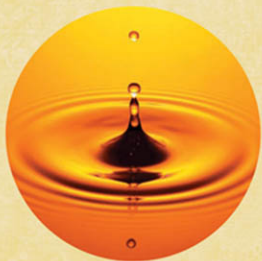


Foreword by MARK VICTOR HANSEN
Coauthor of *Chicken Soup for the Soul Series*

three deep breaths



Finding Power
and Purpose in a
Stressed-Out World

Thomas Crum

Author of *The Magic of Conflict* and *Journey to Center*

An Excerpt From

***Three Deep Breaths:
Finding Power and Purpose in a Stressed-Out World***

by Thomas Crumm
Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

Contents

Foreword

by Mark Victor Hansen

ix

Acknowledgments

xv

The Wrinkle

1

The Lift

7

The First Breath

13

Centering

23

A Master Teacher in Disguise

33

The Second Breath

41

Possibility

51

The Third Breath

57

The Mystery

69

The Journal

77

Practice, Practice, Practice

87

Afterword

93

About the Author

97

Foreword

The World Health Organization has called stress a worldwide epidemic. Surveys show that 75 to 90 percent of all visits to primary care physicians are for stress-related conditions! Job stress alone is costing us a fortune. According to a report from the American Institute of Stress, U.S. businesses pay 300 billion dollars a year in job-related stress costs and *that figure is expected to rise in the future.*

Science says that stress occurs whenever a significant change happens in your mind or body, or in the environment in which you live. It could have a positive or negative source—going on a vacation or having a fight with a colleague, buying a new home or being late for an appointment. Let's face it. In this ever-changing world of increased complexity, information overload, new technologies, time crunches, and relationship struggles—*there will be stress.* As you will discover in this parable about a man crazed by the complexity of modern life, we have a choice. We can allow stress to gnaw at our minds and bodies all the way to the doctor's office, or we can see it as an opportunity to become wiser, stronger, and more flexible, like an elite athlete stressing his body in daily workouts.

Once we know we have a choice, the direction we take is obvious: health over illness, joy over frustration. A thirty-year study at Johns Hopkins University involving one thousand men found that those who got upset over everyday stresses were about three times more likely to have a heart attack and six times more likely to have a stroke than those who took life in stride. As Epictetus says, “Man is troubled not by events themselves, but by the views he takes of them.”

So, how do we take a stressful life in stride? We know it can't be done just intellectually: when we are under stress or in conflict, *everything* is involved—our emotions, our bodies, our minds, our spirits. Our choices must be of a mind/body/spirit nature. Our choices must include the whole being.

Enter Tom Crum.

I first learned for myself about Tom when I heard him speak at the National Speakers Association. His unique and brilliant thinking, his energetic aikido demonstration, and his pureness of intention wowed my soul. I recognized that he was a world changer and dedicated to doing immense amounts of good. I knew from his history that he had been singer John Denver's bodyguard, mentor, and best friend. I became an instant fan, friend, student, and reader of everything that Tom did.

Tom is a seminar leader, aikido expert, and the author of two books, *The Magic of Conflict* and *Journey to Center*. Tom Crum helps people develop the total mind/body/spirit approach needed to turn stress into power and purpose.

Aikido is a Japanese form of self-defense that focuses on the energy of an attacking opponent to render his attack harmless, without doing harm, even to the attacker. “If

someone goes to punch you,” Tom teaches, “don’t try to block the punch. When you do that, you are using resistance—your own power and strength against the attacker’s. That sets up a win/lose confrontation.” Tom shows people how to step aside with an accepting and pivoting movement, using the attacker’s energy to throw the person or to apply a neutralizing technique. The key to all this, as Tom teaches, is to learn how to be centered and to see the bigger picture—the needs and wants of both—so that you can move to higher ground, where true solutions can be found. I have often heard Tom say, “You would not get in front of a fast-moving train. When someone comes at you in anger, step aside and try to figure out where the energy is coming from.” That is one of the keys to his Magic of Conflict approach that he has shared with thousands throughout the world. Conflict isn’t bad; it’s an opportunity, a reminder for us to seek our higher selves.

