

MOVEMENT BUILDING PRACTICE:

Stance, Breath,
and Awareness



Developed in conjunction with the Transformative Movement Building Webinar Series.
For further exploration, including more movement building practice guides and the archived webinars, visit
<http://movementstrategy.org/publications-tools/>

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PRACTICE?

Practice is **conscious** and **repetitive** action that **cultivates specific qualities and capacities**. Conscious practice is distinct from the unconscious action of habit. For example, someone might take daily walks as a practice, cultivating awareness and momentum. By contrast, someone could walk the same route on “autopilot” every day, taking the same action as an unconscious habit, not as a practice.

In developing strategy, habits make us vulnerable and ineffective because they lock us into fixed patterns of thinking and acting that are not responsive to present reality and opportunities.

Practice allows us to take small, immediate steps to nurture shifts that are larger than we might imagine in the present. A pianist runs through the scales daily, developing capacity that makes an entire sonata possible. A runner puts in daily miles, developing muscle strength, endurance, and memory that can be called on in a marathon.

Conscious practices can be applied in our movement building and in other areas of life, allowing us to cultivate new qualities and capacities — and interrupt ingrained habits — even when we are unsure or unclear about our future. For example, writing down one gratitude each day increases the capacity to recognize and emphasize positive aspects of any situation; meditating for 15 minutes a day increases overall awareness and mental agility.



What Are Ways to Practice Stance, Breath, and Awareness for Movement Building?

STANCE: PROACTIVE AND READY

How to Practice:

Stand with your feet as wide as your outer hips, with your weight distributed evenly on both sides. Alternately, sit in a chair at the edge with feet flat at the floor. Lean slightly forward, putting more weight in front than behind. This is a forward facing, proactive stance.

Why practice this?

Stance is our physical orientation to the world. We can have a walking, standing, sitting and lying stance. Often our movements are defensive and/or protective in response to injustice. Instead, we can cultivate a stance that is proactive, ready to move, and grounded in core strength.





What Are Ways to Practice Stance, Breath, and Awareness for Movement Building?

BREATH: LOW AND SLOW

How to Practice:

Take a moment to be aware of your breathing. Slow down to a steady breathing that doesn't feel too rushed, nor so slow that it disrupts your breathing. Breathe in and out slowly, focusing the energy of your breath downwards, below your navel. Focus on consistent, steady breaths with a balanced rhythm, bringing the energy of the inhale down to the low belly.

Why practice this?

Breath is related to both energy and rhythm: Creating the change we want to see in the world requires immense energy. We do not want to burn ourselves out in the process of creating change! Consciously breathing low and slow cultivates energy that is restorative and can propel us to act and/or attract what we want depending on the situation.

Rhythm is related to pacing. Conscious practice around rhythm can help us take action quickly, or slow down, depending on what is called for in a given situation. It can also help us to set a sustainable rhythm to powerfully advance towards our vision.



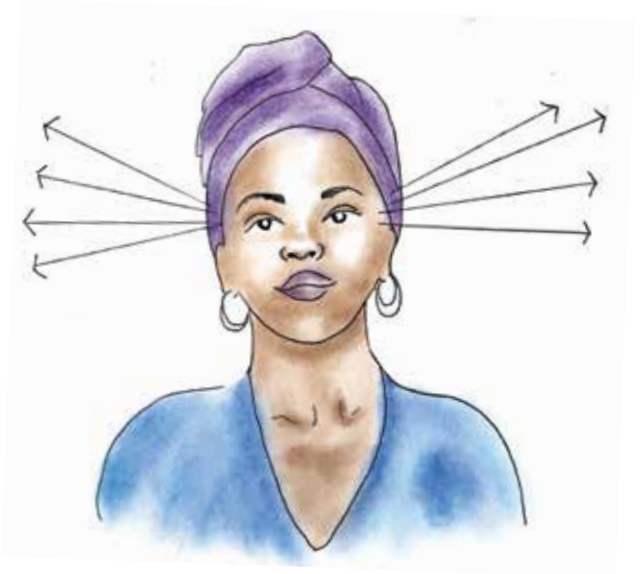


What Are Ways to Practice Stance, Breath, and Awareness for Movement Building?

AWARENESS: LONG, BROAD VIEW

How to Practice:

Lift your gaze to the distant horizon (your own eye level). Look out all the way in front of you and, without moving your eyes, broaden your gaze to see out of the far corners of your eyes. Keeping your gaze forward, see all that lies in front of you and even expand your senses to have awareness of what is behind you.



Why practice this?

Lifting our gaze helps us to keep awareness of the big picture and remember where we want to go, as well as the steps right in front of us. We can cultivate broad and non-reactive awareness to see the full context we are working within, including others moving in our landscape, potential opportunities, and unexpected challenges.

For more, check out a [breathing and movement exercise](#) that builds on these principles, offered on youtube by Norma Wong.

Movement Strategy Center and Move to End Violence are grateful for the guidance of [Norma Wong](#) with the IZS-Applied Zen program of the Institute of Zen Studies, and for the articulation of Forward Stance principles developed by Norma in collaboration with [Forward Together](#).