

LESSON FIVE

YOU-TURN IN ACTION: STAYING CENTERED WHEN YOUR PARTNER IS OFF-BALANCE

*You ask me to enter,
But then you make me crawl
And I can't be holding on
To what you got
When all you got is hurt*

—Bono, *One*

IN TODAY'S MEDITATION, you'll be guided into a relaxed state by first focusing on your body's sensations. Then I'll prompt you to bring your attention to your partner. The goal is for you to continue to stay in a state of mindful awareness, just noticing the sensations that arise in your body, moment-to-moment, as you introduce the image of your partner. In other words, you'll make a you-turn.

In the last stage of this course—days 11 through 15—I'll be showing you how to lead with your vulnerability—trusting its raw power to move your partner and bond you together, without a lot of force or effort on your part. But leading with your vulnerability first requires that you have full awareness of and control of your stress response. And we typically lose this control because our executive functioning Self literally shuts down when we're stressed or afraid.



Learning at a Glance

- How the you-turn helps you “let go of the rope” in a tug-of-war conflict with your partner
- How to disengage your partner mindfully and re-engage after your level of stress is lower
- Where to focus your energy and attention when it's not productive to focus on your partner

5 Steps of the You-Turn

1. **Temporarily let go of the idea that your partner needs to change.**

- Accept the reality that you're getting stuck in tug-of-war conflict with your partner and temporarily "let go of the rope."
- Engage your (non-literal) right brain and relax your goal-oriented left brain (see Lesson Two).
- Trust that you can revisit your left-brain expectations and agenda, but not until you've reduced the level of tension between you and your partner.

2. **Instead of fixating on your partner, focus on *your* reaction (behavior, emotions, thoughts) and physical state.**

- Use the COLA qualities (curiosity, openness, love, and acceptance) to bring a mindful awareness to your reaction(s).
- Call a time-out from further interaction with your partner to avert escalation.
- Set aside distractions and find a quiet place to sit and direct your focus inside yourself.
- Monitor your body's stress response (elevated heart rate, sweaty palms, tense muscles, etc.), using COLA to help trigger the relaxation response. (Using a simple 10 or 20-minute guided relaxation, like the Lesson One meditation, will help you with this step.)
- As your body relaxes, look for the re-emergence of your big mind Self (awareness of your awareness).

3. **Identify your secondary (protective) emotions and relax them**

- Identify the parts of you that are most triggered by your partner (your protective secondary emotions).
- Focus intentionally on giving COLA to these protective parts of you. COLA will naturally tend to lower your guard, so to speak. Intentionally think of "disarming" your protectors and ask them to step aside (imagining parts of you figuratively, in the third person, will help you engage more of your social, right brain capacity).



TIP: The more you can engage your figurative right brain in step three, the better. You may want to use the Conductor image mentioned in Lesson Four to help with this. As the Conductor, ask your protective parts to step aside and allow you to feel the feelings they are guarding. These primary emotions that are behind a protective secondary emotion can be thought of as “exiled” feelings.

4. **Feel and ride-out your primary emotions.**

- Identify the feelings you have without the protective mask of your secondary reactions.
- Focus on sending COLA qualities to these exiled parts of you.
- Notice the positive feelings that emerge from having a relaxed, accepting attitude toward parts of you that are normally carrying the burden of feeling unwanted, criticized, or shamed.

If you're feeling curious, open, loving, and accepting of your primary feelings, you'll be able to ride them out and feel lighter and more free afterward. Without the stress or shame that normally gets associated with our exiles, these more primitive emotions often have the spunkiness of a younger version of you.

Feeling primary emotions combined with COLA can have a rejuvenating and energizing effect, and yet these emotions inherently carry risk—an authentic primary emotion shared with your partner is an unguarded state and has no strings attached. Most people must be prepared to process and release (ride out) memories of hurt and distress that are associated with being vulnerable, unguarded, and open. But doing this work (on your own or in therapy) is a necessary and rewarding part of becoming the kind of partner your partner will feel safe bonding with at an intimate, unguarded level.

