

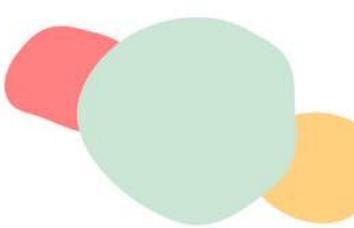
Healthy Leadership

for Curious Minds

Seed One
Ground Position

Knowledge Seeds for Innovators,
Creatives, Change Makers, and Other
Brilliant Minds

Michael Laussegger
Gitte Klitgaard



This booklet is designed to help **Curious Minds** cultivate a healthy leadership stance.

Curious Minds are people with a deep, persistent desire to make sense of the world, to see things earlier, differently, and with greater nuance. They often combine high cognitive ability with hyperfocus, emotional sensitivity, intensity, and the challenges that come with these traits. If you recognize yourself as a Curious Mind, this booklet is for you.

We created this with a simple yet powerful intention: to foster healthy growth for curious individuals, teams and organizations. We need Curious Minds, the innovators, the artists, and the change makers, to build a healthy future. Our aim is to shift the focus from fixing a perceived deficit to cultivating a genuine strength. We equip Curious Minds with leadership tools to excel in a world not always made for them, but increasingly shaped by them.

We plan to offer small, digestible, and actionable seeds for Curious Minds. This is our first seed in which we focus on self-perception, self-leadership, learning, and managing our inner safe space.

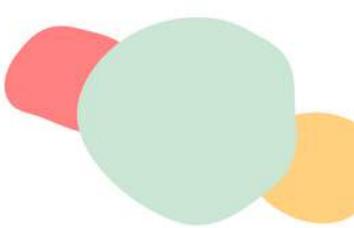
We see this as a first step on the path toward building a healthy future.



Gitte
Klitgaard



Michael
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This book contains exercises designed to help you reflect on and reprogram some of your inner convictions.

We recommend completing these exercises in solitude. The more honest you are with yourself, the more you will benefit from the process.

Coaches and therapists are trained to support you in exploring some of the questions raised here. If you find yourself struggling, consider seeking their guidance.

Note: We offer stories, insights, and tools to support reflection and to encourage your personal emotional and mental development as a foundation for healthy leadership. We do not provide medical or psychological advice. This self-coaching guide is not a substitute for professional support during challenging times.

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About Curious Minds

Curious Minds.

Every system tells a story about how the world should work. Every generation produces people who cannot help but ask if that story is still true. These are the **Curious Minds**.

They tend to notice cracks before they become visible failures. They sense when something that once worked has grown rigid. This does not come from rebellion, but from attention. Yet inside systems designed for stability, curiosity often feels like a threat. Systems protect coherence. Curious minds test it. When those forces meet, rejection is not an exception. It is the pattern.

This is where many curious minds often learn the wrong lessons. Over time, external rejection becomes internal. Questions start to feel like liabilities. Difference turns into doubt. What began as friction with a system slowly becomes self-rejection. This is not a personal failure. It is a cultural mismatch.

Curious minds live at the edge of systems that optimize for continuity. They are the punk band in a world tuned for easy listening. Necessary, often misunderstood, and rarely welcomed at first. Curious Minds are not a flaw. They are a feature of a healthy society. Curiosity appears wherever growth is possible and signals that adjustment is needed. When societies suppress curiosity, they may gain short-term order, but they lose adaptability. Over time, comfort replaces vitality.

This book is not about fixing curious minds. It is about reframing the experience they repeatedly face. Curious minds will always encounter systemic rejection. That does not change. What can change is what happens next.

When rejection is mistaken for a verdict on self-worth, it becomes the source of many psychological follow-on problems. Chronic self-doubt, anxiety, burnout, over-adaptation, and disconnection from instinct often grow from this single misunderstanding. Rejection was never meant to be personal.

The work is not to eliminate rejection, but to understand it. To see it as signal rather than judgment. To stop turning system friction into self-erasure. This book is an invitation to reclaim curiosity as strength, stay intact under pressure, and learn how to live well in a world that resists change even as it depends on it.

Rejection isn't a flaw; it's a system reacting to novelty.
You're not flawed. You're a curious mind.

George Bernard Shaw: "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man."

What exactly is a Curious Mind?

How do you know whether you are what we call a Curious Mind?

After all, curiosity, and the creative problem-solving that comes with it—is a highly valued trait in a society hungry for innovation. Many people admire creativity, yet struggle with the less comfortable traits that often accompany it.

There are a few assumptions about human life we tend to hold that deserve to be challenged. One of them is our deep attachment to individualism, especially when it comes to creativity and innovation. We like to imagine the eccentric artist, designer, or entrepreneur as a singular figure—someone uniquely destined to change the world.

The less romantic story is different.

The systems we emerge from shape not only our personalities and the development of our brains, but also how our genes are expressed. Each of us is, quite literally, a child of our time. Curiosity does not arise in isolation; it emerges in response to the conditions that surround it.

So when we speak of Curious Minds, we are not attempting a strict definition—partly because doing so would be impossible. We are also not referring to clinical labels such as giftedness, attention deficit, or autism spectrum conditions, which are often associated with neurodiversity. This is not a diagnostic category.

Curious minds are the often troubled minds that emerge from a society that needs them. Steve Jobs called them *the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently*. Isaac Newton was a curious mind of his time. Virginia Woolf was one of hers. We could extend this list endlessly, yet most curious minds remain unknown. Not because they failed, but because their curiosity led them to places where there was no fame to gain. Someone, three thousand years ago, invented the spoon, and no one remembers their name.

Being a curious mind is not a status symbol, a badge of honor, or a diagnosis.

It simply means your brain is wired differently - and that it should be used differently.

Struggles Looking Familiar?

We're not trying to define what makes a Curious Mind, but here are a few things you might struggle with if you are one.

Which boxes would you tick for yourself?

Cognitive & Thinking

- Distraction and inability to focus on assigned tasks.
- Overthinking and mental exhaustion.
- Conflict in structured or conformist environments.
- Neglect of responsibilities due to inability to switch tasks.
- Impatience with slower processes or peers.
- Tunnel vision and neglect of other areas.

Attention & Regulation

- Neglect of basic needs such as sleep, meals, or relationships.
- Procrastination and incomplete work.
- Restlessness and chronic dissatisfaction.
- Inconsistent productivity and frequent crashes.

Social & Communication

- Perceived bluntness, tactlessness, or rudeness.
- Difficulty in casual social interactions.
- Exhaustion and emotional burnout from masking.
- Misunderstandings and interpersonal conflict.

Emotional & Sensory

- Overwhelm and mood swings.
- Visceral, painful reaction to injustice or hypocrisy.
- Emotional fatigue from others' issues.
- Stress, discomfort, and avoidance of busy environments.
- Impulsive or disproportionate reactions under stress.

Executive Function & Daily Life

- Disruption and stress from sudden changes.
- Friction or rejection due to impractical approaches.
- Neglect of immediate obligations.
- Difficulty adapting to conflicting schedules or systems.

Identity & Self-Perception

- Chronic self-doubt and over-analysis.
- Conflict with societal or workplace expectations.
- Rumination and indecision.
- Isolation and feelings of alienation.

Skills Looking Familiar?

Here are some of the ways curiosity may give back to you.

Again, which boxes would you tick for yourself?

Cognitive & Thinking

- Deep insights; constantly asking questions
- Strong pattern recognition or spotting inconsistencies
- Divergent or “outside-the-box” thinking
- Hyperfocus on areas of interest
- Rapid learning in motivated topics
- Exceptional memory for preferred subjects

Attention & Regulation

- Ability to focus intensely, sometimes losing track of time
- Easily distracted by tasks perceived as boring
- Enjoyment of novelty, challenge, or mental stimulation
- Periodic bursts of high productivity followed by rest or recharge

Social & Communication

- Direct, precise, or logical communication style
- Preference for meaningful interactions over small talk
- Conscious masking to adapt to social norms
- Occasional difficulty reading subtle social cues

Emotional & Sensory

- Heightened emotional sensitivity
- Strong ethical compass and anticipation of ethical collapse.
- Deep empathy or awareness of others' feelings
- Sensory awareness (light, sound, texture) that can be managed
- Emotional intensity that can fuel creativity or engagement

Executive Function & Daily Life

- Heavy use of routines and strategies to stay organized
- Creative problem-solving when standard methods fail
- Ability to plan and execute long-term in areas of interest
- Flexibility to adapt routines when necessary

Identity & Self-Perception

- Strong self-awareness of personal strengths
- Values-driven decision-making, often unconventional
- Reflective tendencies; learn from introspection
- Acceptance of differences and ability to leverage them

Side Note:

Interestingly, research into twice-exceptionality (2e) indicates that the dyslexic brain (not in focus here), when combined with high cognitive ability, creates a powerful *big picture* way of thinking. These individuals are often brilliant at spatial visualization and seeing how ideas from different worlds connect. They can often anticipate where a complex situation is headed earlier than others (See [8]).

Welcome to the Club.

We leave it to you, dear reader, to decide whether you consider yourself a Curious Mind or whether some of your loved ones are. The more boxes you ticked on these last two pages, the more likely our set of tools will help you thrive with what we build.

Our goal has never been to define what makes a Curious Mind. That would be impossible and would miss the point. What we hope to achieve is a shift in perspective: a way to see what has often been framed as deficit or difficulty, not as weakness, but as a feature of a mind built to notice, question, and innovate.

If, as you have read these pages, you feel a spark of recognition, if what we have shared helps explain or even begin to solve some of the challenges you face, then welcome to the club.

Welcome to Healthy Leadership for Curious Minds.

Here, curiosity is not a flaw. Rejection is not a verdict. Being different is not a problem. These are signs that your mind works differently and that difference, when understood and nurtured, becomes your greatest asset.

So take your place among the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, and the round pegs in square holes. Not because you seek fame or recognition, but because your mind was meant to ask, to wonder, to create.

You are a Curious Mind. And the world needs you.

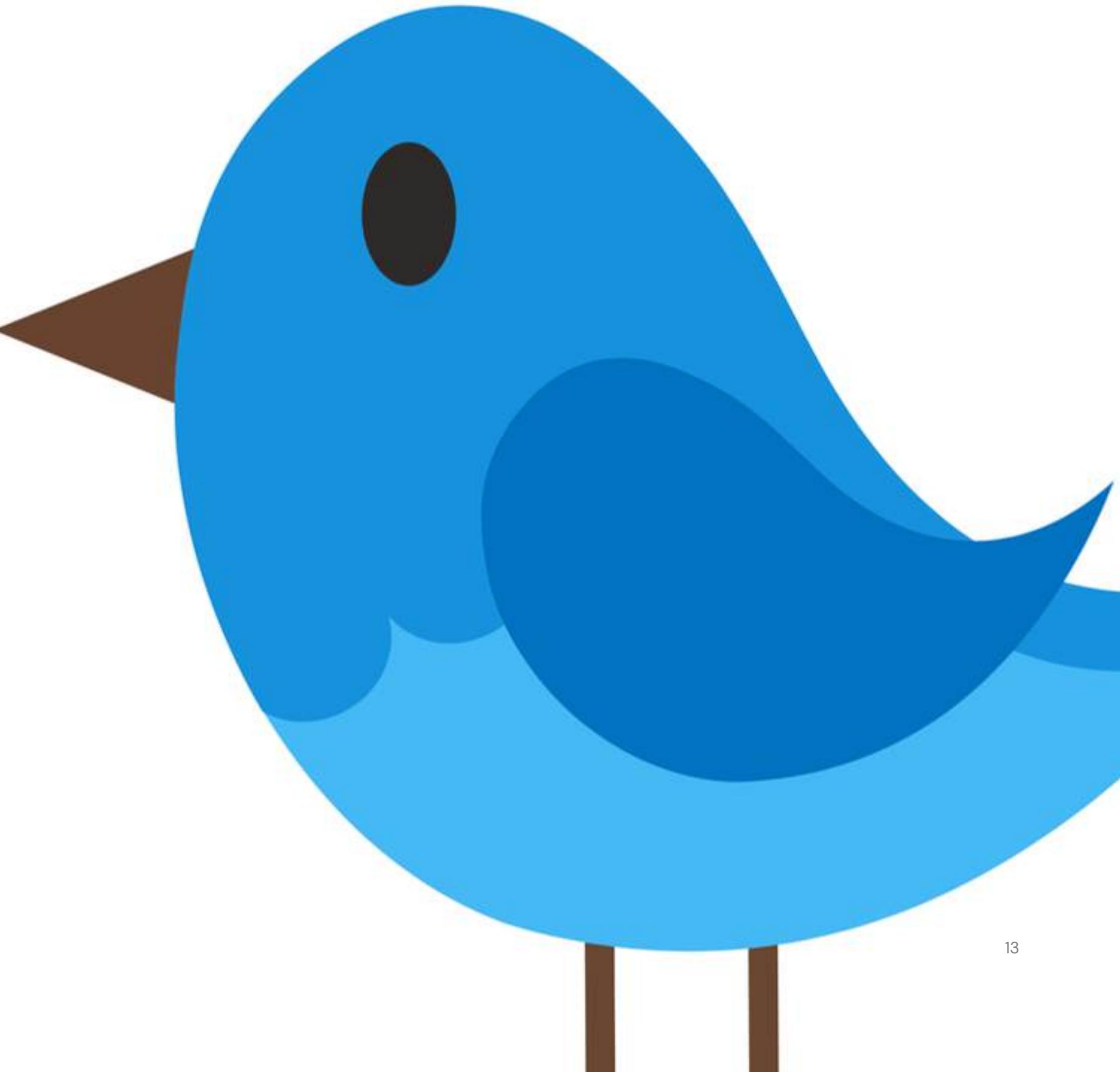
Psychological Safety for Curious Minds

A tweet from a curious mind:

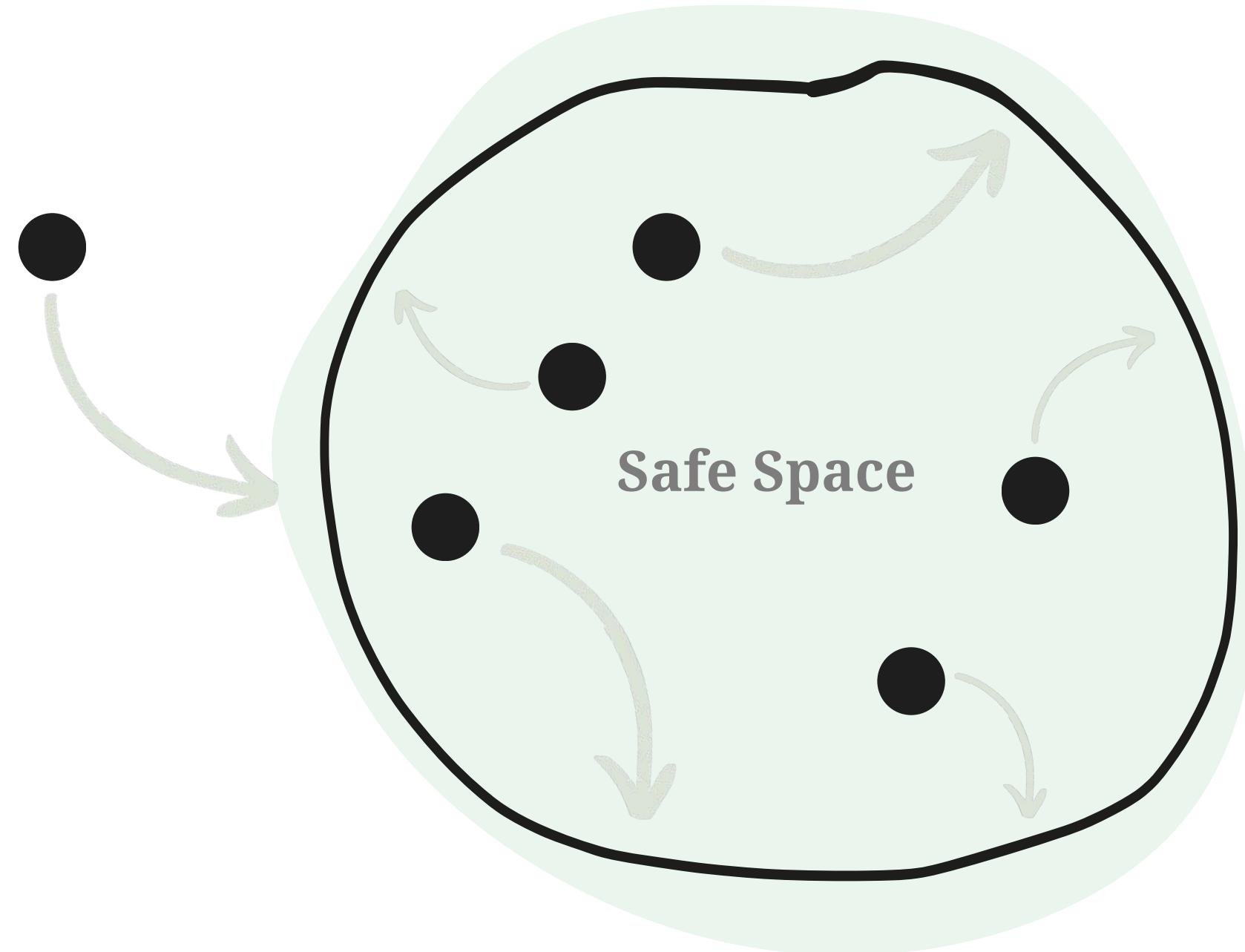
For me, psychological safety means trusting that I can speak up without fear of negative consequences - in groups, classrooms, teams, and organizations.

It's feeling confident sharing ideas, asking questions, and admitting mistakes. That trust empowers me to contribute openly, propose new solutions, and be honest about challenges without worrying about my reputation or future.

When I make a mistake, I can acknowledge it, learn, and move forward without the weight of judgement. This sense of safety boosts my engagement, strengthens collaboration, and deepens my sense of belonging - allowing me to bring in my full self.



