

HELENA BOURDILLON

4x World Champion | 4 World Records | 16 National Records

Presents

Freediving Through Fear: Mental Fitness to Unlock Capabilities We Don't Know We Have

5 Key Tools

5 KEY TOOLS

Build self-trust through actual experience; prove your capacity and propel you towards your goals.

Focused Breathing

01

4:6 Method

- Inhale for a count of 4, exhale for a count of 6. All breathing through your nose.
- Allow your body to relax into the exercise at your own counting pace.
- Practice for 5 minutes at a time.

Rapid Anchoring

02

The 3-3-3 Rule

- Identify 3 objects you can see.
- Identify 3 distinct sounds you can hear.
- Move 3 body parts deliberately and mindfully.

PMR

03

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Starting with toes/feet, tense them as much as possible for 5–10 seconds.
- Suddenly release and pay attention to the contrast between tense and relaxed states for 15–20 seconds, then move on to the next muscle group.
- Repeat the cycle 2–3 times.
- Muscle order: Toes and Feet, Calves, Thighs, Buttocks, Stomach, Chest, Back, Hands and Arms, Shoulders, Neck and Face.

5 KEY TOOLS

Cold Water Stimulation

04

Vagus Nerve Activation

- Splash face with cool/cold water, particularly around the eye area.
- Alternative: Apply cold compress to back of neck for 2 minutes.

Re-framing Thoughts

05

Cognitive Restructuring

- Recognise the negative thought.
- Question its accuracy.
- Consider alternative interpretations.

It's not about forcing positivity but finding a more balanced perspective.

Implementation

Choose one of these and keep practicing until you start to notice positive changes. Then try combining tools together for additional benefits — for example, The 3-3-3 Rule followed by a little bit of Focused Breathing, or Focused Breathing followed by Progressive Muscle Relaxation.

Practice when the stakes are low, so when the stakes are high, your body knows exactly what to do.

Mental fitness is not separate from sustainable professional excellence,
it is the foundation of it.

HELENA BOURDILLON

Helping leaders and their teams in high-stakes sectors eliminate imposter syndrome, decision paralysis and presenteeism — the hidden drivers of burnout — through building Mental Fitness, the foundation of sustainable high performance.

Available for Speaking and Workshop engagements

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MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT RESOURCES

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health challenges, help is available. You are not alone.

Lawyers' Assistance Programs

Every U.S. state operates a Lawyer Assistance Program (LAP) providing free, confidential support for attorneys.

- All services are free and confidential. Most are available 24/7.
- Find your state's LAP: americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance

Your state LAP provides:

- Confidential counselling and support
- Referrals to mental health professionals
- Peer support programmes
- Stress management and work-life balance resources

National Crisis Resources

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988** — Available 24/7
- **Crisis Text Line:** Text HOME to 741741 — Free, 24/7 support
- **SAMHSA National Helpline: 1-800-662-4357** — Free, confidential, 24/7

Additional Support

- ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs: americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): www.nami.org | 1-800-950-6264
- National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being Report (2017)

Remember: Seeking help is the most courageous thing you can do.

RESEARCH & REFERENCES

These five tools are supported by current neuroscience and mental health research.

Focused Breathing (4:6 Method)

Balban et al. (2023, Cell Reports Medicine): Stanford study found 5 minutes of daily breathwork with prolonged exhalations produced greater mood improvement and physiological arousal reduction than mindfulness meditation.

Watso et al. (2023, American Journal of Physiology): Nasal breathing increases parasympathetic nervous system activity and lowers blood pressure compared with mouth breathing.

Zaccaro et al. (2018, Frontiers in Human Neuroscience): Systematic review confirmed slow breathing enhances autonomic flexibility and increases heart rate variability.

Rapid Anchoring (3-3-3 Rule)

Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry: Grounding exercises can reduce acute anxiety symptoms by activating the parasympathetic nervous system and interrupting anxious thought patterns.

Strohmaier, Jones & Cane (2020, Mindfulness journal): 71-participant randomised controlled study found shorter mindfulness interventions (5 minutes) produced greater effects on mindfulness and stress reduction than longer sessions (20 minutes).

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Manzoni et al. (2008, BMC Psychiatry): Meta-analysis of 27 studies found relaxation training including PMR produced a medium-large effect on anxiety reduction ($d = 0.57$).

Simon et al. (2022, Journal of Sleep Research): PMR participants spent 125% more time in deep sleep compared to control groups, demonstrating measurable improvements in sleep quality.

