



Leadership Development Consultant

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THE INNER GAME OF LEADERSHIP

Helping Teams Perform Better Under Pressure : L.D Workshop

This presentation introduces a practical approach to improving employee performance by helping teams better understand and manage stress responses in high-pressure environments.

COMMON CHALLENGES IN MANY WORKPLACES

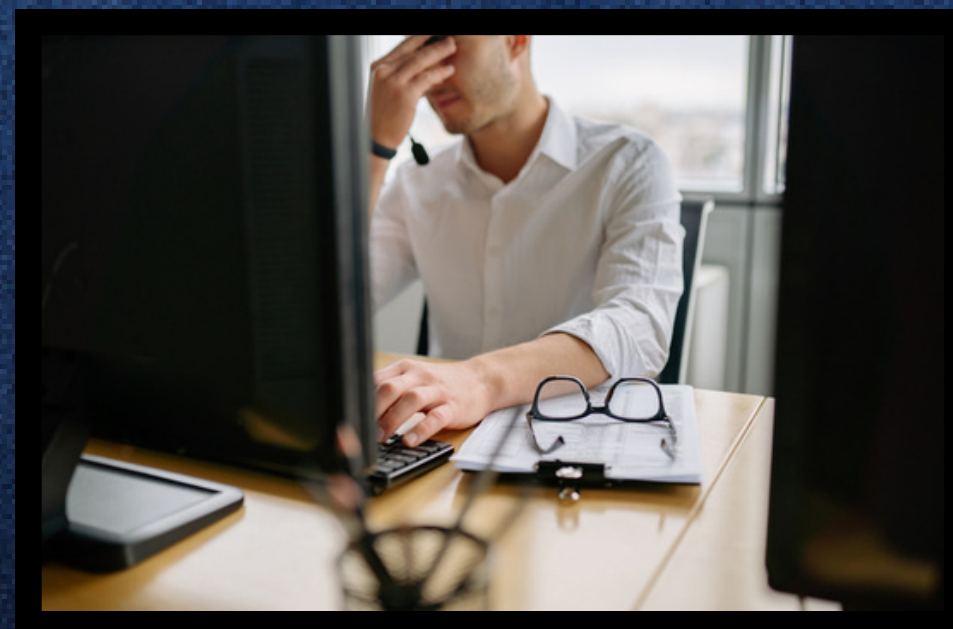
Communication breakdowns between employees

Declining productivity during stressful periods

Mistakes or rushed decisions under pressure

Workplace conflict or frustration

Burnout and absenteeism



These challenges are often treated as productivity problems,
but many times they are actually **stress-response problems.**

UNDERSTANDING WORKPLACE STRESS

STRESS IS THE BODY'S RESPONSE TO PRESSURE, UNCERTAINTY, OR PERCEIVED THREAT.

In the workplace, stress often appears when employees experience:

- Tight deadlines
- Heavy workloads
- Complex decision-making
- Customer demands
- Unexpected problems

When pressure increases, the body activates a stress response, which can affect thinking, communication, and decision-making.

Under high stress, people often react automatically rather than responding thoughtfully.

Sources: American Psychological Association (APA) – Stress Effects on the Body
National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) – Stress and Your Health
World Health Organization (WHO) – Mental Health in the Workplace
Harvard Health Publishing – Understanding the Stress Response

THE FINANCIAL IMPACT OF WORKPLACE STRESS

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT WORKPLACE STRESS **CREATES MAJOR BUSINESS COSTS:**

- Workplace stress is estimated to cost businesses hundreds of billions of dollars each year through lost productivity, absenteeism, and turnover.
- Stress-related productivity loss leads to billions of dollars in reduced output each year as employees struggle to perform effectively under pressure.
- Mistakes, accidents, and communication breakdowns caused by stress can result in costly errors, delays, and rework for organizations.
- Presenteeism — employees working while sick or mentally exhausted — can cost businesses around \$150 billion annually in lost productivity.

Sources: Harvard Business Review: Presenteeism costs businesses ~\$150B annually. CDC: Absenteeism-related productivity losses cost employers \$225B annually
Harvard Business Review: Presenteeism costs businesses ~\$150B annually. Harvard Business Review: Presenteeism costs businesses ~\$150B annually.

HOW STRESS AFFECTS WORKPLACE PERFORMANCE

When employees experience high levels of stress, several changes can occur that affect workplace performance.

Stress can influence:

- Attention and focus
- Decision-making ability
- Communication between employees
- Emotional reactions to challenges
- The ability to think clearly under pressure

Sources: Harvard Business Review – Presenteeism Costs Businesses ~\$150B Annually

American Institute of Stress – Workplace Stress and Organizational Costs

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – Absenteeism-Related Productivity Losses Cost Employers ~\$225B Annually

REACTION VS RESPONSE

HOW EMPLOYEES RESPOND TO PRESSURE

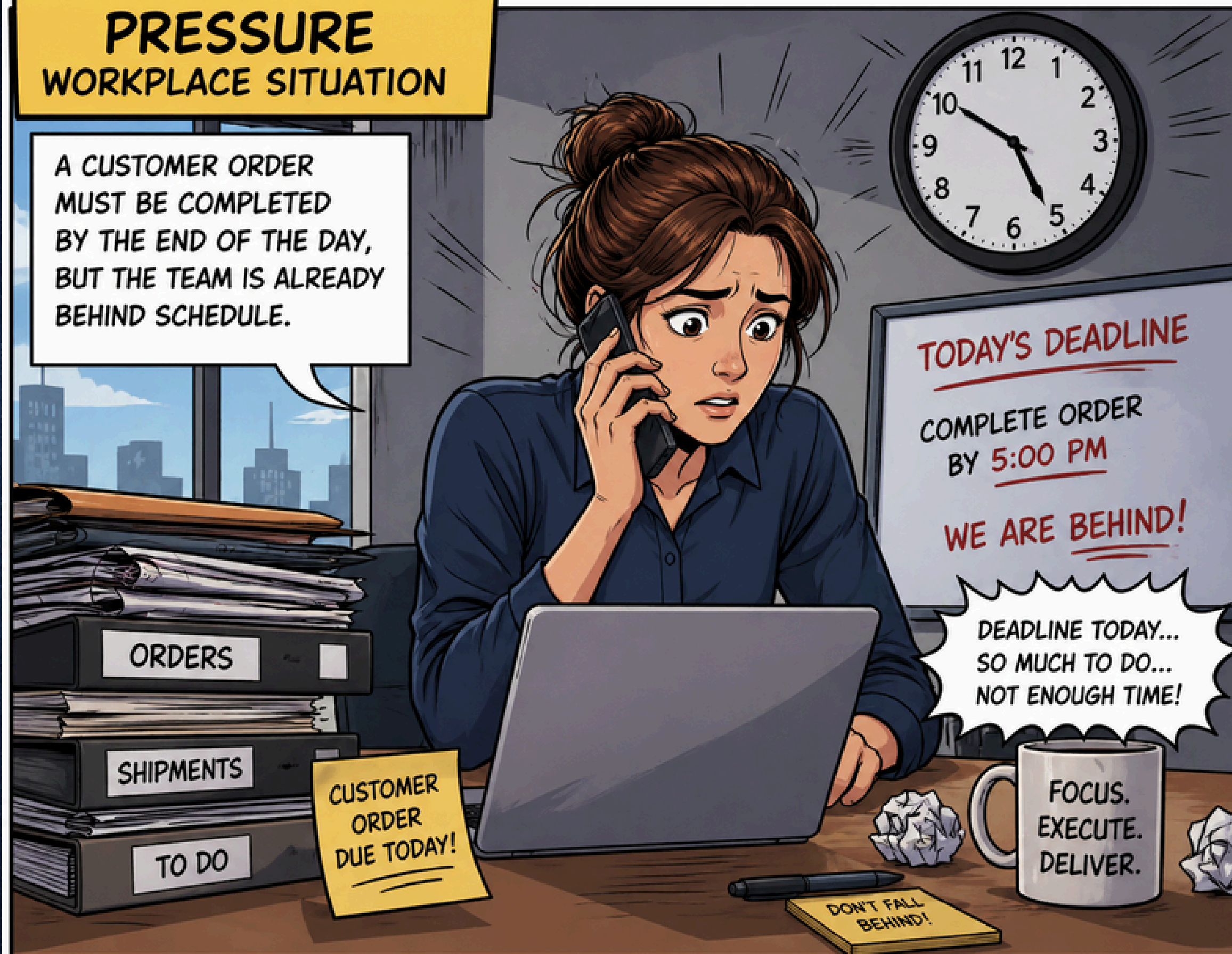
When pressure increases in the workplace, employees often move into automatic stress reactions.