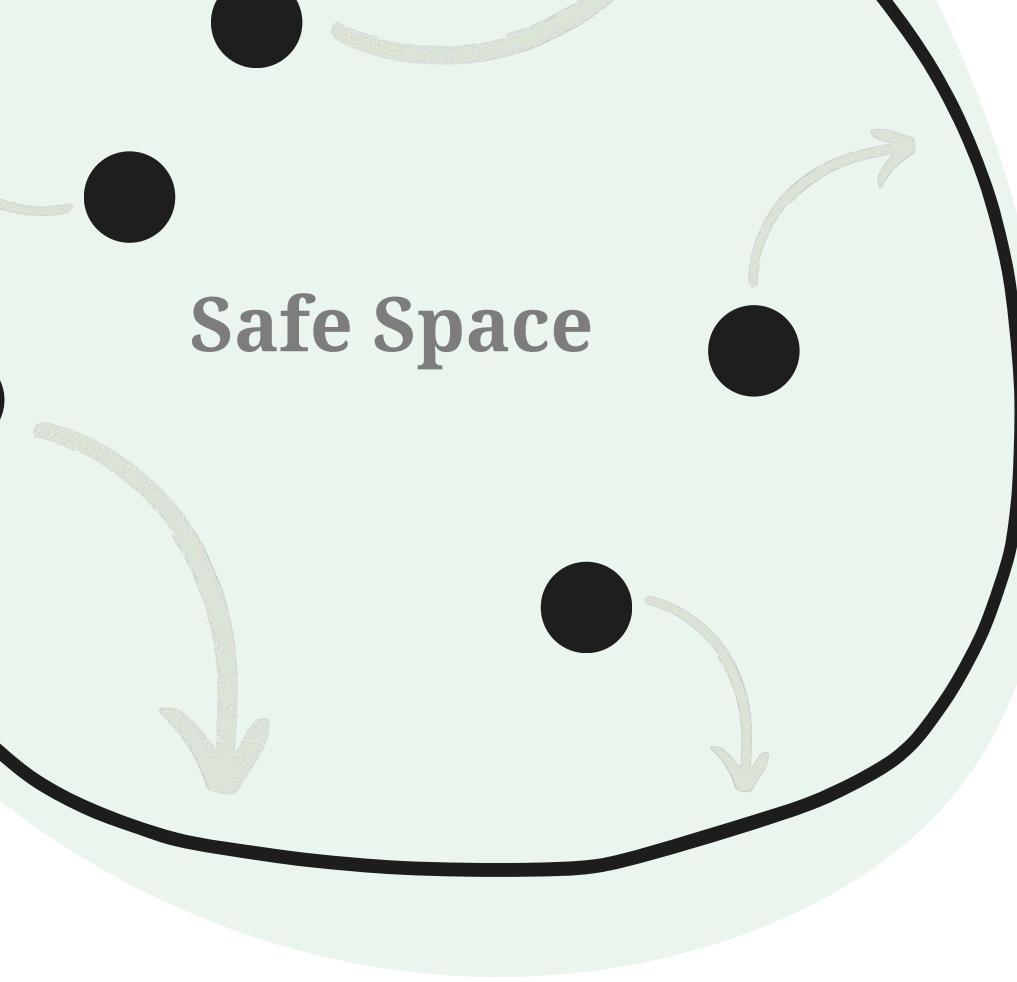
The Architecture of Safety



Psychological safety sits at the heart of Healthy Leadership. Because we all lead at different moments and in various capacities, creating a safe space is a skill everyone must master.

Often, those who understand this best are the ones who have lived through its absence. These are the ***Curious Minds***. They understand psychological safety better than most. Not because they studied it, but because they grew up without it.

The genius kid at school who could not sit still and learned early that being different meant being “the problem.” The young rebel shouting into a world that was not listening, raising their voice while the world tuned out even more. The entrepreneur who set out to fix the global food crisis, only to discover that we prefer not to look at problems that touch our comforts. The artist who turns pain into meaning, even when no one is watching.



Safe Space

Even within your own organization, you see the team lead who will never reach the top because they refuse to play the political games others find necessary.

All of these people share a common history. They know exactly what an unsafe space feels like. They know that without safety, the best parts of us remain hidden.

The Foundation of Expression

Amy Edmondson defines psychological safety as a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.

In high-pressure environments like the technology sector, this belief is often tested. Tech moves fast. Competition is constant. There are always more ideas than there is budget to fund them. While many organizations claim to make decisions in the best interest of the collective, the reality is often different. Political maneuvers and funding battles can turn a workplace into a minefield.

To assume psychological safety exists without someone actively building it is naive. If you wait for the organization to provide it for you, you may be waiting forever.

Drawing the Circle

You may not have the power to transform an entire corporate culture, but you do have an area of influence. This is where your work begins. By shifting your focus from a dysfunctional system to the space you actually control, you find the agency to act. You can create a level of safety that is strong enough to allow for healthy growth.

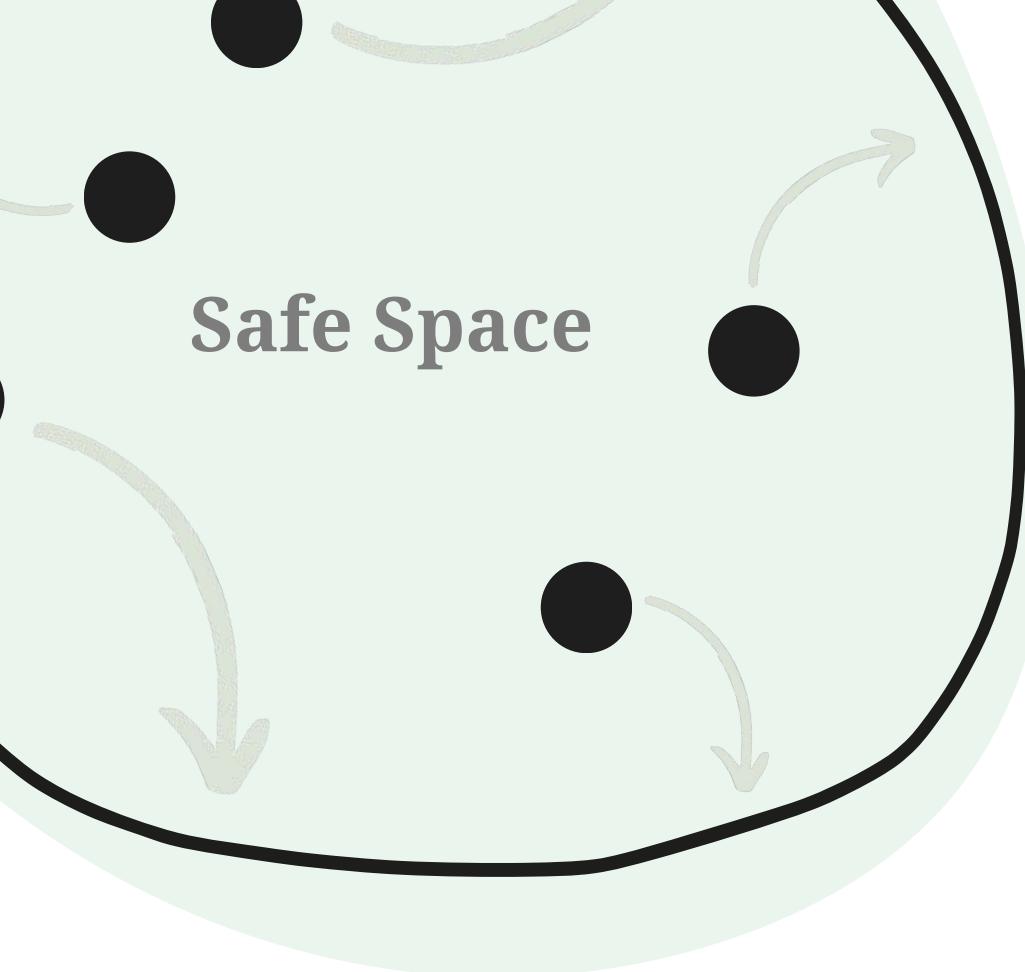
This process requires boundaries. Think of them as the framework that protects the essential work of yourself and your team.

The Framework of Protection

To build this sanctuary, you must understand the different types of architecture available to you. Boundaries are not walls meant to isolate you. They are the structures that allow the right things to flourish while keeping the wrong things at bay.

When we talk about creating a safe area of influence, we look at four distinct layers:

Physical Boundaries: Doors, quiet zones, and controlled spaces. These keep uninvited distractions and physical interruptions out so that deep work has the room it needs to breathe. Whether your favorite space is your home office, a co-working space, or the open-plan office, boundaries matter.



Safe Space

Organizational Boundaries: Clear protocols, transparent workflows, and defined roles. These structures ensure that decisions remain consistent and fair, protecting the team from the burden of ambiguity. There is plenty of knowledge available on how to build organizational boundaries that benefit the teams.

Mental Boundaries: The filters we apply to information and noise. These protect your cognitive energy and your ability to think independently. They ensure that the volume of the environment does not drown out your own judgment or dictate your focus. This is where it gets interesting and we will elaborate more in future.

Emotional Boundaries: The most vital layer. These are the internal guardrails that keep you steady regardless of the external challenges life throws your way. It is the core of your resilience.

By defining these boundaries, you create a container for psychological safety. You are essentially telling yourself and your team that while the world outside may be unpredictable, and it is, the space you occupy together is governed by intent.

When your mental and emotional boundaries are firm, you stop reacting to every spark and start responding to the mission. You gain the clarity to see which conflicts are worth your energy and which are simply noise. This is where true authority begins. It starts with the realization that you are the architect of your own environment.

The Responsibility of Ownership

The most important rule of healthy leadership is this:

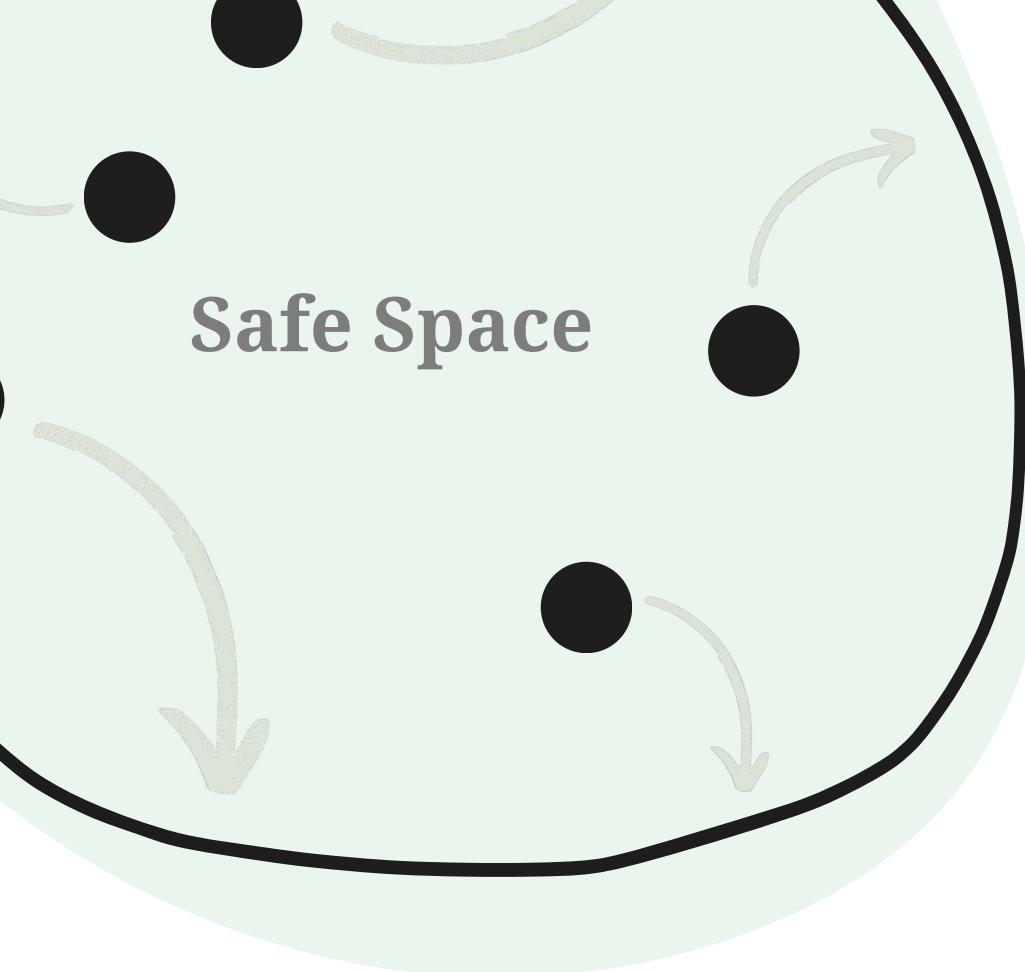
Never delegate your own mental health and safety.

In a competitive landscape, it is natural for people to prioritize their safety and you must do so too. Look after your own health, then extend that protection to your team. This is not a selfish act. It is a necessary one.

Establishing these boundaries may create friction, especially in work friendships, but friction is not bad. It's a signal. A call to action. Your boundaries belong to you. You must decide deliberately when a personal relationship takes precedence over your professional growth.

Do not expect your company to behave like a family or a circle of friends with no stakes. A company is an environment of high consequences. Psychological safety is not about being nice or avoiding the truth. It is about being intentional, clear, and fair.

Own your space. Make your rules explicit. When we stop assuming others will understand our needs and start communicating them clearly, we create the room needed for bold, meaningful work to happen.



Questions for the Quiet Moments

The shift from understanding a concept to living it happens in the space of reflection. These questions are not meant to be answered quickly. They are meant to be carried with you until the answers become clear.

The Cost of Silence: Recall a moment when you felt the need to hide your best thinking or a difficult truth. What was the cost of that silence to you and to the work at hand?

The Ownership of Safety: In which areas of your professional life are you waiting for the organization to provide safety? How might you begin to build that safety for yourself starting today?

The Boundary Check: Look at your current team dynamics. Where has the desire to be "nice" blurred the boundaries necessary for honest growth? Is there a conversation you are avoiding because you have mistaken comfort for safety?

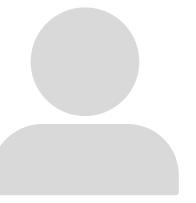
The Circle of Influence: If you were to make one rule explicit for your team to ensure their ideas are protected, what would that rule be? How will you communicate it so it feels like a promise rather than a constraint?

The Weight of Friendship: Where do your personal connections and professional stakes collide? Have you decided, deliberately, which one takes precedence in your current environment?

Your health is non-delegable

Toxic cultures can have a devastating impact on mental health, whether in families, schools, relationships, teams, organizations, or societies at large. It is too important to leave to others. Do not delegate this responsibility.





Exercise
Twinny is ...

Twinny is ...

Imagine you have a clone twin called Twinny. Unlike a human twin brother or sister, Twinny has exactly the same biology and has lived through everything you have. Nothing about their past is different from yours. In this moment, Twinny is in perfect health and at peace, both personally and with the world around them. The only difference? Twinny is not you.

Take five minutes to imagine and observe Twinny. Think about Twinny's personal characteristics. Focus on strengths as well as challenges. Be honest about Twinny. Let the words flow naturally and avoid overthinking. Start each sentence with "Twinny is...". Aim for at least five statements, but feel free to write as many as you can think of. Contradictions are fine.

Ask yourself questions such as

- *What is Twinny really good at?*
- *What does Twinny struggle with all the time?*
- *In what situations does Twinny really feel in his/her element, and what does this say about Twinny?*
- *What difficult situations can you think of and what can they tell you about Twinny?*
- *Think about Twinny's experiences at work, at school, with friends and family. What stands out?*

After this exercise, continue with the debrief on the next page.

Twinny is ...

Debrief

This exercise helps you uncover some of your inner beliefs about yourself. Surely you will find yourself in Twinny. Feel free to do it again later if you want to explore further. You may need more time, but try not to think too much.

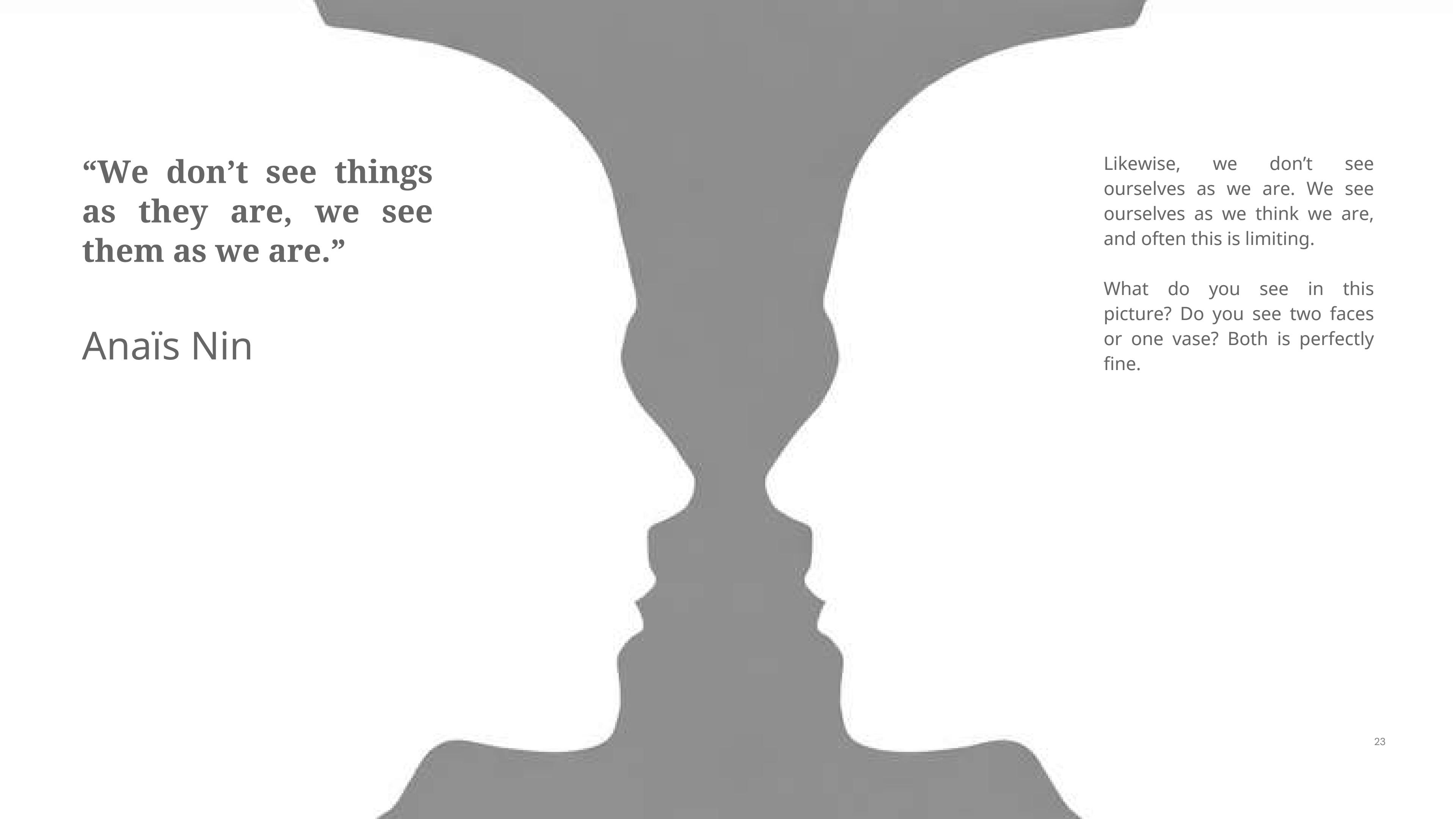
It's perfectly fine for Twinny's traits to contradict each other. It's also fine if they are born out of the current situation and your current emotional configuration.

We don't seek universal truth. You are not destined to be the person you have described on the last page. On the contrary, we want to see this as a starting point for exploring your own leadership capabilities, uncovering new potential, and expanding on it as we move forward.