My first real contact with Tom was participating in one of his Magic of Skiing programs. Living in Aspen, Colorado, he applies the Magic of Conflict approach to this wonderful sport. Tom teaches that skiing and snowboarding can be a magical opportunity to move to higher ground, even without the chairlifts. When you go skiing, you learn to take any challenging conditions (such as stormy weather, icy conditions, rental equipment) and turn them into a great day. He encourages you to choose your criteria for success: it’s a great day because you’re learning; or it’s a great day because you are with friends; or it’s a great day because you’re breathing. I love to ski but I was really cautious and stuck in skiing as a beginner on the green slopes. Tom got me to realize that skiing was all about the use of energy. “Where is the energy going on the mountain?” he would

ask. “Down the hill,” everybody would answer. “Then that’s where you have to send your energy. If you turn downhill but your energy is holding back, you are fighting the mountain. Instead of fighting the mountain, become one with it. Relax and go with the energy of the mountain.” Tom got me breathing in as I approached a turn and breathing out as I finished a turn. I was amazed at how easily I could go down the mountain when I was concentrating on breathing and awareness, not just techniques.

As Tom would say, “Only when you are present to the energy around you can you learn to dance with life.” Tom’s approach is so invigorating that it not only improved my skiing, but it also improved my life. Tom is one of the world’s greatest life coaches. Every morning, Tom led us in meditation, stretching, and specific exercises which centered us, made us feel awake, alive, energized, excited, ready to ski, and, better yet, ready to take on ever-bigger life challenges.

I loved skiing with Tom and the other students. It was a heartfelt joy and made me a happy ski addict. What really revealed the greatness of the man to me was when he fell on his ski pole, instantly breaking one of his ribs. Tom acknowledged the problem and his personal pain, and continued to ski and teach the rest of the day. One of the students was a doctor of acupuncture from Honolulu. Tom asked us to join him in his home for dinner that night.

Entering Tom’s home is an eye-opener. It is a multilevel home with no staircases from level to level, only ropes, ladders, and bridges. Tom and his wife built it with their children in mind. It is heaven for kids and adults like me who are still kids at heart.

After dinner, the acupuncturist worked on Tom’s broken rib and gave him an acupuncture treatment that started the

healing process. I was delighted to see such quick results. The next morning, Tom was teaching aikido, moving and skiing as though nothing had happened. Tom is one of my heroes. He actually lives the exemplary nonconflicted life that he talks about.

Tom's parable, which you have in your hands, shows how to handle and conquer our modern epidemic of stress. But this is not a book of tips. Simply giving people advice like "eat better," "improve your work/life balance," "set priorities," "get regular exercise," and "clean up your relationship" won't do it. People are constantly hearing tips everywhere from friends, magazines, and a barrage of TV commercials trying to sell something. They have become numb to the possibility that sustained fulfillment is a reality that they actually can, with practice, integrate into their daily lives.

Tom's *Three Deep Breaths* provides us with what science says is critical in dealing with stressful living: a sense of control about how we respond to life's situations. And, best of all, it doesn't take time, you can do it anywhere, and it really works.

Tom's *Three Deep Breaths* is beguilingly simple. Simplicity doesn't mean superficial, nor does it mean instant success. Just because I'm learning the skills to be a good skier doesn't give me instant passage down the steepest mogul run on the mountain. But, as nature teaches us, simplicity and efficiency go hand in hand, and there is great beauty in being present, focused, and uncomplicated.

As I read *Three Deep Breaths*, I knew immediately that this philosophy was a wonderful strategy to help me seek the higher ground, focus on the spirit, and be the best me that I can be.

FOREWORD

Read this wonderful story about the transformation of Angus, a self-centered, task-oriented, type-A man whose tunnel vision blocked the bigger picture. On the way to work, at home, or anywhere, you can learn to use Tom's *Three Deep Breaths* to help you become more aware and connect, rather than compete, with others. You will like yourself better and everyone you contact will like you better, too.

Mark Victor Hansen



The Wrinkle

He probably never would have looked at his reflection at all, if it hadn't been for something his daughter said. He would have done what he usually did—go downstairs, get on his computer, and wrestle with deadlines and dilemmas. But tonight, while he was tucking her into bed, Angus noticed Sierra looking at him intently.

“Why do you have that big line on your face, Daddy?”

“What big line?”

“This big line here,” she said, tracing with her finger a line on his brow that extended down between his eyes.

“I guess it's from worrying too much,” was Angus's truthful reply.

“What are you going to do?” his daughter persisted.

“I'm not sure.”

He kissed her good night and reached to turn off the light.

“When I'm not sure of something I just ask my teacher.”

“That's a good idea, Sierra. Now, go to sleep,” he said, closing her bedroom door.

“And my teacher says the answers are always there, Daddy,” he heard her call out. “You just have to look for them.”

That was when he caught his reflection in the hallway mirror.

