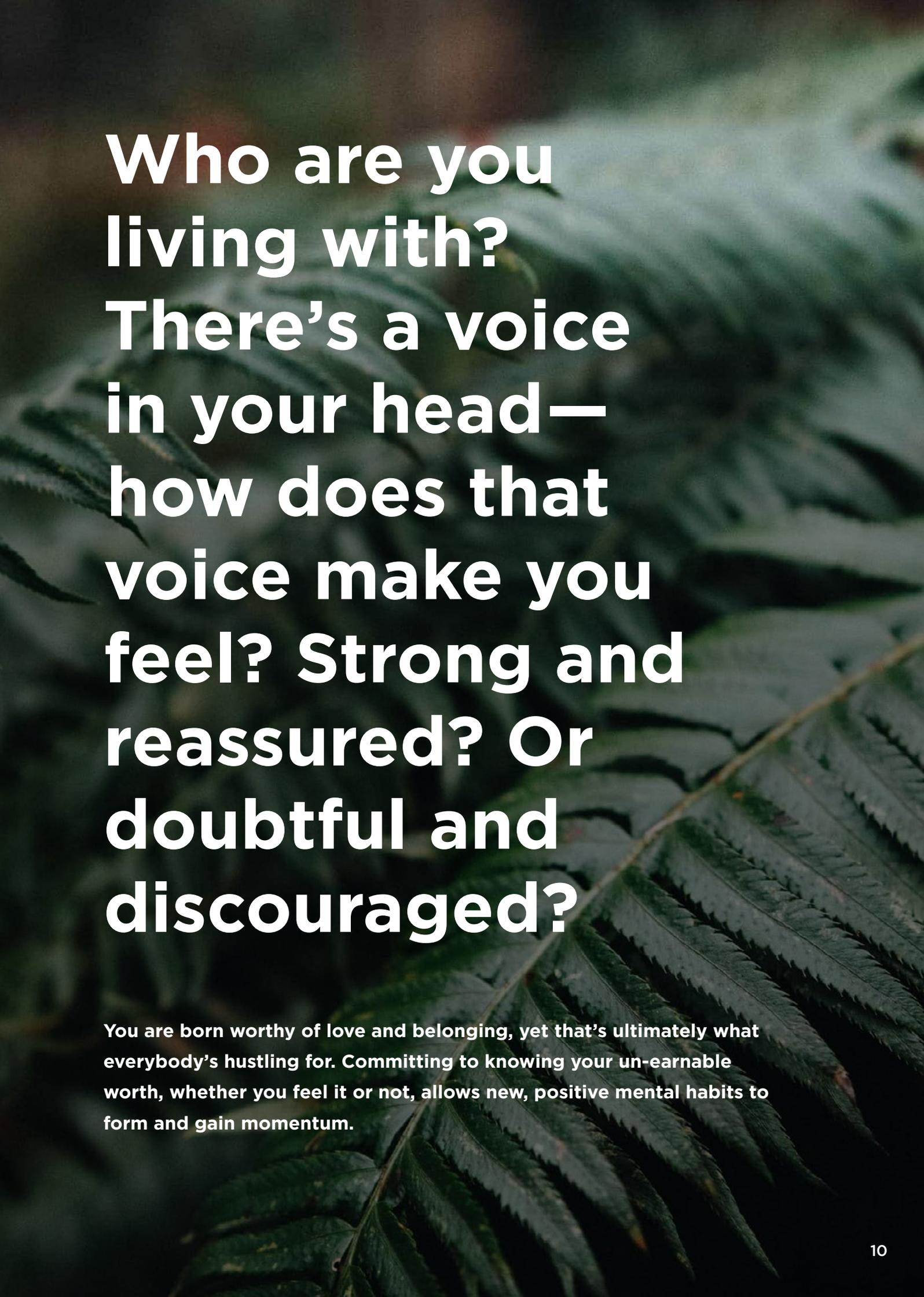
That you have to be a good coder, a good daughter, a good partner, whatever; then you've added enough to your 'worthiness bank' to then start being nicer to yourself. It doesn't work that way.

**Your unique consciousness, perspective and path in this existence cannot be replicated. You're valuable just because you exist, whether you think so or not.**



**There are no  
prerequisites  
for worthiness.**

**Brené Brown**



**Who are you  
living with?  
There's a voice  
in your head—  
how does that  
voice make you  
feel? Strong and  
reassured? Or  
doubtful and  
discouraged?**

**You are born worthy of love and belonging, yet that's ultimately what everybody's hustling for. Committing to knowing your un-earnable worth, whether you feel it or not, allows new, positive mental habits to form and gain momentum.**

# We may feel that the voice in our mind is an entity we can't control.

**It seems to govern itself. That's just because it's a mental habit that we've probably practiced for years, so we're on autopilot.**

**It's essential that your self-talk - also referred to as your internal dialogue - is healthy if you want to create a full and successful life.**

Yet this is something very changeable. With a bit of practice we can form new mental habits that serve us better.

When I coach people on how to improve their ongoing negative self-talk one of their first reactions is: "it's going to be hard". My reply then is: "it's harder not to".

You can spend your life feeling discontent and perhaps stuck with unhelpful thinking styles, or you can spend your life deliberately inclining towards a positive relationship with yourself.

When we frame it in terms of a *relationship*, we can start to see it as a lifelong commitment. It's organic, it has ups and downs but we want it to flourish and grow so we pour courage and love into it—and trust and fun start to build.

How does your self-talk make you feel? Your emotions are your indicator - if it feels bad, try to say (think) it in a way that feels better.

I'm not suggesting that we shouldn't look at ourselves honestly so that we can improve where we fall short. It's about the attitude and tone we take with ourselves. Sometimes we speak worse to ourselves than those we don't even like.

Often people refer to it as 'the nasty voice in your head'. I don't think it's a nasty voice. I think that the voice is well-meaning and wants your survival, but is fear-driven and unskilled in creating true safety and fulfilment for you.

It doesn't always have to sound like a mean gremlin. It can sound like 'wisdom' that was passed down to you or like 'being realistic'. It can be so subtle and sneaky you don't even realise it's running the show.

“

**You become what you think about all day long.**

”

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

# Practice makes perfect.

## Coaching and therapy.

Externalising your thoughts and feelings with a professional who you feel well-matched with, can certainly help. One gains insights and tools to heal root causes of negative patterns and behaviours. It's important to remember however that, applying what you learn, is what's needed to create positive change.



## Journaling.

Journaling helps you to clarify your thoughts and feelings while releasing stress. It's also a great problem solving tool. Check the tone that you write with, it's a good indicator of the tone and attitude of voice that you use with yourself. By externalising your thoughts and feelings on paper, you can reflect upon them and choose better feeling thoughts as you go. Leaning towards being understanding and kind to yourself helps improve self-talk.

## Practice Mindfulness.

Mindfulness increases your awareness and essentially ‘turns up the volume’ of your self-talk. Being non-judgemental is a key aspect of mindfulness, which helps you identify less with your self-talk and become more of an objective observer of your mind. From here, you can more clearly see which thoughts serve you and which don’t, and decide to practice preferred thoughts.