Cold Water Stimulation

Jungmann et al. (2018, JMIR Formative Research): Randomised controlled trial ($n=61$) found cold stimulation of the face and neck significantly increases cardiac-vagal activation via the trigeminal-vagal reflex.

Richer et al. (2022, Scientific Reports): Cold Face Test reduced cortisol stress responses by over 70 percentage points compared to controls, confirming parasympathetic activation under acute stress.

Reframing Thoughts

Ezawa & Hollon (2023, Psychotherapy): Meta-analysis found cognitive restructuring predicted lower depressive symptoms and reduced relapse risk, with a large effect size ($d = 0.85$).

Santos et al. (2024, Healthcare): Scoping review confirmed cognitive restructuring has positive effects on depressive symptoms through a structured process of identifying dysfunctional thoughts, examining their validity, and developing adaptive alternatives.

Legal Profession Mental Health Crisis

Krill et al. (2023, Healthcare): Lawyers are twice as likely as the general population to contemplate suicide (8.5% vs 4.3%).

ALM Mental Health Survey (2023): 71% of lawyers experience anxiety (up from 64% in 2019); 38% experience depression (up from 31% in 2019).

Krill et al. (2023): Youngest lawyers most at risk — over 14% of attorneys age 30 or under have contemplated suicide.

Additional Research

Viktor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning: The space between stimulus and response.

National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being Report (2017).

ABA Working Group on Lawyer Well-Being resources.

MY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The tool I'm committing to practicing:

When I'll practice (daily trigger or specific time):

Week 1 Progress: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Week 2 Progress: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

What I've noticed after 2 weeks:

Where in my life could these tools make a difference?

HELENA BOURDILLON

60-Minute CLE Keynote

“Freediving Through Fear:

Mental Fitness To Unlock Capabilities We Don’t Know We Have”

Programme Overview

A 60-minute CLE-accredited keynote for legal professionals addressing the documented mental health crisis in the profession. Grounded in neuroscience, personal narrative, and five practical tools drawn from Helena’s journey from severe depression to 4× World Champion freediver.

CLE Credit Category: Mental Health & Wellness / Professional Responsibility

Delivery: Live in-person or virtual (Zoom)

Interactive elements: Two guided exercises within the session

Core Positioning

Mental fitness is not separate from sustained excellence, it is the foundation of it.

The profession’s crisis in numbers (2023 data, Healthcare journal):

- Lawyers are twice as likely as the general population to contemplate suicide (8.5% vs 4.3%)
- Over 14% of lawyers aged 30 or under have contemplated suicide
- 71% experience anxiety — up from 64% in 2019
- 38% experience depression — up from 31% in 2019

The central argument: What quietly undermines sound legal judgement, erodes confidence, and keeps capable people operating below their actual capacity isn’t effort or intellect. It’s a nervous system stuck in survival mode.

What Survival Mode Costs the Legal Professional

Chronic threat response doesn’t announce itself. It feels like focus, looks like dedication, and quietly degrades the capabilities that matter most:

- Accurate risk assessment - catastrophizing masquerades as thoroughness

- Full working memory - cognitive bandwidth erodes under sustained cortisol load
- Self-trust and instinct - imposter syndrome steps in where professional judgement should be
- Creative problem-solving - threat response narrows thinking to “what keeps me safe”
- Emotional regulation - every provocation feels personal, every difficult client a crisis
- Present-moment attention - mentally rehearsing the next argument while the witness is still speaking

These aren't character flaws or signs of insufficient commitment. They're what happens when a high-performing nervous system is running in the wrong gear.

This programme addresses all of them.

Timed Agenda

Time	Section	Content
00:00–10:00	Opening	Fear and Trust freediving scenarios. 90-second 4:6 Breathing exercise. Introduction to Performance Architecture and the three capabilities survival mode locks away.
10:00–12:15	Foundation	Mental fitness as operational necessity. 2023 legal profession mental health statistics. The case for treating mental fitness as professional infrastructure, not wellness programming.
12:15–14:00	Personal Journey	Helena's experience with severe depression (aged 11–26), self-harm, and suicidal ideation. Recovery through therapy and the five tools. The profound insight: the opposite of anxiety isn't calm — it's self-trust.
14:00–24:30	Tool 1	Focused Breathing: Email apnea phenomenon, nose vs mouth breathing, the 4:6 technique. Croatian hospital story. Stanford 2023 research: five minutes equals 20 minutes effectiveness.
24:30–26:00	Being Present	Viktor Frankl quote on the pause between stimulus and response. Lao Tzu on past/future/present. Present-moment awareness as core mental fitness competency.
26:00–29:00	Tool 2	Rapid Anchoring: The 3-3-3 Rule (3 objects, 3 sounds, 3 body movements). Legal-specific applications: before court, before client calls, during depositions.
29:00–35:30	Tool 3	Progressive Muscle Relaxation: Shoulders and fists interactive demonstration. Russian doll layers of relaxation. Connection to physical tension and quality of legal judgement.
35:30–37:15	Discovery & Trust	How the three tools built self-trust. The opposite of anxiety is trust. Ripple effects into teams, firms, communities.
37:15–40:00	Freediving Story	Starting freediving at 39. First World Championships terror. 4× World Champion journey. Two additional tools discovered at depth.
40:00–43:15	Tool 4	Cold Water Stimulation: Mammalian Dive Reflex, vagus nerve activation. Legal applications — cold compress to neck before high-stakes moments.