Sources: American Psychological Association (APA) – Stress Effects on the Body
National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) – Stress and Your Health
World Health Organization (WHO) – Mental Health in the Workplace
Harvard Health Publishing – Understanding the Stress Response

PRESSURE WORKPLACE SITUATION

A CUSTOMER ORDER
MUST BE COMPLETED
BY THE END OF THE DAY,
BUT THE TEAM IS ALREADY
BEHIND SCHEDULE.



TODAY'S DEADLINE

COMPLETE ORDER
BY 5:00 PM

WE ARE BEHIND!

DEADLINE TODAY...
SO MUCH TO DO...
NOT ENOUGH TIME!

FOCUS.
EXECUTE.
DELIVER.

DON'T FALL
BEHIND!

CUSTOMER
ORDER
DUE TODAY!

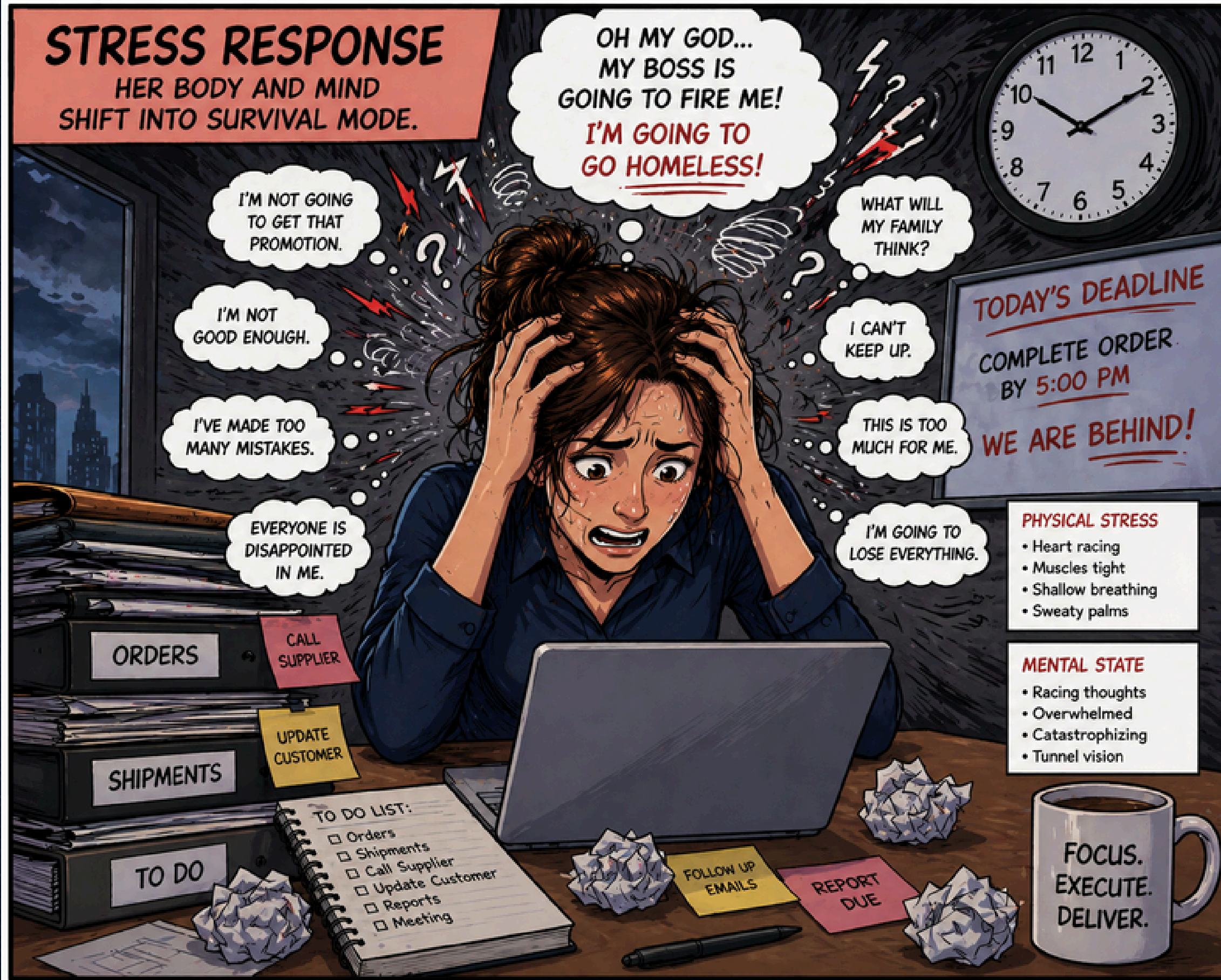
ORDERS

SHIPMENTS

TO DO

STRESS RESPONSE

HER BODY AND MIND
SHIFT INTO SURVIVAL MODE.



OH MY GOD...
MY BOSS IS
GOING TO FIRE ME!
**I'M GOING TO
GO HOMELESS!**

I'M NOT GOING
TO GET THAT
PROMOTION.

I'M NOT
GOOD ENOUGH.

I'VE MADE TOO
MANY MISTAKES.