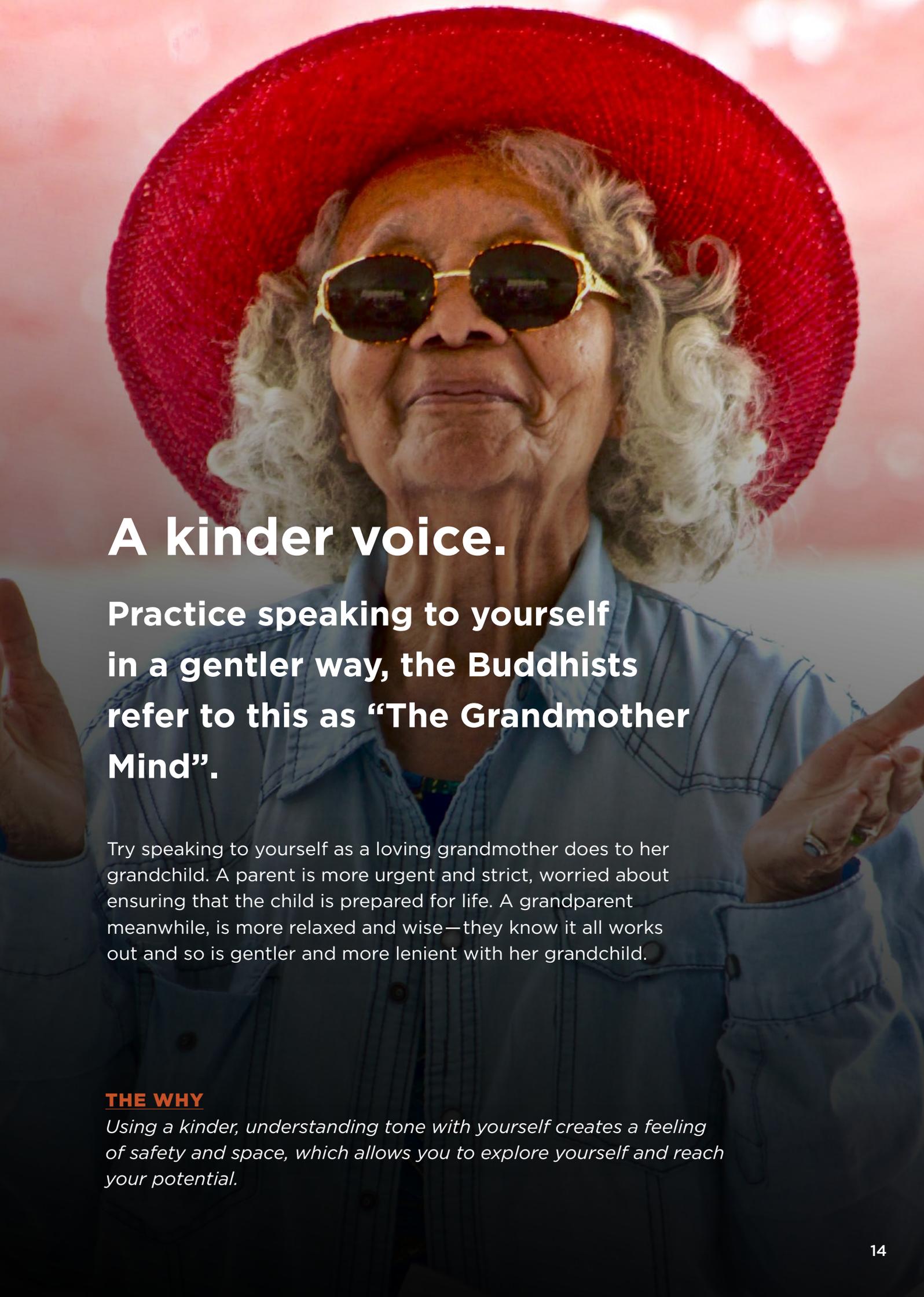


## Call yourself on your patterns.

Blame, shame, harsh judgement, and regret are some of the toxic threads that weave our unhelpful thought patterns together. These patterns can be so ingrained that we unknowingly use them in our personal development journeys as well. (For example, we want better for ourselves so try to improve ourselves and when we get off track, we beat ourselves up. Then we beat ourselves up for how we beat ourselves up!)

### **THE WHY**

*The aim is to catch your unhelpful self-talk (the earlier the better) and short circuit the pattern by shifting from self-criticism to self-compassion.*



## A kinder voice.

Practice speaking to yourself in a gentler way, the Buddhists refer to this as “The Grandmother Mind”.

Try speaking to yourself as a loving grandmother does to her grandchild. A parent is more urgent and strict, worried about ensuring that the child is prepared for life. A grandparent meanwhile, is more relaxed and wise—they know it all works out and so is gentler and more lenient with her grandchild.

### **THE WHY**

*Using a kinder, understanding tone with yourself creates a feeling of safety and space, which allows you to explore yourself and reach your potential.*

# After all, you're living with yourself all day, everyday.

**You're the closest person to you.  
The way you speak to yourself—  
your relationship with yourself—  
defines everything else in your life.**

Even though study after study shows the benefits of positive self-talk, some are still skeptical. After all, personal experience is the best teacher so I suggest they test it for themselves for a period of time and see for themselves the difference it makes. It's test driven personal development isn't it?

## **THE WHY**

*As you improve your self-talk, note your progression and commend yourself for taking your true path of loving yourself to success. Because truly, being kind and loving to yourself is success.*

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## SECTION 2

# How to avoid burnout at Makers?

Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress that leads to a lack of motivation and a breakdown of health.

# What are the causes of burnouts?

**Christina Maslach, author of *The Truth About Burnout*, has identified six factors that make a person more likely to burn out—workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. I've witnessed the journeys of many Makers over the years, and these are some things I've noticed about mitigating burnout:**

## **Work Overload.**

Makers is a fast-moving environment. Students almost always feel behind in the amount that they have to absorb as there's so much to learn each day. The course is designed that way. I encourage students to try to make peace with doing your best, as stressing about not being able to complete everything ultimately slows you down.

Learning is the point, not completing everything. It's easy to get caught up in the Makers journey and forget this. As long as you're doing your best and focusing on learning, not completion, you're likely to be progressing in a more optimal way.

There's a fine line between pushing yourself and over-doing it. With proper attention to self-care, you can be sensitive to that line and avoid burnout.





## Lack of Control.

At Makers we value a sense of autonomy in work and learning. Students engage with self-led learning which means they are in control of their journeys. You're expected to set and take charge of your own goals, which is quite a new concept for most (especially those coming from traditional education, where there are generally clear hoops to jump through). It can take some time adjusting to that and can sometimes leave you feeling out of control.

Certainty is a core human need but is often a rare commodity at Makers, as the curriculum is deliberately designed to keep you on your toes as you have a series of coding curve-balls thrown at you—being aware of this helps prevent burnout from creeping in.

Remind yourself to trust the process and reach for what is certain in your life: your support network (Makers staff/resources, cohort members, family, friends, hobbies, values etc.).

Drop expectations that you might have had about how the course should go for you and try to be present, while allowing the process to take you on the journey. If you value a high level of control in your life then this is the perfect opportunity to practice being flexible and adaptable as those qualities rank high in what makes a great developer.

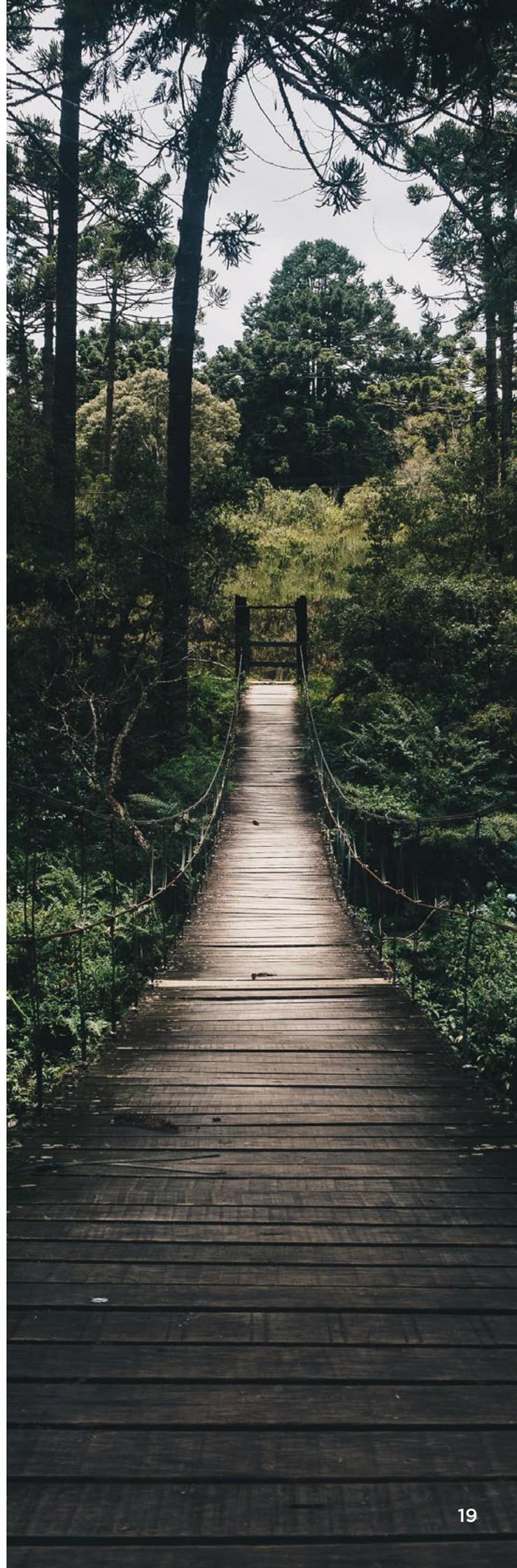
## Insufficient Reward.

