

Rising Above Toxic Leadership:

A Guide to Healing and Empowerment with IFS and Self-leadership

By Anna Milaeva



Part 1: Internal Family Systems (IFS) – A Path to Inner Harmony

This guide is designed for anyone suffering from the effects of toxic leadership. This first part introduces you to Internal Family Systems, a compassionate and powerful framework for personal transformation and healing. Here, we explore practical methods to better understand and start healing your inner dynamics, empowering you to find balance and enhance your well-being in and out of the workplace.

Understanding Internal Family Systems Model:

Developed over 40 years ago by Dr. Richard C. Schwartz, IFS is a powerful psychotherapeutic model and a transformative approach for understanding and harmonizing the complexities of the human psyche. At its core, IFS reveals that our minds consist of multiple parts each with its own distinct roles and emotions. These parts interact like members of a family, often with conflicting agendas and emotions, particularly under stress.

IFS provides a compassionate and non-judgmental framework that helps individuals recognize and engage with these diverse parts. For example:

Manager Parts: These parts strive to maintain control and protect us from perceived threats by managing our behavior and our environment.

Firefighter Parts: In times of intense emotional distress, these parts react impulsively to extinguish or soothe the pain as quickly as possible, often through extreme measures.

Exiled Parts: These are often vulnerable, carrying burdens of painful emotions from the past. They are usually hidden away by manager and firefighter parts to keep their distress from overwhelming the system.

Recognizing and engaging with these distinct parts of ourselves facilitates a deep understanding of our internal dynamics, paving the way for more inner balance and harmony. At the heart of the IFS model is the transformative notion that each of us possesses a core Self that remains undamaged, no matter the hardships or traumas we have endured. This Self is not just a passive presence; it is a powerful source of innate qualities such as curiosity, courage, creativity, connectedness, confidence, calm, clarity, and compassion.

When we allow this Self to lead, it acts as a compassionate leader, harmonizing and balancing our various parts. This core Self has an extraordinary capacity to heal, integrating and healing our parts in a way that restores our internal equilibrium and empowers us to live with greater peace and fulfillment. Through this process, we not only manage our internal conflicts but also unleash our true potential, guided by the wisdom and kindness of our undamaged Self.

Through IFS, we can learn to approach our internal family of parts with understanding and kindness, which can be especially beneficial in navigating the stress and emotional turmoil often appearing after being exposed to toxic leadership.

Practical Application of IFS:

Identifying Your Parts: Learn to recognize which parts are activated under stress or in response to toxic interactions. Understanding these parts helps you help overwhelming emotions or reactions.

Dialogue with Your Parts: Establish compassionate dialogues with these parts. Inquire about their needs and listen to their concerns, fostering understanding and cooperation within your internal system.

Balance Your System: Work towards a balanced internal state where your core Self leads and harmonizes all parts, enhancing your ability to handle external pressures.

Notice, Know, and Need Practice: A straightforward and powerful way to start connecting with our inner parts.

Step 1: Notice: Start by simply observing what's happening within you. What feelings, thoughts, or internal dialogues are present right now? This could be anything from a sense of hurry to a feeling of unease. The key here is to observe these internal experiences with curiosity and openness, without any immediate intention to change or fix them.

Step 2: Know: Once you've noticed a prominent part or feeling, engage with it. Start getting to know them. Pose gentle, inquisitive questions to understand it better:

What are you trying to tell me today?
Why are you present right now?
What's behind these feelings or thoughts?

This step is about deepening your understanding of this part and learning about its motives and fears at the moment.

Step 3: Need: Now that you've gotten to know this part a bit better, the next step is to uncover what it really needs. Ask these questions gently:

What do you need from me right now?
How can I help or support you internally?
Is there an external action that could fulfill this need?

This is about truly listening to and addressing the part's needs, whether they are internal (like reassurance or self-compassion) or external (like a specific action or change in environment).

Implementing the Practice in Daily Life:

Incorporate this practice into your daily routine to transform how you perceive and react to challenges within your work environment or in other challenging situations. Regular engagement with this practice can lead to a better understanding of your inner world and a greater ability to navigate complex dynamics with confidence, compassion, and clarity.

[Link to the full practice](#)

Conclusion and Additional Resources:

This guide is the beginning of your journey toward healing from the effects of toxic leadership. In part 2 we'll dive deeper into Self and Self-leadership and how we can access more of it through our breath.