EVERYONE IS
DISAPPOINTED
IN ME.

WHAT WILL
MY FAMILY
THINK?

I CAN'T
KEEP UP.

THIS IS TOO
MUCH FOR ME.

I'M GOING TO
LOSE EVERYTHING.

TODAY'S DEADLINE
COMPLETE ORDER.
BY **5:00 PM**
WE ARE BEHIND!

PHYSICAL STRESS

- Heart racing
- Muscles tight
- Shallow breathing
- Sweaty palms

MENTAL STATE

- Racing thoughts
- Overwhelmed
- Catastrophizing
- Tunnel vision

ORDERS

CALL
SUPPLIER

UPDATE
CUSTOMER

SHIPMENTS

TO DO

TO DO LIST:

- ☐ Orders
- ☐ Shipments
- ☐ Call Supplier
- ☐ Update Customer
- ☐ Reports
- ☐ Meeting

FOLLOW UP
EMAILS

REPORT
DUE

FOCUS.
EXECUTE.
DELIVER.

IMPULSIVE REACTIONS

Automatic. Emotional. Often Regrettable.

When stress takes over,
we react without thinking.

1. QUITTING OR WALKING OUT

Leaves the problem
behind—temporarily.



RESULT:

Burned bridges.
Financial stress.
Problem not solved.

2. BLAMING SOMEONE ELSE

Avoids responsibility
and creates conflict.



RESULT:

Damaged relationships.
Loss of trust.
Team tension increases.

3. LYING OR HIDING THE TRUTH

Feels like a quick fix
but causes bigger
problems later.



RESULT:

Erodes credibility.
Harder conversations
in the future.

4. RUSHING DECISIONS OR TAKING SHORTCUTS

Leads to mistakes
and more work.



RESULT:

Costly mistakes.
Rework. Delays.
More stress.

5. EMOTIONAL OUTBURSTS

Lets emotions take
control of behavior
and communication.



RESULT:

Hurts relationships.
Creates fear or distance.
Harder to resolve issues.

IMPULSIVE REACTIONS MAY FEEL GOOD IN THE MOMENT, BUT THEY CREATE MORE STRESS, MORE PROBLEMS, AND MORE REGRET.

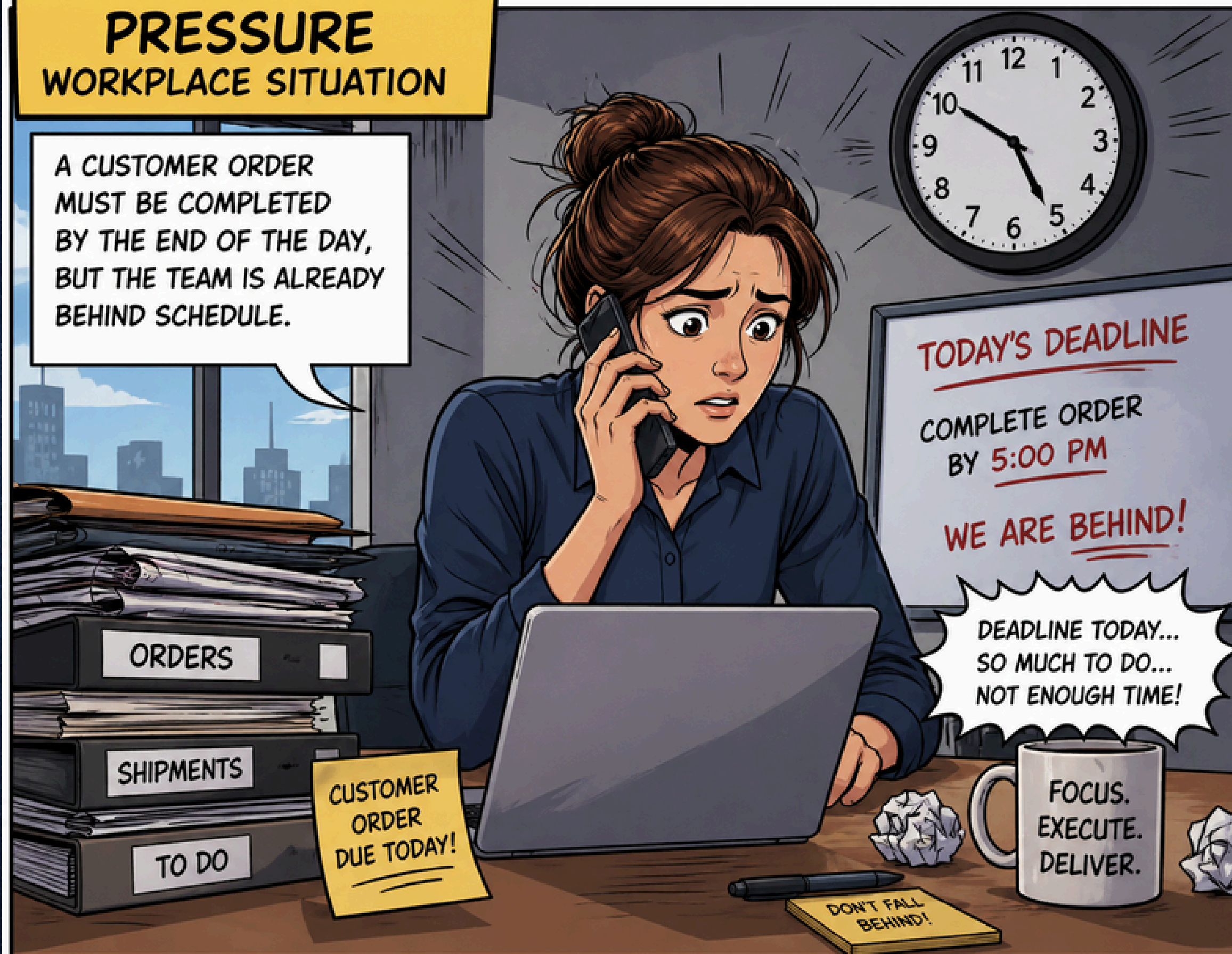
SELF - AWARENESS



ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO

PRESSURE WORKPLACE SITUATION

A CUSTOMER ORDER
MUST BE COMPLETED
BY THE END OF THE DAY,
BUT THE TEAM IS ALREADY
BEHIND SCHEDULE.



TODAY'S DEADLINE

COMPLETE ORDER
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SO MUCH TO DO...
NOT ENOUGH TIME!

FOCUS.
EXECUTE.
DELIVER.

DON'T FALL
BEHIND!

AWARENESS CHANGES THE OUTCOME

Same Pressure. Different Path.

1. PRESSURE

A customer order must be completed by the end of the day, but the team is already behind schedule.