It answered back unflinchingly.

Behind that professional demeanor and that successful-looking suit, that crisply pressed shirt and silk tie, lurked something Angus didn't like. Something unnerving, like driving a car with loose brakes. The headset from his cell phone was still dangling around his neck, keeping him connected, but connected to what? He focused in on his tired eyes and the wrinkles on his brow. So this was the result of all this striving for success. Angus put both hands on the little table under the mirror to get a closer look. Sure, he had a good job, a loving wife, a wonderful eight-year-old daughter, a nice home. Wasn't he supposed to be happy? What was this miserable feeling and what was behind this sad and bewildered face?

The image didn't look at all like the person he wanted to be. He saw right through the efficient business-suit exterior to the stressed-out, "no time available" man he had become.

What are you going to do about it? he thought. The mirror, Zen-like, reflected back only his confusion.

Angus's cell phone rang, but for once he did not answer it.

Oh, I'm connected all right! PDA, cell phone, Internet, fax messages, 500 cable channels, the whole cyberspace nightmare! You would think if anybody had access to the answers it would be me. But I'm just like everybody else, walking around with a headset on, appearing to be mumbling to myself. It used to be if we were on the street talking to ourselves, we were considered crazy.

If only there were a delete button for dastardly days. Or maybe a do-over one. What was worse, this had been just a typical day for Angus. It had started with the alarm clock

jack-hammering the billion neurons of his brain into consciousness. He had reached up in such a knee-jerk stupor that he knocked the clock off the table onto the hardwood floor, dividing it into two clocks, neither of them working. *Alarm.* That was the perfect start for Angus's day—frenzied—like fire ants in his boxers.

Had he set the alarm for an hour earlier, he would still have sabotaged himself. Some people travel in the fast lane, some are stuck in the slow lane. Angus was stuck in the *late* lane. Even when he planned extra time, he would squander it away in the shower in a hypothetical debate, bullying one of his colleagues into accepting one of his ideas, until the hot water ran out. Then he would notice the time, and the panic would begin anew.

Angus had rushed through the kitchen and kissed his daughter with the early morning pleasantries, "Sierra, I'm going to make it to your soccer game this afternoon." He went to kiss his wife, Carly, but his cell phone rang, so he answered it instead.

"Hello? Yeah, hello, Robert. Oh yeah? I figured that would happen. I'm surrounded by idiots, that's what I think of it."

Grabbing his coffee mug, he had rushed out the door with an affirmative grunt to his wife's query, "Coffee for breakfast again?" Carly could only sigh, looking down at the eggs she was about to scramble and then helplessly at her daughter.

"Sierra, he's just really busy these days. He's got big challenges at work. Don't be disappointed if he misses another game." She managed a smile for her daughter, and then quickly looked back at her eggs, disguising her own frustration.

But of course, Angus had missed the importance of that moment. He was deeply lost in the oblivion of the preoccupied, roaring down the highway, talking in his annoyed business voice to Robert on his cell phone, jacked up on coffee and anxieties, acting like an NFL linebacker blitzing on third down.

“All right, Robert. We’ve got problems. I’ll be there soon.”

He slammed the cell phone shut.

“Don’t! Don’t you dare!” he screamed at the traffic light turning red. *The longest red light in the city, and I have to get it.*

He had taken another gulp of his java while simultaneously flicking on the radio and dialing his office assistant on his cell phone. Angus could multitask with the best of them, a skill essential to the chronically late.

“Hi, Kelly. If Sterner gets in for our meeting before I do, tell him I’m on my way. I’m stuck in a major traffic jam!” A lie, of course, but not from his perspective. Everything was *always* major.

“What’s that, Kelly? What does Harold want? A meeting tomorrow? Okay, okay, tell him I’ll be there. See if you can free up my schedule.”

Harold was his boss.

That’s when Angus had started to sweat. He loosened his tie and unbuttoned his collar. *Isn’t this red light ever going to change?* He could feel his heart pounding. Then he did that thing he always did under stress. He escalated. He took one worry (*Why does the boss want to see me?*) and created a catastrophic scenario around it (*I’m over budget, I’m not meeting deadlines, I’ll get fired, Carly and Sierra will disown me, I’m going to die*). He had perfected this apocalyptic spiral of despair: he was a world-class down-hiller on a slippery slope.

Angus had been eyeing Eddy, the homeless guy who worked the red-light traffic for loose change. This had always irritated Angus and today it downright killed him. He wanted to yell, "Hey, Eddy, how about lending *me* a buck? You're even, and I'm down \$18,000 in credit card debt!" But the light turned green, so Angus jumped on the horn instead.

