

Sequel to leading with inner agility

In the month since I posted [Leading with inner agility](#) on *Letting go. Stepping up.* leaders have shared with me their experiences of working with the idea of developing their inner agility. Their questions have prompted today's post in which I delve deeper into practical ways to strengthen your inner agility.

As a leader, you have your lens through which you see situations and personal and professional ways of responding that you have learned over many years.

To improve your coping mechanisms, you need to fortify your mental muscles by combining your intellectual acuity with emotional strength and mindfulness. Doing this will help you adapt confidently, quickly and decisively in the face of uncertainty and complexity – you can read more about dealing with volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous circumstances (VUCA) in my post [Leadership in a \(prolonged\) crisis](#) and in short, becoming a transformational leader.

Four practical tips

Using these practical tips effectively and effortlessly requires practice and reflection. It's all-too-easy to slide back into the comfort of old ways. My advice is to pick one or two and work on using them at every opportunity. As you do this, reflect on how you feel, think and act at the time: What went well? Why? How did I feel? What will do differently next time? Share with others what you are seeking to improve. Invite them to observe you closely and give you feedback. Like an athlete, you need to be consciously disciplined.

1. **Stop and count to 10** All-to-often, when you are fearful of the unknown and anxious about possible adverse outcomes, you act too quickly. Thinking "I have to do something" rushes you into action without first defining the problem, considering all options and considering possible unintended consequences.



To slow down your reaction and create mind space, stop and deliberately count to 10. Breathe in and count (1), breathe out and in again on the count of (2). This takes longer than you realise and clears your mind, breaking the commotion

around you.

2. **Ground yourself** JRR Tolkien, of Lord of the Rings fame, wrote 'Deep roots are not reached by the frost' by which he meant that thinking and behaving in a values-based manner grounds and protects you. This focuses you on what's most important and allows you to be both part of and separate from the situation. In Tolkien's metaphor, your deep roots are your values protect you being caught up in the eddies of the situation.



3. **Always stay open** Listen! is easy to say but much harder to do well and consistently.



Only by suspending your own beliefs and judgement can you be truly open to what someone else is saying to be able to move from a place of not knowing.

Leaders don't have to be right and don't have to know everything. Great leaders listen by exercising their curiosity and [emotional intelligence](#).

4. **Play the long game** The McKinsey [authors](#) use a metaphor for how to play the long game. They say don't look through the window at the thunderstorm outside (your immediate business problem) when you need to go out. Rather, look up the weather forecast (business trends) when deciding what to do. Playing the long game reduces anxiety caused by short-term concerns.



More on this topic

- a) [Leading with inner agility](#) – which draws a 2018 McKinsey Quarterly article by Sam Bourton, Johanne Lavoie and Tiffany Vogel, and
- b) [Leadership in a \(prolonged\) crisis](#) – which builds on Harvard Business Review articles published in 2009-2011 reflecting on the GFC