# **Just Breathe, I Guess**

**Zoe's avatar**

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Howdy!

It is nearing the end of November and guess what? I totally failed. I’ve meditated maybe four times this month and probably journaled about that much. I did buy a new journal and considered splurging on the paid version of Headspace. Hey, I tried.

Thankfully, I am through the work stressors that this month had in store for me, and despite not actively meditating or journaling a ton, I am actually ok with how I have been navigating this stress.

First some housekeeping:

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This week’s note was initially going to be about workload ebbs and flows. That note will come, don’t worry. However, that note was borne of my readjustment to the post-event/deadline lull. It was me both giving myself and you all permission to go slow, especially after you’ve been going fast. Instead, I want to talk about how even though I failed to meditate and journal and achieve nirvana in three weeks, I also succeeded.

For context, I was a part of the organizing team for a couple of my organization’s major donor-focused events. I did two in two weeks before I was even 90 days into my new role. Beyond the standard event stress, I was feeling the pressure of first impressions with my new team. I had to show them that I was a good hire — at least, that is what my perfectionistic and overachieving brain was convinced was the case.

The first event arrived and had me battling with technology, trying to ensure that microphones and clickers worked. When I finally looked up at the end of the event, I realized that everything actually went well.

The second event was more of a learning experience.

In that second event, I made a couple of back-to-back mistakes. After embarrassing myself in front of a room full of my organization’s top donors, I realized that I could not continue to effectively do my job if I let this shame and panic eat me for the rest of the day. Hell, I had to take meeting notes immediately after my first mistake and I could barely concentrate. I knew I had to address it.

While I took those notes, I had to constantly bring myself back to the present and not replay my faux pas. I found myself calling upon as many mindfulness techniques as I could muster to get through that next half-hour. As soon as that session was over, we had a break — hoorah! In that break, I proceeded to make another, if less publicly humiliating mistake. This mistake left me rattled, angry, and indignant. Again, I had to return to my seat and not make a fuss. Again, I threw all of my skills at trying to bring myself back down to human scale.

You know what? They didn’t fucking work.

At least not enough. By the time our next break rolled around, I was still fuming and barely able to focus. Luckily, that break was an hour-long lunch that did not require my presence or attention, so, I took that time to step outside the event space and into the slightly chilly fall weather to find a quiet and isolated spot. I sat down, and I focused on my breathing. I did not close my eyes, but I did let them land on some pretty leaves that had fallen to the ground in my secret hiding spot. I placed my hand on my chest and assured myself that everything was fine and I was ok. I rehearsed a compassion meditation that I had heard on a podcast a couple of times, changing it because I couldn’t quite remember the proper structure. I acknowledged that most of what I was feeling was fear, and that it made sense that I would react poorly to that. I acknowledged that just breathing would not fix the problem, especially as I was about to head back into that stressful environment. What I could do, however, was promise to take care of myself once my day was over.

I leaned into the skills that I have been learning over the past year and I was able to recover (enough).

I say all of this for a reason beyond bragging. I say this because if you are reading this, it is probably not the first time you’ve thought about how you could improve yourself. You have probably listened to podcasts, read books, or watched TED talks. You know more skills than you give yourself credit for simply because you care.

There is not one single skill that will make you resistant to fear or embarrassment. I threw everything I had at my stuff and honestly, it was a bandaid that got me through until I could rest and recover. That being said, it was a bandaid that I did not have a year ago.

Maybe I do say this to brag because I am really proud of myself. It is so validating to see that despite the challenges that I had faced without a toolkit in the past, I at least have the tools to limp through now. My hope is that I can share those skills with you or encourage you to go out in search of those skills on your own.

Best of luck, my darlings!

Zoe

**Femme Futures Cooperative Founding Principles**

💚 **Mission**: The mission of Femme Futures is to create a community space for young professionals who identify as over-achievers and activists to generate collective success by providing resources and platforms to thrive in challenging workplace environments.

💙 **Vision**: To contribute to a world where driven individuals are equipped with the tools, guidance, and connections to overcome systemic barriers, fully utilize their talents, and enact positive change in their organizations and communities.