Revisit your results and mark those inner beliefs that are born out of a supportive mindset—those based on the core belief:

I am okay.

How Our Brains Constructs Reality



**“We don’t see things
as they are, we see
them as we are.”**

Anaïs Nin

Likewise, we don't see ourselves as we are. We see ourselves as we think we are, and often this is limiting.

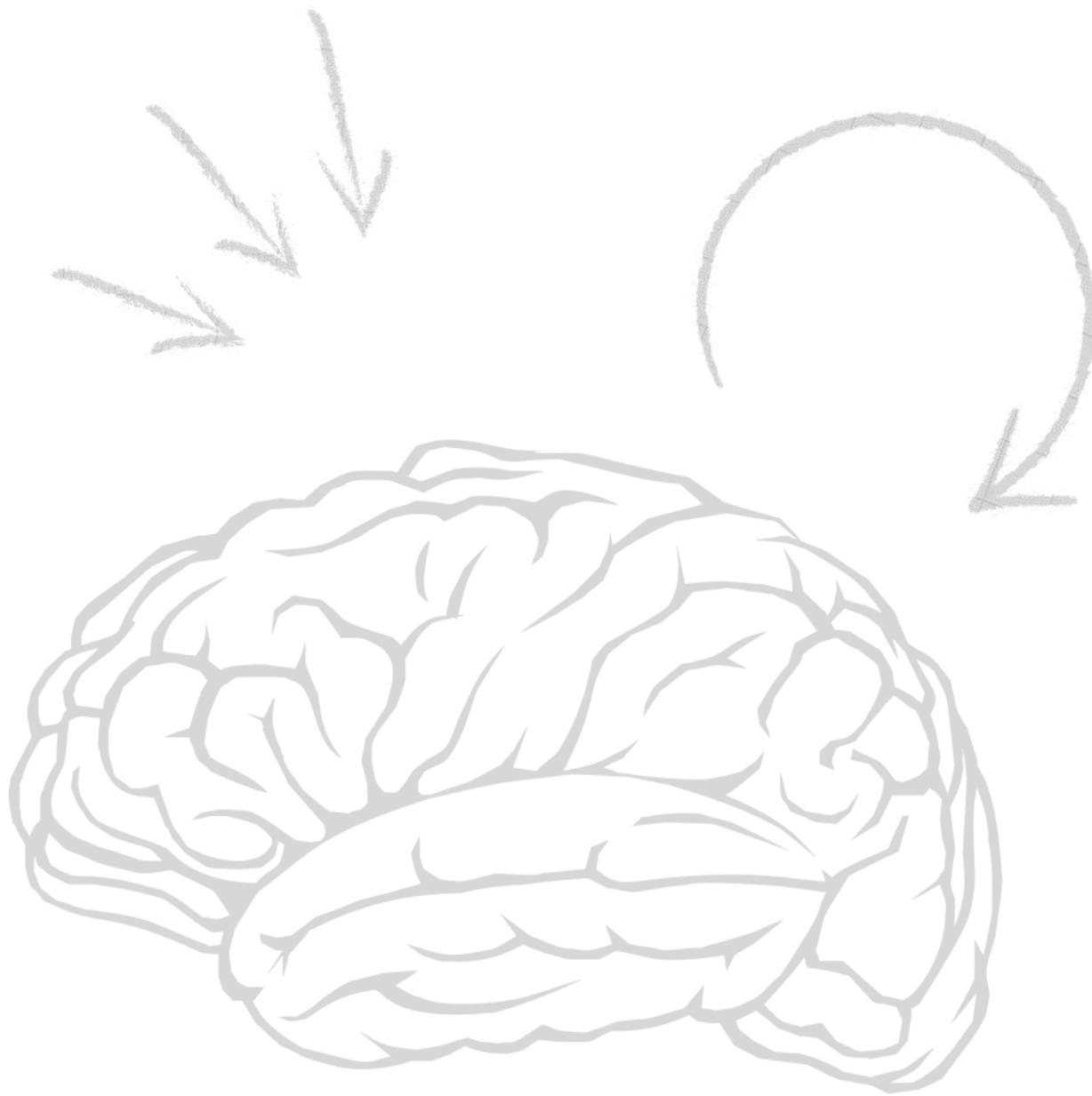
What do you see in this picture? Do you see two faces or one vase? Both is perfectly fine.

Our self-perception creates the reality we live.

Our experience of reality is not shaped solely by what we see, but also by the beliefs and thoughts that influence how we interpret the world around us.

Psychologists such as Carol Dweck have shown that a growth mindset—the belief that abilities can be developed—supports greater persistence, learning, and resilience. When we hold constructive and realistic beliefs about ourselves, we are more likely to act in ways that help us face challenges as opportunities for growth. This perspective is supported by neuroscience and research on neuroplasticity, which shows that repeated patterns of thought and behavior can strengthen corresponding neural pathways over time.

In this way, the brain actively interprets sensory information through the lens of past experiences, expectations, and emotions. The essential insight is simple yet meaningful: how we think about ourselves strongly influences how we experience, interpret, and respond to the reality we live in.

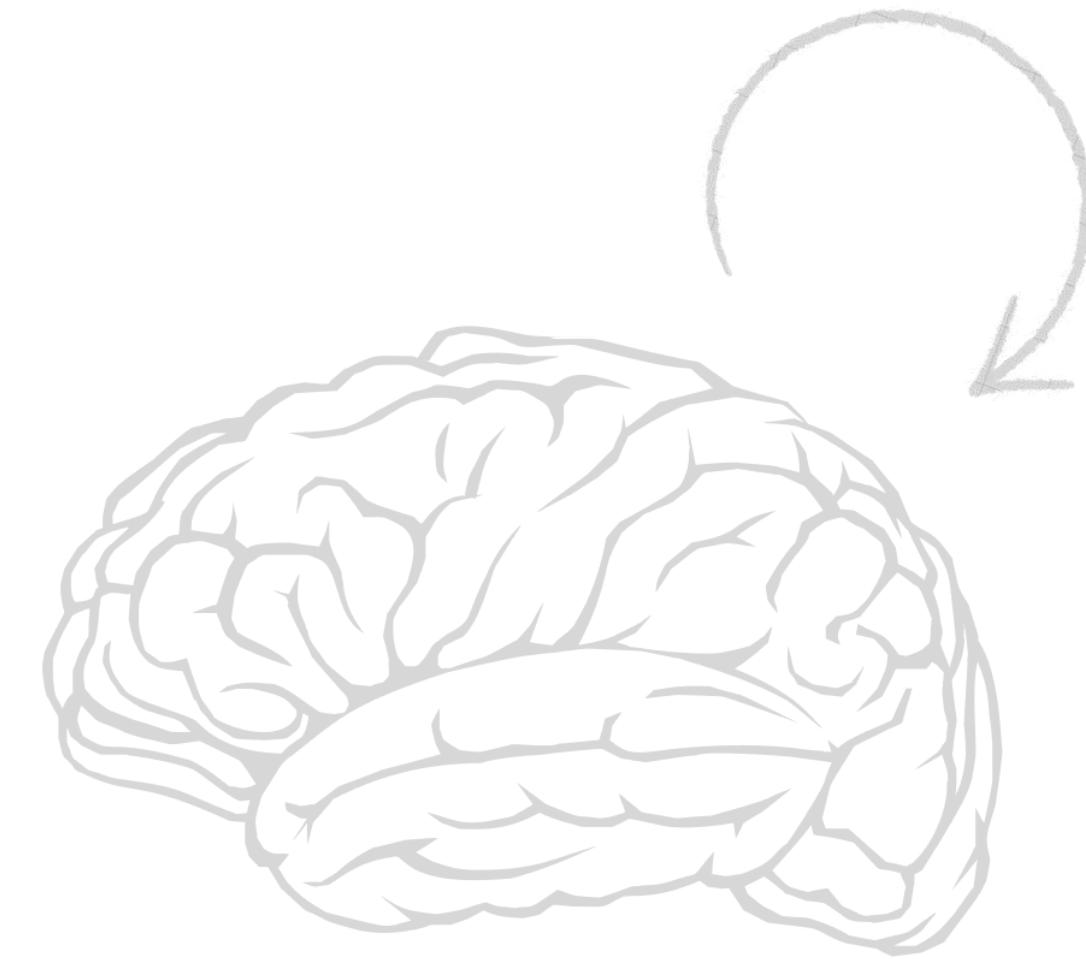


“ This process represents more than a shift in attitude; it is a functional intervention at the level of neural organization.”

Our internal cognitive frameworks function as biological filters, shaping how the brain interprets external stimuli. From the perspective of neuroplasticity, the self-perception we maintain creates patterns of neural activation; the more frequently a thought pattern is repeated, the more strongly the underlying neural circuitry is reinforced.

When we intentionally adopt a constructive and self-supportive internal stance, we engage in cognitive reframing. By consciously affirming our capacity to cope and adapt, we reduce amygdala reactivity, the neural system most closely associated with fear and threat detection. This dampening of the stress response supports greater mental flexibility, allowing us to respond to challenges with analytical clarity rather than emotional defensiveness.

This process represents more than a shift in attitude; it is a functional intervention at the level of neural organization. By consistently reinforcing a high-agency self-concept, we leverage the brain's capacity to reorganize itself over time. As these adaptive neural response patterns become more efficient and readily activated, they increasingly guide default cognitive appraisal, fostering a stable cycle of resilience, problem-solving, and solution-oriented behavior.

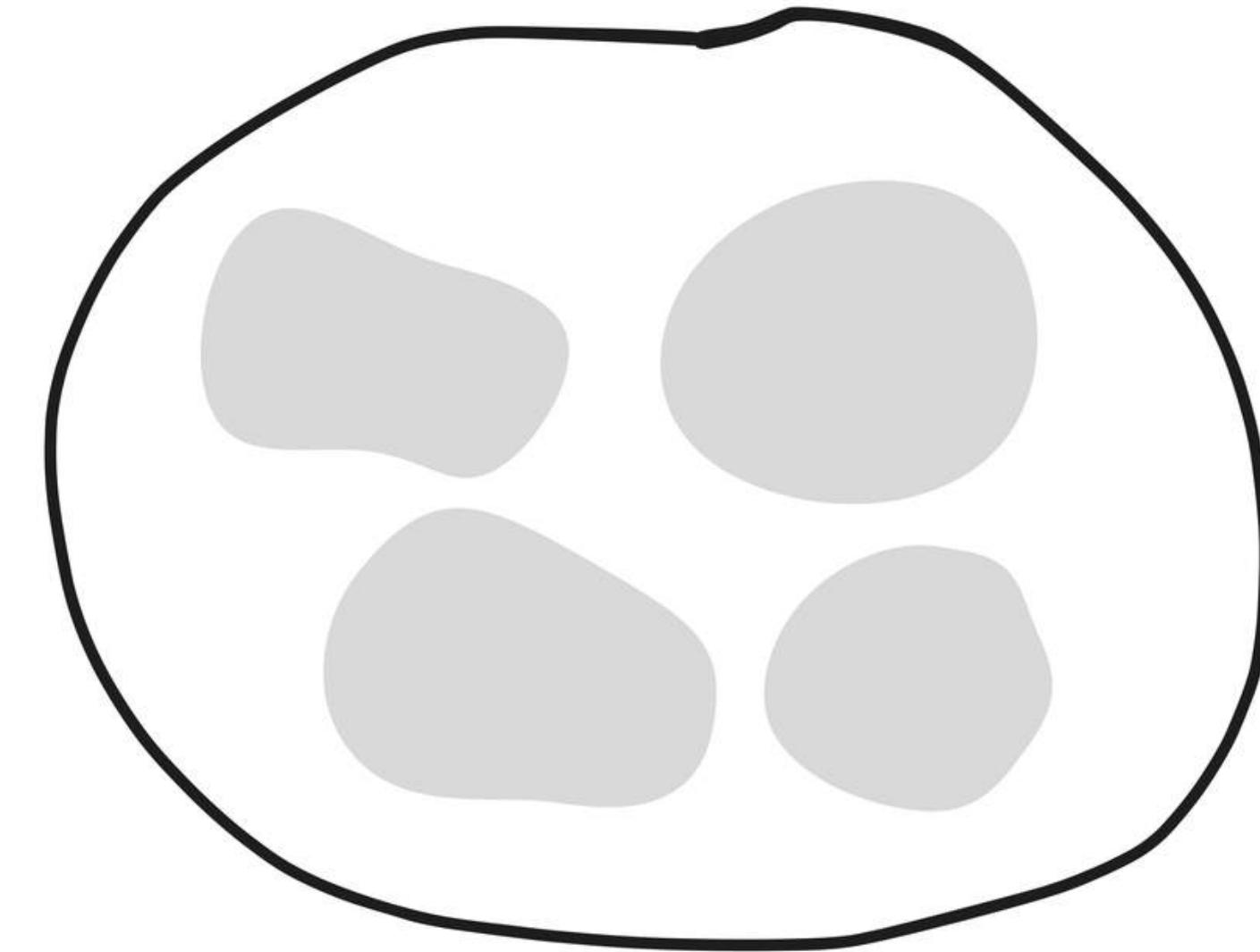


Our inner world is as dynamic and varied as life itself

Our personality is full of nuances and contradictions that come to light in different situations. And that's a good thing, because as much as we wish for simple answers, they don't do justice to a complex mind. So, when Goethe spoke of the two souls in our chest, he was probably understating the case.

Our brain works tirelessly to organize our perspectives by filtering and structuring our perceptions, emotions, and beliefs. This process of sense-making allows us to explore new viewpoints and adjust our perspectives, creating a reality that is fluid and ever-changing. Our inner world is as dynamic and diverse as life itself.

Think of a situation where you struggled to make an important decision. You probably looked at it from different perspectives, which seemed completely right in one moment and somehow wrong in the next. This inner back-and-forth demonstrates that our mind's capability of maintaining multiple potential "realities" until that very moment, when we decide for one. Each is shaped by different perceptions, emotions, or insights and allows us to adapt the perspective from which we make decisions. But the point is, reality does not just happen. We choose which one we want to see. Most of the time, unconsciously.



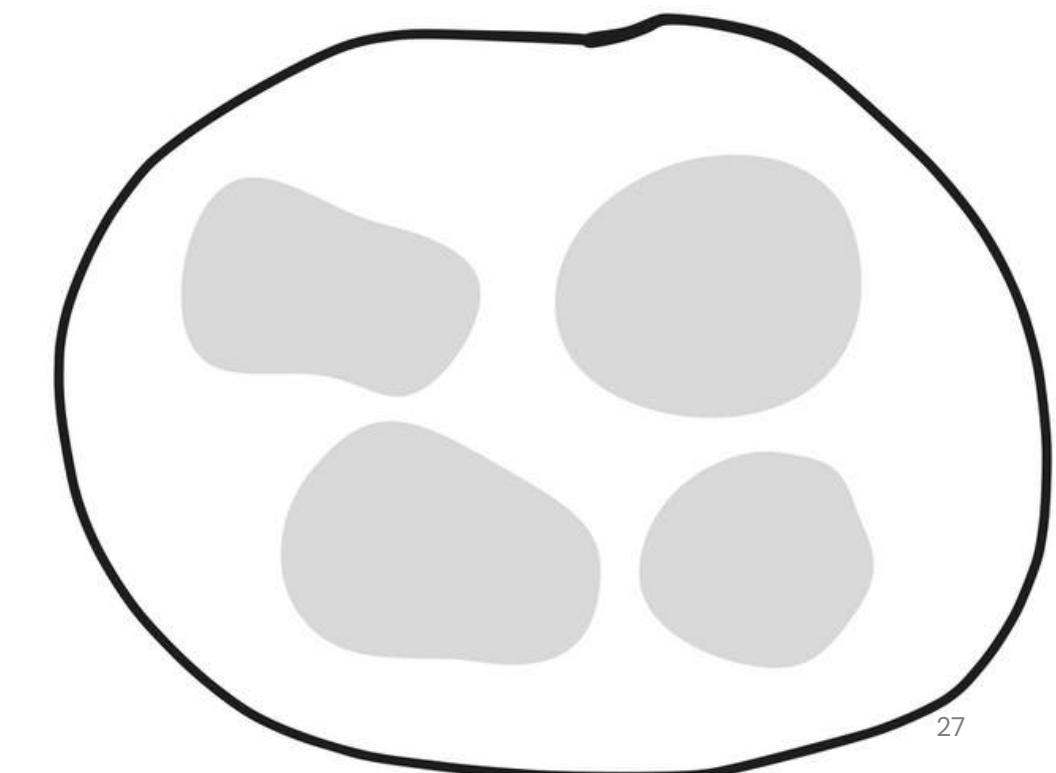
We have different voices living inside us and that's okay.

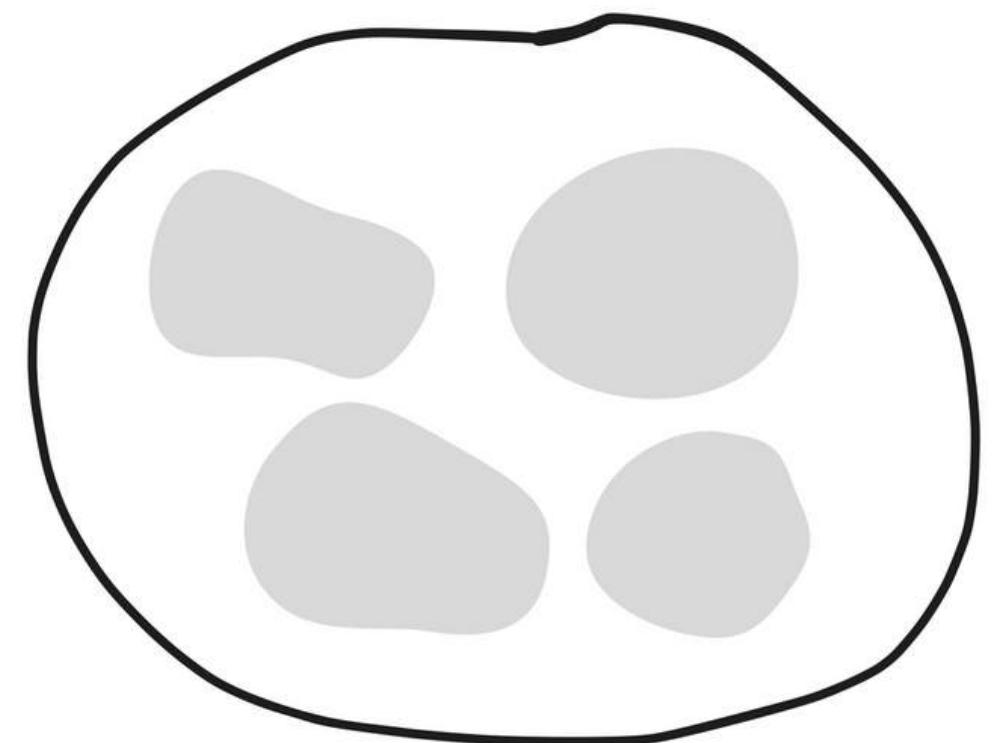
Imagine that within each of us resides a chorus of voices, each one carrying its own unique tone, perspective, and desire. Sometimes, these voices harmonize, creating a sense of inner peace and clarity, while at other times, they clash and compete, each one vying to be heard.