**Many Makers feel that just choosing and engaging with the journey is rewarding in itself, and that's so wonderful to see! But, like certainty, overt reward can be a rare thing at Makers when it comes to your day to day learning challenges.**

In our fast-paced learning environment, it's common to feel somewhat behind a lot/most of the time. It's easy to overlook what you've already achieved as you race on to the next thing. It's essential to acknowledge achievements and growth along the way as a way of keeping your morale up.

Humans thrive on progress more than goals, so don't wait until all your boxes are ticked to give yourself a pat on the back. Tune yourself to reasons to celebrate daily. High-five small and big wins.

Keep the bigger picture in mind when you get caught up in day-to-day frustrations. Your biggest reward, the reason you became a Maker, is in the making, and it's coming through what you're going through right now.





## Disconnected from Community.

**Humans are social creatures. We have an innate need for a sense of belonging. Makers' community is our strongest asset and a big reason for people joining the course.**

In I've had students confide in me, about their stress of not feeling like they 'belong' at Makers or in their cohort. It's painful, gets in the way of learning and contributes to burnout.

My encouragement to them is to shift their thinking in the following way: Stop seeking belonging and give belonging. There's a good chance others feel the same way, so how can they create a space of safety and belonging for others? That way they move the negative focus off of themselves while realising their ability to uplift others and create belonging for themselves and everyone.

**Along with the technical curriculum, Makers offers classes on relationship-building through confidence, feedback, empathy, healthy boundaries and more.**

At the same time, practice allowing others to support and encourage them also. At Makers, belonging isn't bestowed upon you. If you are there, you belong there, and it's up to you to claim your space, just as you are.

## Unfairness.

**Feeling unfairly treated can be a big drain on your resources especially when you feel disempowered to change it. That's why at Makers we encourage communication and feedback so strongly. We want everyone to feel empowered to voice themselves for any reason: whether it's a concern about a peer, Makers, or a personal issue.**

Speaking up can be difficult, so we try to make it as accessible and safe as possible to voice your concerns. My role in particular, as Chief Joy Officer, includes supporting students to feel empowered to report their concerns. Communication and assertiveness training is included in the Emotional Intelligence Curriculum. Private 1:1 sessions are available to assist as well.

Our coaches and staff are all dedicated to making the Makers experience as beneficial as possible to our students. We have a code of conduct in place to ensure a safe learning environment. The key is to speak up if you feel something is unfair—we must shed light on a situation in order to bring about resolve.





## Inactive values.

**At Makers we practice Extreme Programming (XP)**

**Values—Communication, Simplicity, Feedback, Courage and Respect.**

**I see how students thrive when they apply these values. They are amazingly useful with coding but are equally applicable to life in general.**

What are your values? What principles do you live your life by? What matters to you the most? These are the things that underlie your motives and therefore it matters that you define them and use them to guide you.

Values are a grounding force. Values are important decision-making tools for your life on a day-to-day basis and with regards to your high-level goals. Without them we can feel lost, void, “in limbo”, maybe even meaningless. Again, an energy-sapper that, if left to continue, invites burnout.

Inactive values deplete the spirit. If you don’t know what your values are, take some time to find out what they are, and practice making decisions that line up with your values.

# In Summary.

**Prioritise self-care: stick to a routine, make use of the meditation and yoga classes, take breaks so that you're balanced and optimised to handle the workload.**

**Focus on what you do have control over, not what you don't.**

**Make use of the resources around you, don't wait until you're overwhelmed to reach out.**

**View growth as a reward. Celebrate your progress along the way.**

**Use your peers/community to become a better version of yourself. Have fun.**

**Embrace a "one step at a time", flexible mindset and be kind to yourself.**

**Know your boundaries, know your rights and values as a person and as a Maker—the Makers community wants you to feel empowered.**

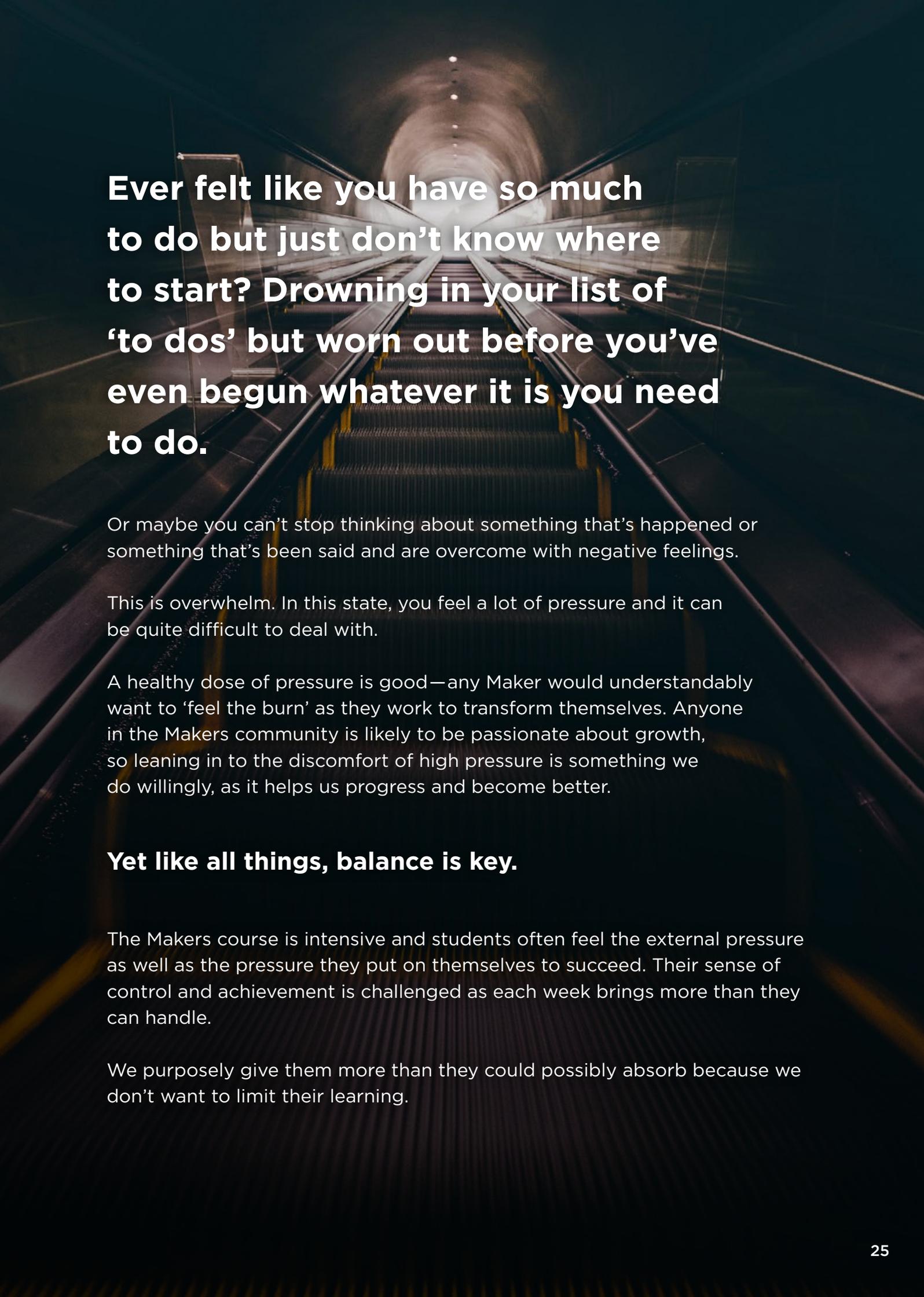


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SECTION 3

# 3 Keys To Conquering Overwhelm

Insights on dealing with overwhelm from my experiences as Chief Joy Officer at Makers.



**Ever felt like you have so much to do but just don't know where to start? Drowning in your list of 'to dos' but worn out before you've even begun whatever it is you need to do.**

Or maybe you can't stop thinking about something that's happened or something that's been said and are overcome with negative feelings.

This is overwhelm. In this state, you feel a lot of pressure and it can be quite difficult to deal with.

