

---

# Thrive 101 – how to hack your brain and tame the inner critic

---

**By Dorian Baroni for Women Agents of Change program**

**[www.womenagentsofchange.org](http://www.womenagentsofchange.org)**

**HOW CAN YOU DEVELOP  
THE INNER CONDITIONS  
OF A RESILIENCE IN THE  
MIDST OF A BUSY LIFE?**

**START WITH SOMETHING  
AS SIMPLE AS AN  
INTENTIONAL PAUSE**



# Growth rarely comes from comfort zones

There is real power in knowing how to develop the inner conditions of a ‘personal safe zone’ during stressful or challenging times

## WHAT WE WILL COVER

- |           |  |           |   |
|-----------|--|-----------|---|
| <b>01</b> | THE FEAR TRIGGERS IN THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT                          | <b>04</b> | HOW THE 3 SYSTEMS INTERACT TO DRIVE OUR ACTIONS AND DECISIONS |
| <b>02</b> | THE NEUROCHEMISTRY OF OUR BRAIN STATES THAT DRIVE BEHAVIOR             | <b>05</b> | HOW TO BUILD FLEXIBLE RESPONSIVENESS AND RESILIENCE           |
| <b>03</b> | MINDSETS THAT SHAPE OUR VIEWS OF OUR OURSELVES AND THE WORLD AROUND US |           |   |

# The fear triggers in a complex world



**The 4 triggers that we are  
built to react with fear to  
in our environment**

# 4 TRIGGERS OF THREAT BRAIN

**Uncertainty**

**Change**

**Attention**

**Struggle**



Whether factual  
or imagined

## THE ZOO TIGER



EASY SCORE

SAFETY SCORE

AMOUNT OF STRUGGLE

SURVIVAL POTENTIAL

SKILLS DEVELOPED

CHALLENGES FACED

## THE JUNGLE TIGER



EASY SCORE

SAFETY SCORE

AMOUNT OF STRUGGLE

SURVIVAL POTENTIAL

SKILLS DEVELOPED

CHALLENGES FACED

First obstacle : our Threat Brain: survival – using fear to keep us safe

- It gets activated by :
- Uncertainty
- Attention
- Struggle
- Change
- Glitch : can't determine nature of challenge (good or bad)
- Threat brain always will choose easy over hard