In a moment of conflict or uncertainty, you might notice the voice of the "Protector" urging caution, warning of potential dangers, whispering that it's better to stay safe and avoid risks. Meanwhile, the voice of the "Adventurer" pipes up, eager to break free, encouraging you to take bold steps forward, to seize new opportunities regardless of the unknown.

Perhaps there's also the voice of the "Peacemaker," soft and persuasive, asking everyone to calm down, to find common ground and avoid conflict at all costs. Then, lurking at the edges, the "Critic" speaks up, questioning your choices, doubting your abilities, and urging you to hold back.

These voices, in their variety, represent different parts of you, each bringing its own wisdom and fears. Learning to listen to these voices, to understand which ones might serve you in the moment and which might be holding you back, becomes a dance of inner dialogue. When you can bring these voices into conversation, you may find a deeper sense of self-guidance, one that allows you to navigate life's challenges with greater clarity and inner alignment.





**Oh my. Being human
can be overwhelming
at times.**

Me trying to choose which voice to
listen to:



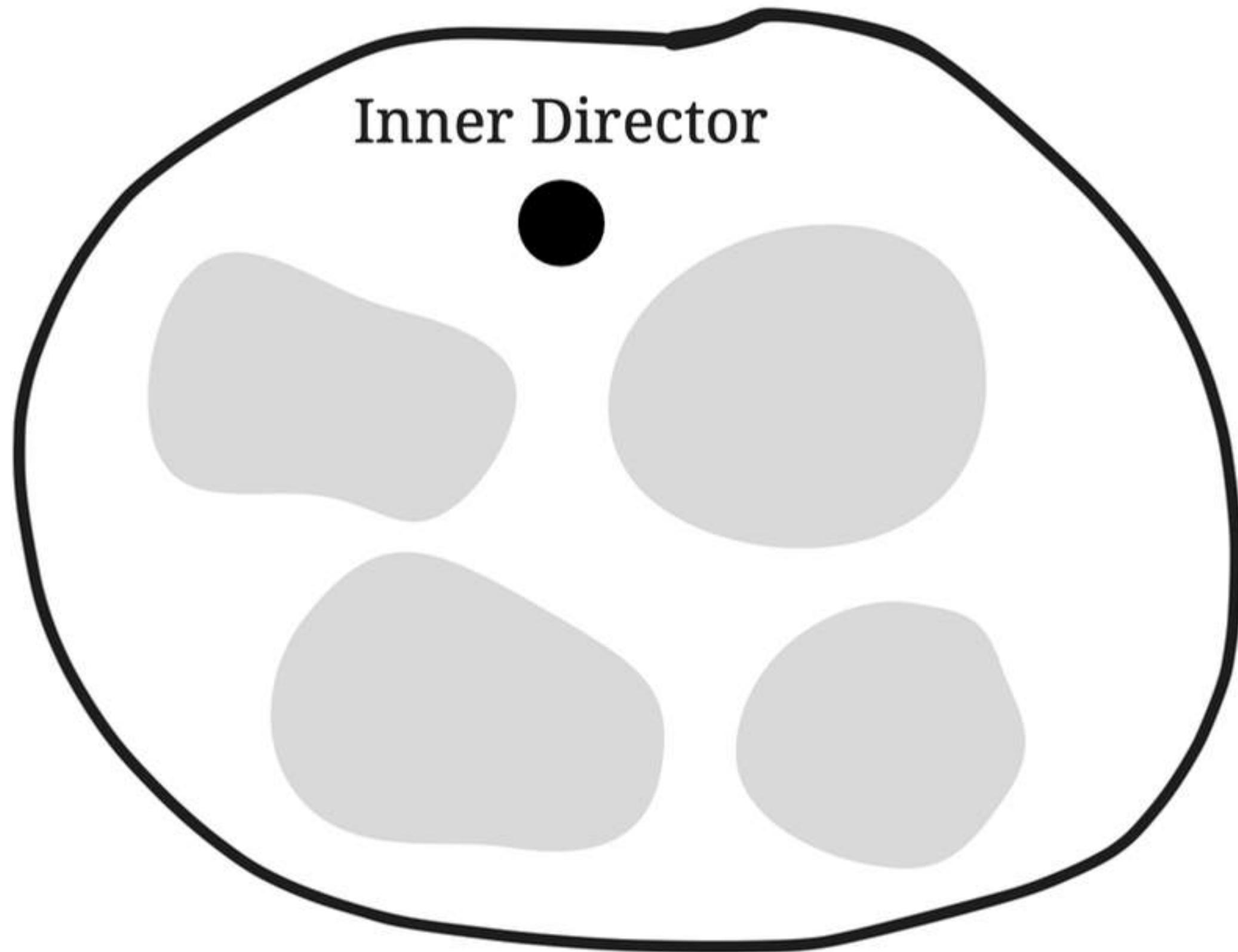
Let's introduce a new player to the team

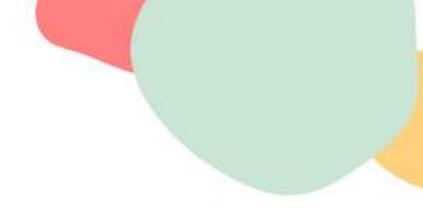
The *inner director* plays the pivotal role of orchestrating the different voices within our mind, ensuring that all perspectives are acknowledged and integrated. This part of our psyche acts as a mediator, balancing conflicting emotions and thoughts—whether it's the voice of confidence, caution, excitement, or fear. The *inner director* listens to these sub-personalities and synthesizes their input to make well-rounded, conscious decisions. By maintaining inner harmony, the *inner director* helps guide an individual towards self-awareness and balanced actions, fostering clarity and confidence in handling life's challenges.

But the most important message the inner director has to say is this:

Ambiguity is okay. Harmony is the exception.

Simple truth can only survive in a simple world view, because every meaningful question has more than one true answer.





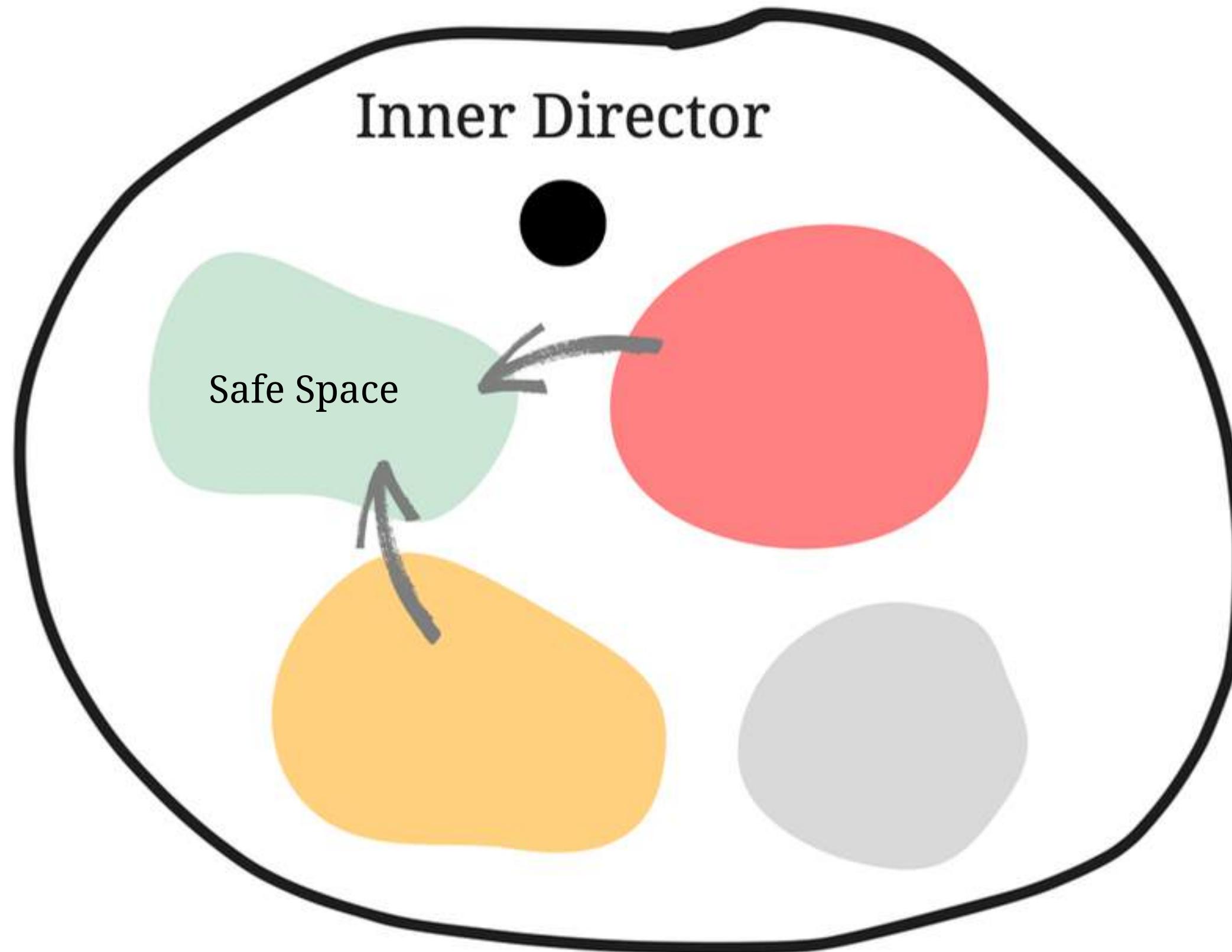
The wise and steady observer within us

The *inner director* is like a wise and steady observer within us, always on the lookout for red and yellow flags that signal when we're straying too far from balance. This inner director has a keen awareness of shifts in our mental state, noticing when we're drifting too deeply into Shadowland—where self-doubt and victimhood prevail—or getting lost in Utopia, where overconfidence and a sense of superiority may take hold.

When we begin to feel overwhelmed by helplessness, resentment, or negativity, or when we feel an exaggerated sense of control, judgment, or responsibility, the inner director steps in. It doesn't judge or criticize; instead, it gently reminds us to return to a balanced, grounded mindset—our inner Homeland.

Psychologists have found many names for the inner director over the course of decades, all of them loaded with narratives of their time and framed for a specific purpose. Friedemann Schulz von Thun and his "Inner Team" is one of them—an inspirational one (see [7]). However, we'd like you to stay independent of external narratives. For us, the sole purpose of the inner director is to maintain a healthy inner balance.

The *inner director* helps us maintain emotional and mental health by guiding us back when we wander too far into mental spaces that no longer serve us. It understands that visiting these places temporarily can offer insight, but it also knows the importance of returning to our inner safe space, where peace and safety anchor us. The inner director makes sure we stay aligned with our true values and respond to life's challenges from a place of strength, balance, and connection.





Our inner director is often biased and untrained.

Our inner director is often favoring unhelpful ways of seeing ourselves. For Curious Minds, a long history of systemic rejection makes it even harder to maintain balance. Our brains adapt, and over time we get used to it.

Rejection can show up as self-devaluation or as arrogance and the devaluation of others. Heightened self-worth is common, reinforced by keen observation and the frustration of seeing large-scale failures, short-sighted decisions, and our inability to solve global problems.

The goal of this first seed is simple. Train the inner director to take a deliberate and balanced stance. In doing so, Curious Minds can navigate the world with clarity, lead with compassion, and use their perspective to make a meaningful impact.



Exercise Inner Voices

Inner Voices

In this exercise, we will explore our inner voices and learn to accept ambiguity as a healthy response to a complex world

In this exercise, we will explore the concept of inner voices—those mental patterns and recurring thoughts that shape how we experience and interact with the world. These voices, often arising from deeply ingrained beliefs or past experiences, can either be a source of strength or a limiting force.

In Part 1, you will be introduced to a set of common inner voices. Some may resonate with you more than others, either because they act as a resource that fuels your growth or as a barrier that holds you back. Your task is to identify which voices you are most attached to, evaluate their impact, and choose five that you believe can empower you moving forward.

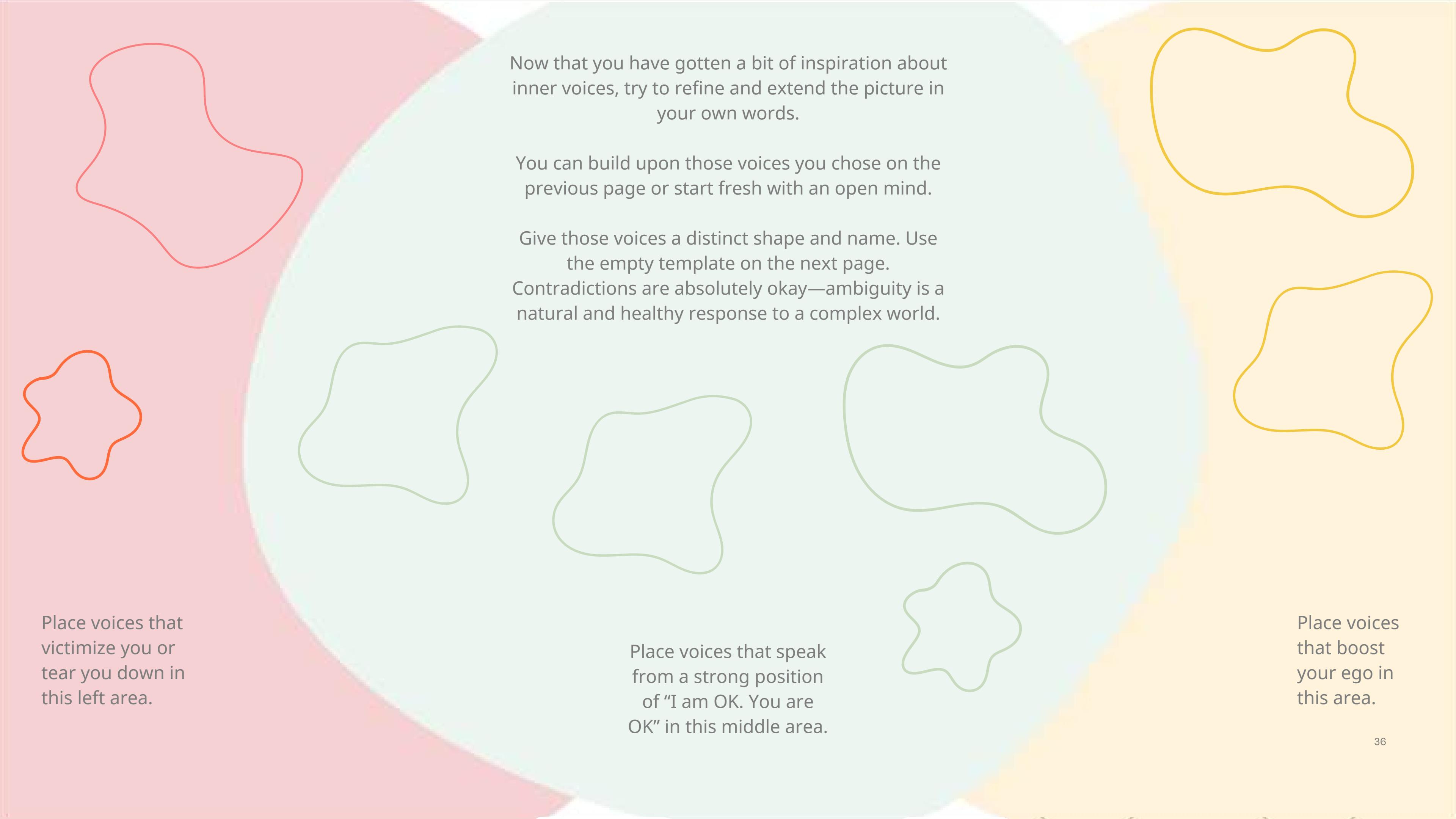
In Part 2, we will extend this exploration by giving those voices more definition. You will have the opportunity to reflect on their characteristics and assign them unique shapes and names. This exercise encourages you to create a deeper understanding of how these voices influence your life, and by doing so, you can begin to actively shape the role they play. Embrace the contradictions and the ambiguity that arise—it's an essential part of navigating the complexity of your inner world and the world around you.

By the end of this chapter, you will have developed a clearer perspective on the inner voices that guide you, and you will be equipped with practical tools to use them consciously, turning them into resources that strengthen your path forward.

The Critical Voice Harsh and judgmental, focusing on shortcomings and imperfections, saying things like 'You always mess things up' or 'You're not capable of succeeding.'	The Motivational Coach Encourages and supports, saying 'You can do this!' or 'Keep going, you're almost there!'	The Perfectionist Demands flawlessness with unrealistic standards, saying 'It has to be perfect' or 'Anything less than perfect is a failure.'	The Worrier Focuses on worst-case scenarios, saying 'What if something goes wrong?' or 'You're going to fail, and everyone will know.'	The People-Pleaser Seeks approval and acceptance, saying 'Don't upset anyone' or 'You need to make sure they like you,' often leading to self-sacrifice.
The Naysayer Doubts abilities and ideas, saying 'That's never going to work' or 'You're wasting your time,' undermining self-confidence.	The Rational Thinker Uses logic and calm reasoning, saying 'Let's break this down step by step' or 'What's the most practical solution?'	The Daydreamer Encourages creativity and imagination, saying 'What if we tried something totally new?' or 'Imagine if anything were possible.'	The Devil's Advocate Challenges ideas and assumptions, saying 'What if you're wrong?' or 'Have you considered every possible outcome?'	The Nurturer Gentle and compassionate, saying 'It's okay to take a break' or 'You've done your best, and that's enough.'
The Persecutor Deeply critical and cruel, saying 'You deserve this failure' or 'You'll never be good enough,' fueling guilt and shame.	The Protector Shields from harm or emotional distress, saying 'Don't take risks, it's too dangerous' or 'Stay in your comfort zone; it's safer.'	The Nostalgic Voice Looks back on the past fondly, saying 'Things were so much better back then' or 'I wish things could go back to how they were.'	The Rationalizer Justifies actions or behaviors, saying 'It's not that bad' or 'Everyone does it,' easing guilt over certain choices.	The Optimist Hopeful and positive, saying 'Everything will work out' or 'There's a silver lining here, we just need to find it.'
The Procrastinator Encourages delay, saying 'You can do this tomorrow' or 'It's not that important right now,' leading to last-minute stress.	The Inner Parent Nurturing and guiding, saying 'You need to take care of yourself' or 'It's okay to take a break and rest.'	The Inner Leader Encourages confidence and leadership, saying 'You have the power to lead this project' or 'You can inspire others with your vision.'	The Encourager Reminds you of strengths and past successes, saying 'You've overcome challenges before, you can do it again' or 'Don't forget how much you've already accomplished.'	The Inner Child Represents carefree joy, saying 'Let's have some fun' or 'It's okay to be silly sometimes.'
The Social Butterfly Encourages sociability, saying 'Go out there and meet new people' or 'You'll have so much fun if you just join in!'	The Philosopher Reflects on deeper meanings, saying 'What's the purpose of all of this?' or 'What is the true meaning of success?'	The Helper Focuses on serving others, saying 'How can I help?' or 'I need to be there for others, even when it's difficult.'	The Realist Focuses on practicality, saying 'Let's focus on what we can actually control' or 'Be realistic, this is what we're dealing with.'	The Freedom Seeker Craves independence, saying 'I need to do things my way' or 'I can't stand being tied down.'
The Inner Rebel Resists authority and norms, saying 'Why should I follow the rules?' or 'I don't want to conform to what they expect.'	The Skeptic Questions motives or beliefs, saying 'Are you sure about that?' or 'How do you know this is true?'	The Imposter Undermines accomplishments, saying 'You're not really qualified for this' or 'One day, everyone will find out you don't belong here.'	The Victim Frames events as unfair, saying 'Why is this happening to me?' or 'No one understands what I'm going through.'	The Idealist Focuses on aspirations, saying 'There has to be a better way' or 'Things can and should be different than they are.'