The guy in the red truck in front of him made the obligatory gesture, which caused Angus, with a maniacal gleam, to accelerate around him, barely making the right-hand turn onto the freeway. He screeched to a halt behind the slow line queuing up for the freeway entrance. He had saved no time whatsoever, but to him, he had just sacked the quarterback.

But then came the guilt, the remorse, the worry: *Somebody could have gotten hurt and it would have been my fault.* Anger one minute, guilt the next.

He eventually wheeled into the packed company parking lot, smoldering as he looked for a space. He noticed one up front near his building, as well as a car approaching from the opposite direction with its blinker on. Another quick acceleration and Angus casually swerved into the space before the car could make the turn. It was rude, he knew, so he feigned innocence, although in the rear-view mirror he recognized the driver as an elderly woman who worked in his building.

At least it's not a fellow employee. I'm late and I need the space. This is an emergency.

He grabbed his briefcase and ran to the building.

"Mornin', Angus," came the happy, singsong voice of Daisy, the groundskeeper, who had been watering some small fir trees.

Some days that woman annoys me. Actually, most days. Doesn't she ever have a bad day?

He gave her a professional nod of recognition.

There is just no graceful landing possible from a horizontal position three feet off the ground. The garden hose that tripped him, combined with the speed at which he was moving, launched him skyward like a wounded condor, arms and briefcase flapping for balance. And losing. Prone on the sidewalk and cursing, Angus gathered himself up and hobbled into the building before Daisy, a big, lovable woman capable of carrying the perplexed Angus easily over one shoulder, could get there to help.

“Whoa! That was some flight, Angus! Are you still in one piece?”

Without looking back, Angus waved her off. *Can this day get any worse?*

It did. But there is no need to describe the rest of the misery that Angus created. More pulse-racing battles with time, anxiety rushes, and ego-related tailspins, real and imagined.

Angus had hoped that he could relax at home that evening, but all he saw were rush-hour stand-stills, a hundred e-mails, a disappointed daughter whose soccer game he had missed, and a detached wife who had had about enough of his unavailability.

And that was when his daughter had said, “The answers are always there, Daddy. You just have to look for them.”

Angus found in the mirror the worry wrinkle that Sierra had pointed out. He traced it with his finger as if to erase it, but it did not go away. In this moment, for the first time, Angus recognized the truth of his situation.



The Lift

Angus had a fitful night to match his day, this time fretting over his upcoming meeting with Harold, his boss. His conversation with his colleague Robert that morning confirmed a rumor he'd heard that his job as project manager for the new marketing plan was being questioned. Not just by his team, but by his boss. He had obsessed until he dozed off at 4:10 A.M., only to be jarred to attention by his daughter's alarm clock, which he had borrowed to replace the one he had broken the previous morning. The Disney tune was on full volume: "Zippity-do-dah, zippity ay."

No, this is not a "wonderful day"!

Fumbling unsuccessfully for the switch, he yanked the plug.

Angus rubbed his eyes and felt his tired body. He staggered to the shower and was drenched by a torrential down-pour of warm water and cold thoughts. He stood aimlessly in the shower for who knows how long. It occurred to him that he was staring at his conditioner in his left hand, and couldn't remember whether he had shampooed or not. In his next fleeting glimpse of consciousness, he caught himself staring into the mirror holding his toothbrush but un-

clear as to whether or not he had brushed his teeth. Only the mint taste in his mouth gave him some confidence.

The next moment of awareness came while driving down his street. *Did I even see Carly and Sierra this morning?* The full coffee mug in his hand was an indicator that there had been an exchange, but the specifics were hazy.

If it is true that the world exists only in the present moment, then Angus's morning, full of ruminations about his upcoming meeting with his boss, had been nonexistent for all but an occasional blip on his screen of consciousness, usually associated with a gulp of caffeine.

The physical jolt of the car hitting the curb grabbed Angus's attention, causing him to grip the steering wheel tightly with both hands while grasping the thought that *yes, he was* driving by Hanford Park at 7:32 A.M., bumping along on a flat tire.

"No! No! Not today!" Angus raged as he pulled over alongside Hanford Park. He leaped out and saw the right back tire had been destroyed. Checking his watch and perspiring profusely, he opened the trunk and took out the jack. He got the lug nuts off and the car jacked up and went to grab the spare tire. He gave it a hopeful test bounce, but it replied with a splat.