5. **Re-engage your partner with more confidence, clarity and compassion**

- Steps 1–4 should help you feel substantially more relaxed, self-confident, and less prone to blaming or criticizing your partner. If you feel stuck here, it's ok. Many, many couples struggle with this step even with professional help. If you think you're ready for personal coaching or counseling on this or other steps, you may want to read a book I wrote which is a consumer's guide to couples therapy called *Love Under Repair: How to Save Your Marriage and Survive Couples Therapy*.
- Take a leadership (Big Mind) role and reframe your frustration/anger, directing it at your own ineffective, protective reactions—instead of at your partner. For

example, you might say, “I want to ask for what I need without putting you down or defending myself. I’m sorry for hurting you, and I want to find a way to be more selfless but also be myself.” Or “I’m no longer going to tolerate how I blame you to hide my hurt over feeling rejected. It’s not fair to you, and it undercuts my ability to be more present with you and benefit from all the good that you bring to my life.”

- Express a willingness to listen and admit to having a defensive/protective reaction.
- Empathize about possible hurt that your protective reaction may have caused.
- Be content to take one good step toward a positive, respectful interaction, rather than solving everything all at once.

It’s counter-instinctual to be relaxed with our vulnerability—for example, your need for acceptance or affirmation, or your dreams and wishes. The only way to be relaxed *and* vulnerable at the same time is to have prior exposure to the situation *WITHOUT* feeling stressed. How do you do this? When we first fall in love, the neuro-chemical cocktail of endorphins makes this easy. But once we’re locked into a power struggle with our loved one (which at some point is inevitable), we often need some way to transcend the intense emotional stress that arises. Even if you’re getting good support from a professional counselor, your counselor isn’t at your side coaching and modeling effective behavior to stop the conflict and make good repairs. You need to mentally rehearse the way out of conflict—*when you’re not in the heat of conflict itself!* That’s why this course is designed to give you lots of time to mentally rehearse the you-turn. The end result is that you gain a new capacity to take responsibility for your emotional reactions and make a positive contribution to your relationship, even under the great stresses that befall all relationships.

I’ll illustrate what the you-turn looks like in real life, with the story of Courtney and Tim.

Life Lesson: Tim Practices the You-Turn

Courtney desperately wants her partner, Tim, to be more interested in her career. She’s going through a stressful management transition, and could really use Tim’s support. She’s mentioned that she’s tried to talk to Tim about work several times, but Tim isn’t getting the message. Typically, her reminders become prods, and her prods become louder and more sarcastic, until finally Tim does respond—but he’s angry and defensive. It’s not the kind of attention Courtney wants from Tim, but she’s stumped about how else to get through to Tim besides getting negative.

Tim and Courtney have become habitually tense when they're around each other. Both have mental habits that cause them to focus negatively on the other person's flaws while minimizing their own contribution to their dissatisfaction. They easily get sucked into a left-brain mode of interacting, where their executive Selves are biased toward critically evaluating each other's actions and words. Courtney's left-brain logic tells her that since Tim isn't responding, she should persist until he does respond. Tim's left-brain logic tells him that since he's confused about why Courtney is getting upset, he shouldn't respond until it becomes more clear what he should do. Both of them can feel the tension and distress in their bodies, putting their brains' thalamus—the brain's inner gatekeeper, which filters irrelevant information—out of order, *further* biasing their attention toward only negative information. Fortunately, Tim remembers to use the mindfulness practice of the you-turn, and by doing so he introduces a radical shift in their negative pattern.

According to the you-turn principle, any time Tim thinks Courtney is in the wrong and finds himself in a power-struggle with her, he should pay more attention to himself than to Courtney. This puts Tim in a tricky spot since she already thinks he's ignoring her. But Tim has completed this course and knows from previously learning about leading with vulnerability that he can be confident with the end result of the you-turn, even if it seems counter-initiative at first.

First, Tim has to acknowledge that he's tired of his own response to Courtney. So, rather than voicing his upset with Courtney, he demonstrates leadership, and re-frames his upset in terms of himself. He might say something like this: "I'm really tired of always finding myself on the retreat from you. You really don't deserve this from me. I'd like to take a new step that I haven't taken before. Give me 30 minutes to come back to you after I've sorted out what's happening inside of me."