# The Neuroscience of Fear

© Trevor Ragan

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=K33481upXnA>

# Elizabeth Gilbert and Fear

VIDEOLINK <https://vimeo.com/169750602>

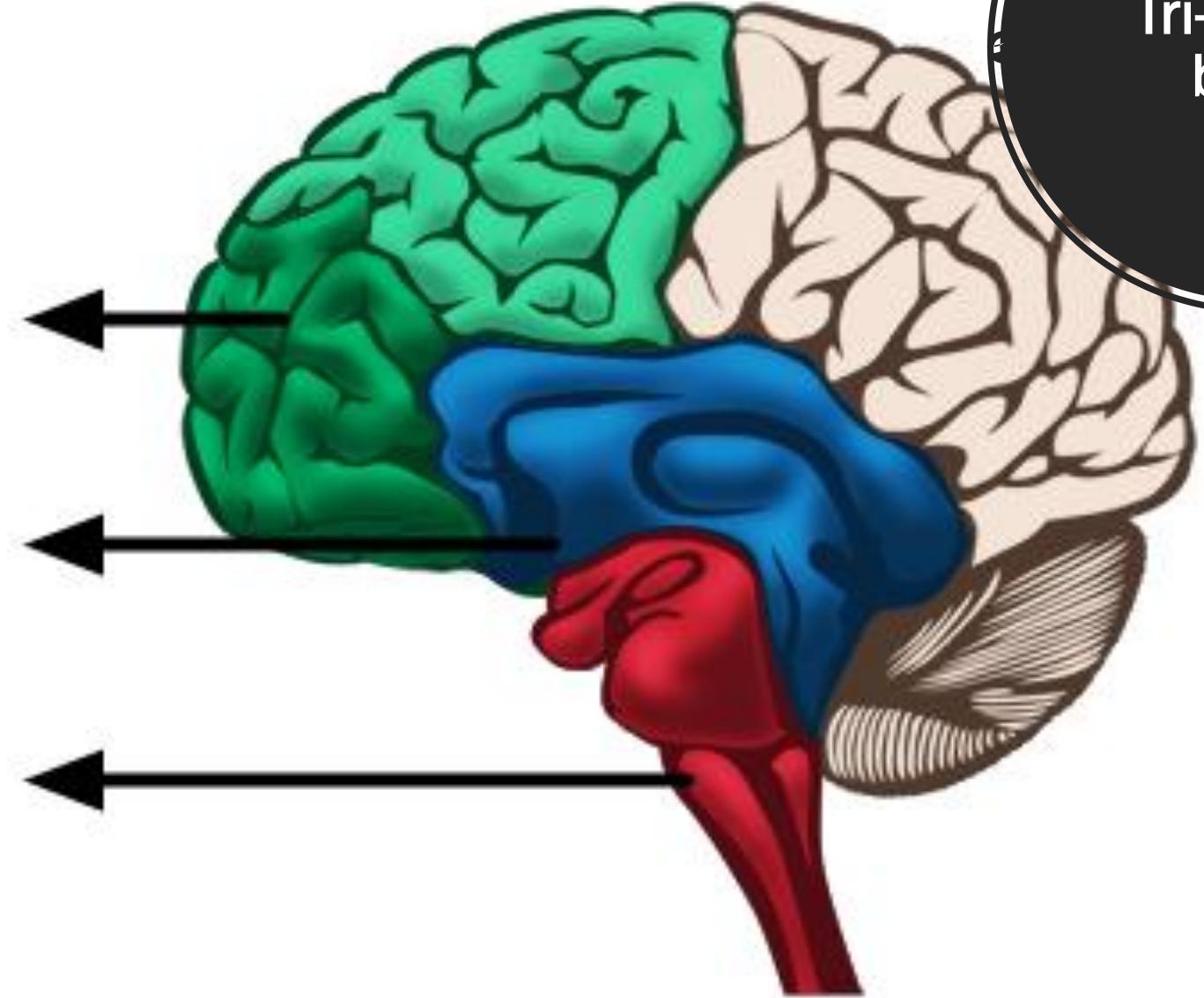
-dearest fear, creativity and I are about to go on a road trip. I understand you'll be joining us because you always do. I acknowledge that you believe you have an important job to do in my life and you take your job seriously. Apparently, your job is to induce complete panic in me whenever I'm about to do anything interesting and may I say you are superb at your job! so by all means keep doing your job, if you feel you must. but I will also be doing my job on this road trip which is to work hard and stay focused. there's plenty of room in the minivan for all of us, so make yourself at home but understand this: creativity and I are the only ones who will be making any decisions along the way. I recognize and I respect that you're part of this family and I will never exclude you from our activities, but still your suggestions will not be followed, you are allowed to have a seat, you're allowed to have a voice but you are not allowed to have a vote, you don't get to touch the roadmaps, you're not allowed to suggest detours, you're not allowed to fiddle with the temperature, dude you're not even allowed to choose the freaking snacks. but above all else my dear old familiar friend you are absolutely forbidden to drive. and then we head off together me and creativity and fear side by side by side forever marching once more into the terrifying but marvelous terrain of unknown outcome"



# The Tri-motive brain

**Your 3 motivational states  
that drive decisions and  
actions**

Tri-motive  
brain



## Safe Brain

**Thoughtful Decision Making**  
**Executive / Thinking brain**  
*What can I learn from this?*

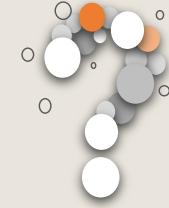
## Drive Brain

**Achievement & Emotion**  
**Limbic/ Feeling brain**  
*How do I get things? My tribe?*

## Threat Brain

**Fear, Instincts & Urges**  
**Survival /Reptilian /Amygdala**  
*Am I safe? Fight, Flight or Freeze*

# Your inner world



**Beliefs, assumptions,  
mindsets, orientations,  
biases, mental models**

# Your inner world

Mindset is a key intervention point – Neuroplasticity enables changes

Some key dynamics:

- Growth vs Fixed mindset
- Quieting the inner critic
- Tuning into the inner mentor

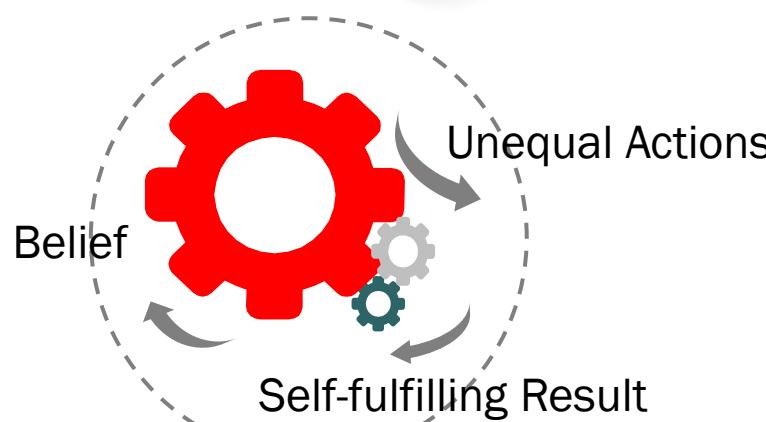
## FIXED MINDSET

SKILLS ARE BORN  
YOU CAN'T LEARN & GROW

BELIEFS

PERFORMANCE & OUTCOMES  
NOT LOOKING BAD

FOCUS

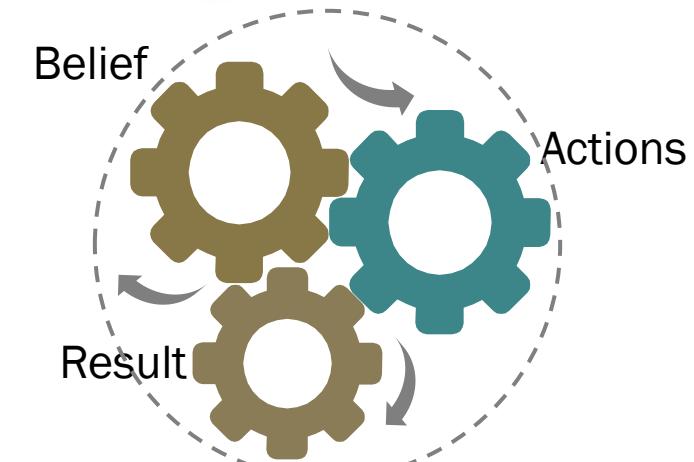


## GROWTH MINDSET

SKILLS ARE BUILT  
YOU CAN LEARN & GROW

BELIEFS

THE PROCESS  
GETTING BETTER



## FIXED MINDSET

# MINDSET

## CHARACTERISTICS

## GROWTH MINDSET

SKILLS ARE BORN  
YOU CAN'T LEARN & GROW

PERFORMANCE & OUTCOMES  
NOT LOOKING BAD

BELIEFS

FOCUS

SKILLS ARE BUILT  
YOU CAN LEARN & GROW