A healthy dose of pressure is good—any Maker would understandably want to 'feel the burn' as they work to transform themselves. Anyone in the Makers community is likely to be passionate about growth, so leaning in to the discomfort of high pressure is something we do willingly, as it helps us progress and become better.

**Yet like all things, balance is key.**

The Makers course is intensive and students often feel the external pressure as well as the pressure they put on themselves to succeed. Their sense of control and achievement is challenged as each week brings more than they can handle.

We purposely give them more than they could possibly absorb because we don't want to limit their learning.



**We're not looking at whether or not the Maker completes the challenge but rather what they learn in the process.**

A win is when they've struggled and been challenged but eventually learned how to overcome that and move forward. It can feel like a 'fail' for some students as the habitual urge to have 'everything' complete goes unfulfilled. Add this to extra worries like 'my weekend challenge didn't go well' or 'I need a break but my pair just wants to keep going' or 'what group am I going to be in next week?'

Plus fatigue, personal life stuff, week after week, and overwhelm sets in... this is draining and gets in the way of learning.

## DEALING WITH OVERWHELM

# 1. Boundaries.

Being able to say no to others (or your own negative impulses) is essential to avoiding overwhelm. When we try to please everyone we end up exhausted.

Some examples where Makers find themselves needing to exercise boundaries:

- Saying no to socialising so that they can focus on their weekend challenge;
- Saying yes to socialising so that they can get a break from the screen and nourish themselves with fun and connection;
- Communicating with a pairing partner to manage expectations: working styles, break times etc;
- Refusing to indulge in unhelpful comparing to peers.

### **Boundaries are personal.**

You have a right to your boundaries. There's a difference between walls and boundaries.



**Walls shut people out, are overly self-protective and fear-based, while boundaries come from a place of care and self-respect to help you be your best.**

If you feel anxious or guilty about setting boundaries just remember that your relationships suffer when you're unhappy.

To start putting this into practice, list areas and situations in your life that could do with better boundaries (hint: they usually cause you stress).

Ask yourself: what would a healthy boundary look like here?

How can I take better care of myself when this situation arises?

Once you have an answer, you can then practice it. It might be challenging at first, so be kind to yourself, but building your boundary muscle is hugely worthwhile—not just to avoid overwhelm but for your overall quality of life.

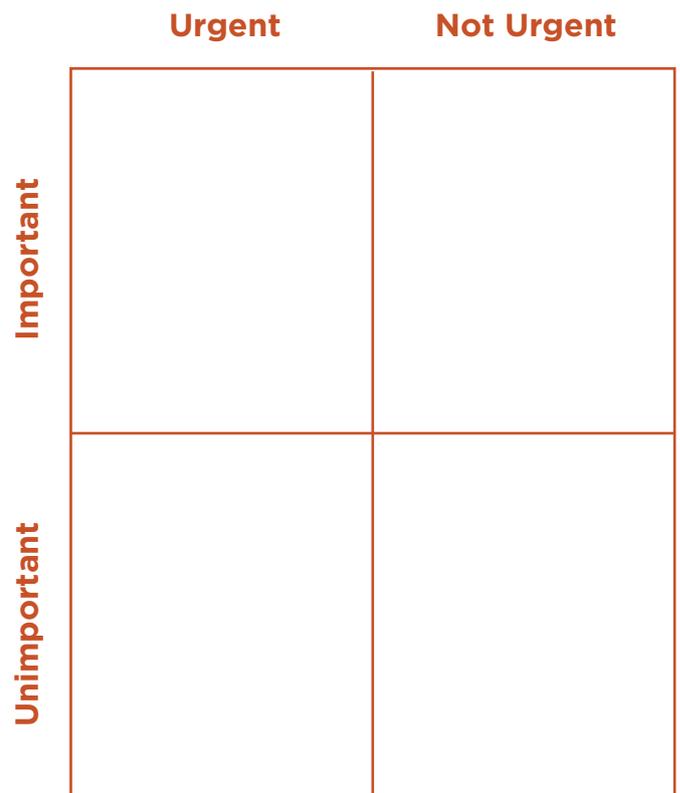
## DEALING WITH OVERWHELM

# 2. Prioritise.

**Are you trying to ‘do all the things’ and end up not doing much at all?**

Without prioritisation we can easily just scurry through the day without making a proper impact on the tasks that have the most importance. This is a waste of energy and of course can lead to overwhelm.

On the right is the Eisenhower Matrix. I personally find it excellent as a prioritisation and time management tool:



**Sometimes our overwhelm is due to things aren't on our to-do list.**

**A Maker might worry about:**

- Getting a job (and it's only week 3!);
- How quickly a peer seems to understand concepts;
- Feeling tired from lack of sleep

**Prioritise your time and energy by focusing your precious attention on what you can control.**

Take 10 minutes and write down everything weighing on your mind. Don't edit yourself: go for a total brain-dump. Once you've listed everything (small and big)—draw a line through the things you have no control over and focus on the things you can control.

“

**If the first thing you do each morning is to eat a live frog, you can go through the day with the satisfaction of knowing that that is probably the worst thing that is going to happen to you all day long. Your “frog” is your biggest, most important task, the one you are most likely to procrastinate on if you don't do something about it.**

”

**Mark Twain**



## DEALING WITH OVERWHELM

# 3. Self-care.

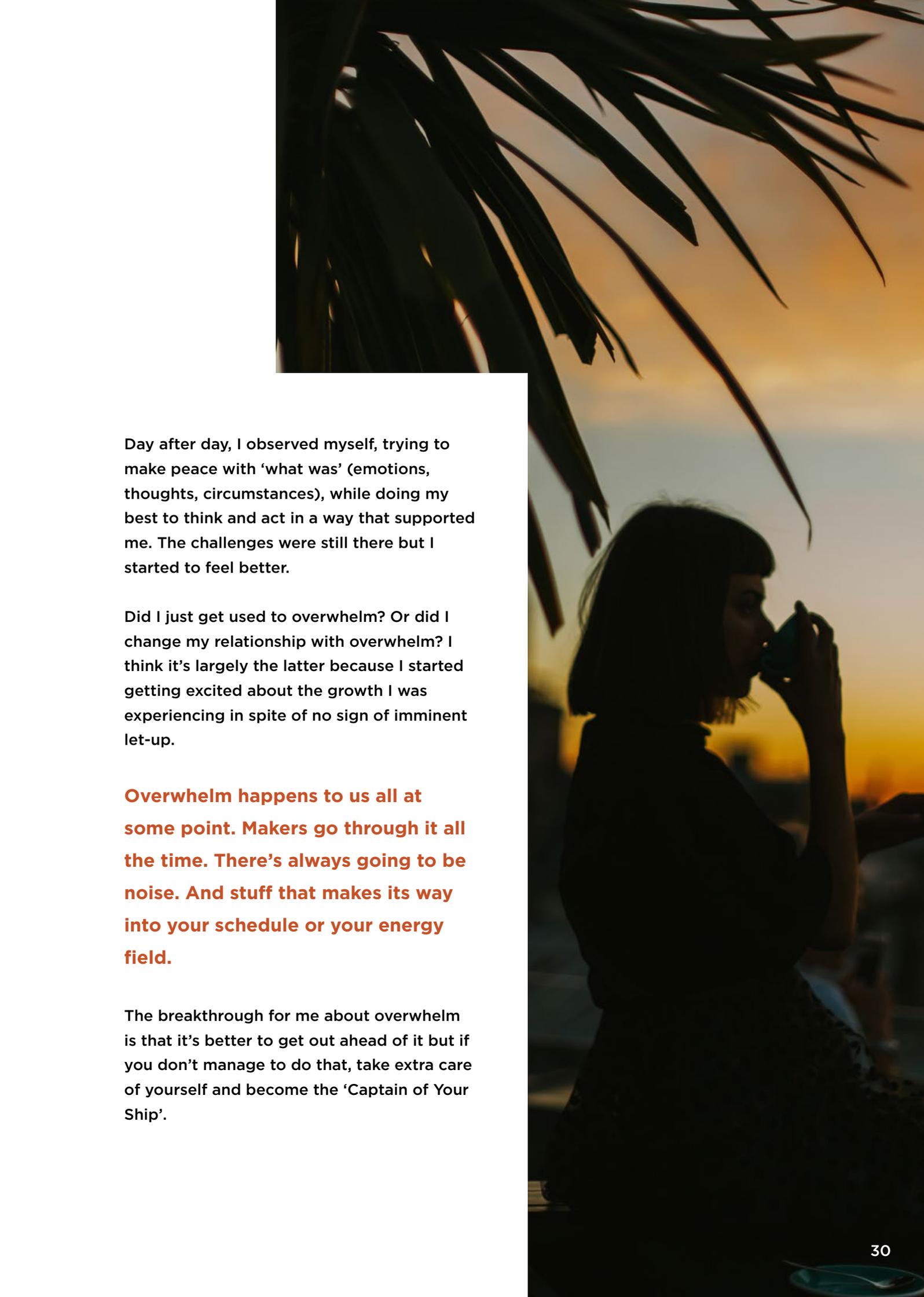
**For some folks, giving extra attention to their wellbeing feels counter-productive when there are so many fires to put out. Yet when you're in a state of overwhelm you can't think clearly, you're less productive and unable to perform at your best.**

I recently experienced a bout of overwhelm due to life's demands and soon realised I had to ramp up my self-care.