The protective part of Tim would much rather focus critically on Courtney's habit of attacking him. But this would be unproductive and would distract them from the heart of the matter, which is that they both long for a deeper and easier connection with each other. Tim remembers that his thalamus is biasing information about Courtney to be negative, and engages his executive Self to set aside his defensiveness.

Now that Tim has taken a time out from the fight with Courtney, he takes the second step of the you-turn, which is to apply the COLA principles to his mental and physical reaction. He turns off his phone and closes the door to the bedroom so he won't be distracted. He notices a sick feeling in his gut and tightness in his shoulders. Using his breath, he imagines breathing into his belly and shoulders while extending permission and acceptance to these parts of his body. He feels his heart rate begin to slow and notices a soothing, tingling sensation run up his spine. After only a few minutes, Tim's parasympathetic nervous system responds to being summoned.

Turning his attention to his thoughts, Tim notices the most prominent voice inside him is angry that Courtney isn't giving him a chance to support her. Driven by his protective stress-response, the anger feels justified and doesn't want to back down. Tim is able to feel his anger, but, by using his executive Self, he's also able to step out of his anger and observe it. Rather than judging his anger or trying to make it go away, Tim is able to extend compassion and openness to his anger from his big mind self. This is an example of "permissive focusing," described in Lesson Four. He imagines that his breath is nurturing and caring for his angry part and immediately feels a relief. Almost as if Courtney were right there hugging him and saying, "I'm sorry Tim," he feels a rush of endorphins as his brain's empathy circuit lights up. Amazingly, Courtney isn't even there!

Tim still knows it's important to tell his side of the story about his feelings and needs, but he can now approach Courtney with more patience and a deeper feeling of trust that—despite her state of distress—she's also there for him and will be caring and supportive of him once she regains her "right" mind. By taking a little bit of extra time to reflect on his reaction using COLA, Tim disarmed his anger, anger that he wasn't noticing moments ago because he was too busy focusing on Courtney. At first, Courtney was skeptical that Tim wasn't really just avoiding her again as usual. But once she realized that he needed some time to get into *his* right mind, she was deeply relieved and was able to greatly soften toward Tim.

 **You may now proceed to listen to the Lesson Five meditation.**

After completing this meditation, turn to the next page to complete the Lesson Five journal and reflection questions.  



Lesson Five—Journal Questions:

1. Write down the activity you were doing right before beginning the meditation.

2. What feelings or thoughts were you aware of prior to the meditation? (For example, you might have felt distracted, stressed, confused, tired, or been struggling with a problem at work or with your kids, or rehashing an argument with your partner.) Just jot down enough information to record, generally, what mental state you were transitioning from to start the meditation.

3. How stressed or relaxed did you feel before you started the meditation?

(Overwhelmed with stress) 1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 (Totally relaxed)

4. How stressed or relaxed did you feel after the meditation?

(Overwhelmed with stress) 1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 (Totally relaxed)



Lesson Five—Reflection Questions

What was the stress trigger that you imagined when I asked you to imagine your partner walking into the room you're in?

1. Name or describe the kind of first response, protective reaction(s) you felt. These can be feelings, thoughts, or sensations in your body.

Rate the degree you felt yourself immersed or overwhelmed in this protective/defensive reaction when you thought about a difficult moment with your partner. In other words, were you able to separate from the emotional event inside of you or did the reaction you had completely eclipse your feelings?

(Immersed in reaction) 1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 (Unblended from reaction)

2. If your initial emotional reaction to your partner subsided (you rode the wave of the emotion without fighting it, and the intensity decreased), what new parts of you (thoughts/feelings/sensations) emerged? Often these feelings are more primitive than our first responder emotions. For example, if your initial anger, defensiveness, or aversive reaction subsided, were you able to feel more of your core, vulnerable feelings (primary feelings)? Examples of primary feelings are excitement, joy, surprise, fear, shame, hurt, or sadness.

Rate how immersed (blended) you felt with your core/primary feelings?

(Immersed in reaction) 1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 (Unblended from reaction)



LESSON FIVE ITEM CHECKLIST:

- Watched Lesson Five video introduction
- Read Lesson Five workbook chapter
- Completed Lesson Five audio meditation
- Completed Lesson Five journal and reflection questions

Note: Remember, you have 21 days to complete the 15 lessons.