Here's a set of inner voices that you may have experienced already. They are so common that most of them have become well-known metaphors in everyday life.

Mark those that you feel most attached to, whether negatively as a limiting force or positively as a resource in your life.



Now that you have gotten a bit of inspiration about inner voices, try to refine and extend the picture in your own words.

You can build upon those voices you chose on the previous page or start fresh with an open mind.

Give those voices a distinct shape and name. Use the empty template on the next page.

Contradictions are absolutely okay—ambiguity is a natural and healthy response to a complex world.

Place voices that victimize you or tear you down in this left area.

Place voices that speak from a strong position of "I am OK. You are OK" in this middle area.

Place voices that boost your ego in this area.

Debrief

You have now uncovered some of your inner voices that shape the reality as you perceive it.

Again, we don't seek universal truth. On the contrary, we want to see this as a starting point for exploring your inner voices and learning to give a stage to those different voices when they are helpful, and silencing them when they are not.

Revisit your results:

- Who is speaking when?
- Who is falling short and when?
- Are you missing someone?
- What would friends and family say?
- Which of those voices are the loudest at work?
- Which of them help you most in challenging times?
- Which of them are causing you trouble regularly?
- Which of them are limiting you?
- Which of them help you thrive?



Our self-perception
creates the reality
we live.

“You become what you believe.”
Oprah Winfrey

“Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t - you’re right.”
Henry Ford

Homeland

How to Own Your Narrative



You deserve to live in a reality where you are protected from mental distress.



As we have learned, we must be the ones to architect this protection. Regardless of our circumstances, whether shaped by strong leadership or the lack of it, bullying at school, or the challenges of difficult family dynamics, we deserve a reality that safeguards us from distress. We deserve an environment that fosters personal growth and strengthens our social connections.

We deserve to live as the protagonists of our own stories, where our voices and our well-being truly matter. Ultimately, we are the ones who write that story.

This is what we call Homeland

This reality is built on a non-negotiable baseline for every personal interaction. It is a continuous practice in maintaining a healthy perception of ourselves and others

**I am OK.
You are OK.**

While this may sound like common sense, daily life constantly challenges these principles. Whether it is the dismissive teacher, the workplace bully, the manager who sidelines you, or the partner who betrays your trust, crediting these individuals with inherent worth is not always easy, but it is always worthwhile.

When we acknowledge the inherent worth of others, we are not necessarily committing to keeping them in our lives. Instead, we are making a functional choice to shift our response from fear and defensiveness to resilience. This is not about blind optimism; it is about clarity. It allows us to process reality as it is, address setbacks without shame, and engage in high-stakes collaboration without wasting energy on ego-protection.

These inner certainties provide a psychological anchor. By affirming our own capacity and that of others, we create the stability necessary for trust and genuine connection. This mindset acts as the 'unseen thread' of effective relationships, allowing for a level of directness that is impossible when one party feels diminished.

Ultimately, these principles serve as the practical bedrock for healthy leadership and innovation. They ground us in a clear-eyed, effective way of relating to the world.



Homeland

This reality is built on the grounds of two core principles

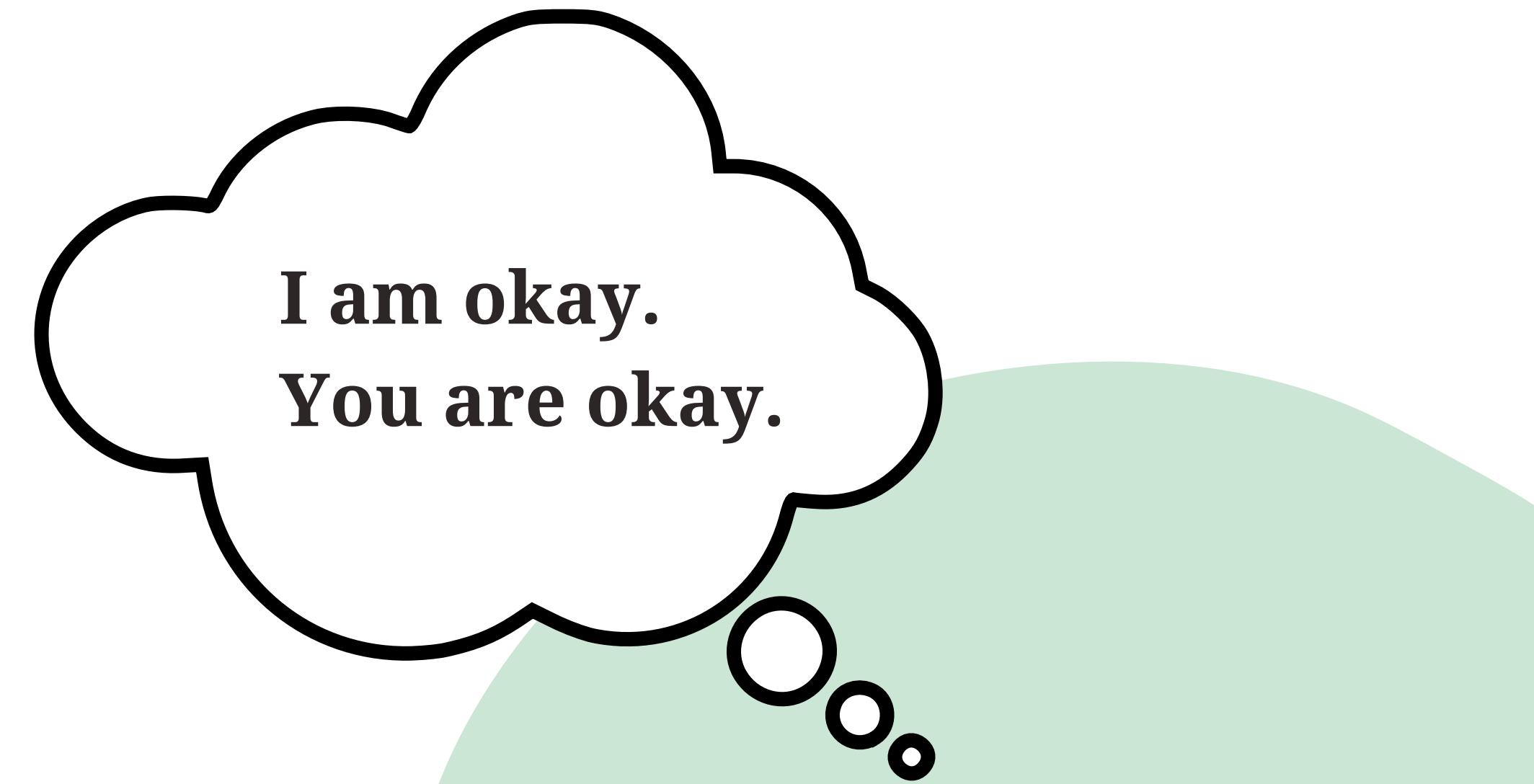
These principles are our non-negotiable baseline for every interaction and a continuous practice in maintaining a healthy perception of ourselves and others.

I am okay.
You are okay.

When we adopt the stance that both we and those around us hold an indispensable intrinsic worth, we shift our response to challenges from fear and defensiveness to resilience. This isn't about blind optimism; it is a functional choice. It allows us to process reality more clearly, address setbacks without shame, and engage in high-stakes collaboration without the friction of ego-protection.

These inner certainties provide a psychological anchor. By affirming our own capacity and that of others, we create the stability necessary for trust and genuine connection. This mindset acts as the 'unseen thread' of effective relationships, allowing for a level of directness and equality that is impossible when one party feels diminished.

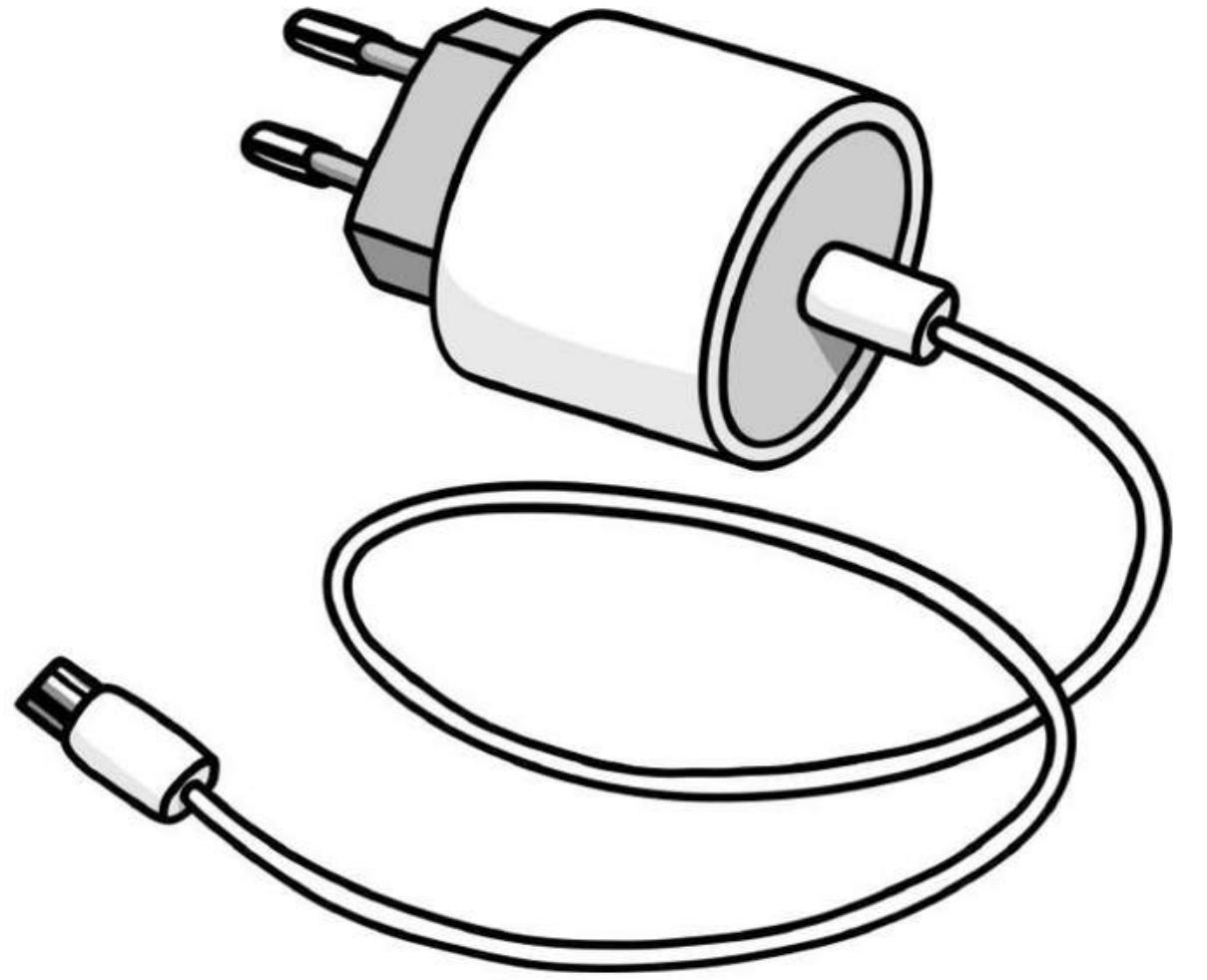
More than a personal philosophy, this stance serves as a practical bedrock for leadership and innovation. It grounds us in a clear-eyed way of relating to the world.



Shadowland

Let's explore Anna's story, who is not living in Homeland at the moment, but in a rather frustrating alternative reality.





The Charger

In a bustling co-working space filled with the low hum of people typing and quiet conversations, Anna suddenly realized her phone was about to die. Panic set in for a moment—her entire afternoon was filled with back-to-back virtual meetings, and without a charger, she'd be disconnected from her responsibilities. She looked around and noticed a young woman sitting two tables away, deeply immersed in her work, headphones on and eyes fixed intently on her screen.

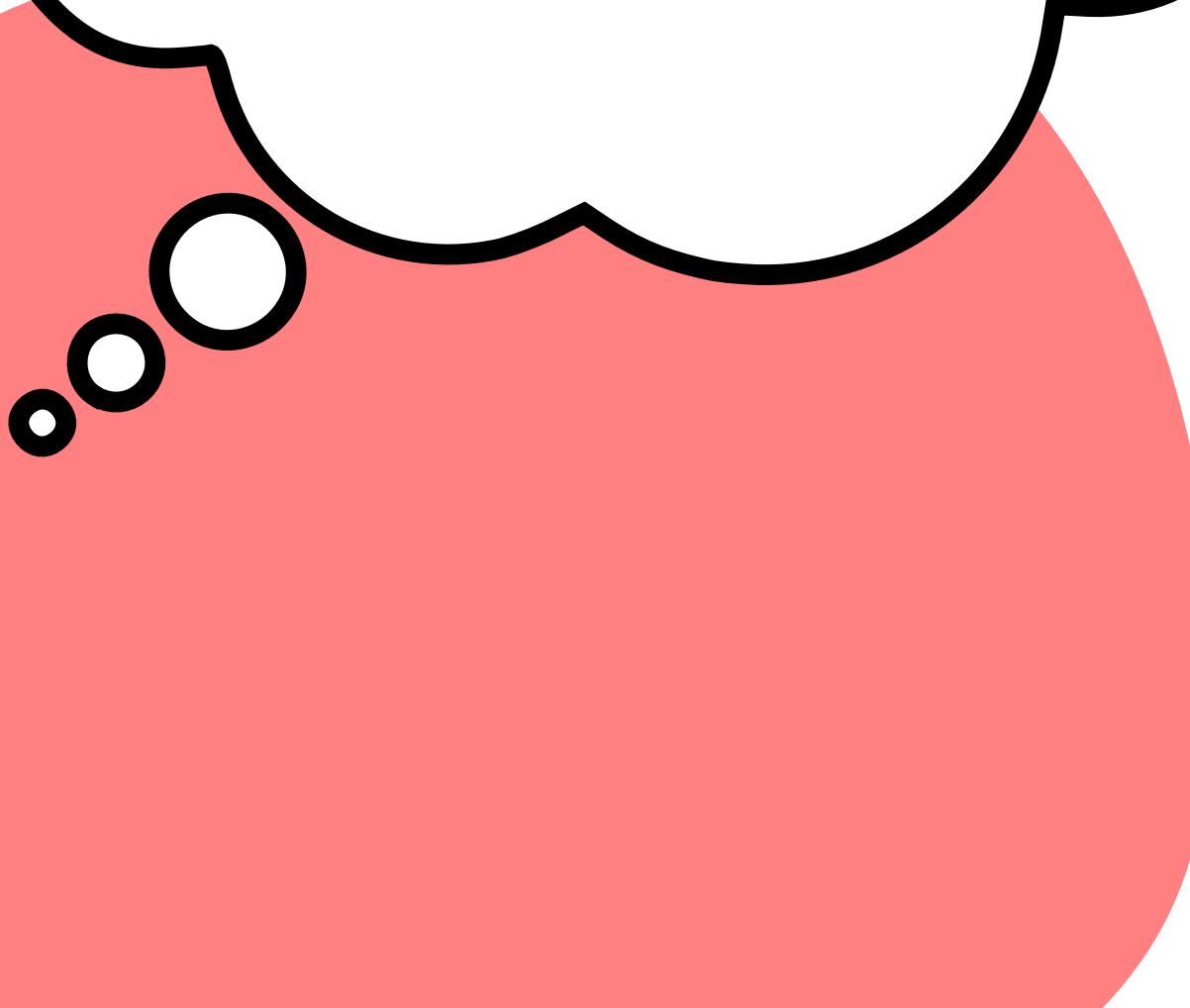
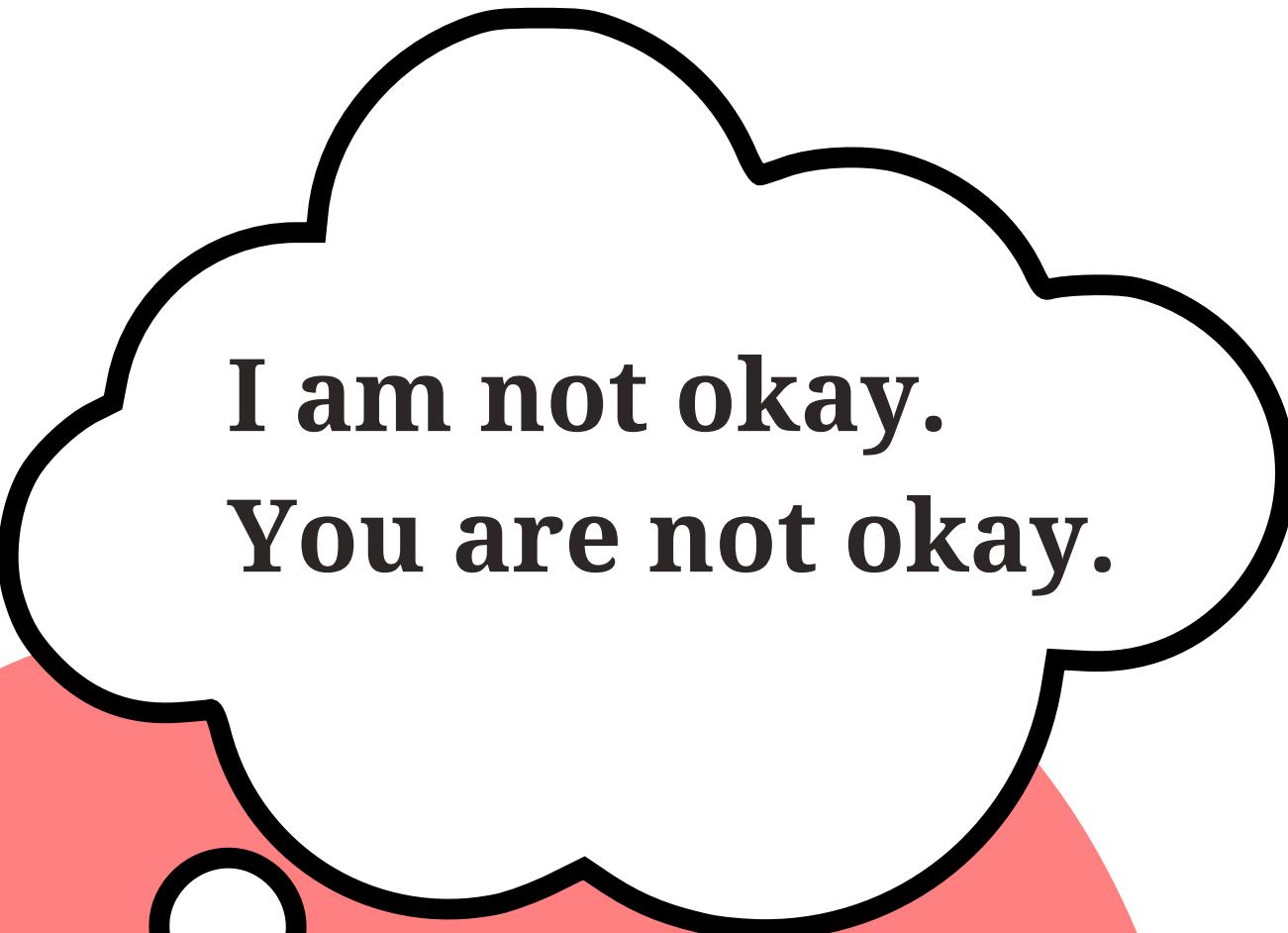
Anna hesitated. I should ask her for a charger, she thought. But as she stood up, doubt crept in. What if she's too busy and gets annoyed? Memories of moments when she had been interrupted at the peak of focus flooded her mind. Maybe she'll just ignore me or, worse, roll her eyes at the interruption. People in these spaces can be so territorial about their concentration.