Angus sank despondently to the curb, his determination and energy as flat as the spare tire he was staring at.

He pulled out his cell phone. "Kelly, it's me. Middle of rush-hour traffic and I'm sitting on the curb with a lug wrench in my hands, a flat tire, and a flatter spare. I'm a mess. If I look as crazed as I feel, I'd be arrested."

"I'm sorry, Angus," she replied kindly, and added, "But there is no hurry because Robert left a message saying he can't meet with you this morning."

Robert! Messing me up again!

Swelling with irritation, Angus jerked at his tie to loosen it.

“Why don’t you take a little time, Angus?” Kelly, his long-time assistant, was trying to be helpful. “It sounds like you need it. You want to be calm and clear for your meeting with Harold this afternoon. You know how important it is.”

“I know what I’m doing,” snapped Angus, and hung up. *I’m fuming, that’s what I’m doing.*

“You need a ride, sonny?”

He was startled by such a soothing sound; a breath of calm amid the rush-hour traffic. He turned in the direction of the voice. The first thing he noticed was the shoes—black, high-top Converse All Star basketball shoes, vintage early sixties. Then the gray sweat pants, classic old school with the baggy bottoms. Silver hair sprung out both sides of the man’s head under his baseball cap. With a fatherly smile and twinkling eyes the old man stood with both feet firmly planted and his hands on his hips, a hybrid of Albert Einstein and Vince Lombardi. He could have been forty or ninety: his dynamic physical presence spoke of youth, but his deep wrinkles could only have been carved by decades of laughing smiles and arduous miles. Hypnotized by the stunning sight, Angus tilted his head.

“Maybe I need to ask in another language?” the old man laughed.

“Oh, no. It’s just that, that, oh forget it,” Angus stammered. “Yes, I would appreciate a lift. I just need to make a phone call first.”

“Take your time.”

Angus tossed his spare tire and tools back into the trunk, and called his service station on his cell. He scribbled a

note, “Car repair truck on the way,” and placed it under the wiper.

That’s when Angus’s memory kicked in.

“Hey,” he said to the old man. “Aren’t you the guy I see doing those strange-looking movements in the park every morning?”

“Strange to you, maybe,” the old man laughed. “But very familiar to me. Something I learned from an old martial arts master, when I was the one who was needing a lift.”

The old man bounded into a baby blue, ’57 Chevy convertible in mint condition. Angus opened the car door and sat down. He blinked to clear his focus, and then looked at this strange being in the vintage hot-rod with a yin-yang symbol on the gearshift knob, a pair of fuzzy dice hanging from the rearview mirror, and immaculate white leather upholstery.

“I’m Angus. Thanks for the lift.” His eyes toured the interior again. “This is some car.”

“It’s a good ride,” replied the old man. And then he said, looking at Angus with piercing blue eyes, “Are you clear about where you desire to go?”

If it had been a normal “where would you like to go” Angus’s response would have been immediate. He knew where the office was. He thought he knew where he was. Yet the old man’s choice of words, and the way he said “clear,” and “you,” and “desire” gave direction-finding an entirely new meaning.

“Someplace different from where I seem to be headed,” Angus sighed. Then he recovered with the more concrete, “I work at the Jefferson Building on Fourth and Federal.”

“Well then, let’s begin our journey. First, you need to fasten your centering belt.”

“My what?”

“Oh! I know you call it a seat belt. But for me it’s far more important than that.”

“Centering belt?” Angus asked, bewildered.

“Wise words,” the old man asserted.

“Weird words. The wisdom loses me.” But Angus realized that nothing in his life was making any sense these days, so why not continue down this strange road?

“Do you have ten minutes before we proceed?”

“Not really,” snapped Angus. “I’m a very busy man.” *Who does this guy think he is? Time is money. God, I hate not being in control, stuck, dependent on this old geezer who probably wants to sell me something useless.*

He watched the old man start up the engine without hesitation or argument, his peaceful demeanor unchanged.

Okay, okay. My morning meeting has been canceled. And, well, maybe Kelly is right. I do need to pull myself together.

“On second thought, why not?” Angus responded, annoyed at the situation. “I’ve got a few extra minutes.”

First, You Need to Fasten

Your Centering Belt

this material has been excerpted from

***Three Deep Breaths:
Finding Power and Purpose in a Stressed-Out World***

by Thomas Crumm

Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

Copyright © 2009, All Rights Reserved.

For more information, or to purchase the book,
please visit our website

www.bkconnection.com