

## **An introduction to *Resilient Sensitivity*© - a therapeutic practice for managing and monitoring trauma**

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Lawyers, like actors, have to deal with many life dramas. The actor 'acts' while the lawyer 'acts on behalf of'. For both professionals, the 'show must go on' in spite of how such often violent and violating circumstances may personally affect them. But there has been a history, in these and other professions, which one must 'toughen up' and separate one's self from one's professional life in order to survive in the business. Alternatively, such professionals find ways to numb the pain and disconnect between themselves and the roles they play.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

Traumatisation through either direct abuse or bullying (psychological, physical, verbal) or exposure to the experiences of those who have experienced physical and psychological violence (clients, witnesses, patients, bystanders). It is now recognised as, variously, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma or secondary trauma stress (often resulting in burnout) in studies of nurses, lawyers, social workers, police, the military, and media crews in conflict or disaster zones.

*Journey wisely through tough and  
sometimes unpredictable terrain*



Managing trauma is like driving a 4-wheel drive through rough terrain. You need to safely and effectively traverse the most hostile and unpredictable terrain even if at times one or more of the wheels may lose grip. The appropriate focus and energy you provide, and the braking you also apply, ensures that you have good 'grip' wherever you need to travel. And it's a journey that can never be repeated – you need to learn to 'bounce' forward through adversity.

## ***Resilient Sensitivity***© -

is an inter-dependent set of practices, developed by Dr Seton, to enable professionals (in law, performing arts, healthcare, etc.) to both honour their professional skills and process the inevitability of stress and trauma that are encountered in practice. Like a 4 –wheel drive, this system consists of 5 key, interconnected elements (4 ‘wheels’ and a ‘central differential’ that co-ordinates and redirects energy where it is most needed at any particular part of the journey).

**Perception** – what do you experience and how do you make sense of that experience

**Preparation** – how does your training affect your interactions with others

**Process** – how do you carry out your job and remain responsive rather than reactive

**Perspective** – what professional/social/cultural contexts affect your interactions

+ (holding these in a dynamic and creative tensions)

**Play** – how do you remain adaptive, innovative, playful and open to possibility

The following are brief examples of the training offered to develop each element.

### **PERCEPTION:**

Developing a daily practice of self-awareness and interpersonal perception, drawing upon personal resources and interpersonal support (on call), to be ready to engage with encounters of trauma in a respectful and pro-active manner.

#### **Example: Daily Warm up and Check in**

breathe and sigh  
stretching and squirming sequence  
upper body twist and hip circles  
leg swings and feet treading  
face stretching and skin massage  
final shake down

**Notice** what you bring into the present moment – feeling states, desires and expectations, any contexts that need to be considered (e.g. physical injuries or disabilities, current emotional or relational concerns) – hold it all gently and lightly

### **PREPARATION:**

Learning about both your preferences and your possibilities for stretching/extending yourself (noticing where there may be hesitations) – and looking for, going towards the good – with an easy focus.

**Example: *Focus Energy Balance Indicator*** ® \* is used in many business and creative contexts to enable staff to identify where their energetic preferences and possibilities may lie when they do certain activities, either by themselves or with others. <http://www.focusleadership.com/>

There are 4 physically-identified, primary energy styles that we all use for engaging with ourselves and the world. Notice if any of the following styles in particular are more comfortable or less comfortable than the others.



PUSHING – associated with focussed, driven, single-mindedness

SWINGING – associated with interpersonal, collaborative, negotiation

SHAPING – associated with formal, strategic organisation

FLOATING – associated with easy-going, big-picture visioning

ALL these styles have value – ALL these styles are available to every body  
Learn to identify and apply the right combination of styles for the work circumstances that you encounter.

\* Dr Seton is a certified FEBI (Focus Energy Balance Indicator) trainer and consultant and can arrange a personal or team analysis of energetic work preferences.

## PROCESS

Learn to recognise and re-negotiate what you choose to keep (in your lived experience) and what you let go of (from your lived experience). Being able to **say yes to the good** and learn ways to be creative engaged in non-work related activities has been recognised by many experts as a key way to address experiences associated with compassion fatigue and secondary trauma. Similarly, learning to **say no to those things and persons that demand you to become a ‘rescuer/saviour’** helps you set appropriate, healthy and professional boundaries

**Example: InterPlay© forms – easy focus, sighing, noticing, ex-formation through moving, shaping, witnessing.**



**InterPlay**  
unlock the wisdom of your body is an improvisational creative practice that begins with embodiment and lived experience as both the foundation and reservoir for managing meaning-making in daily life. Through InterPlay©, we recognise and explore how our unique, embodied experience negotiates in-formation (the ideas, images, sounds, experiences we take into our selves) and ex-formation (the ideas, images, sounds, experiences we want to release or let go of).