The longer she stood there, the more vivid her imagined scenarios became. She probably thinks I'm irresponsible for not bringing my own charger. Or maybe she'll judge me for using an older phone. Anna's thoughts spiraled further: This is exactly why I shouldn't ask. I can't bear that kind of awkwardness. I'll just have to figure something else out.

But then, frustration surged. No, it's unfair. I bet she thinks she's above everyone else, just because she's working so intensely. People like her make others feel uncomfortable just for needing help. Before she could stop herself, Anna walked over with a forced confidence. She tapped the girl's shoulder, who startled slightly and pulled off her headphones.

"You know what? Forget it. I don't need your charger," Anna snapped, her voice louder than she intended. The girl blinked in confusion, eyes wide, as Anna walked away, leaving behind a stunned silence.

Anna sat back down, heart pounding. She glanced up after a moment and saw the girl quietly resume her work, a faint look of bewilderment still on her face.

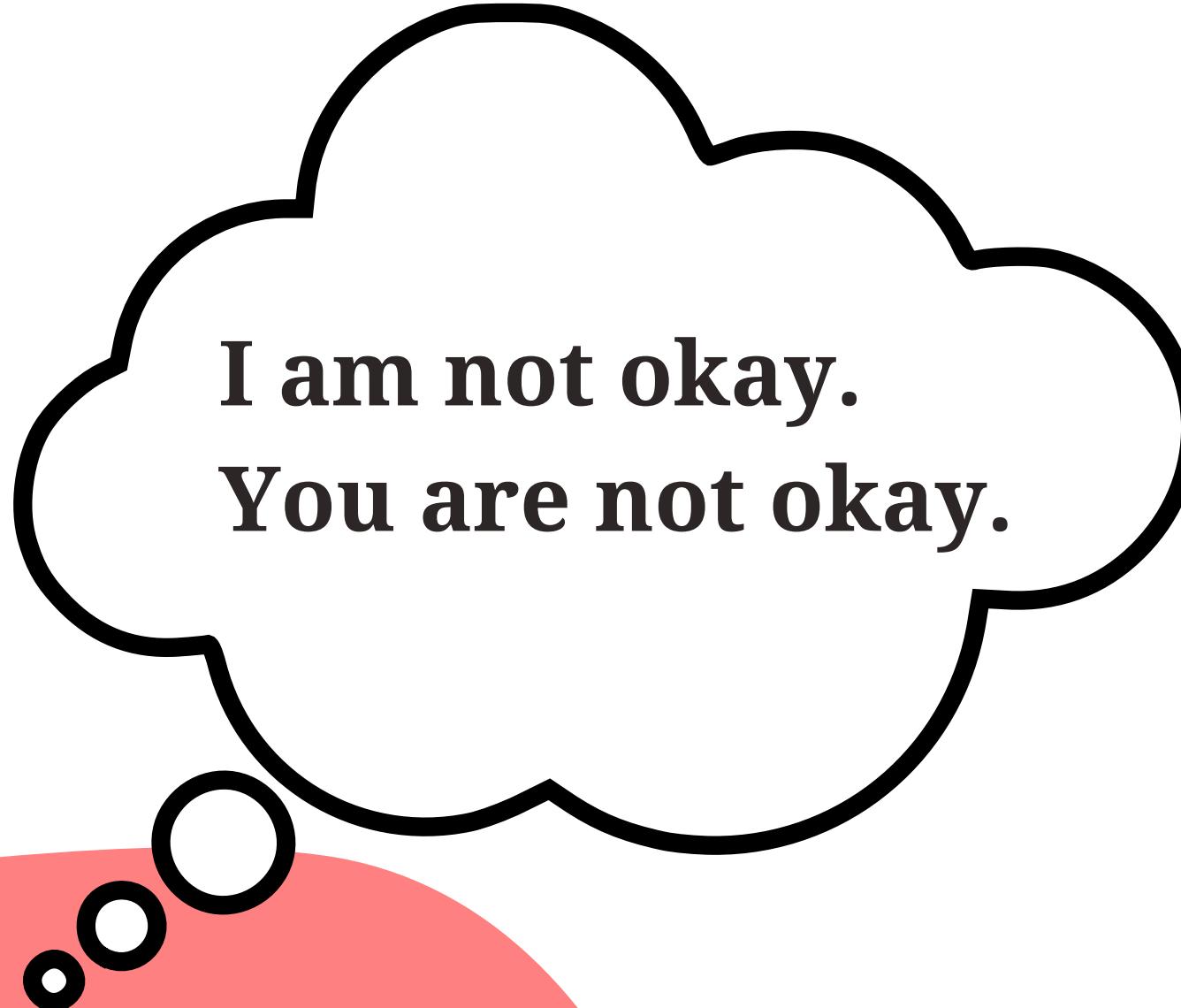


Anna is clearly not living in Homeland but rather in an alternative reality fueled by self-doubt and the devaluation of others. Her internal dialogue spirals from a simple need into a web of assumptions, where her own insecurities project negativity onto her surroundings. This mindset distorts her perception, making her view a simple situation as a source of potential rejection and judgment.

In essence, her mindset is grounded in two convictions:

I am not okay.
You are not okay.

Shadowland



**This is what we call
Shadowland**

Shadowland is a desolate mental landscape, a place where light and hope seem unreachable, cloaked in a fog of isolation and despair. In Shadowland, two haunting convictions loom like shadows: I am not okay and You are not okay. These beliefs twist reality, casting dark filters over every interaction, thought, and feeling. Here, self-doubt reigns, and the trust in others is fragile at best. The voice of Shadowland insists that both you and those around you are fundamentally flawed or broken, creating a vicious cycle of loneliness, guilt, and alienation.

The Victim in Us

The Red Flag



In Shadowland, it's easy to feel like a victim. This place intensifies our feelings of helplessness, self-doubt, and blame, and it often convinces us that we're at the mercy of circumstances or the actions of others. Sometimes, these feelings arise because we've truly been wronged, misunderstood, or faced unexpected hardships. Other times, the sense of being a victim can be a response to perceived failures or setbacks, even if those around us don't intend harm. In Shadowland, everything can feel amplified, and we may feel disconnected from our inner strength, leaving us feeling powerless and trapped.

While acknowledging these feelings of victimhood is important—they are valid signals that something within us is seeking recognition—this sense of being a victim should ultimately act as a **red flag** and wake-up call. When we start to feel that powerlessness, it's a sign that it's time to navigate back to Homeland, where balance and resilience await. In Homeland, we can reframe the situation, seeing not only our pain but also our capacity to respond to it with strength and compassion.

By returning to Homeland, we regain our perspective: I am okay. You are okay. The Exercise "Ground Position" at the end of this book will help you transition back into Homeland.

From this balanced space, we can let go of the feeling of being defined by circumstances and instead focus on our agency and our choices moving forward. Homeland reminds us that while we cannot always control what happens, we can choose how we respond, fostering resilience, self-respect, and peace. This shift helps us transform victimhood into self-empowerment, allowing us to face life's challenges with a stronger sense of purpose and calm.



How Shadowland is still helpful at times

Navigating to Shadowland, a place of deep introspection and raw vulnerability, can still play an essential role in processes like mourning, healing, and self-reflection. In Shadowland, we allow ourselves to fully experience difficult emotions—grief, sadness, regret, or even guilt—that often come with loss or painful life experiences. This mental space is where we confront what we might normally suppress: memories of a loved one, our mistakes, or our sense of helplessness. For a time, it's a necessary descent, one that helps us validate and honor the depth of what we feel, which is a critical part of authentic healing.

In a creative process or personal growth journey, spending time in Shadowland can lead to greater self-awareness, revealing unacknowledged struggles or emotional wounds. This can prompt deeper healing or help us build resilience. Likewise, in situations where caution is crucial, such as making big life decisions or navigating potential conflicts, Shadowland can alert us to potential pitfalls we might otherwise overlook, allowing us to tread carefully and avoid impulsive actions.

However, while Shadowland has its role, it's essential to navigate back to Homeland in a timely way. Prolonged stays in Shadowland can lead to despair, rumination, or a sense of being "stuck" in grief or self-doubt. When we return to Homeland—the balanced mental state where we embrace the convictions I am okay. You are okay. We make mistakes. We do our best—we create space for self-compassion and resilience. We remember that while loss and hurt are real, so too is our capacity to heal, find purpose, and connect with life again.

Utopia

Let's revisit Anna's story once more. This time, Anna has summoned all her strength to position herself as an incredibly valuable contributor to the world around her.

The Charger again

In a buzzing co-working space, Anna suddenly noticed her phone was about to die. Her afternoon was packed with important virtual meetings, and the idea of being cut off was out of the question. She scanned the room and spotted a young woman sitting a few tables away, headphones on, absorbed in her screen.

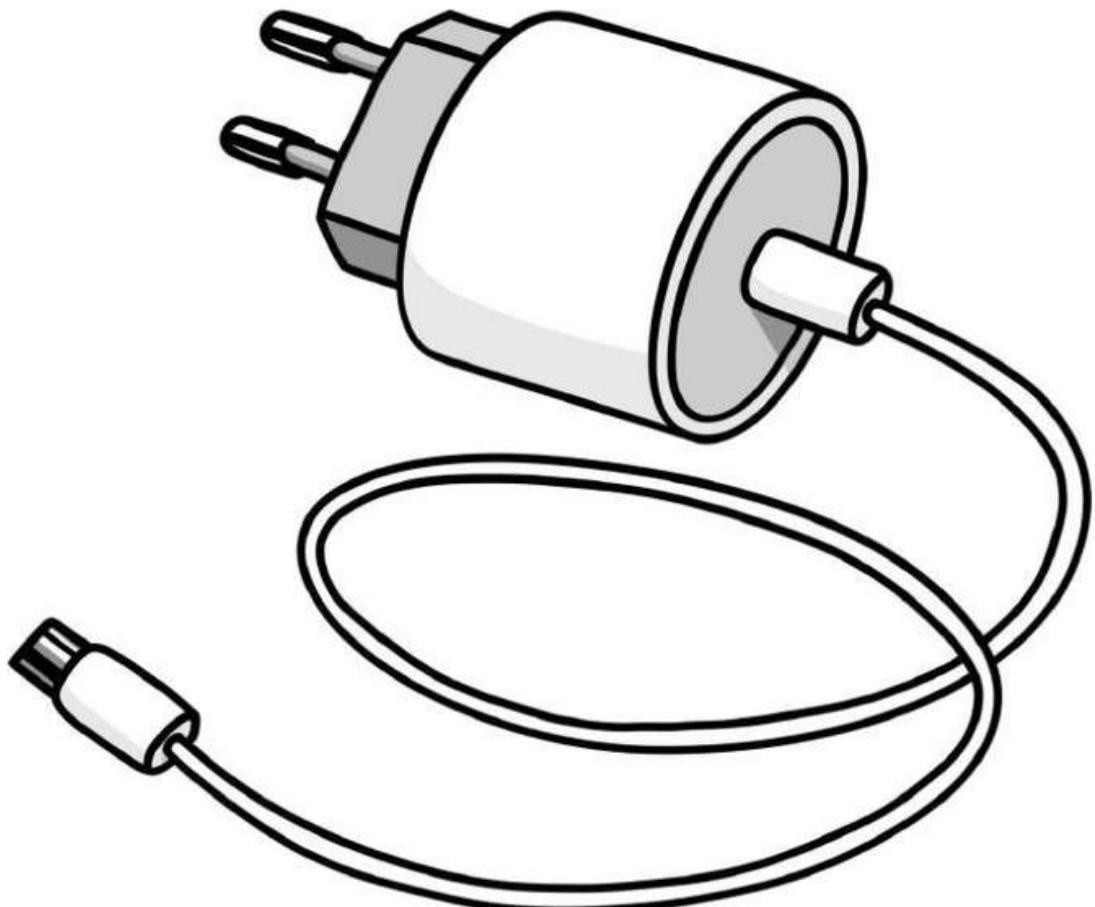
Anna rolled her eyes slightly. Why do I even have to ask for a charger? People here should be more aware and accommodating. She felt a flash of annoyance—surely someone as organized as she was shouldn't have to ask anyone for anything. Without bothering to soften her approach, she walked over, tapping the woman's shoulder a bit harder than necessary. The woman looked up, startled, pulling off her headphones. "Yes?" she asked tentatively.

"Hi," Anna said, impatience already in her tone. "I need a phone charger. Do you have one?" The woman hesitated, glancing at her bag. "I think I might, but I'm in the middle of something".

"Oh, come on," Anna interrupted, crossing her arms. "I only need it for a few minutes. I have important meetings to attend. Can't you just hand it over?"

The woman's polite expression faltered, and she carefully took out her charger. "Here," she said, her tone wary.

"Thank you," Anna replied curtly, grabbing it and returning to her seat without a sign of appreciation. She plugged in her phone and set to work, already feeling agitated by the interaction. But as she tried to focus, her phone buzzed with a notification: her first meeting had been rescheduled.



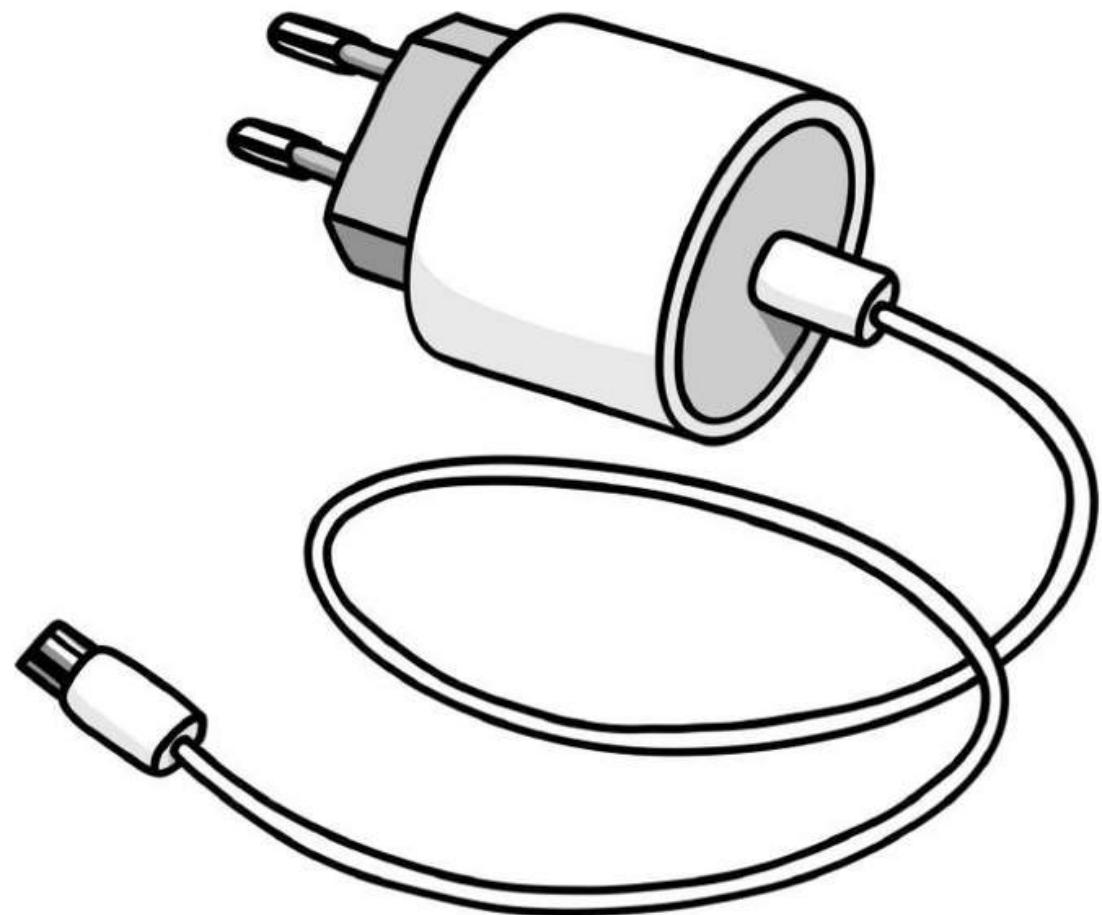


Frustrated, Anna glanced over at the woman, who had resumed her work, now more distant. A part of her felt uneasy, yet she brushed it off. People are so sensitive these days, she thought. I shouldn't have to tiptoe around others just to get what I need.

As the day went on, small inconveniences seemed to stack up—her laptop froze, her second meeting was delayed, and a client sent an email questioning her project proposal. Each problem only fueled her irritation, and by the end of the day, she felt drained and dissatisfied.

When she finally returned the charger, she found the woman deep in conversation with someone else. Anna dropped it on the table without a word, feeling dismissed and unappreciated, as if the world just didn't understand her importance.

Walking out of the co-working space, Anna couldn't shake the feeling that something was off. Instead of the confidence she expected, her superiority left her isolated and irritable, with no one to turn to for support.



“Anna’s belief in her own superiority thus creates a destructive reality, where her potential for connection, support, and simple kindness is replaced by alienation and frustration”

In this story, Anna’s ground position of “I am superior” shapes her interactions and perception, creating a reality filled with frustration, disconnection, and isolation. This belief influences her behavior from the start: instead of seeing herself as equal to others, she approaches the woman as if she is entitled to assistance without needing to ask politely.