THE PROCESS  
GETTING BETTER

## KEYS TO GROWTH

NOT NECESSARY  
NOT USEFUL

BACK DOWN & AVOID  
FRAME AS A THREAT

HATE THEM & GET DISCOURAGED  
TRY TO AVOID MAKING THEM

NOT HELPFUL  
GET DEFENSIVE & TAKE PERSONALLY



EFFORT



CHALLENGES



MISTAKES



FEEDBACK

USEFUL  
WILL LEAD TO GROWTH

EMBRACE & PERSEVERE  
FRAME AS AN OPPORTUNITY

USE THEM TO LEARN  
TREAT THEM AS OPPORTUNITIES

USEFUL INFORMATION  
APPRECIATE IT & USE IT TO GROW

"I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

- Michael Jordan

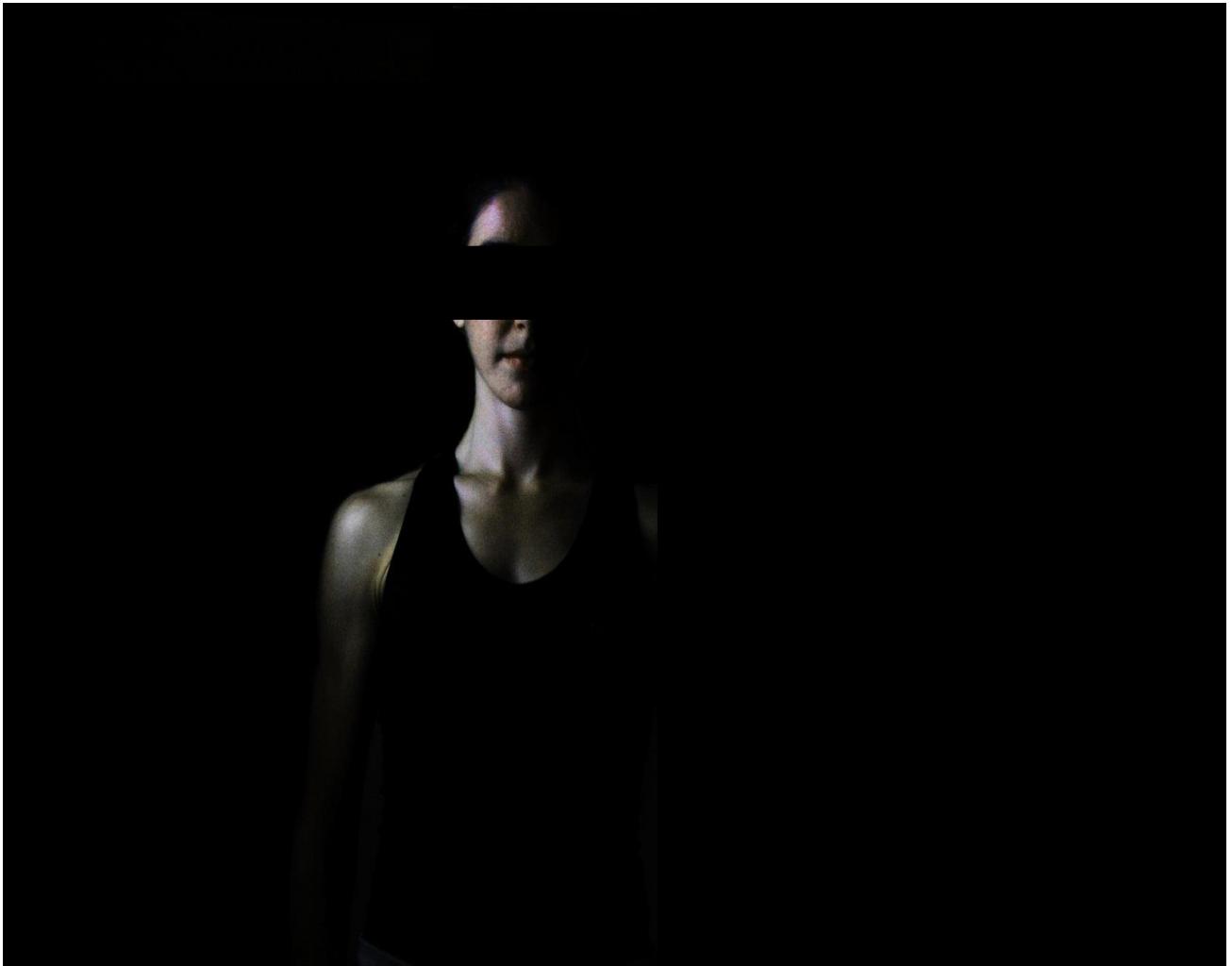
**WHAT MINDSET ARE YOU  
IN MOST FREQUENTLY?**