I maintained awareness of my state and gripped on to my daily self-care rituals knowing how easy it is to let these supporting behaviours fall to the wayside when we need them most.

I called myself out when I noticed I was slipping into feeling victimised by tiredness and too much going on, and brought out my inner Captain of the Ship.

Ship captains have to maintain calm for the sake of everyone onboard—panic serves no one. Personally, I found it useful to embrace a bit of stoicism in an age where freak outs are somewhat glamourised as we often see in reality TV.

A woman is shown in silhouette, talking on a mobile phone. She is positioned on the right side of the frame, facing left. The background is a warm, golden sunset sky, with the dark silhouettes of palm fronds in the upper left corner. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

Day after day, I observed myself, trying to make peace with 'what was' (emotions, thoughts, circumstances), while doing my best to think and act in a way that supported me. The challenges were still there but I started to feel better.

Did I just get used to overwhelm? Or did I change my relationship with overwhelm? I think it's largely the latter because I started getting excited about the growth I was experiencing in spite of no sign of imminent let-up.

**Overwhelm happens to us all at some point. Makers go through it all the time. There's always going to be noise. And stuff that makes its way into your schedule or your energy field.**

The breakthrough for me about overwhelm is that it's better to get out ahead of it but if you don't manage to do that, take extra care of yourself and become the 'Captain of Your Ship'.

# In Summary.

**Admit and accept the overwhelmed state. It's normal to experience some overwhelm especially in unfamiliar or demanding situations.**

**Give up trying to 'push through' and make your brain work without breaks—its not designed to do that.**

**Get out of your head—you're not in the right frame of mind to 'think yourself better'.**

**Take care of yourself. Whether it is reaching out for support, having a cry, taking a nap, meditation, journaling, going for a walk or plain old distraction eg: funny internet cat videos—do it.**

**Clarify and practice your boundaries, prioritise your tasks.**

**Shift to an attitude of growth. Understand that you're outside your comfort zone and sometimes have to push yourself if you want to grow.**

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SECTION 4

# 10 Ways to Hack Your Meditation

Insights on building a solid meditation practice  
from my experiences as Chief Joy Officer

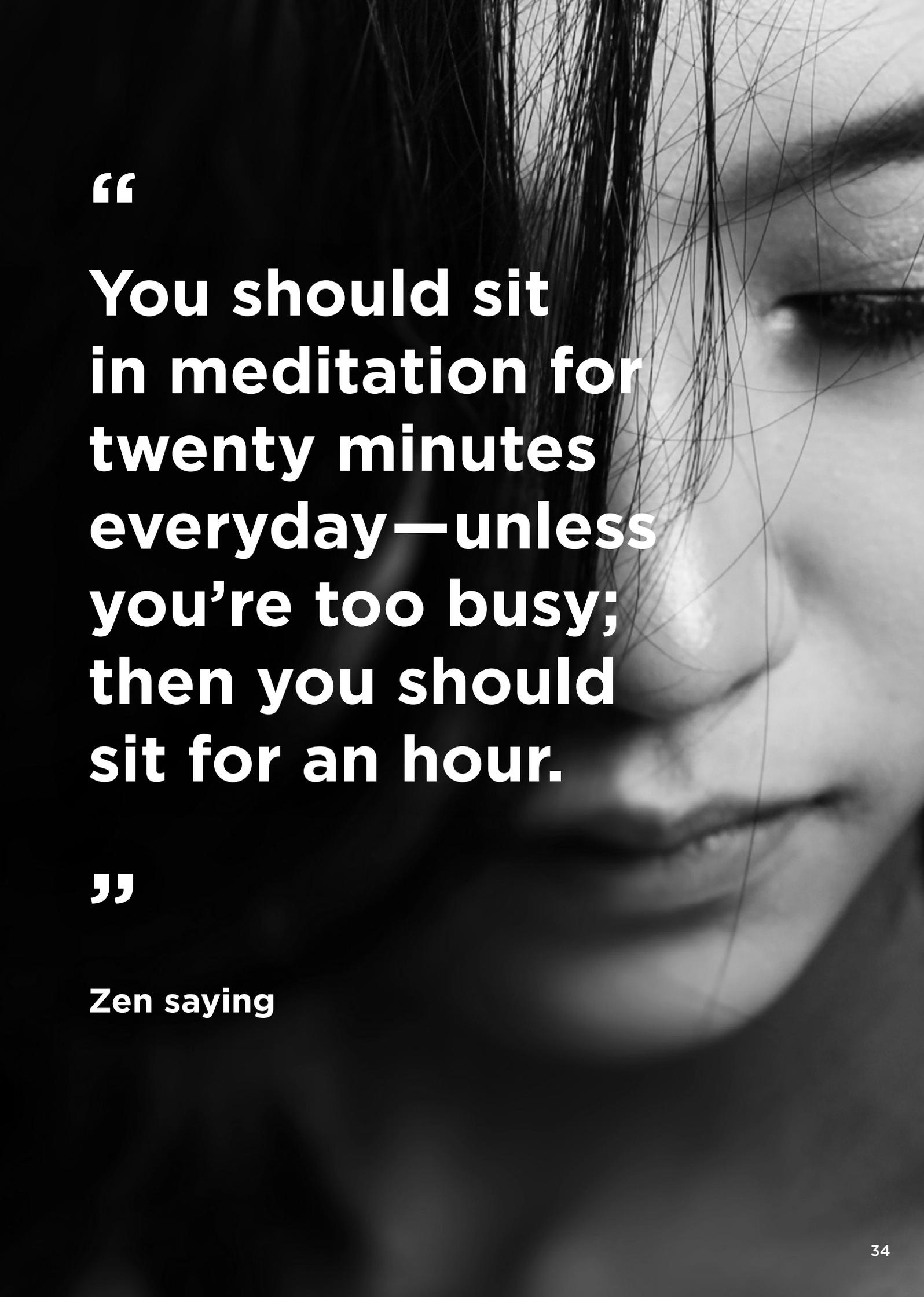


## Meditation at Makers.

**Meditation is backed by scientific research and evidence, and can improve your wellbeing, just like regular exercise or a balanced diet.**

Taking care of yourself is an important aspect of professional development, which we take very seriously here at Makers.

In fact, at Makers, I'm often met with people who want to meditate more yet are struggling to integrate it into their lives. Below, are some of the most common excuses and the advice I often give our Makers in response.



“

**You should sit  
in meditation for  
twenty minutes  
everyday—unless  
you’re too busy;  
then you should  
sit for an hour.**

”

**Zen saying**



## 1. “There’s not enough time.”

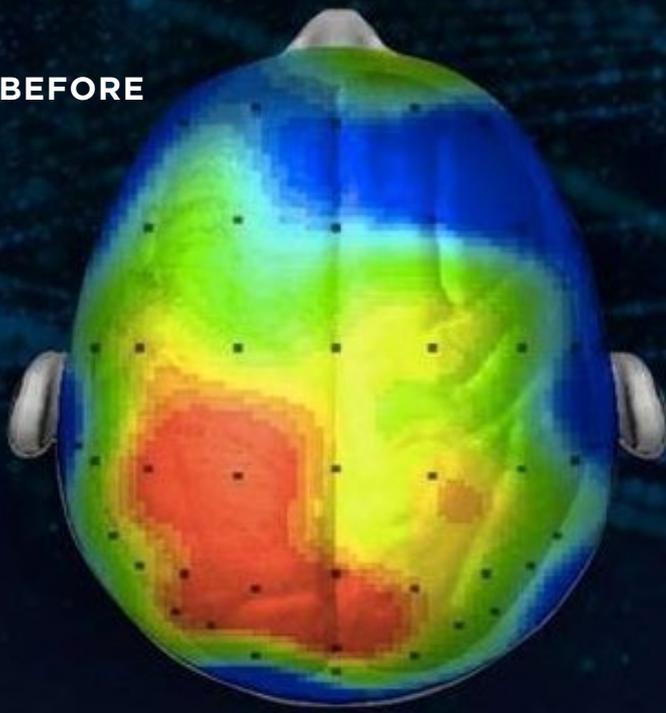
**If you don’t fill your own tank first, you’ll be running on fumes, which means you won’t be doing things as well as you could. Meditation is an effective way of ‘fuelling up’.**

With benefits such as increased energy and focus, clarity of mind and improved health, meditation gives you time because you’re optimising yourself.