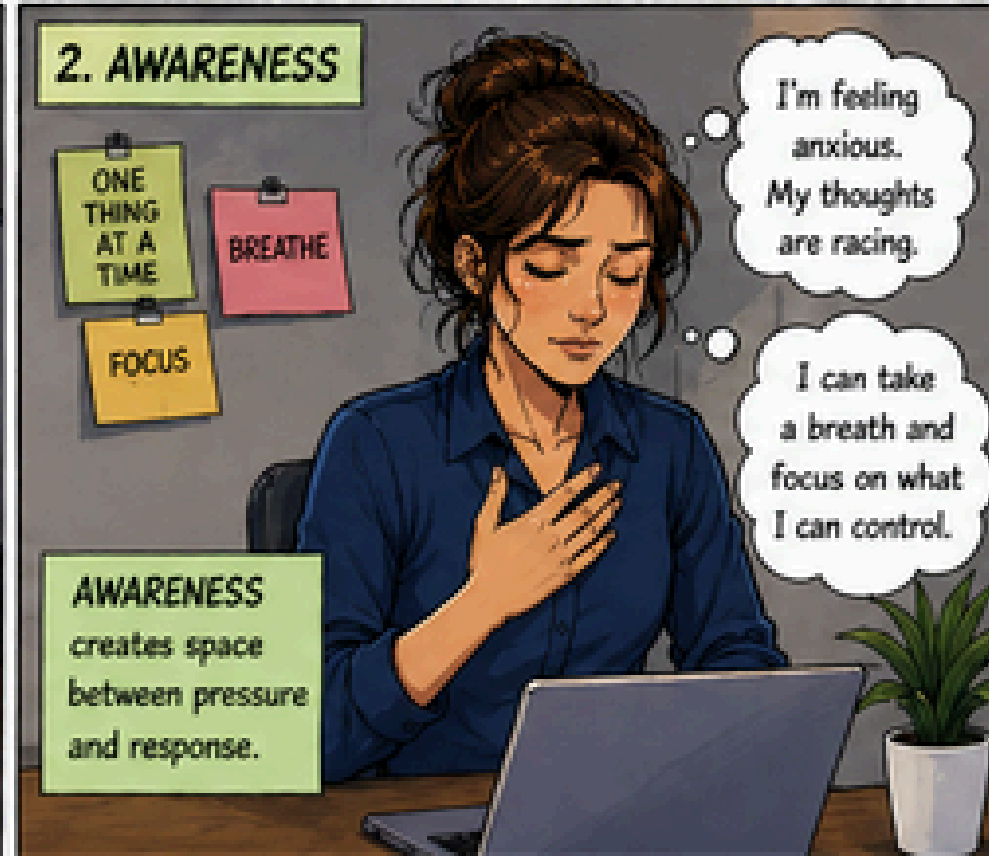
2. AWARENESS

ONE THING AT A TIME

BREATHE

FOCUS

AWARENESS creates space between pressure and response.



3. INTENTIONAL ACTION

She tackles one thing at a time and communicates clearly with her boss.

Plan:

1. Finish priority order
2. Update customer
3. Reassess timeline

Clear plan. One step at a time.



4. OPEN COMMUNICATION

I want to be transparent. I don't think we can meet the deadline for the full order. I'm having some anxiety today and my mind is telling me I'll get fired. I just wanted to be honest.



5. COLLABORATIVE SOLUTION

Let's prioritize the most important part of the order today. I'll communicate the new timeline to the customer.

Teamwork. Trust. Better solution.



6. BETTER OUTCOME

The order gets completed, the customer is satisfied, and stress stays manageable.

GREAT WORK TEAM!

- ✓ Order completed
- ✓ Customer satisfied
- ✓ Stronger trust
- ✓ Less stress



AWARENESS LEADS TO CHOICE.

Choice leads to better actions.
Better actions lead to better results.



CALM MIND



CLEAR COMMUNICATION



STRONGER RESULTS

WHY DOES SELF-AWARENESS WORK?

Self-awareness allows people to recognize what is happening inside themselves in moments of pressure.

When people are unaware of their internal reactions, they often operate on autopilot, reacting automatically to stress.

When people develop awareness, they can recognize these reactions as they happen.

This creates a small but powerful moment where they can pause and choose how to respond instead of reacting impulsively.

Sources: Frontiers in Psychology – Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation

National Institutes of Health (NIH) – Self-Awareness and the Brain

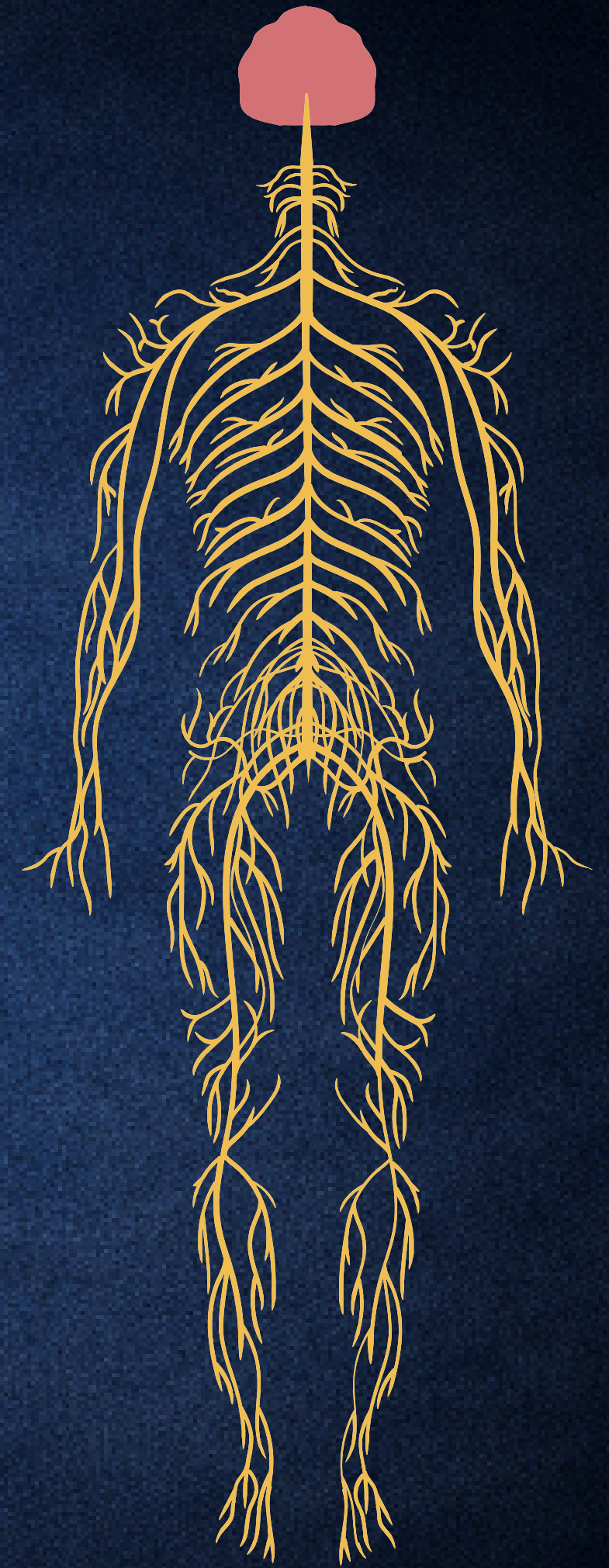
Harvard Health Publishing – Mindfulness and Emotional Regulation

American Psychological Association (APA) – Mindfulness Meditation: A Research-Proven Way to Reduce Stress

WHAT IS THE NERVOUS SYSTEM?