**GROWTH MINDSET?**



**WHAT MINDSET ARE YOU  
IN MOST FREQUENTLY?**

**FIXED MINDSET?**



**WHAT MINDSET ARE YOU  
IN MOST FREQUENTLY?**

**FIXED MINDSET?  
+  
INNER CRITIC?**

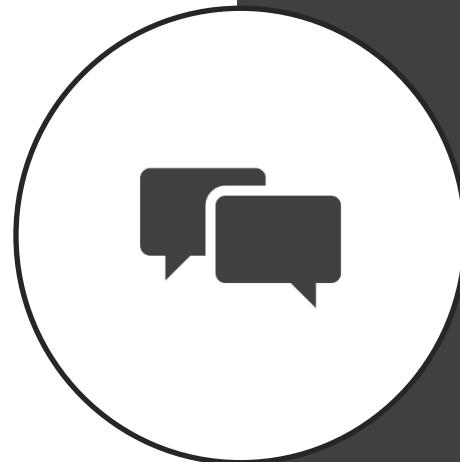


# Mindset



Think about an important, difficult and specific situation that you feel you didn't go well

- What were the beliefs that you held that contribute to not working well or got on the way?
- What beliefs could have helped you move through the situation?
- What were you paying attention to in that specific situation (your focus)?





fire  
your  
inner  
critic

DANIELLE LAPORTE

# Inner Critic

based on the work of Tara Mohr in her book Playing Big

# Key Concepts for Understanding the Inner Critic

**All women grapple with the inner critic, but it shows up in different domains for different women** - some may struggle with it more in the arena of work, others with body image, others with mothering, others in their creative life, and so on.

01

**There are common (though not universal) qualities of the inner critic voice** that can help us recognize the critic when it speaks up (see next slide).

02

**We often confuse the inner critic with realistic thinking,** but we can differentiate them through their different “tones” and way of approaching problems.

03

**It is crucial to remember: that the inner critic is an expression of our safety instinct** – part of us that wants us to avoid any emotional risk/harm. This part misleads us as it is only concerned with avoiding discomfort; it has no interest in fulfillment, joy, or self-actualization.

04

**The Inner Critic and your context** - Women who have worked or studied in environments where critical thinking is the dominant mode, may find they have inadvertently strengthened the voice of their inner critic.

05

**1**

Harsh, rude, mean

**3**

Ostensibly, the voice of reason

**5**

The voice of “you aren’t good at  
math / negotiating / technical stuff”

**7**

The tape

**9**

Irrational but persistent

**11**

The inner critic may take inspiration  
from critical people in your life

**2**

Binary

**4**

The voice of “you aren’t ready yet”