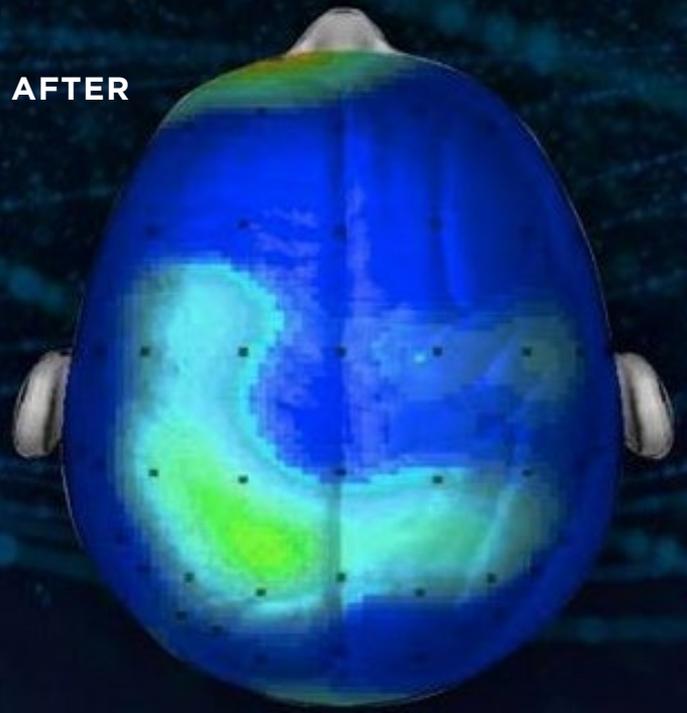
### **TIP**

*Don’t find time, make time. It might mean waking up a few mins earlier in the morning. If you can set 15 or 20 minutes aside to practice, that’s great, but don’t underestimate the benefits of a 10 minute meditation.*

BEFORE



AFTER



2.

## “It doesn’t work for me.”

**Everyone ultimately needs to follow what feels right for them but you owe it to yourself to give meditation a fair chance.**

Meditation requires patience: while a decrease in tension is often felt from the first practice, it can take a bit of time for its deeper benefits to be felt. In my experience working with over several hundred students, I’ve yet to encounter someone who hasn’t felt the worthwhile benefits with consistent practice.

### **TIP**

*Commit to a meditation practice for 30 days. Let go of any expectations of how it should go. Notice and enjoy even the smallest progress.*

“

**Meditation has helped me find inner peace about something I’ve been struggling with for so many years**

”

**Makers student**



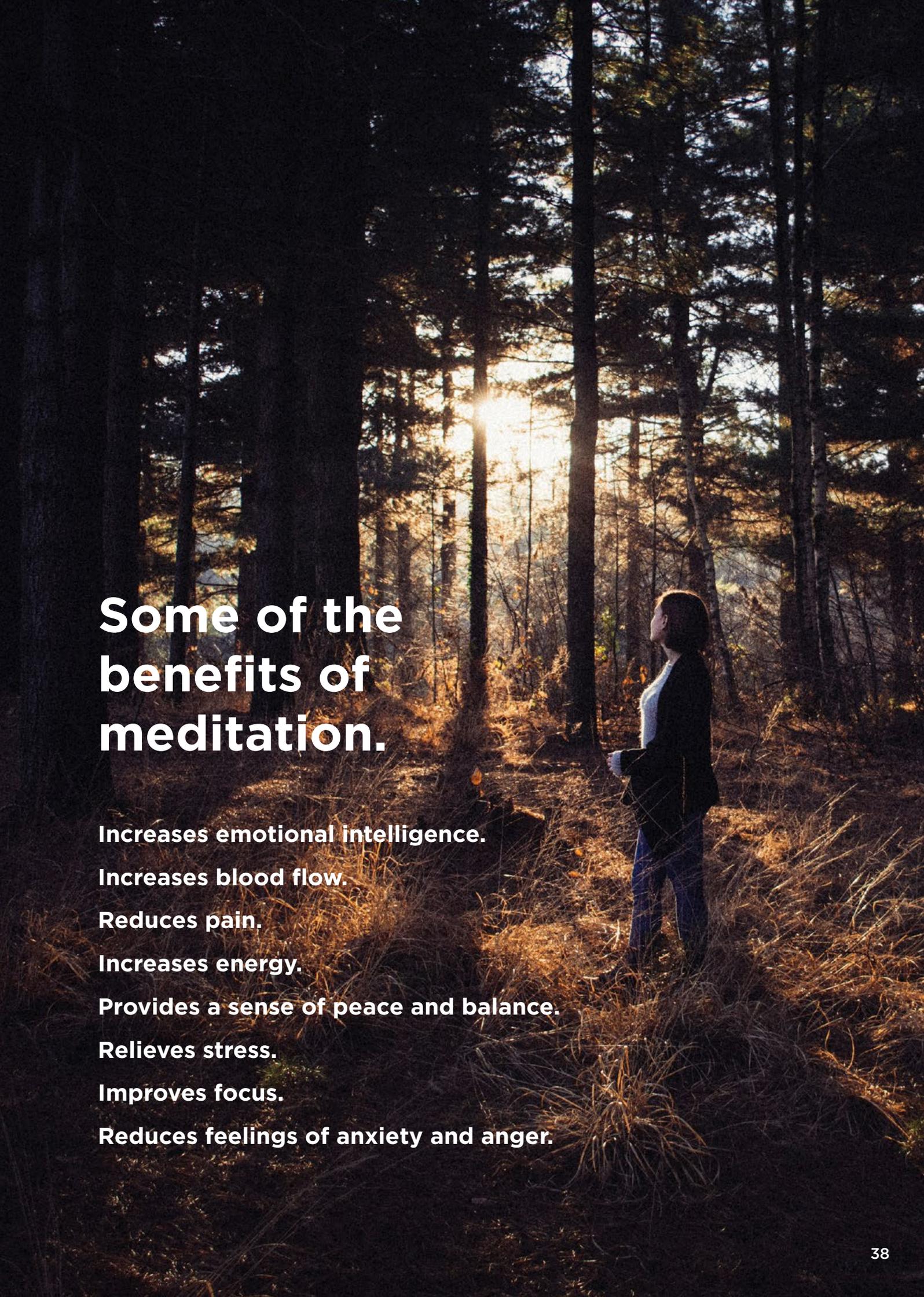
### 3. “It’s too hard.”

**Training yourself to do anything can be challenging. Is the gym meant to be easy? This is where having a **growth mindset** is useful. Meditation is like a ‘gym for the brain’—if you do the push-up, you’ll build the muscle.**

Meditation has so many benefits that make life richer and lighter. In my opinion, living with less self awareness, excess tension, duller focus and so on is far more difficult.

#### **TIP**

*Meet yourself where you are, observe yourself non-judgmentally experiencing a difficult time and you will connect with the essence of the practice. Lastly, tell yourself “It’s not hard, it’s new”. Remind yourself that this practice is backed by extensive scientific research, and will improve your life if you stick with it.*

A woman in a dark jacket and blue pants stands in a forest, looking towards the trees. The sun is low in the sky, creating a warm, golden glow through the trees. The forest floor is covered in dry grass and fallen leaves.