- The nervous system constantly scans the environment to determine whether situations feel safe or threatening.
- When it senses pressure or threat, it can activate a stress response that prepares the body to react quickly.
- In high-pressure situations, the nervous system can override clear thinking and push people into automatic reactions.
- This is why people sometimes say or do things under stress that they would not normally choose when they are calm.

Sources: National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) – Stress and Your Health
Harvard Health Publishing – Understanding the Stress Response
Nature Reviews Neuroscience – Stress Signalling Pathways that Impair Prefrontal Cortex Function



**WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING IN THE BRAIN &
NERVOUS SYSTEM ?**

HOW STRESS MOVES THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Our nervous system is always scanning for safety.
Pressure can shift us out of balance.



Awareness helps us choose our response. 🧠

Sources: National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Stress and Your Health, Harvard Health Publishing Understanding the Stress Response
Nature Reviews Neuroscience Stress Signalling Pathways that Impair Prefrontal Cortex Structure and Function, tephén Porges
— Polyvagal Theory (Frontiers in Integrative Neuroscience)

THE WORKSHOP



THE INNER GAME OF LEADERSHIP MODEL

Most leadership training focuses on external performance — tasks, targets, and results.

But workplace performance is also influenced by something deeper:

How individuals think, interpret situations, and respond under pressure.

The Inner Game of Leadership Model focuses on developing the internal skills that shape how people behave in real workplace situations.

When individuals become more aware of their internal reactions and learn how to manage them, they are able to communicate more effectively, collaborate better with others, and perform more consistently under pressure.

This model is built around five key pillars that support effective leadership and team performance.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF THE INNER GAME OF LEADERSHIP

1. Awareness
2. Regulation
3. Communication
4. Collaboration
5. Performance

PILLAR 1: AWARENESS

Employees learn to recognize:

- emotional reactions under pressure
- automatic behavior patterns
- how stress influences thinking and decisions

Awareness creates the space between reaction and response.

Workshop Example

Employees learn to recognize what stress actually feels like in the body.

For example, when someone begins to feel anger or frustration:

- jaw or teeth tighten
- shoulders and muscles tense
- breathing becomes faster

Recognizing these signals helps employees notice when their nervous system is becoming activated, allowing them to pause before reacting automatically.



PILLAR 2: REGULATION

Once employees recognize their internal reactions, the next step is learning how to regulate them.

Employees learn practical tools to:

- calm the nervous system
- regain mental clarity during stressful situations
- pause before reacting impulsively

Regulation allows individuals to return to a state where clear thinking and problem-solving are possible.

Workshop Example

During a stressful moment at work — such as a disagreement with a coworker or pressure from a deadline — employees learn how to:

- pause briefly before responding
- take slower breaths to reduce tension
- step back mentally from the situation

These tools help interrupt automatic stress reactions and allow individuals to respond more thoughtfully.



PILLAR 3: COMMUNICATION

Stress often disrupts communication in teams.

Employees learn how to:

- express concerns clearly
- address problems directly
- reduce misunderstandings between coworkers

Clear communication builds trust, accountability, and stronger teamwork.

Workshop Example

For example:

Instead of saying

“Why didn’t you finish this on time?”

Someone might say

“I’m feeling some pressure with the deadline. Can we look at how to prioritize this together?”

This shifts communication from reactive conflict to collaborative problem-solving.



PILLAR 4: COLLABORATION

Different people respond to stress in different ways.

Employees learn to recognize:

- different personality patterns
- different communication styles
- how stress amplifies behavioral tendencies

Understanding these differences helps teams work together more effectively.

Workshop Example

Under pressure, people often default to familiar patterns.

For example:

- some individuals become more controlling or directive
- others become quiet or withdrawn
- some become anxious and overly cautious
- others try to push forward quickly to solve the problem

When teams understand these patterns, they are less likely to misinterpret each other's behavior and more able to work constructively during stressful situations.



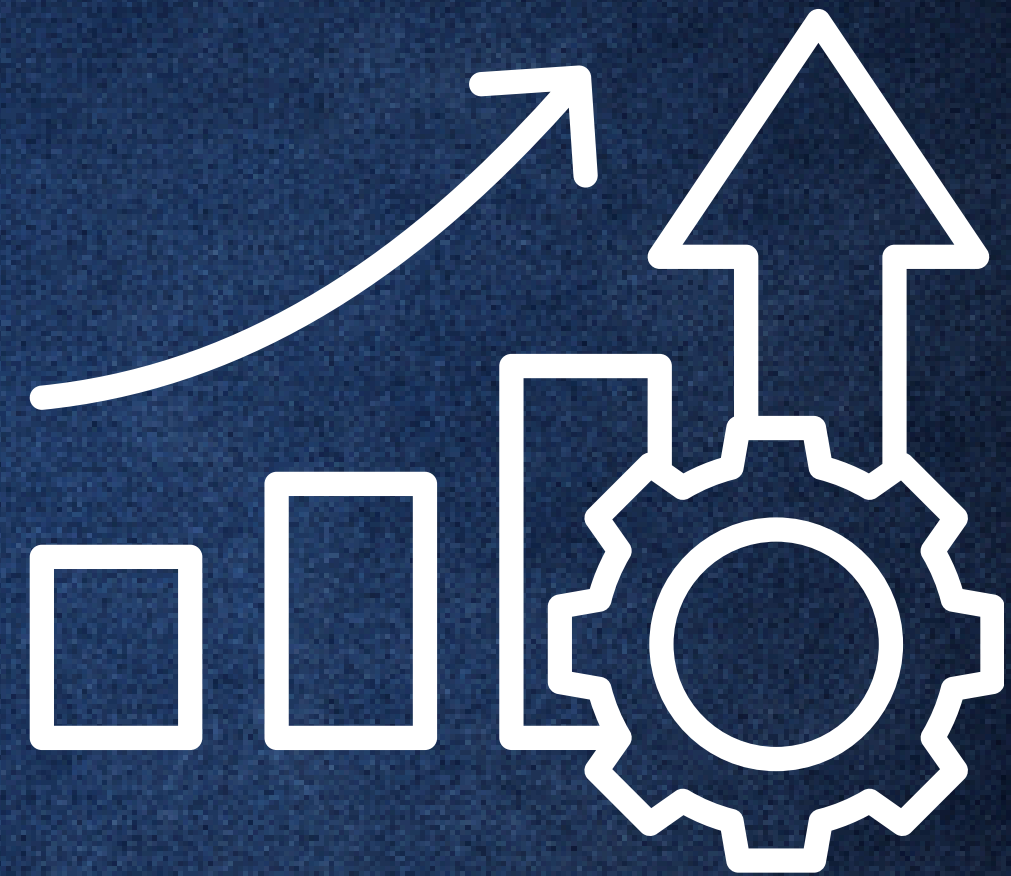
PILLAR 5: PERFORMANCE

When teams develop awareness, regulation, communication, and collaboration, performance improves naturally.