When the woman hesitates, Anna’s sense of superiority fuels irritation rather than empathy. This dismissive attitude creates tension, leading to an interaction that lacks appreciation, humility, or gratitude. By acting on her belief that her time and needs are more valuable than others’, she disrupts the chance for a simple, positive exchange, instead fostering discomfort.

Throughout the day, Anna’s sense of superiority continues to manifest in her frustration with small setbacks. Her belief that she is entitled to a perfect, uninterrupted workflow leads her to view every minor inconvenience as a personal affront. Instead of adapting to these challenges or seeking solutions, she becomes increasingly agitated, feeling as though the world is failing to recognize her importance.

As a result, Anna's ground position isolates her. By seeing herself as "better than," she distances herself from potential support or connection. The day ends in dissatisfaction, as her attitude leaves her drained, misunderstood, and without meaningful connection to others. Her belief in her own superiority thus creates a destructive reality, where her potential for connection, support, and simple kindness is replaced by alienation and frustration.

In essence, her mindset is grounded in one unhealthy conviction:

I am superior.

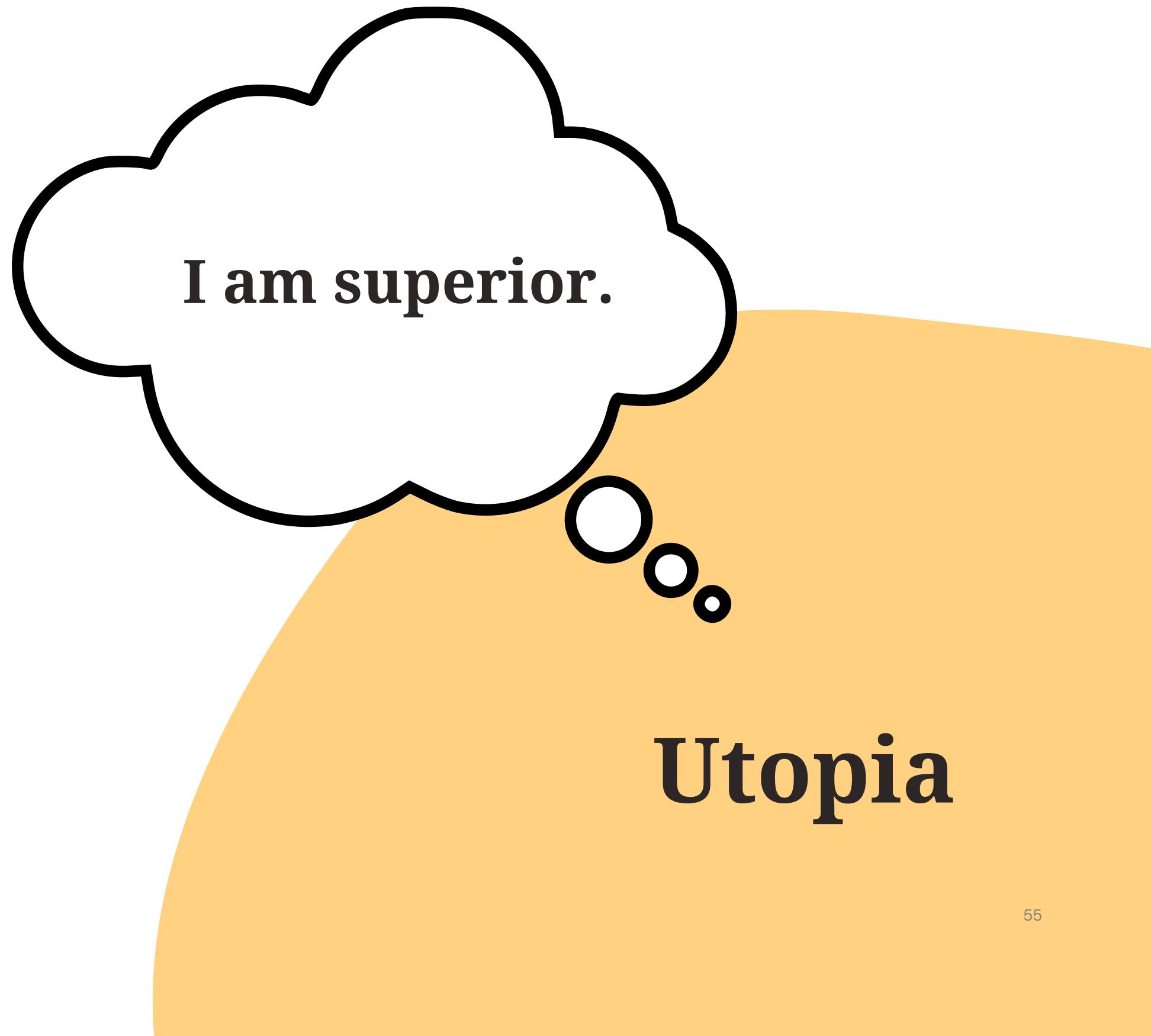


This is what we call Utopia

Utopia is a bright yet deceptive mental landscape, a place where a sense of superiority and perfection colors everything. In Utopia, the core conviction is I am superior, a belief that creates an addictive sense of self-importance and control. Within Utopia, there's a powerful allure; everything feels ordered, refined, and tailored to affirm one's own worth above all others. This reality can feel like a protective fortress, where flaws are dismissed and doubts are silenced under the comforting glow of self-assurance.

Yet, Utopia's allure is ultimately isolating. By fostering a belief in one's own superiority, it creates a barrier between oneself and others, leading to detachment, loneliness, and a gradual erosion of genuine empathy. Relationships are often shallow or transactional, as others are seen as tools to reinforce this self-image or as threats to it. In time, this view damages mental health by feeding a hidden sense of insecurity and fear of being exposed as less-than-perfect.

The addiction to Utopia's illusion creates a cycle of dependency, where one constantly seeks validation to maintain a sense of superiority, but always feels empty or hollow beneath it. This reality, though seductive, can trap one in an endless loop of inflated self-worth masking deeper insecurities, making genuine connection and inner peace harder to attain. Recognizing Utopia as an illusion, rather than a truth, can be the first step toward breaking free from its grasp.



Utopia

In Utopia, we may find ourselves feeling like a savior—an unwavering sense that we're the one who can help, fix, or save others and the world. This mindset can feel empowering, fueling us with a sense of purpose and direction. Sometimes, it comes from a genuine desire to make a positive impact or help others, yet in Utopia, this feeling often takes on an inflated, urgent quality. We may begin to see ourselves as the only one who understands or the only one equipped to bring change, placing an immense sense of responsibility on our shoulders.

While the desire to help others can be a beautiful thing, this feeling of being a savior should ultimately act as a **yellow flag** and wake-up call to navigate back to Homeland. In Homeland, we are reminded of our core beliefs: I am okay. You are okay. Here, we can find a more balanced perspective, where we understand that while we can support others, they too have their own strength and agency. We don't have to bear the weight of the world alone or believe that everything rests on us.

Returning to Homeland allows us to continue helping others in a grounded way, without sacrificing our own well-being or losing sight of others' abilities. Homeland is a place where we embrace mutual support and healthy boundaries, where we can make a difference without feeling like it's solely our burden to carry. This balanced approach lets us contribute with empathy and respect, recognizing that everyone, including ourselves, is doing their best, and that true growth happens when we empower rather than rescue.

The Savior in Us

The Yellow Flag



Navigating to Utopia, where confidence is amplified and a sense of control feels absolute, can sometimes be beneficial. In high-stakes situations that demand strong belief, such as public speaking, negotiations, or leadership during a crisis, a brief visit to Utopia can lend the conviction and poise needed to inspire others and make difficult decisions with certainty. In these moments, the belief in one's own capability or vision can offer reassurance, reduce self-doubt, and create a more persuasive presence that others naturally gravitate toward.

However, staying too long in Utopia—where self-importance and superiority can cloud judgment—comes with risks. The longer one resides there, the more difficult it becomes to stay grounded, open to feedback, and connected with others' perspectives. Over time, Utopia can encourage dismissiveness, unrealistic expectations, and a lack of empathy, damaging relationships and limiting one's ability to adapt and grow.

This is why it's crucial to navigate back to "Homeland," a balanced state where the core values are rooted in mutual respect and self-acceptance.

How Utopia is still helpful at times.

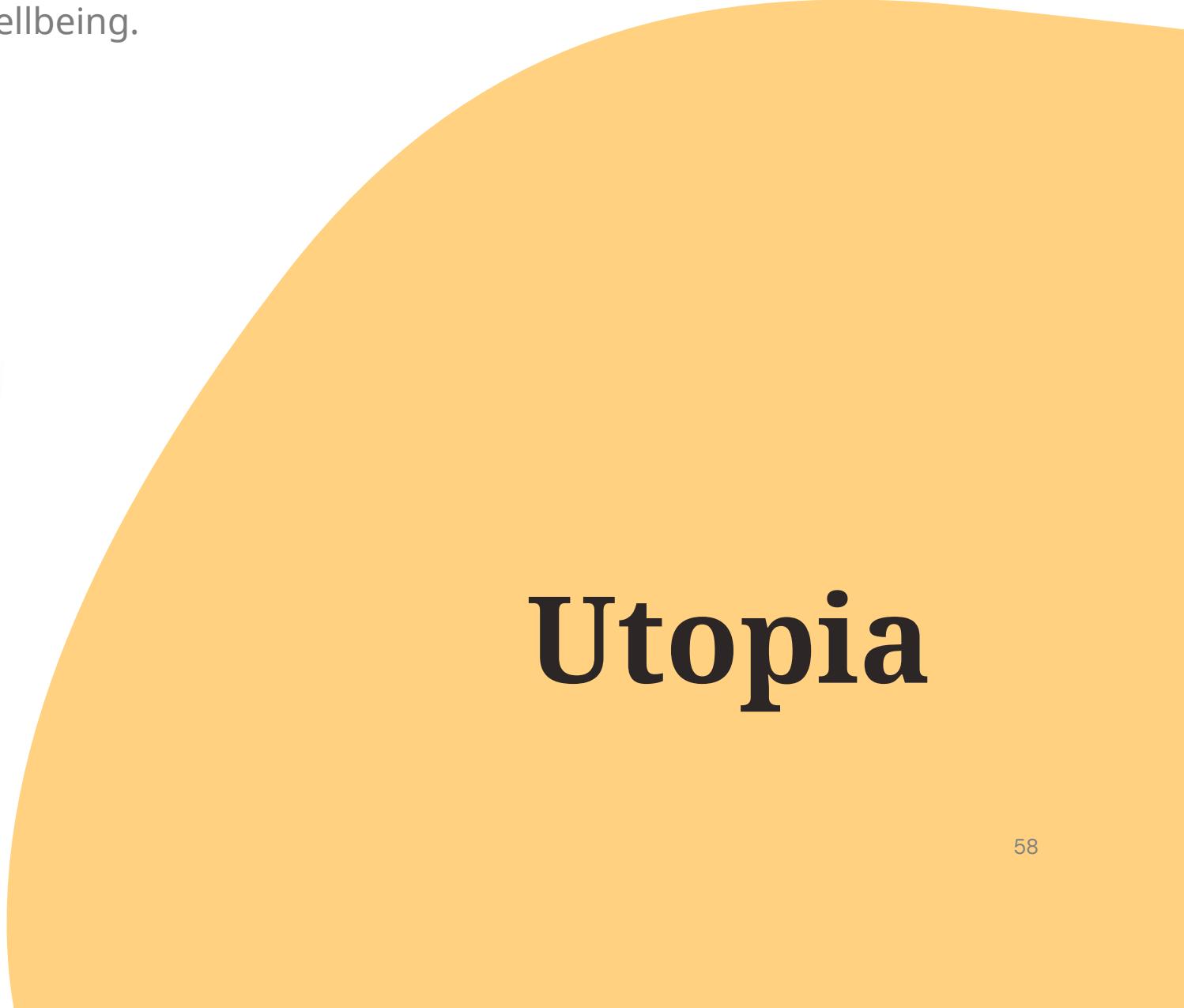
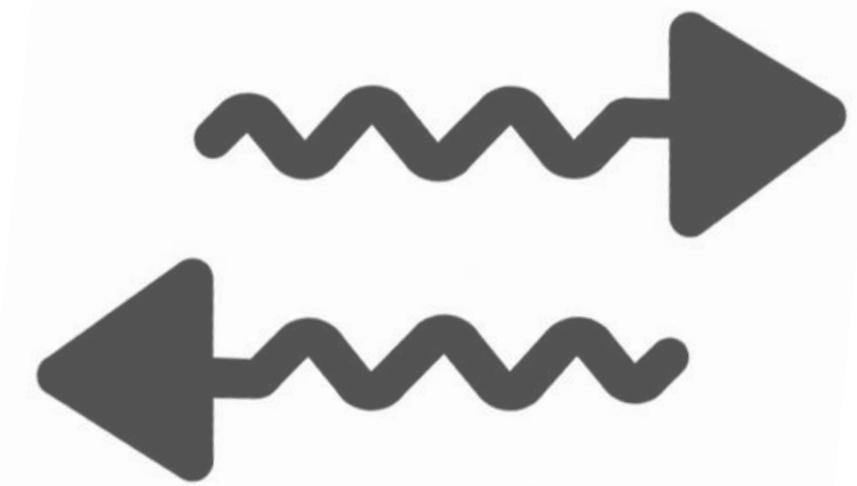
An Unstable State.

Now that you have experienced both Shadowland and Utopia, it is important to understand that they are not stable states of being. Typically, with an inner bias towards one or the other, people like Anna tend to swing between the two. One day she feels superior, ready to conquer the world; the next she falls into the abyss of feeling worthless.

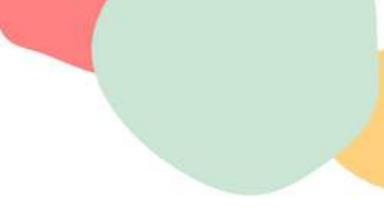
This cycle will continue until she adopts healthier inner beliefs and takes full responsibility for her wellbeing.



Shadowland



Utopia



Principles of Healthy Leadership

Through our experience, we've arrived at a set of guiding principles. We aren't claiming they are universal truths, but they have proven incredibly effective in our work with curious minds and innovation teams. They are the lessons that have stood the test of time.

I Show Up

Lead with presence. Engage intentionally. Know when to act, when to pause, and when to recover. Showing up is leadership.

I Am Okay

My worth is inherent. It does not depend on performance or approval. I care for my mental and emotional health as the foundation for sustainable growth.

You Are Okay

I see the worth in others. I trust their potential and create space for them to grow. Different perspectives make us stronger.

We Own Our Boundaries

Boundaries protect clarity and energy. We say yes with intention, no with courage. We respect ourselves and others.

We Do Our Best

We show up fully, not perfectly. We choose progress over perfection. Our consistent effort, combined with others, creates impact beyond any one of us.

PS: And when it is necessary, we do what it takes. We stay kind and sober. We stay human. And we do not go to jail.

Dec 2025

Principles of
Healthy Leadership

The Principles

Imagine a place where we approach life and work from a balanced inner stance: I am okay. You are okay. For Curious Minds, this position is not a moral appeal, but a strategic essential. Not to deny reality, but to navigate it more effectively. Scarcity, competition, and misconduct are real; they are part of the world we inhabit. However, by cultivating a secure inner space, we gain the clarity and resilience needed to take thoughtful action rather than reacting destructively. This space begins within ourselves, extends to our teams, and when built into systems, creates large-scale impact at very little cost.

When we act from this balance, we effectively separate the person from the problem. This enables a level of communication that is both direct and respectful:

- **Addressing Errors:** Criticism is no longer a personal attack but a factual correction. Because the individual's worth isn't being questioned, they don't need to waste energy on defense and can remain focused on the solution.
- **Setting Boundaries:** Those who perceive themselves as "okay" can draw firm lines without aggression. This fosters psychological safety and prevents the buildup of hidden frustration.
- **Managing Crises:** In high-pressure situations, this mental "buffer" between stimulus and response allows us to answer thoughtfully instead of reacting out of impulse.

When this mindset is anchored in a culture, the "transactional costs" of communication drop drastically. When you can trust that others are doing their best, the need for micromanagement. Curious Minds can then focus on finding new paths and seizing opportunities instead of getting bogged down in interpersonal friction.

This is why the principles of Healthy Leadership form such a vital foundation: they transform kindness and trust from perceived weaknesses into hard-hitting organizational strengths.

I Show Up is about engaging intentionally with life, showing up for yourself, your team, and your community. It includes knowing what to show up to, when to step back, and when to create space for recovery. Presence is the foundation for applying curiosity, insight, and creativity effectively.

I am okay reinforces self-worth and combats feelings of inadequacy. It allows Curious Minds to approach challenges with resilience, confidence, and stability.

You are okay fosters understanding and strengthens relationships by recognizing that others are also doing their best. It creates space for empathy, reduces judgment, and encourages genuine connection.

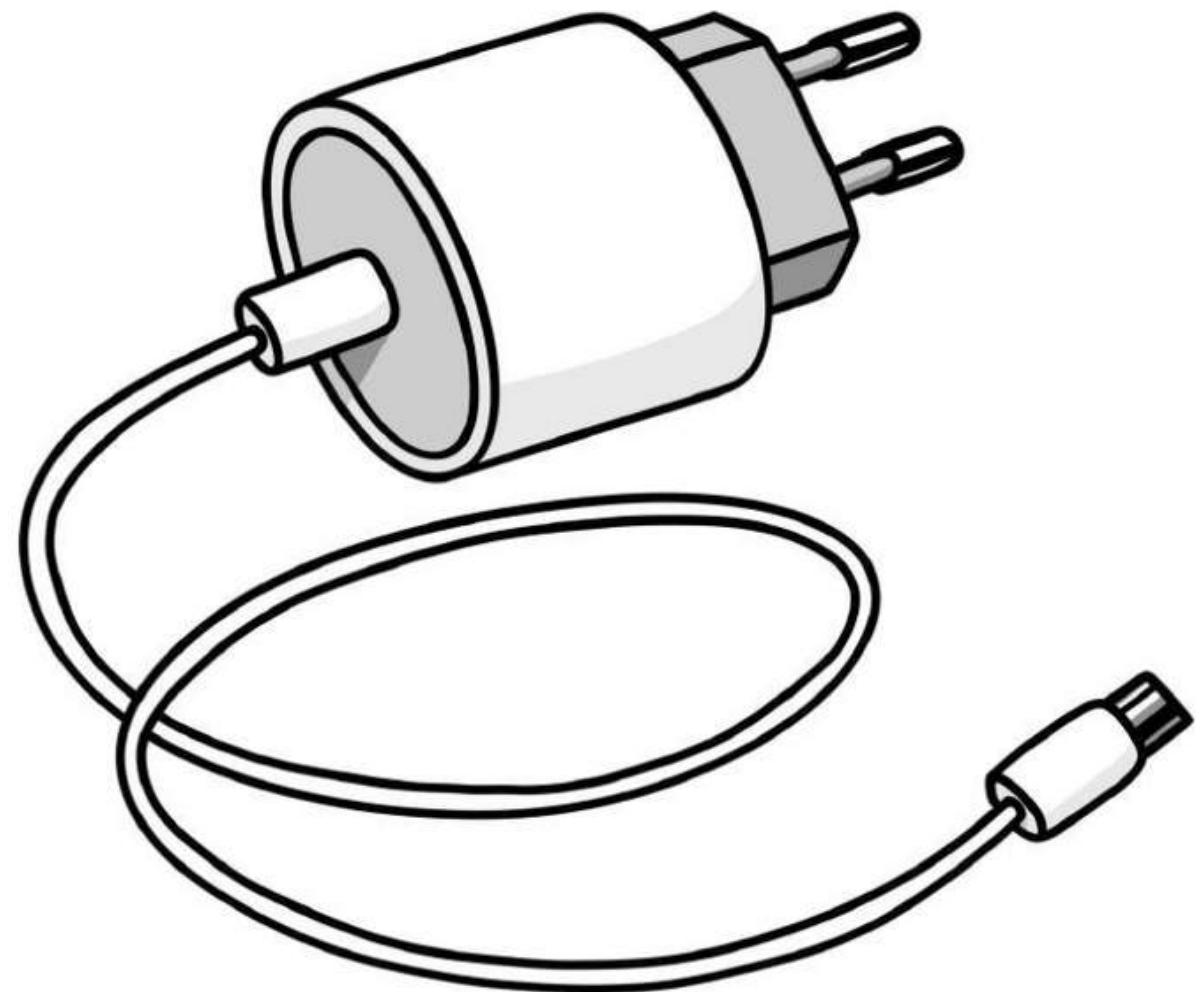
We own our boundaries emphasizes personal agency and self-respect. By honoring our limits and the limits of others, we maintain clarity, trust, and open communication, essential for meaningful interactions.