43:15–49:15	Tool 5	Reframing Thoughts: Inner critic identification specific to legal profession. Three-step process: Recognise, Question, Consider alternatives. Freediving internal dialogue example.
49:15–51:15	Implementation	Choose ONE tool. Practice at low stakes. Short and frequent beats long and occasional. Building evidence of capability.
51:15–56:15	Q&A	Up to five minutes audience questions.
56:15–60:00	Conclusion	Plane/freediving story. Joy vs pleasure. Boundaries as the edge of what you’ve discovered so far. Call to action: one tool, today.

The 5 Key Tools at a Glance

#	Tool	What it does	Legal application
1	Focused Breathing	4:6 technique activates the parasympathetic nervous system. Five minutes rewires stress response (Stanford 2023). Restores executive function within seconds.	Before depositions, difficult client conversations, or any moment where clear-headed judgement is non-negotiable.
2	Rapid Anchoring	3-3-3 Rule: three things seen, three sounds heard, three body parts moved. Interrupts anxiety spiral and restores present-moment awareness in under 60 seconds.	Before entering court, during a break in proceedings, when panic rises mid-deposition.
3	PMR	Progressive Muscle Relaxation releases normalised tension. Systematic tense-and-release cycle shifts the body from fight-or-flight to rest-and-digest. Builds body awareness over time.	Recognising and releasing tension before high-stakes meetings. Preventing chronic pain and burnout from accumulated physical stress.
4	Cold Water Stimulation	Vagus nerve activation via the Mammalian Dive Reflex. Triggers rapid shift from nervous energy to calm confidence.	Cold compress to the back of the neck for two minutes before a high-stakes moment. No wet shirts required.
5	Reframing Thoughts	Three-step process: Recognise the negative thought, Question its accuracy, Consider alternatives. Addresses the inner critic specific to the legal profession.	Challenging catastrophising during case preparation. Questioning imposter syndrome’s favourite phrases: “They’ll see through you.” “You missed something.”

Interactive Elements

- 90-second 4:6 Breathing exercise at opening — audience experiences nervous system shift in real time
- 1-minute PMR demonstration — shoulders and fists, with audience engagement on where they hold physical stress
- Eight audience engagement questions woven throughout — personalised application to legal practice

Key Phrases & Positioning Lines

“Mental fitness isn’t optional in this profession. You must make it non-negotiable.”

“It feels like focus, looks like dedication, but is more than likely survival mode disguised as high performance.”

“The opposite of anxiety isn’t peace and calm, these are wonderful by-products. The true opposite of anxiety is self-trust.”

“What are YOU capable of, that you haven’t discovered yet?”

“The boundaries you think are set? They’re not. They’re just the edge of what you’ve discovered so far.”

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Presents



FREEDIVING THROUGH FEAR:
Mental Fitness to unlock capabilities we don't know we have











Mental Fitness is the foundation of
sustainable performance.



5 KEY TOOLS

1. FOCUSED BREATHING



“Between stimulus and response there is space.

In that space is our power to choose our response.

In our response lies our growth and freedom.”

Victor Frankl

Holocaust survivor and renowned psychologist

5 KEY TOOLS

1. FOCUSED BREATHING
2. RAPID ANCHORING



5 KEY TOOLS

1. FOCUSED BREATHING
2. RAPID ANCHORING
3. PMR









5 KEY TOOLS

1. FOCUSED BREATHING
2. RAPID ANCHORING
3. PMR
4. COLD WATER



5 KEY TOOLS

1. FOCUSED BREATHING
2. RAPID ANCHORING
3. PMR
4. COLD WATER
5. REFRAMING THOUGHTS







HELENA BOURDILLON

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