# **Some of the benefits of meditation.**

**Increases emotional intelligence.**

**Increases blood flow.**

**Reduces pain.**

**Increases energy.**

**Provides a sense of peace and balance.**

**Relieves stress.**

**Improves focus.**

**Reduces feelings of anxiety and anger.**



## 4. “There are too many distractions!”

**In the footballing world, training is often done on beach sand. This is harder than training on grass, and players are fitter and more agile as a result.**

Makers campus is in the heart of London, students’ minds are flooded with code... it’s not the most serene environment. Yet we cultivate a meditation practice in the midsts of that—we’re ‘training on beach sand’. Distraction is good. Part of meditation is practicing allowing of all ‘the happenings’. Soon your strength and stamina as a meditator will increase, leading to a strong, clear and focused mind.

### **TIP**

*Practice viewing everything as ‘just a happening’. Nothing is deliberately trying to add or detract from your experience—it’s all just impartial stuff coming and going.*

## 5. “I can’t turn off my thoughts.”

**The nature of the mind is to think. The point of meditation isn’t to stop thoughts but rather to identify less with thoughts as you observe them in a non-judgemental way.**

With practice, you rewire your brain, the mind is less ‘on auto-pilot’ and increased mental calmness prevails.

### **TIP**

*Treat the mind like a puppy. The nature of the puppy is to wander, just like the mind. Training the puppy to stay in one place takes understanding and gentleness. Some thoughts can be so compelling, sucking us in for the duration of the practice—that’s normal. With practice you’ll catch your wandering thoughts more and more.*





## 6. “I can’t sit still”

**Busyness/doing-ness, achieving, being productive, is the order of the day in our ‘rat-racey’ modern life. It can feel very counter-intuitive, even wrong, to take time out to do ‘nothing’.**

The ability to be still with yourself is a highly overlooked skill and is totally worth practicing. If you can’t sit still for 10 minutes, you should definitely be practicing meditation.

### **TIP**

*Try meditating soon after physical activity e.g. a walk, gym, yoga, house cleaning etc. — it helps to release restlessness. Don’t put pressure on yourself to jump into a 10 minute practice straight away. Start with 2 minutes a day and when you feel ready, add an extra minute. Going at your own pace will ease you into stillness.*

“

**The body  
benefits from  
movement and  
the mind benefits  
from stillness.**

”

**Sakyong Mipham**



## 7. “I’m not a religious or spiritual person.”

**Many meditation practices have spiritual origins, and if you are a religious/spiritual person, you might enjoy exploring those aspects of the practice.**

The type of meditation I teach is a simple mindfulness meditation which I often refer to as “brain training”. With regular practice, you strengthen connections in your brain, also known as cortical thickening. This leads to benefits such as better concentration, an increase in emotional intelligence competencies and enhanced wellbeing.

### **TIP**

*Remind yourself that your meditation practice is time you’re taking to optimise your brain.*



## 8. “I practice yoga instead.”

In my blog post “[Coding and Yoga Unite](#)”, I talk about the 8 limbs of yoga and explain that often people think that yoga is mainly just the physical postures (Asana).

Asana’s purpose is to prepare the body for concentration (Dharana) and meditation (Dhyana), which are the limbs of yoga for training the mind.

### **TIP**

*While there’s some crossover of physical yoga practices and meditation, you’ll gain much more when you treat them as two separate practices, as each one has its different benefits ie. Asana practice + meditation = :) meditation practice is time you’re taking to optimise your brain.*



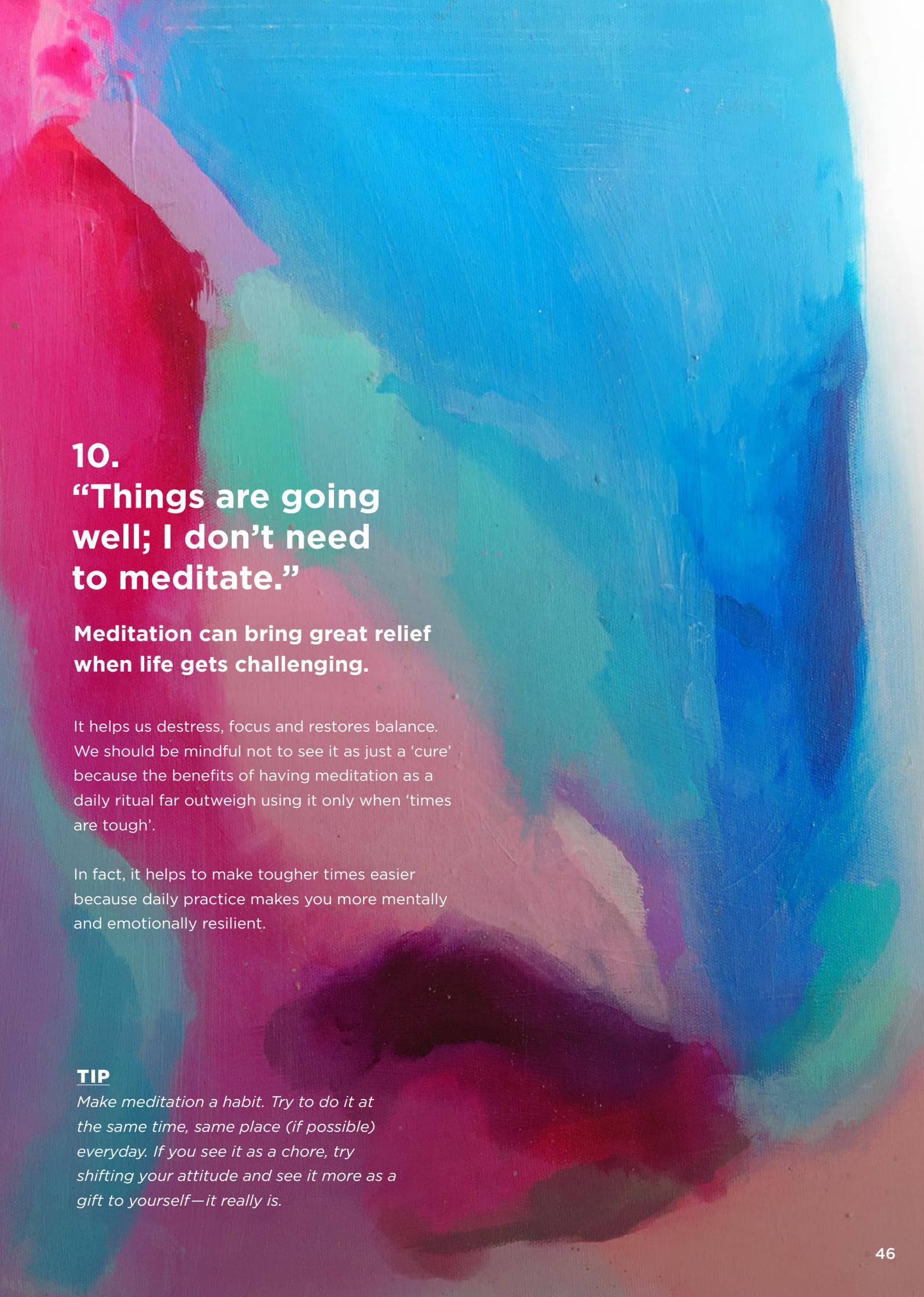
**9.**  
**“I keep falling  
asleep.”**

**Falling asleep during  
meditation is very common.  
What we’re looking for in  
meditation is to be relaxed  
and focused at the same time.**

It’s normal to tip into either being too tense while trying to concentrate or too sleepy from relaxation. With practice we learn to ‘hover in the sweet spot’.