Employees become better able to:

- think clearly under pressure
- make thoughtful decisions
- communicate and collaborate effectively
- maintain focus during challenging situations
- solve complex problems more effectively
- think creatively and generate innovative solutions

When individuals are not constantly operating in reactive stress states, they gain greater access to clear thinking, creativity, and strategic problem-solving.



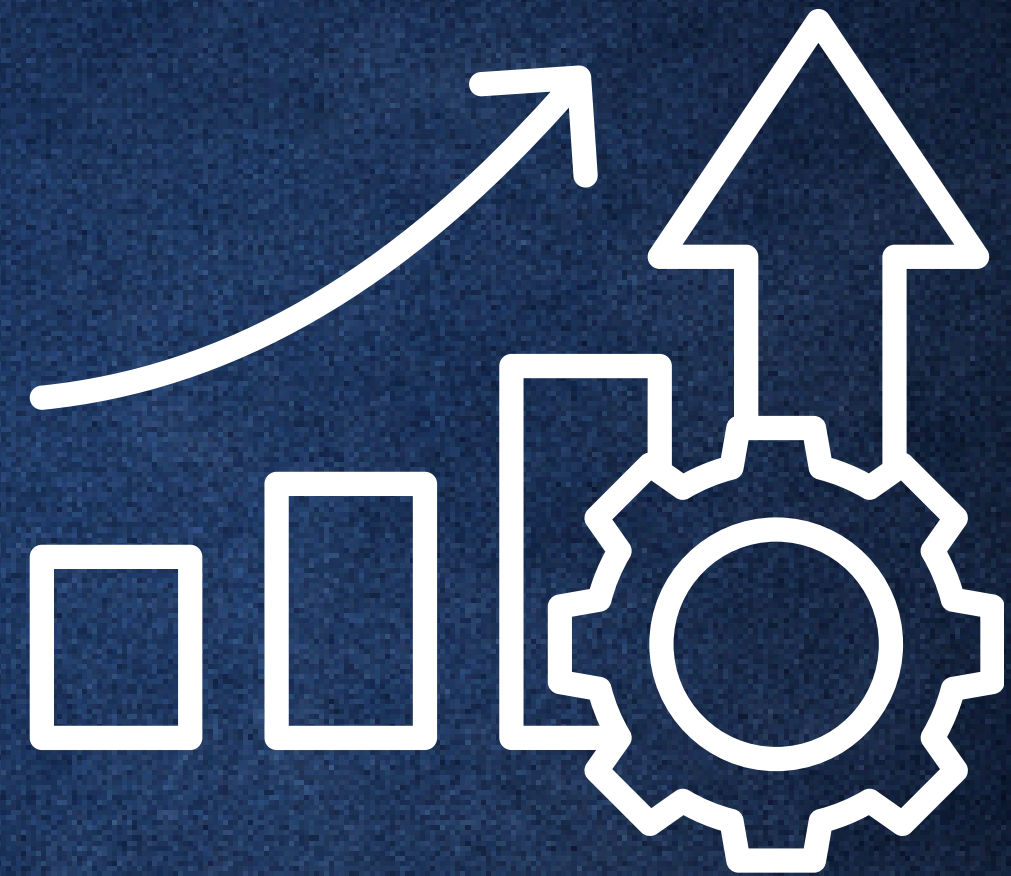
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WHY THIS MATTERS

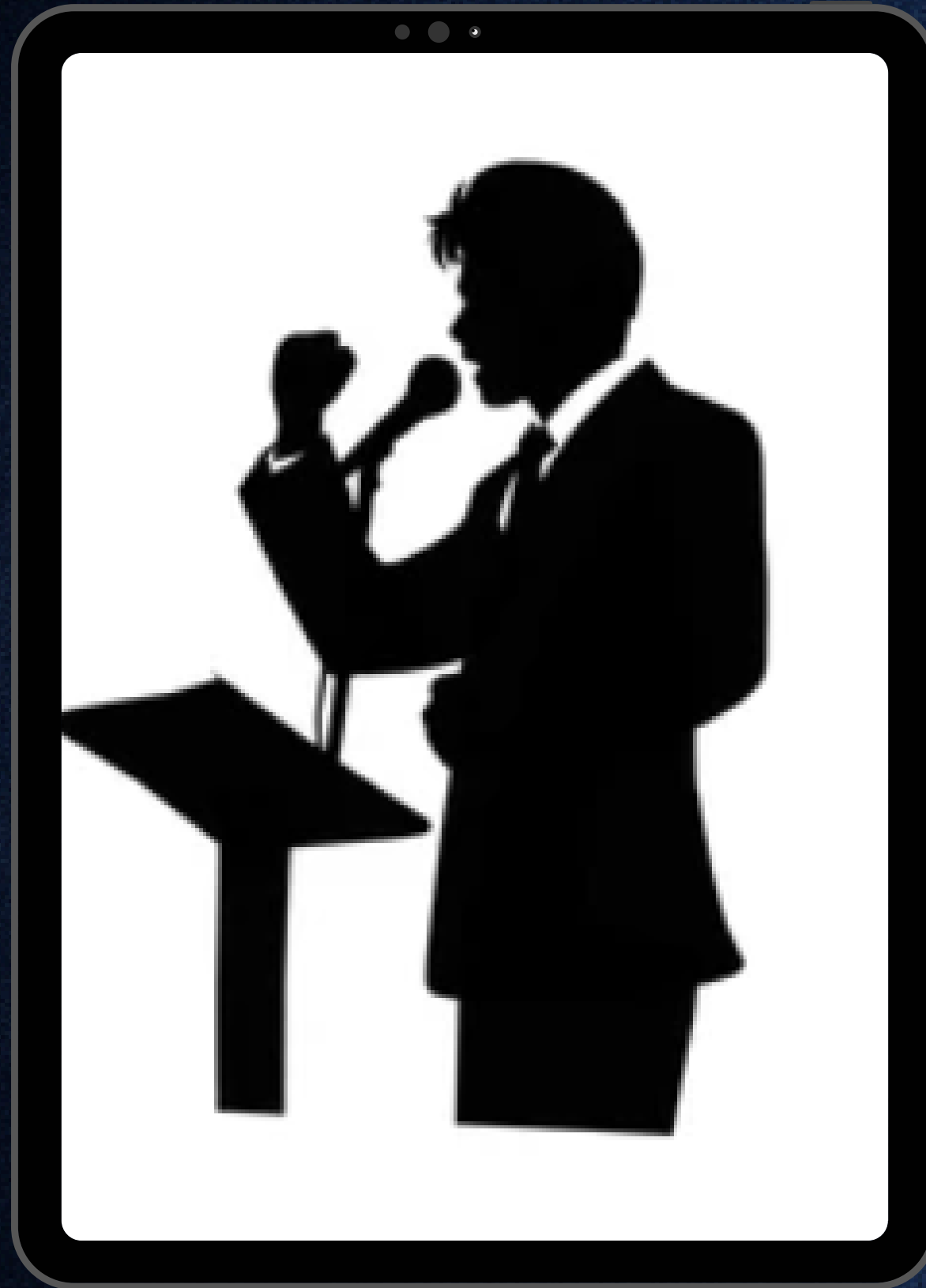
Most workplace challenges are not caused by a lack of intelligence or effort.