**6**

The voice of body-perfectionism

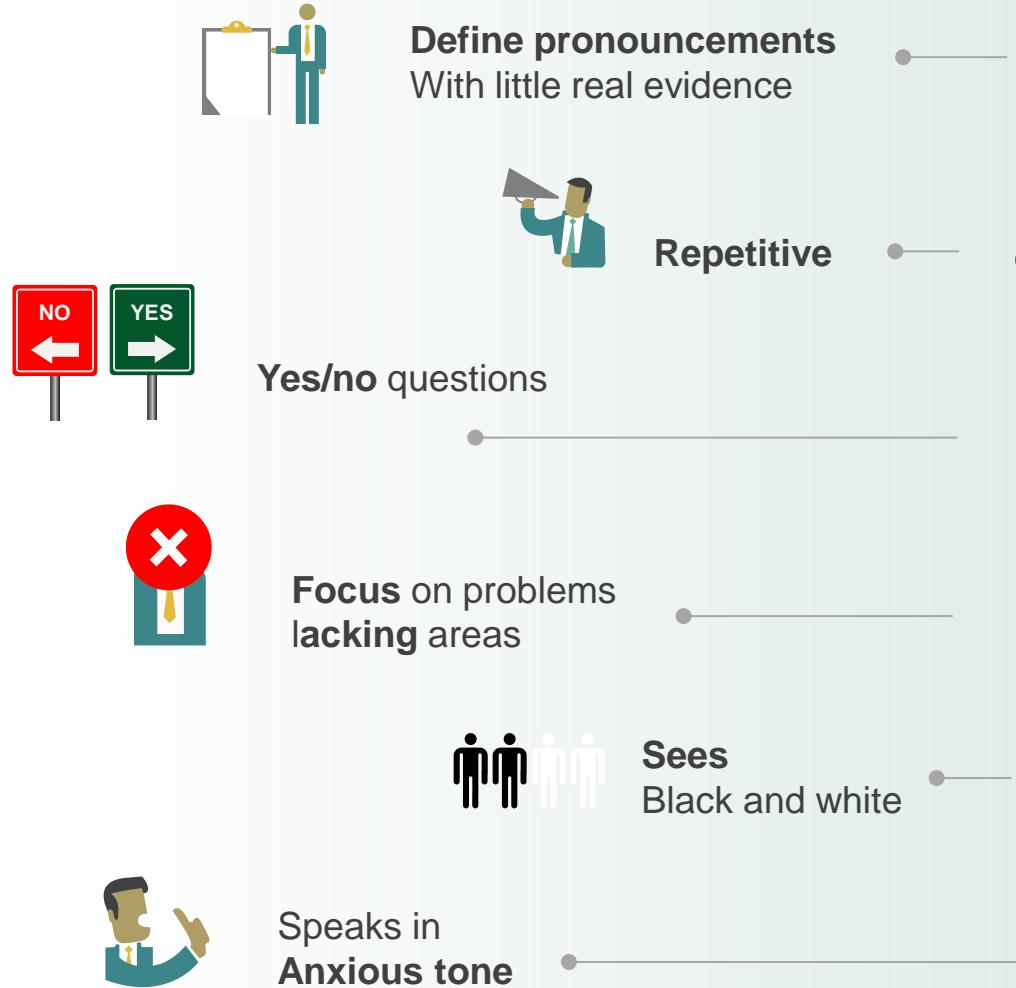
**8**

A broken record

**10**

The one-two punch

# Inner Critic



# Realistic Thinking



DIFFERENCE BETWEEN

# When does it show up most strongly

- Speaks up most loudly and most vocally when we are considering (or taking) bigger steps that bring new levels of exposure, visibility, praise, potential criticism. An Inner Critic flare up can be a sign of being on the right path!
- The inner critic may be informed and exacerbated by outer critics in our lives, but it is not “caused” by them – the inner critic arises in us even without the presence of critical others in our lives.
- We are not trying to get rid of the critic – because we are all hardwired to have one! Self-doubt will continue showing up as we step into big changes. The goal is to learn how to hear the Inner Critic voice and not take direction from it.

## Inner Critic

Definite pronouncements with little real evidence  
Black and white  
Yes/no questions (“Is it possible?”)  
Repetitive  
Focuses on problems/lacking areas  
Speaks in anxious tone

## Realistic Thinking

Curious questions + interest in evidence  
Able to see the gray  
Open ended questions (“What part is possible?”)  
Forward-moving  
Seeks solutions  
Speaks in calmer tone

