

# Gotta Get a Better Body

## Reflections from a Coaching Perspective

by Karen Staib Duffy

As life's events unfold around us, we usually approach our daily challenges without much thought about our bodies. We are mostly unaware of how we are standing, sitting, breathing. As a culture, we are very cerebral. Outside of sports, we ignore our body and it just does whatever it does with no conscious choice involved. Yet, there are times when, by focusing specifically on what we are doing with our bodies, there is a process that allows us to make significant, even radical, changes in how we manage our most difficult problems or situations. When we can't seem to learn something or do what we say we want to do, we may not have the specific body needed for it. These are the moments when we gotta get a better body!

**“Our bodies must be in dynamic coherence with our thoughts and emotions.”**

### Basic Body Dispositions

The way that we hold energy in our bodies determines our disposition in approaching life's challenges. In the Ontological Coaching model by Newfield Network, there are five basic Body Dispositions: Determination, Openness, Stability, Flexibility, and Centeredness.

According to this model, our bodies must be in dynamic coherence with our thoughts and emotions. We can control each of these separately to tap into the best Body Disposition for a particular circumstance. This means we can use our body and our thoughts to create the most desirable emotional state for ourselves. By combining a way of standing or moving with a Phrase that captures the essence of what we want to feel, we can generate any of the five Body Dispositions.

Most of us have one Body Disposition which is dominant and with which we are very comfortable, but we can all increase our capacity to use all the Body Dispositions with time, attention and practice.

As an example, for Centeredness, stand still and very tall with shoulders back and head up. Breathe deeply several times. Center is where you go, not to stay, but to move into another disposition. To move into Determination, practice leaning forward with your body, harden your eyes, and focus intently. For Openness, lean back in your chair, soften your shoulders and eyes, and smile slightly. For Stability, make a repetitive movement like walking slowly and sinking into the ground with each step. For Flexibility, you can try standing on one foot while waving your arms around, to deliberately throw yourself off balance. The first three suggested actions can be done in a group setting. The latter two exercises would be better practiced in private and mentally visualized later when you need to shift.

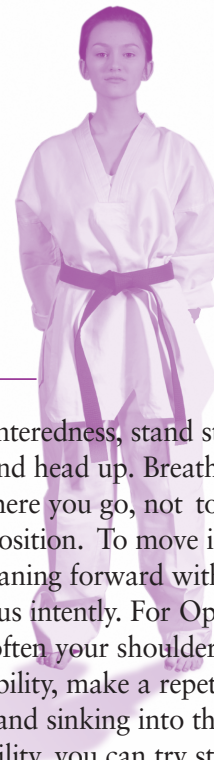
### Body of Choice

In addition to the basic Body Dispositions above, we can also design a specific “Body of Choice” for ourselves. This is a body that reflects more precisely how we want to act and feel in a particular situation.

For example, when someone is struggling to look confident when they are not, they typically lack the body to project that confidence. When we are in a situation that scares us, without our awareness, our body will move into a position to reflect that fear. We may find ourselves cowering, slumped over, head down, eyes wide, voice weak. On the other hand, in those situations where we feel quite confident, our body will be straight and tall, our gaze direct, our voice firm and strong. Recognizing these distinctions in body position, we can create a “Body of Confidence” to be called on whenever we need it.

To create the Body of Confidence, we start by remembering a time and place when we were confident. We visualize it and hold the image until we feel how we felt then. Next, we observe how our body has shifted its position. While we each express emotions a bit differently, there are some common themes. Let's say, for the sake of this example, we find our confident self stands up tall and very straight. Our shoulders are back and our head

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is held high. Our face is neutral. Our gaze is steady. We stand solidly on both feet, hands at our side. Make a note of these distinctions. It is the way we stand and move when we feel confident. We will call this position the Body of Confidence.

We then combine this physical expression of the Body of Confidence with a Phrase or word that captures the essence of this for us. It could be “I am confident” or “I can do this” or just “Confidence!” Each of us may choose the specific words that capture it best for us.

Now that we have identified the posture for the Body of Confidence and have the accompanying Phrase, we practice. If building a Body of Confidence is difficult for you, try playing music. Music can move us directly into a desired emotional state. “Jock rock” music, for instance, is designed to make you feel on top of the world, strong and confident, while other music might

## Deep Breathing

With our fast paced schedules today, stress is typically sustained at consistently high levels. This lowers the oxygen in our blood and we feel this as anxiety. We can use deep breaths to reset our physiology and communicate with our body. Breathing is obviously something we do all the time since it is necessary for staying alive, but we do it without focus or attention.

Conscious deep breaths are something we can control anytime, anywhere. It requires just a few seconds while we move into a more centered space and reset our focus and attention. Breathing deeply while we are in the middle of a stressful situation allows us to think more clearly, because the brain has more oxygen, and the levels of cortisol and adrenaline are lowered. These chemicals, while useful in short bursts, are highly destructive when their presence is unrelenting and excessive.

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capture sadness or joy. Select an upbeat, strong favorite recording, and observe how you are standing and moving while listening to it.

To practice our new Body of Confidence, we recreate it, at will and often, in low pressure situations. We do it until we can, in fact, shift how we feel. By practicing in low stress situations, like an athlete trains for a sport, we prepare ourselves to use it when the pressure is on and the stakes are high. For example, we can call upon it when we are put on the spot in a meeting, negotiating in a hostile situation, or asking for a promotion.

As we practice, we check whether the body position and phrase work well for us. Perhaps there is some nuance we want to change, to make it more powerful. For instance, the specific Phrase may change over time. A phrase such as “When I am not in control, I can tap into my intuition and glide” can become “When I am not in control, I can glide” and then, “Glide.”

The process outlined above can be used to create any number of Bodies of Choice. Other examples might include a Body of Relaxation for the weekend or evenings. This body could also enable you to get into the Zone, a space of relaxed alertness that leads to peak performance. You might also design a Body of Happiness, acting “as if” until you feel the way you want to feel.

In addition, when we become fearful or are startled, we often stop breathing for a short period of time. Typically, we are unaware of this. It might be just 10 seconds or a half a minute, but our body feels it. In these situations, we also breathe more shallowly. Over time, the lack of oxygen builds up and can become chronic. Martial arts and other defense training techniques teach us to breathe deeply and steadily as we confront a fearful situation. For those of us with maxed out schedules, high stress workloads, or difficult personal situations, this self-management tool is easily accessible and cumulatively powerful.

Mostly we do things in life because of how we want to feel. When we take a specific action, strive for a promotion or buy something, we are typically seeking to feel a certain way — competent, respected, or perhaps admired. The Toyota commercial, “Oh what a feeling!” captures this aspect perfectly. By consciously working with our bodies, we can create the desired feelings internally when we want them and not be as dependent on external events. Combining deep breaths with a pre-selected Body of Choice, we can rebalance and recenter deliberately at any time.

The next time you find yourself saying, “I can’t do this” or “This is so hard for me to learn,” stop and

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consider what you are doing with your body. Observe which of the Basic Body Dispositions you are in and whether it is the most optimal. Are you Determined when you need to be Open? Seeking Stability when

Flexibility might be the better approach? Maybe you even need to create a new, specific Body of Choice for yourself. In order to learn or do what you now find challenging, you gotta get a better body! ■



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