By using our different energetic preferences and possibilities (*see Preparation activity*) we can, in a playful way, ‘take on’ and ‘let go of’ stuff that impacts our lives, our work and our relationships.

## **InterPlay form – a SOLO HAND MOVEMENT**

(ideally done with others who are also participating i.e. doing their own movement at the same time)

Lie down comfortably on the floor – your eyes closed, easy breath, hands and arms by your side.

Lift up one arm above you –  
make smooth movements with the arm and hand for 10 secs  
make jerky movements with the arm and hand for 10 secs  
make slow movements with the arm and hand for 10 secs  
make fast movements with the arm and hand for 10 secs  
make a shape with the arm and hand and hold it in stillness – change the shape –  
change again  
make contact with a part of your body with the arm and hand – make another point of  
contact  
be aware of all the possibilities of movement, shape and stillness you have

Play a piece of music and let yourself move either with or against the flow of the music – let a question or a challenge for you arise and allow the movement to interact with that question/challenge in its own way – keep breathing – at the end, rest, have the movement experience for yourself, before sharing, what you have noticed, with another.

### **PERSPECTIVE:**

Develop an interpersonal network of professional peer and personal support. You need both those whom you can share with – who know what's it's like to do what you do, to have to face the challenges that you face – AND – those who know and care about you outside of work. This is a process of developing conversations and activities that allow us to explore the complexities of making meaning together as an ongoing life-project.

**Example:** The following meaning-making questions, developed by complexity theorist and practitioner Dr Patricia Shaw (2002), can be used for opening up peer conversations to rebuild confidence in each person's sense of professional contribution and calling/vocation. Shaw sees complexity as “paradoxically stable and unstable, predictable and unpredictable, known and unknown, certain and uncertain, all at the same time ... Healthy, creative, ordinarily effective human interaction is then always complex, no matter what the situation”.

Possible conversation starters:

- ‘Who are we realizing we are as we gather here?’
- ‘What kind of sense are we making together?’
- ‘What are we coming to talk about as we converse?’
- ‘How are we shifting our understanding of what we are engaged in?’
- ‘What kind of enterprise are we shaping?’

### **PLAY:**

Dr Brene Brown (a leading research in vulnerability, shame and resilience) offers the following strategic values to play with:

- Lean into joy, with gratitude
- Be compassionate towards yourself and others
- Respect, listen and respond to your own pain – comfort yourself in your pain, rather than numb or deny the pain.

**Example:** Each of these cognitive concepts can be made more meaningful and habitual using InterPlay© forms of story-telling, sound, movement and stillness.

So ...

### **Why *resilient* sensitivity?**

From an ecological perspective, resilience is understood as the ability of a system to absorb disturbance and still retain its basic function and structure. **In the context of lawyers' experiences**, we might begin to understand their potential resilience in terms of their ability to absorb and negotiate both personal and interpersonal disturbances and/or traumas and still retain an emergent sense of identity and meaning-making.

The capacity to be resilient can contribute to a lawyer's sustainability in the present – their **sensitivity** to the nuances of what is at stake and **critical thinking** to identify what will be their contribution as - without eroding the potential for the person to be open to meet future, unanticipated needs and professional challenges.

### **COMING SOON:**

As Director of [www.senseconnexion.com](http://www.senseconnexion.com)  
Dr Mark Seton is available to offer two workshops

#### **Resilient Sensitivity© WORKSHOP (introducing the 5 elements)**

A workshop that can be run on a single day (4 x 1.5 hour sessions, with notes) or over two consecutive half-days.

This is available to both individuals (min. 10 participants in a group session) and organisations such as educational institutions.

AND

#### **Vital Performance for Barristers WORKSHOP** (Effective and sustainable advocacy skills)

A workshop can be run on a single day (4 x 1.5 hour sessions, with notes) or over two consecutive half-days.

1. Preparing the 'scene' – interviewing the client; gathering the evidence: identifying the overall objective
2. Preparing to 'act on behalf of' – analysing the narrative; warming up for the presentation of the 'scene'
3. Presenting the 'scene' – directing the attention of the audience; shaping their experience; collaborating with other stakeholders in the space
4. Debriefing afterwards – debriefing and cooling down after the presentation

This is available to both individuals (min. 10 participants in a group session) and organisations such as educational institutions.

For details of costing for each of these workshops, please contact Dr Mark Seton [mark@senseconnexion.com](mailto:mark@senseconnexion.com)