**TIP**

*If you keep falling asleep, it may mean you’re tired! This awareness is helpful so that you can take appropriate measures to get better sleep. Meditate sitting upright instead of lying down—lying down increases the likelihood of falling asleep. Meditate away from your bed as bed is usually associated with sleep.*



## 10. “Things are going well; I don’t need to meditate.”

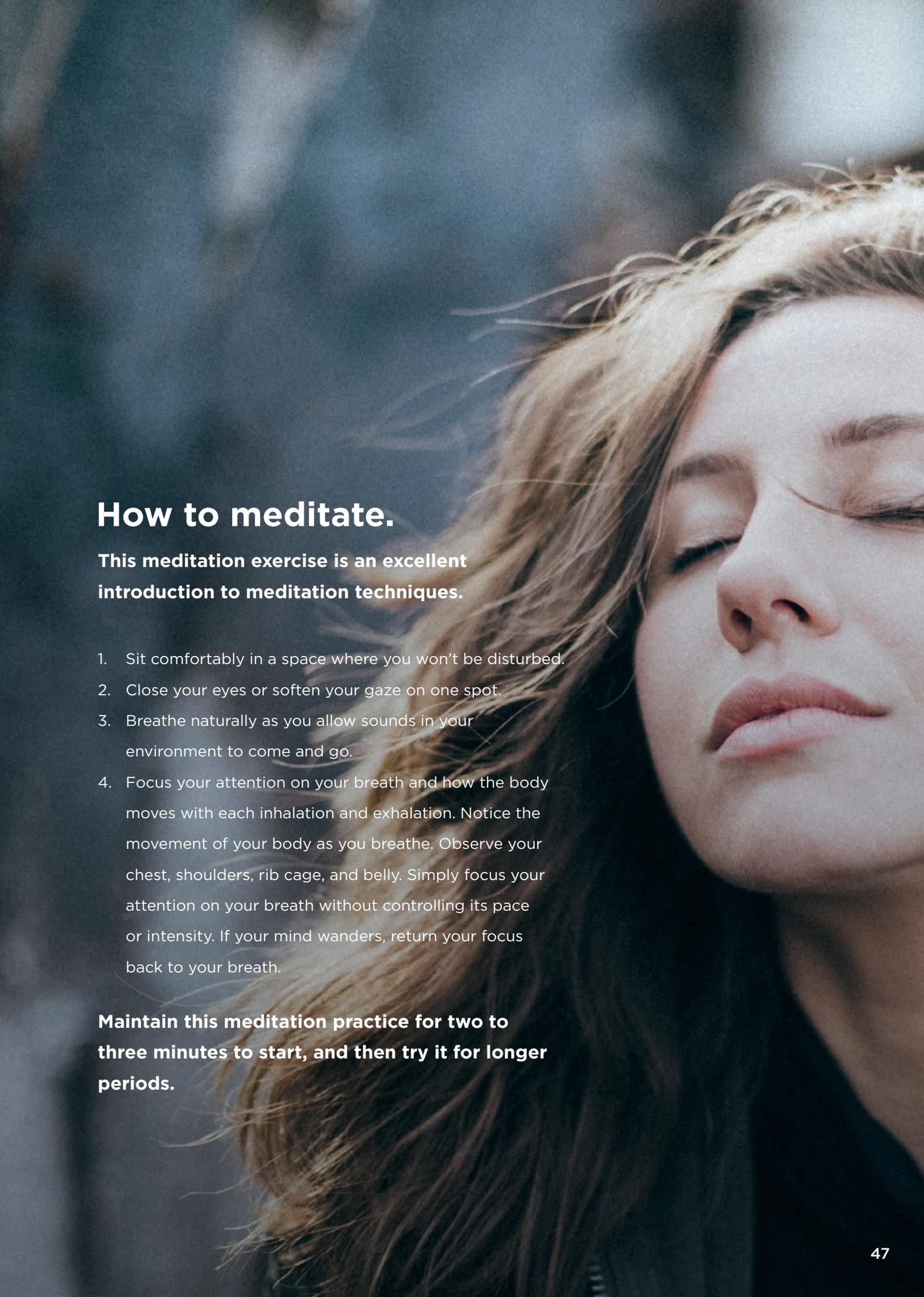
**Meditation can bring great relief  
when life gets challenging.**

It helps us destress, focus and restores balance. We should be mindful not to see it as just a ‘cure’ because the benefits of having meditation as a daily ritual far outweigh using it only when ‘times are tough’.

In fact, it helps to make tougher times easier because daily practice makes you more mentally and emotionally resilient.

### **TIP**

*Make meditation a habit. Try to do it at the same time, same place (if possible) everyday. If you see it as a chore, try shifting your attitude and see it more as a gift to yourself—it really is.*



## How to meditate.

**This meditation exercise is an excellent introduction to meditation techniques.**

1. Sit comfortably in a space where you won't be disturbed.
2. Close your eyes or soften your gaze on one spot.
3. Breathe naturally as you allow sounds in your environment to come and go.
4. Focus your attention on your breath and how the body moves with each inhalation and exhalation. Notice the movement of your body as you breathe. Observe your chest, shoulders, rib cage, and belly. Simply focus your attention on your breath without controlling its pace or intensity. If your mind wanders, return your focus back to your breath.

**Maintain this meditation practice for two to three minutes to start, and then try it for longer periods.**

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SECTION 5

# The Ultimate Sleep Better Kit

Insights on improving sleep quality from my  
experience as Chief Joy Officer at Makers.



## Sleep is an essential part of life.

**It restores our energy levels, repairs muscle tissues, promotes growth, reduces inflammation, helps maintain a healthy weight and immune system and keeps your brain in optimal shape.**

The Makers journey is a holistic and life-transforming experience. As students adapt to the routine of the course, one of the first things I ask when checking in with them is, 'How are you sleeping?'. Often, I can correlate the quality of sleep with the level of concentration and resilience they're experiencing.

Many enjoy consistent good sleep and it shows in their high mental and emotional stamina. Others feel a bit frazzled by the new life-leap and their sleep is affected with excess thinking and concern. Some just claim they've 'never been a good sleeper' and resolved that it will likely always be that way and that they'll 'get by'.

# I feel for those who have trouble getting regular high-quality sleep because I myself know what that's like.

**It's frustrating—making the already challenging day(s) even harder.**

I'm pleased to say that my sleep life has improved a lot by putting a few things into practice. I truly believe that with intention and care we can all cultivate a happy and healthy relationship with sleep.

Here is a list of things I recommend (however, it's not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition).



“

**Also, I could finally sleep. And this was the real gift, because when you cannot sleep, you cannot get yourself out of the ditch —there's not a chance.**

”

**Elizabeth Gilbert**



## Environment.

- Ensure your mattress and pillows are supportive and comfortable.
- The suggested bedroom temperature is between 16 and 18°C for optimal sleep. My advice is to do what works for your body.
- Wear earplugs if noise disturbs you.
- Avoid exposure to bright lights before bed to promote the release of melatonin—the body’s ‘sleep chemical’.
- Ideally, sleep in complete darkness. Blackout blinds or eye masks help.
- Expose yourself to bright light to wake your body up when rising.

## Habits.

- Go to sleep and wake up at the same time everyday to help regulate your body clock
- If you’re a ‘night owl’ trying to get to bed earlier, make your bedtime earlier in manageable increments over time (i.e. do it gradually)
- To avoid hitting the snooze button, put your alarm device far away from your bed so you have to get up to turn it off—then stay up
- Stick to a 2 snooze maximum if you prefer to wake up slower
- Give your mind and body time to wind down before bed by doing more calming activities

## Body.

- Are you sensitive to caffeine? Have a caffeine intake cut-off time (note: In humans, the half-life for caffeine is anywhere from 4 to 6 hours on average).
- Avoid large meals for 2 to 3 hours before bedtime. Try a light snack 45 minutes before bed if you're hungry.
- Drink a cup of camomile tea aka "sleep tea" before bed.
- Take a magnesium supplement—check with your GP beforehand.
- Know which foods are good for sleep and which aren't.
- Lavender oil or pillow spray helps promote relaxation and sleep.
- Regular exercise—as little as 10 minutes of aerobic exercise, such as walking or cycling, can dramatically improve the quality of your sleep.
- Do yoga.
- 4-7-8 breathing is known to induce sleep as it calms the mind and body— Inhale (nose) for 4 counts, hold for 7 counts, exhale (mouth)for 8 counts.



## Mind.

- Try to be accepting rather than feel negative about a bad night's sleep (i.e. if you wake up in the middle of the night and can't get back to sleep, you can be awake and stress about your lack of sleep, or you can be awake and make peace with the fact that it's happening and stressing doesn't help).
- Same acceptance applies to a groggy day from said sleepless night—it is what it is.
- Address issues that are weighing on you with kindness to yourself.
- Journal before bed time. It helps to sooth your mind and emotions of all the day's stimulations.
- Practice mindfulness meditation for improved sleep.
- Use 'sleep talk down' recordings to fall asleep or to get back to sleep.
- Find a great sleep app that helps you slumber like a champ.



## **Thank you for taking the time to read this e-book!**

I hope you've found it useful and would love to hear from you. Special thanks to Adele Barlow, who was the driving force behind this e-book and an amazing mentor to me on my writing journey.

Makers truly is a life changing experience. I'm not exaggerating when I say: I feel appreciative everyday to be apart of an relentlessly brilliant, supportive and super dedicated team and also because of all the awe-inspiring Makers who take the leap and trust us to help them transform their lives - you are amazing. Thank you from my heart.