For further exploration and support:

Book:
[„No Bad Parts“ by Richard Schwartz](#)

Book:
[Self-Therapy: A Step-by-Step Guide to Creating Wholeness Using IFS, A Cutting-Edge Psychotherapy by Jay Earley](#)

[IFS Institute for more materials and directories](#)

Part 2: Self-Leadership – Accessing Your Core Self for Transformation

In Part 1 of „Rising Above Toxic Leadership: A Guide to Healing and Empowerment with IFS and Self-leadership,“ we introduced the Internal Family Systems (IFS) model, a powerful framework for understanding and healing the multiple parts within us.

Building upon these foundational concept, this section deepens our exploration into the transformative power of Self-leadership. Through the IFS model, we learned that all of us have a core Self, inherently endowed with qualities such as curiosity, connectedness, creativity, confidence, calmness, clarity, courage, and compassion.

Here, we focus on how accessing this core Self and its natural qualities in daily life can profoundly transform both personal and professional challenges into opportunities for growth and empowerment.

The Essence of Self-Leadership:

Self-leadership is about harnessing the untainted essence of the Self, the natural leader within our internal systems. This core Self navigates life's complexities with inherent qualities that significantly improve how we respond to life and work challenges:

Calming Fears: By helping overactive Manager and Firefighter parts, the Self alleviates anxiety and stress, enabling a more proactive and clear-minded response to challenges.

Healing Wounds: With compassion, the Self can heal Exiled parts, fostering emotional healing.

Restoring Balance: By ensuring all parts are valued and understood, the Self promotes an internal environment of harmony that manifests as confident and assertive behavior.

Ancient Perspectives on Self-Leadership:

Across various cultures, the significance of the inner essence or core Self is recognized as vital for personal align-

ment and purpose. From the Atman in Hinduism to the "inner head" in African Traditions, these universal teachings enrich our understanding of leading from within.

Introducing Breathwork as a Pathway to Access more Self-energy:

Among many tools for accessing more Self-energy in our daily life, breathwork is particularly effective.

It stands out as a key practice in our toolkit for accessing Self-energy, valua-

ble for those navigating the stress and challenges posed by toxic leadership. Here, we introduce the Double Breath technique—a researched and effective method for quickly helping anxiety and stress, essential in managing the pressures of toxic environments.

How to Practice Double Breath:

Find a Comfortable Space: Choose a quiet area where you can relax without interruptions.

Set a Timer: Start with a 2-minute session and gradually increase the duration.

Begin Double Inhalation: Perform a deep inhalation through the nose, followed by a shorter, quick inhalation.

Extended Exhalation: Exhale slowly and fully through the mouth, focusing on releasing the air steadily. Repeat the Pattern: Continue this breathing rhythm for the duration of your session, focusing on the smooth flow and rhythm of your breath.

Implementing Breathwork into Daily Life:

Regularly incorporate this technique into your routine to strengthen resilience, maintain mental clarity, and enhance emotional calm. It is a practical way to empower your daily interactions and improve your capacity to face and transform challenges.

Resources for Continued Growth:

Embracing the journey toward Self-leadership through IFS and breathwork is transformative, reshaping our engagement with ourselves and our environment. Here are two useful apps to accompany you in your breath sessions.

Othership App: An app dedicated to fun and engaging breathwork sessions that cater to different needs, including stress reduction, energy boosting, and emotional processing. The app offers guided sessions with varied lengths and focuses, suitable for both beginners and advanced practitioners.

Breathwrk App: This app provides a variety of breathing exercises designed to alleviate stress, help with sleep, increase energy levels, or improve mood. Its user-friendly interface makes it easy to start and maintain a regular breathwork practice.

Closing Words of Hope:

Personal transformation is not just a pathway to rising above toxic leadership; it's the key to thriving in all areas of our lives. By committing to understand and nurture our internal parts, we can open doors to new possibilities for professional and personal fulfillment.

Change begins within. Each small step in self-awareness and self-care radiates outward, influencing our environments and relationships. Remember, you have the power to transform your reality, and in doing so, you inspire those around you to embark on their own journeys of transformation and Self-leadership.

THE AUTHOR



Anna Milaeva

After experiencing the profound impacts of toxic leadership on her own well-being and health, Anna found her calling in exploring and advocating effective transformational practices.

Her journey led her to the transformative powers of Internal Family Systems and breathwork, which not only reshaped her life but also set her on a new career path as a Transformational IFS Coach.

Today, Anna is dedicated to supporting individuals and teams through 1:1 coaching sessions, leadership workshops, and small group programs to empower others to rise above toxic leadership and access their authentic power and Self-leadership.

To learn more about Anna's coaching services and group sessions, or to simply connect, please reach out.

<https://www.annamilaeva.com/> and hello@annamilaeva.com you can also find more of her articles and IFS-inspired practices on my Substack blog <https://annamilaeva.substack.com/>.