They often arise from automatic stress responses that influence how people think, communicate, and make decisions.

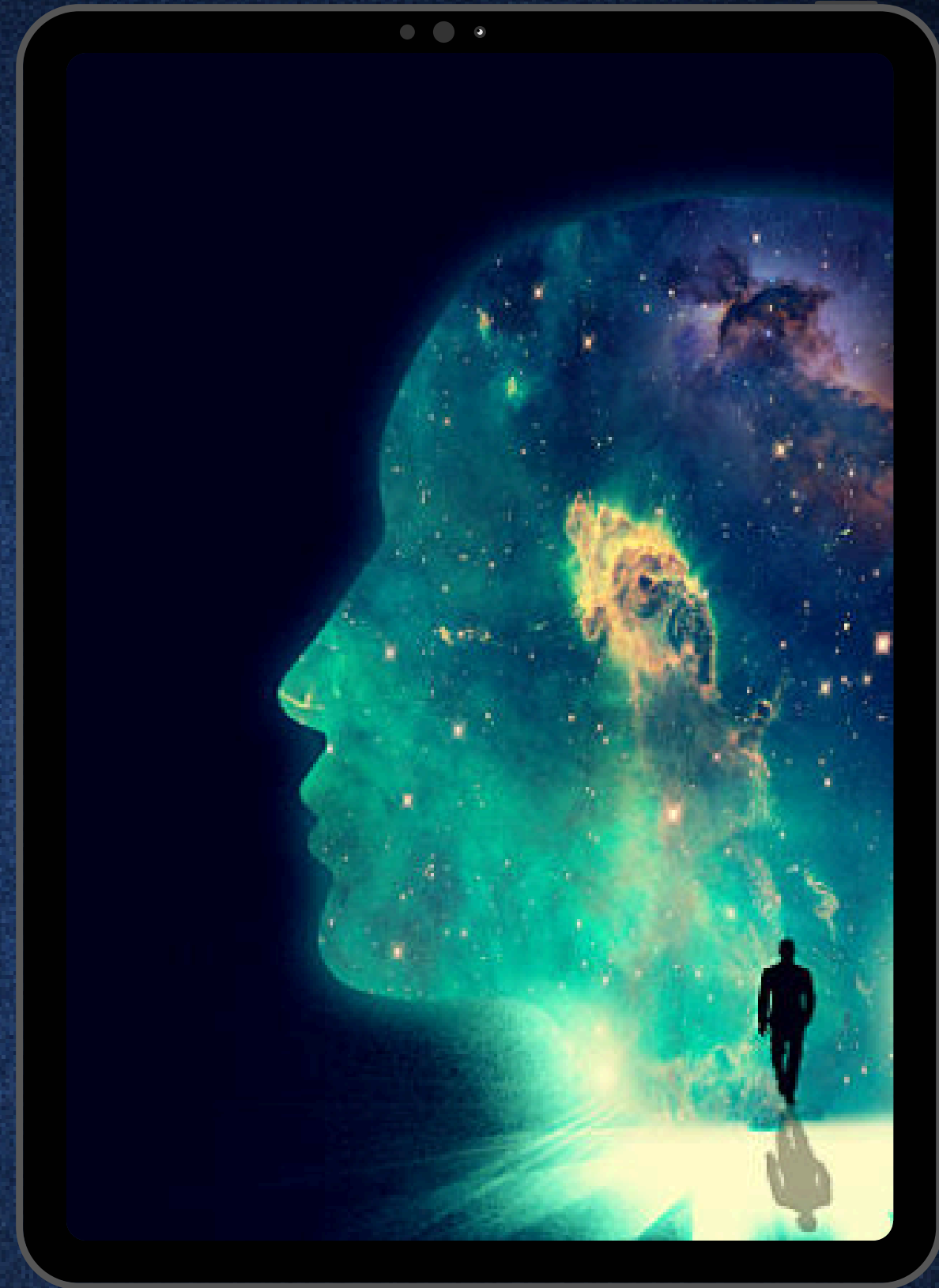
The goal of this model is not simply to change behavior temporarily.

It is to help individuals develop lasting awareness and practical skills that improve how they respond under pressure.

MOTIVATION



TRANSFORMATION



MOTIVATION PUSHES BEHAVIOR. TRANSFORMATION CHANGES IDENTITY.

TRANSFORMATION VS MOTIVATION

Many leadership programs focus on motivation and inspiration.

They introduce powerful ideas and frameworks. But when employees return to the pressures of daily work, those ideas can be difficult to apply in the moment.