RHYMES WITH ORANGE/ by Hilary B. Price



# How it all fits together

**Complex world + your  
brain + your mindsets**

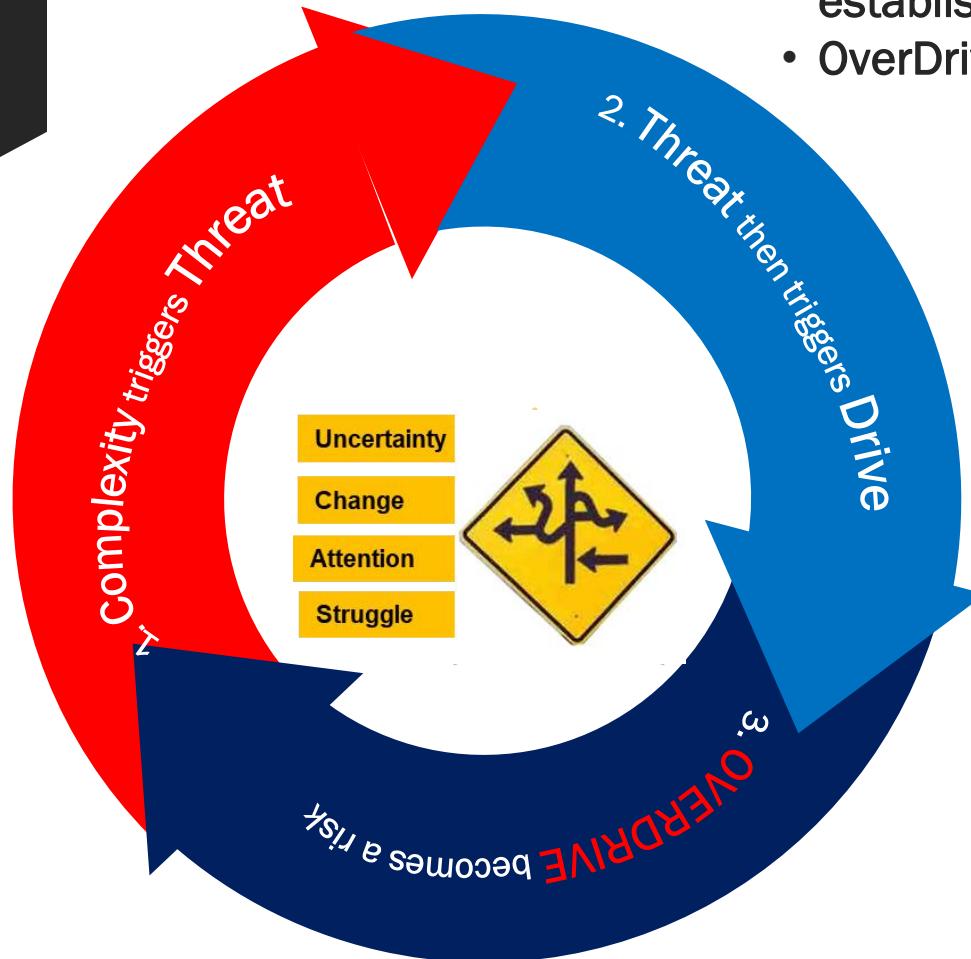
# Tri-motive Brain Danger Loop

## THREAT Brain States

- Fight
- Flight
- Freeze.



In this brain state we cannot differentiate between real and imagined 'threat'. Keeps us 'safe', but not so good for growth and ease.



## DRIVE Brain States

- Most of us will activate Drive Brain to soothe ourselves out of Threat Brain
- A Threat-Drive loop gets established
- OverDrive becomes a risk



## OVER DRIVE Brain States

- Body and Mind running on stress, adrenaline, cortisol
- Easily leads to addictive loops: workaholism, alcoholism, drugs, overspending, perfectionism, procrastination, victimhood, busywork, aggressive ambition, etc



