

BREATHE EASY

Breath work techniques that help conquer performance anxiety.

BY JENNIFER CHAPIS

"Take a deep breath. Everything will be OK." How many times have you

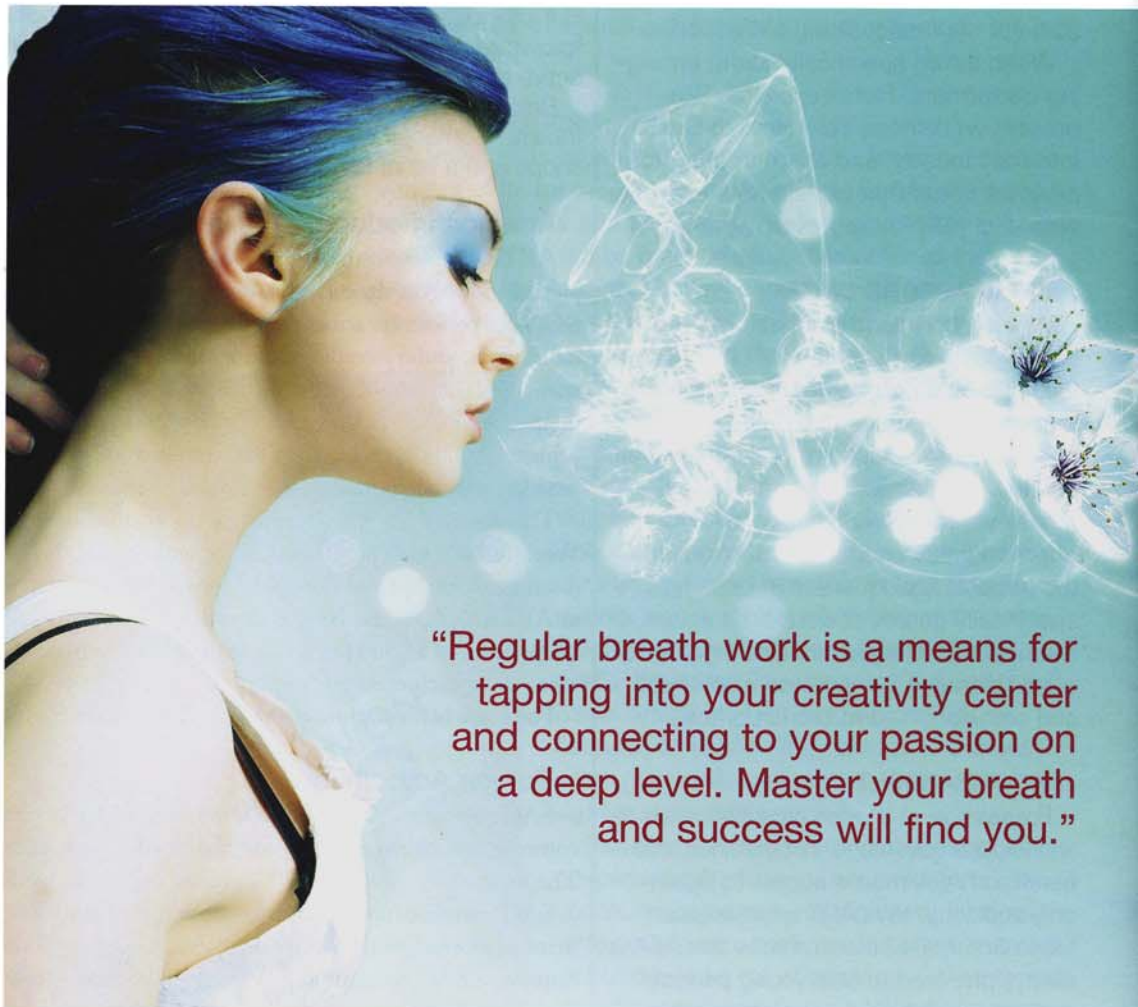
heard this advice? How many times have you given it? People commonly remind one another to just breathe during moments of personal tension or turmoil. When we step back and take a deep breath, centered calm takes over.

What was your breathing pattern the last time you waited in line for your 60 seconds opposite the casting director? Chances are it was shallow and obstructed. What if you knew for certain that something as simple as breathing properly could help you overcome fears, increase confidence and feel genuinely more joyful, energetic and charismatic?

As it turns out, "Take a deep breath" may very well be the best advice we can give. Free of charge and available at all times, your breath is a handy tool for releasing self-imposed limitations, conquering stage fright and performance anxiety, staying focused in the face of rejection and taking full advantage of personal ability.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND BREATHING

Medical fact tells us the intake of oxygen through proper breathing creates balance in the nervous system, nourishes bodily cells, increases blood flow to



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the brain, aids the lymphatic system, promotes healing and even helps us sleep soundly. Eastern sages and western psychologists alike say breathing deeply helps release negative memories and harmful unexpressed emotions stored on a cellular level and in the subconscious. Experts in the fields of martial arts, meditation and health and wellness say breathing leads to mastery of body and mind. Simple human instinct tells us to breathe, yet our tendency when stressed or scared is to hold our breath.