We do our best acknowledges human imperfection and nurtures perseverance. By valuing effort and learning over rigid standards of success, Curious Minds cultivate a growth mindset and resilience.

Together, these principles support emotional well-being, reduce the weight of unrealistic expectations, and create an environment where progress, connection, and psychological safety can flourish.

The Charger Finally

The Charger.



In a bustling co-working space filled with the quiet hum of people typing and soft conversations, Anna suddenly noticed her phone was about to die. A pang of concern crossed her mind—she had back-to-back virtual meetings that afternoon and couldn't afford to lose connection. She scanned the room and spotted a young woman sitting two tables away, headphones on and focused on her screen.

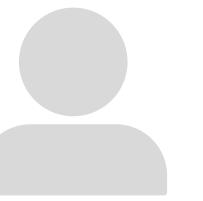
Anna took a deep breath, reminding herself, I'm okay. She's okay. There was no harm in asking for help. I'd lend someone a charger if they needed one, she thought, feeling her confidence return. With a friendly smile, she walked over and gently tapped the woman's shoulder.

The woman looked up, surprised but attentive, and removed her headphones. "Hi," Anna said warmly, "I'm so sorry to interrupt, but my phone is about to die. Would you happen to have a charger I could borrow?"

The woman's face softened, and she smiled. "Oh, of course!" She reached into her bag, pulled out a charger, and handed it to Anna. "No problem at all—I know how it feels to be caught without one."

Anna felt a surge of relief and gratitude. "Thank you so much. I really appreciate it!" They exchanged a few kind words, and Anna returned to her seat, feeling a sense of calm and connection.

Plugging in her phone, Anna glanced back at the woman and shared a smile across the tables. She realized how much lighter and connected she felt, knowing that simple, honest interactions could bridge the gap between strangers. In this small moment, her day brightened—she'd embraced the belief that she was okay, others were okay, and asking for help was always worth it.



Exercise
Ground Position

Healthy Leadership for Curious Minds

Ground Position

The mental shift to a healthy leadership stance that benefits both your health and your teams' growth.

We have created this exercise to help you train the rapid shift to a healthy leadership stance we call the *Ground Position*. A position where you feel at ease with yourself, the people around you, and the situation as a whole. This position is best defined by the principles of healthy leadership.

I show up.
I am okay.
You are okay.
We own our boundaries.
We do our best.

Scientific research has demonstrated that our physical, mental and emotional experiences are intertwined in fascinating ways (see [3,4]). You may have experienced this phenomenon when feeling nervous with a queasy stomach, or when a sunny morning lifted your spirits and gave you energy.

Based on this knowledge, we have designed a three-stage process to guide you into your Ground Position, the foundation of healthy leadership. This exercise deliberately intertwines physical, sensory, and emotional experiences, making it more easily accessible to you when needed.



1



2



3

Exercise Ground Position

In the 'Rising' phase, we intentionally use the body as a tool for self-regulation.

By adopting a stable and expansive posture, you set a powerful physical anchor that secures your system in the present moment. This stance activates your internal resources and creates the essential foundation for the next step: Grounding. By experiencing your body as a reliable base, you create the psychological space to build and solidify inner stability. Our posture acts as an anchor, allowing us to rapidly recall this state of mind whenever it is needed.

Note: this is not power posing. Our posture serves as the gateway to conscious self-leadership, not merely a facade constructed for the outside world.



1

Rising



2

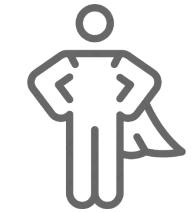
Grounding

We are now going to travel back in time to a moment when you felt deeply at ease with yourself, the people around you, and the situation as a whole. A moment of strength and confidence. We call it your *grounding situation*.

I am okay. You are okay. Our boundaries are our guiding principles at this stage.

At this stage, you will not only immerse yourself in a stable stance, your brain will also associate this experience with your body posture, making it more easily accessible to you in the future.

This is your body, your brain and your emotions at play in a conscious, controlled environment. The ideal setup to reprogram yourself for healthy leadership.



3

Releasing

In the final stage, we will deepen the connection between your bodily experience and your grounded state, preparing you to transition back into your daily routine.

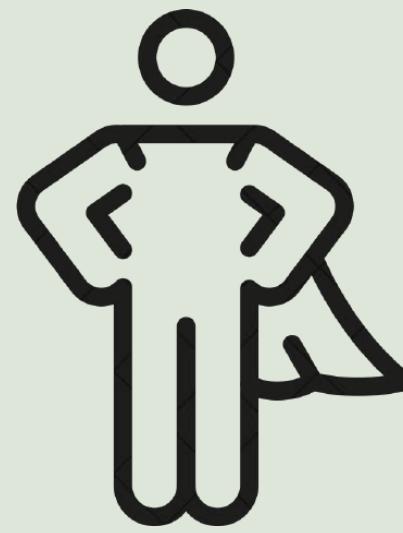
Your body posture will serve as an anchor to help you re-establish your grounded state whenever needed.

Rising into a grounded state will become much easier after practicing it a few times. The more you use it, the more natural and effortless it will feel.

You can now do a trial run of the full exercise while reading through the instructions on the next pages. Repeat the exercise without instructions once you feel confident, or use the one-pager at the end for a bit of guidance.

Stage

1



Rising

Find Your Space: Choose a spot where you can stand comfortably and freely. Ensure the area is distraction-free. If you do this trial run on screen, try to make sure your screen is on eye level.

Stand Tall: Position your feet shoulder-width apart for a strong and grounded stance. Distribute your weight evenly on both feet.

Place Your Hands on Your Hips: Rest your hands on your hips with your fingers pointing slightly forward or outward. Keep your elbows wide to open up your posture.

Lift Your Chin: Raise your head slightly so your chin is parallel to the ground. Avoid looking down; instead, keep your gaze forward or slightly upward.

Open Your Chest: Roll your shoulders back and down, creating an open and confident posture. Feel your chest expand slightly as you stand tall.

Hold the Pose: Maintain this position for 1 minute.

While Holding Your Pose:

Breathe deeply: Inhale through your nose, filling your chest and belly, then exhale slowly.

Engage your core: Gently tighten your abdominal muscles to support your stance.

Stay present: Stand firm, avoid fidgeting, and embrace the moment.

Stay clear: Let thoughts pass without holding onto them.

Feel grounded: Feel the solid ground beneath your feet.

Slowly shift awareness: Focus on the strength in your core and upper body.

Maintain deep, steady breaths.

When the 1 minutes are complete, you'll be ready to move to the next step.

Stage

2



Grounding

Step 1: Recall Your Grounding Situation

Recall a moment in your life when you felt completely at ease and aligned with yourself and the situation. This moment should embody the following experiences:

- I am okay - You felt confident and safe.
 - You are okay - You trusted and felt comfortable with those around you.
 - We own our boundaries - You felt your own limits and those of others respected.
 - We do our best - You feel free of judgement.
- Let the memory come naturally. At least one person should be around. The more the better.
- Think of a professional situation, a nature experience, a personal encounter. Anything is fine.

Step 2: Immerse yourself in it

- Once you have recalled a memory, bring it to life by fully immersing yourself in it.
- What do you see? What colors, objects, or details stand out?
- What do you hear? What sounds or voices? Or silence?
- What do you feel physically? Is there warmth, movement, or stillness? What else?
- Are there any specific smells present in this memory?
- Can you recall any tastes connected to this moment?

Engaging all your senses helps deepen the emotional connection to your Ground Position.

Step 3: Solidify your boundaries

Remain immersed in your memories. Now, visualize your boundaries surrounding you. Imagine a safe space around you, free of distractions, allowing you to move through any challenge with confidence and clarity. Where ever you go, this save space is going to follow you.

Stay in this physical, emotional and mental Ground position for about one minute before you move to the next stage.

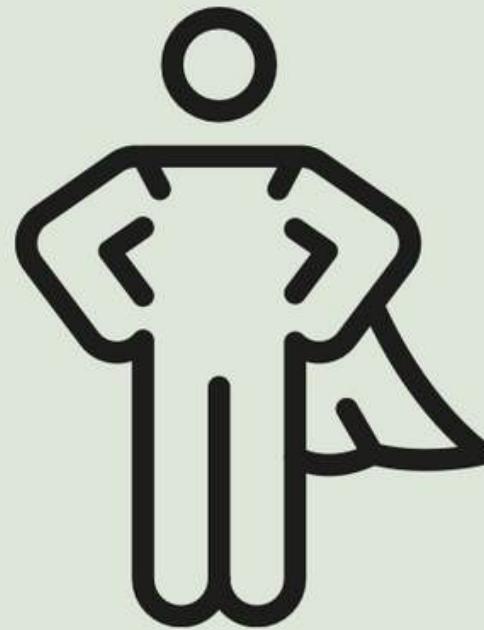
Side Note

Grounding works best when you can recall a vivid memory of a real-life situation. If you have difficulty recalling a specific moment, take a breath and think of a situation that comes close, then use your imagination to perfect it. Imagine all distractions and disturbances falling away. Create a space that belongs only to you. In this scenario, everyone else is a non-playing character.

It is just you—at ease with yourself—amongst a group of people. Focus on the details: the setting, the sounds, the scents, and the feeling of the ground beneath your feet. Make this your grounding situation. Take all the time you need until the image is clear, vivid, and feels okay.

Stage

3



Releasing

Releasing

Remain rooted in your inner ground position. Hold your stable pose and continue breathing deeply and steadily.

Feel the solid ground beneath your feet. Slowly shift your awareness upwards, sensing the strength in your core and upper body.

Take two intentional breaths before transitioning into daily life. Take your grounded self with you.

Use your stable pose and transition into Ground Position seamlessly in future. The more often you use it, the easier it will become.

Note: This self-coaching guide is not a substitute for professional help during challenging times. If you persistently struggle to achieve your ground position using this guide alone, consult a coach or therapist for additional support.

Debrief

Congratulations! With this exercise, you now have the tools to shift into a healthy stance. It will help you confidently navigate difficult situations without stress. This approach not only improves your personal wellbeing, it also strengthens your social interactions and boosts your team's performance. You will be able to address critical issues, remove stress and eliminate the most common, invisible productivity killer: conflict avoidance.

Make this exercise a habit over the next few days - perhaps by incorporating it into your morning routine or using it to refresh yourself during an afternoon energy dip. The more you practice, the more natural it will feel. Pretty soon, getting into your ground position will be as effortless as adopting a stable posture.

Over time, you will create the conditions for psychological safety, foster creativity, and make your organization a place where innovation can thrive without compromising your wellbeing.

Ground Position

1



Rising

Take your favorite stable pose. Breathe slowly and steadily. Allow your thoughts to pass by. Feel your body, wandering from feet to chin.

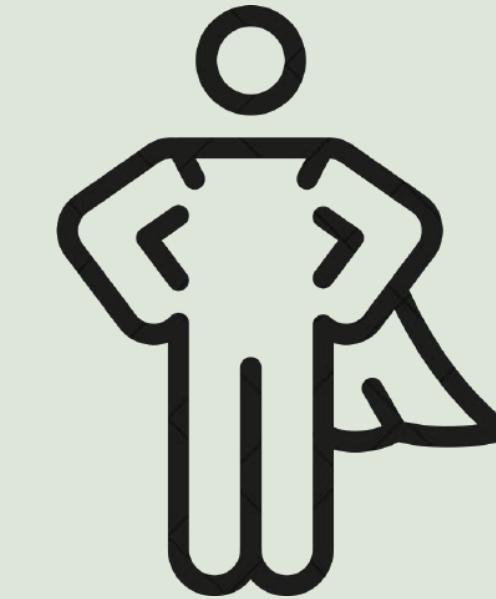
2



Grounding

Recall your *Grounding Situation* where you felt a sense of *I am okay. You are okay. We own our boundaries. We do our best.* What do you see? What do you hear and smell?
Stay in your stable pose.

3



Releasing

Remain grounded. Hold your pose and continue breathing deeply and steadily before releasing into daily routine.

Moving Forward



When you lead from your inner safe space curiosity becomes your compass and strength.

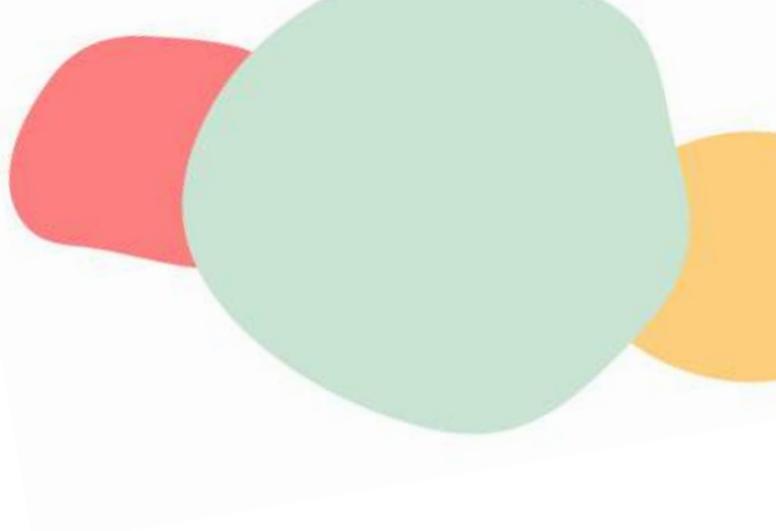
As we come to the end of this first seed, remember that Healthy Leadership begins from within. The practices we have explored, and in particular the Ground Position exercise, are designed to help you set a strong foundation. By anchoring yourself mentally and emotionally, Ground Position creates the inner safe space that Curious Minds need to thrive.

This inner safe space is not a luxury. It is the cornerstone of our architecture for psychological safety, the essential foundation upon which Healthy Leadership is built. When we are grounded, we can face the challenges of scarcity, competition, and uncertainty with clarity and composure. We can show up fully, support others, and lead with compassion.

For Curious Minds, this space allows creativity to flourish, insight to take shape, and bold ideas to emerge without being stifled by fear, self-doubt, or reactive patterns. It is the base from which all other principles—I Show Up, I Am Okay, You Are Okay, We Own Our Boundaries, and We Do Our Best—can be applied consistently and effectively.

Healthy Leadership is not about perfection or control. It is about presence, resilience, and the courage to build environments where people feel safe to explore, grow, and contribute. Ground Position helps us embody that courage, creating a foundation for ourselves and for the teams, families, and communities we influence.

Step into that space. Anchor yourself. Lead from the ground up. The world needs Curious Minds who are supported from within and capable of creating positive impact from a place of inner safety.



We hope you found this first seed helpful and will find ways to integrate the *Ground Position* into your daily lives, so the Principles of Healthy Leadership can become a natural foundation of your personal and professional interactions over time.

We would like to close this seed with an important reminder: While we believe that our mental health and safety are non-delegable, and we provide tools to protect them, this should never be an excuse for anyone in a leadership role to step back.

On the contrary, we encourage everyone to continuously work toward Healthy Leadership as part of their role. Healthy Leadership is a shared responsibility that affects us all, and each of us can take the lead by setting an example and improving our own area of influence. We hope that through our work, we can inspire more Curious Minds to embrace leadership and expand their impact in healthy ways.

A growing community drives meaningful change.



Gitte Klitgaard



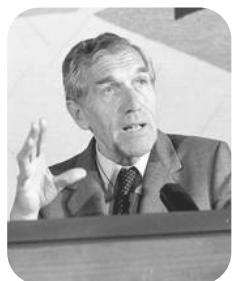
Michael Laussegger

Sources and Inspiration



Amy Edmonson

Our work has certainly been most inspired by Amy Edmondson's research on psychological safety (see [1]). Her insights into creating environments where individuals feel safe to express themselves, take risks, and collaborate without fear of judgment or punishment have shaped the foundation of our approach. We strive to foster trust, open communication, and innovation in all aspects of our work. We hope to achieve this by leading by example and demonstrating how small changes in our own mindset can literally change the world.



Anna's story is inspired by a story from Paul Watzlawick (The Hammer) and illustrates how irrational thoughts and assumptions can escalate (see [5])



The concept is inspired by Eric Berne's Ground Positions, Author and inventor of Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy (see [6])



Inner Voices are inspired by Friedmann Schulz von Thuns metaphor of "The Inner Team" (see [7])

Sources

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- 3) Nair S, Sagar M, Sollers J 3rd, Consedine N, Broadbent E. Do slumped and upright postures affect stress responses? A randomized trial. *Health Psychol.* 2015 Jun;34(6):632-41. doi: 10.1037/he0000146. Epub 2014 Sep 15. PMID: 25222091.
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- 6) Berne, E. (1961). *Transactional analysis in psychotherapy: A systematic individual and social psychiatry*. Grove Press.
- 7) Schulz von Thun, F. (1998). *Miteinander reden, Band 3: Das "Innere Team" und situationsgerechte Kommunikation: Kommunikation, Person, Situation*, Rowohlt.
- 8) The Dyslexic Advantage: *Unlocking the Hidden Potential of the Dyslexic Brain* (originally published in 2011, revised in 2023) is the primary source for the "MIND" framework (Material, Interconnected, Narrative, and Dynamic reasoning).