

PAUSE

The foundation for everything

THE SITUATION

You're about to perform: an important pitch, a difficult conversation with an employee or a critical question from senior management. Your heart is pounding, and your mind goes blank.

THE KEY INSIGHT

You can't always think your way to calm. But you can act your way there.

Under pressure, the brain's alarm system takes over. It reacts in about 80 milliseconds, even to a social threat such as a difficult conversation or a sceptical look from senior management. Meanwhile the "CEO", the part of the brain responsible for overview and nuance, is pushed aside. Working memory can drop from about 90% to about 30%. You still know it. You just can't reach it.

DO IT

Breathe: 2 in, 4 out

In through your nose, longer and slower out through your mouth. It lowers your heart rate and stress hormones and gives your body the signal "I'm okay".

Take the strategic pause

Before you answer a difficult question: breathe out slowly and count to three. You come across as calm and have time to retrieve what you prepared.

Bring the CEO back

Going blank? Notice the colours in the room one by one, or count backwards from 150. It moves your focus from the alarm back to thinking.

COMMIT · YOUR PLAN

Choose one technique, and use it within the next 48 hours.

If _____

then _____

1 · TEST

Use the technique in a real situation.

2 · REFLECT

What worked? What did you notice?

3 · ADJUST

Adapt it, and test again.

Repetition is what turns it into a habit.