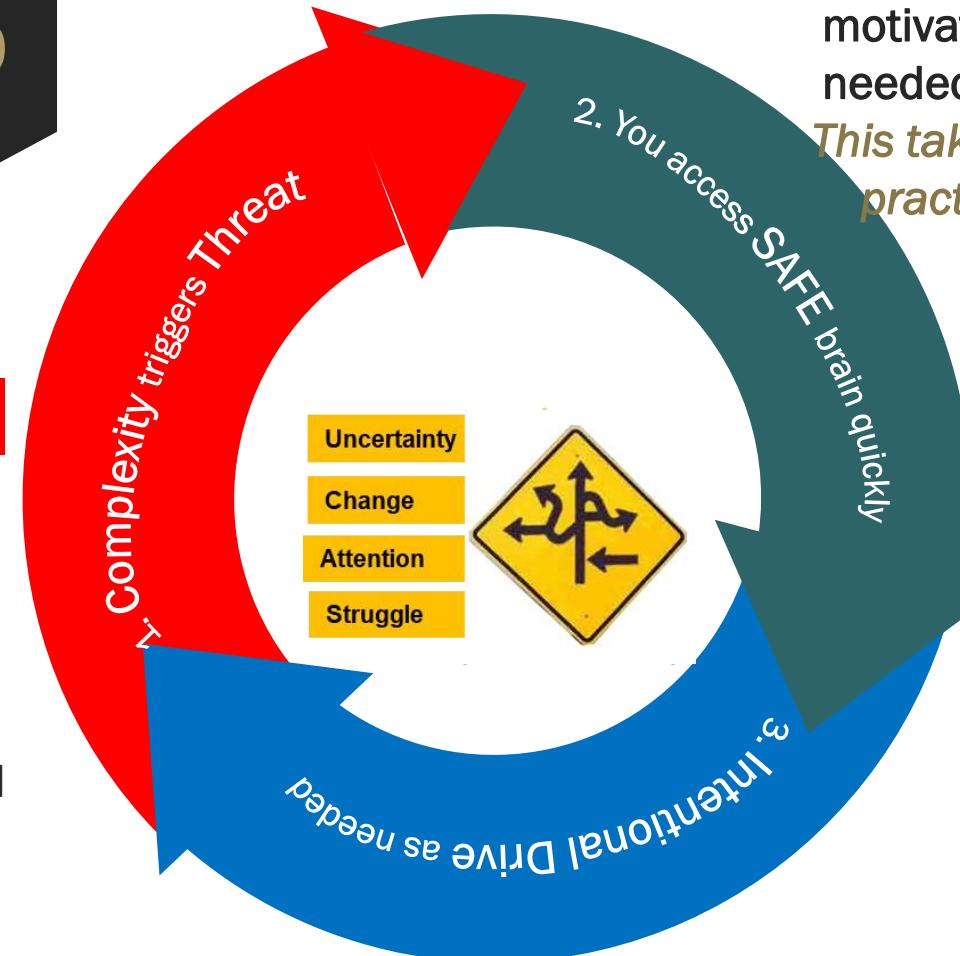
# Tri-motive Brain Resilient Loop

## THREAT Brain States

- Fight
- Flight
- Freeze



In this brain state we cannot differentiate between real and imagined 'threat'



## SAFE Brain States

- Rather than jump into DRIVE and then OVERDRIVE
- We quickly access SAFE brain to determine what motivational state is actually needed

*This takes self-awareness and practice practice practice*



## Healthy DRIVE Brain States

- From SAFE brain we determine what action is required and activate DRIVE brain intentionally



# How to build our capacity to thrive

**How to react less and respond with resilience more of the time**

Grow understanding and awareness of what is

Naming builds perspective; Reframing builds in time for regaining control

Cultivate growth mindset

Curiosity vs staying in the comfort zone; Quiet the inner critic and Enhance access to Your Inner Mentor

Practice the Yin and the Yang of Self Compassion

Mindfulness; A sense of our common humanity; Self care; Clear boundaries

Explore somatic and neuroplasticity enhancing daily practices

Somatic Practices – ex. Using the breath to reset the nervous system; Movement meditation; Hugs for Oxytocin release

Positivity Practice – ex. Simple daily check in at start and at the end of day re: 3 simple things you are grateful for

**WHAT WILL  
YOU GRANT  
YOURSELF  
PERMISSION  
TO TRY OUT  
THIS COMING  
WEEK?**



**To learn more about the Tri-motive brain:**

*Beyond Threat* by Nelisha Wickremasinghe

**To learn more about Self-Compassion and Resilience:**

*The Self Compassion Workbook* by Kristin Neff

*Resilience: Powerful Practices for Bouncing Back* by Linda Graham

**To learn more about Mindset:**

*Growth Mindset* by Carol Dweck

*Immunity to Change* by Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey

**To learn more about the Inner Critic and the Inner Mentor**

*Play Big* by Tara Mohr

# thank you

**DORIAN BARONI**  
**Women Agents of Change**

For more info, please contact us at  
[dorian@dorianbaroni.com](mailto:dorian@dorianbaroni.com)