TRANSFORMATIONAL BREATHING

"When our breath is restricted, the flow of life within us is shut down,"

explains Judith Kravitz, founder and director of the Transformational Breath Foundation and author of the book, "Breathe Deep, Laugh Loudly." Over the last 30 years, Kravitz has taught more than 100,000 people around the globe (including actors such as Goldie Hawn) how to use a self-empowering breath work technique called Transformational Breathing. The breath has the ability to permanently change energetic patterns in our electromagnetic field, she says. Based on a universal law of physics and appropriate for all ages, transformational breathing is an easy, gentle way of accessing our own personal power.

The idea behind transformational

breathing is that when you improve your breathing, your life improves automatically. It sounds so simple: Master your breath and success will find you. It is true that the most powerful things in life are often the simplest and nearest to us. It's also true that large-scale success comes to those who are comfortable expressing their unique talents, and acting and modeling are certainly no exceptions.

When asked what advice Kravitz would give an aspiring actor or model, she says: "Breathe." The younger you start the better. "Regular breath work is a means for tapping into your creativity center and connecting to your passion on a deep level. Acting and modeling are about emotion. Exhalation is itself a natural act of expression. If you want to be more heart-centered in your approach, the breath will help you clear fear, feel self-assured and stay healthy. It will keep you performing at your best."

BREATHE AND SUCCEED

You may be thinking, "But I'm already breathing. I've been doing it since I was born."

On the contrary; just because you breathe a lot (more than 23,000 times a day) does not mean you're breathing properly. Many cultural, environmental and personal reasons exist why the breathing mechanism gets restricted. Unaware that breathing well means living well, most people ignore the way they breathe. "We were never taught how," Kravitz says. "Our parents didn't know, and we didn't go to breathing school." Even people who have taken time to focus on healthy and productive breathing, such as athletes, yoga teachers and musicians, still may not be using their full respiratory system. Unfortunately, most people use only about 20 percent of their breath capacity.

Kravitz explains that using the thoracic diaphragm offers a full open breath,

Work on Breath Work

SIMPLE STEPS TO HELP RESTORE A STEADY, CONFIDENT BREATHING RHYTHM.

- Lie flat with knees bent, or lie with your back propped at a 45-degree angle. (This helps diaphragm muscles to engage.)
- Get comfortable with a pillow and blanket. Relax your mind and body.
- Open your mouth wide. Start breathing through your mouth into your lower abdomen.
- Your breathing pattern should be circular with no pause between inhale and exhale.
- Focus on using your diaphragm, not stomach muscles. Place your hands on your abdomen to help.
- Push the diaphragm muscles down on the inhale (belly rises as it fills with air).
- Then simply relax and allow the exhale to happen naturally (don't try to control or force it).
- If difficult, place a diaphragmatic breathing pillow on your lower abdomen. Filled with sand, the weighted pillow helps exercise and strengthen appropriate muscles.
- You're aiming for big, long, full breaths using the whole respiratory system. (Your entire abdomen should flow like a wave.)
- Emotions (tears) and physical sensations (tingling, heaviness, hot, cold) commonly arise during breath work. Simply allow the process to happen and trust that whatever you feel is natural, healthy and positive.
- Think of an affirmation, such as "It's fun and easy to breathe" or "It's safe to breathe," and repeat as needed.
- Remember to just relax and let it happen. The breath will take over if you let it.
- In the beginning, try practicing your breathing for three five-minute sessions daily.
- For best results, experience the transformational breathing process with a trained facilitator. Follow-up with a guided CD to help lead you through it.

For more info: www.transformationalbreathing.com.

whereas other muscles create tension and limit air capacity. "No two people on the planet breathe alike," she says. "The way you breathe tells a story. It's a map of what's going on with you physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. People do all kinds of crazy things when they breathe. They use their head, neck, shoulder, chest or back muscles. They use their solar plexus. There is just one correct way to breathe. However, only 15 percent of human beings utilize the muscles they were given for breathing."

PRACTICE BREATHING

If there were a class in grade school called "Breathing Basic," this would be lesson number one: Use only your

diaphragm, no other muscles. The diaphragm is a mass of muscle extending across the base of the rib cage, separating the chest from the stomach. Here's an easy test: breathe naturally and watch what happens. Your chest rising during inhalation is a sure sign you're not using the diaphragm. "During healthy breathing," says Kravitz, "air goes down into the stomach cavity and causes the organs in the lower abdominal area to rise. It looks like you're breathing in your belly." This is a great way to start to strengthen the appropriate muscles and begin effective breathing. Then you can go from there to work on opening up the remaining respiratory system. [AFM](#)