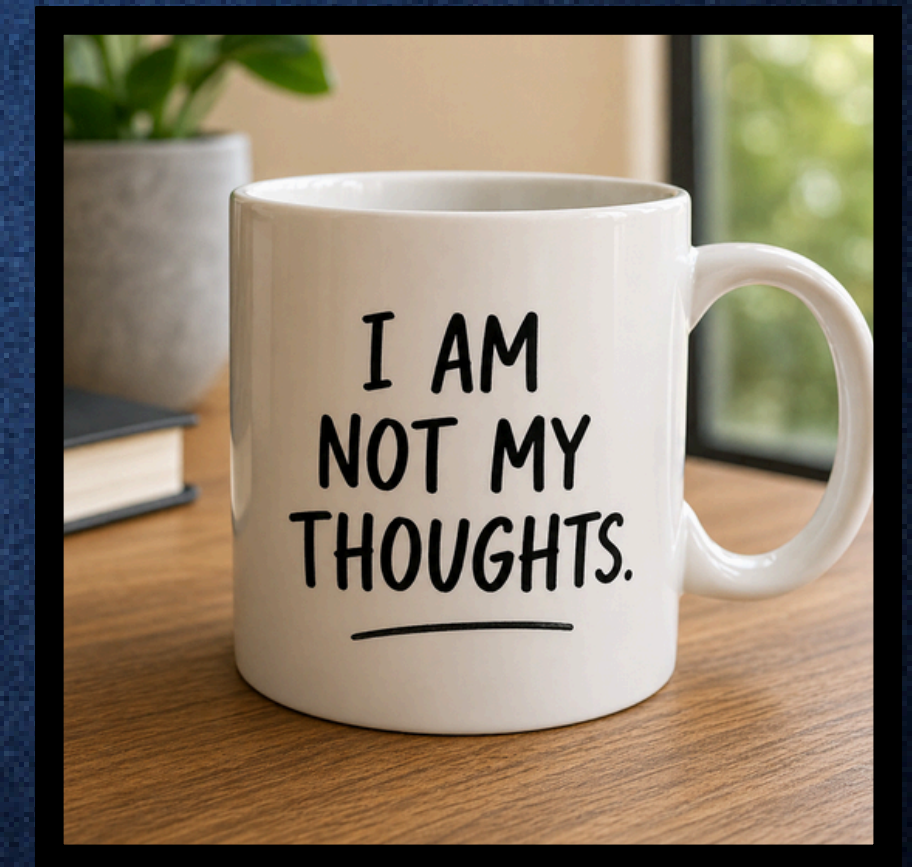
HOW TRANSFORMATION IS DIFFERENT

The Inner Game of Leadership workshop focuses on practical transformation.

Employees learn to:

- recognize internal reactions in real time
- understand how those reactions influence behavior
- apply tools that help regulate stress responses
- develop communication and collaboration skills that improve team performance

These skills are applied in real situations day by day as challenges arise in the workplace.



IMPACT ON TEAM PERFORMANCE

Over time, this leads to:

- stronger communication and collaboration
- improved decision-making under pressure
- higher quality of work
- increased productivity
- reduced stress-related absenteeism



HOW THE WORKSHOP WORKS

The Inner Game of Leadership workshop combines learning, discussion, and practical application.

Workshop Format

- 90–120 minute interactive workshop
- practical teaching of the Inner Game leadership model
- real workplace examples and guided discussion
- exercises that help employees recognize stress reactions
- tools employees can apply immediately in their daily work

Participants will:

- learn the Inner Game framework and the five pillars
- explore how stress responses influence workplace behavior
- analyze real workplace situations
- practice recognizing internal reactions in real time
- learn practical tools for managing stress and improving communication

This creates a practical learning experience rather than a lecture.



THE INNER GAME WORKBOOK

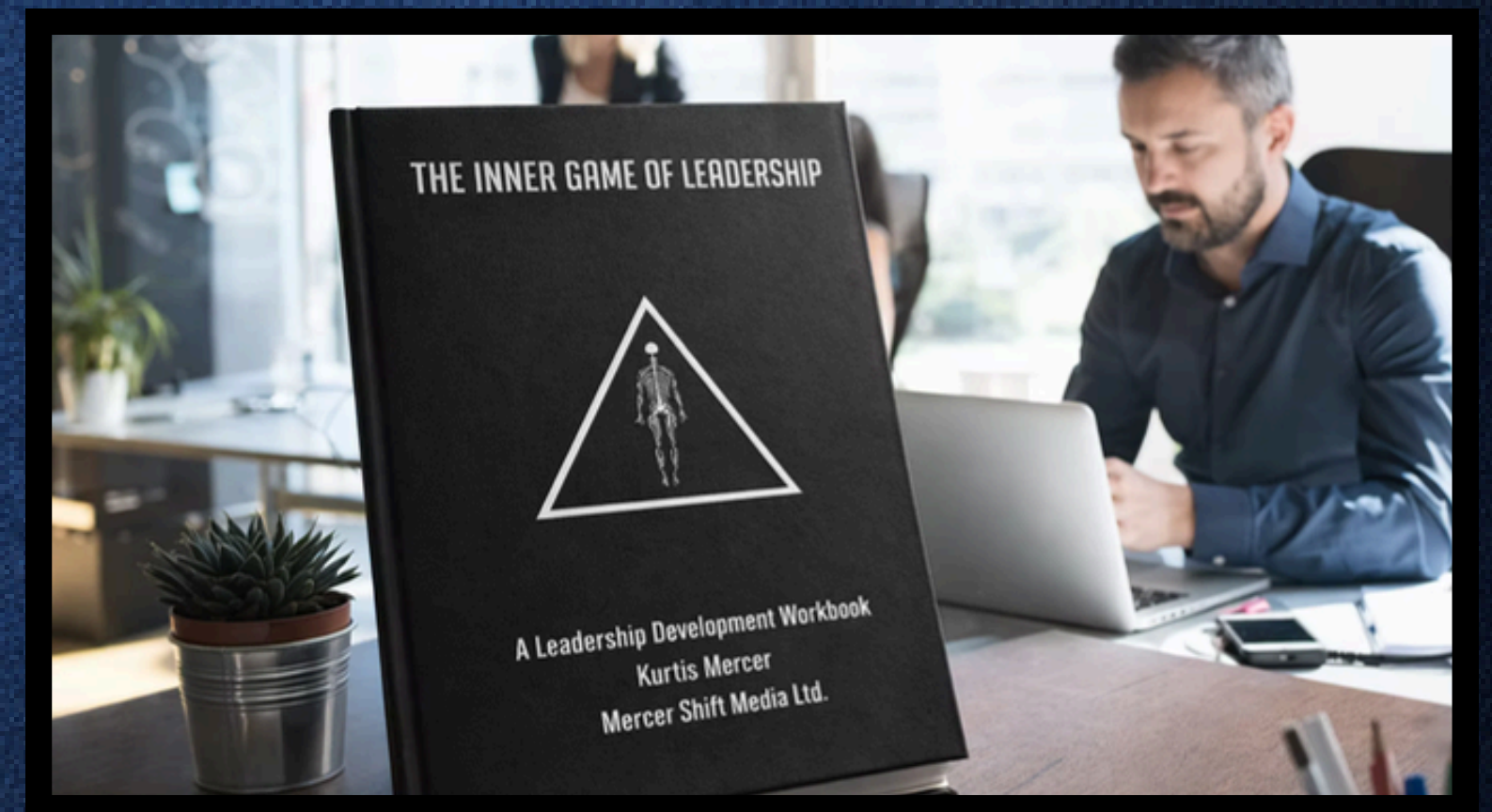
Each participant receives a 65-page workbook designed to help them apply the material in real workplace situations.

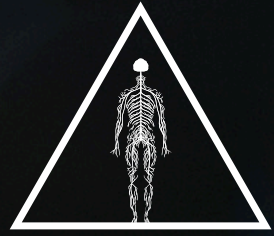
The workbook includes a structured outline with page references, allowing participants to easily revisit specific concepts whenever they need to refresh their understanding.

It guides employees through:

- recognizing stress reactions in real time
- understanding how internal states influence behavior
- applying practical tools introduced in the workshop
- reflecting on real workplace situations

This allows the learning to continue long after the workshop ends.





Leadership Development Consultant

Kurtis Mercer

THE INNER GAME OF LEADERSHIP

Helping Teams Perform Better Under Pressure : L.D Workshop

END OF PRESENTATION