

ICF CONVERGE

OCTOBER 23-25, 2025 • SAN DIEGO



The Possible Self: Toward the Life-Long Development

Maja Djikic, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Organizational Behaviour and HR Management

Executive Director, Self-Development Laboratory

Academic Director, Rotman Executive Coaching Program

Teaching Fellow, The Institute for Gender and the Economy

Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto

FAULTY ASSUMPTIONS

*CHANGE **WHAT?***

1. Who you 'are', your personality, is stable and doesn't change. You can only change behaviours.

*CHANGE **HOW?***

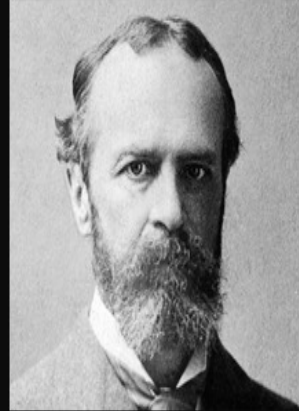
2. The way to change behaviours is incrementally, by employing willpower, with the aim of building better habits.

PERSONALITY

A STABLE WAY OF INTERACTING
WITH ONESELF AND THE
ENVIRONMENT

FOR A WHILE

William James

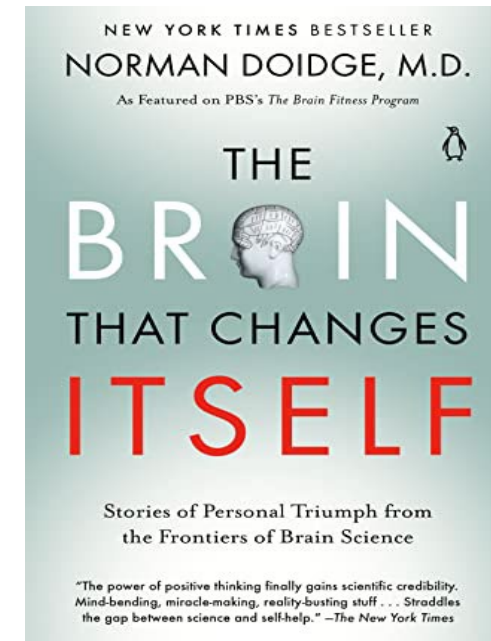


It is well for the world that in most of us, by the age of thirty, the character has set like plaster, and will never soften again.

AZ QUOTES

PERSONALITY/BRAIN CHANGES ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

- Srivastava, S., John, O.P., Gosling, S.D. Potter, J. (2003). Development of Personality in Early and Middle Adulthood: Set like plaster or persistent change? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84 (5), 1041-1053).
- Doidge, N. (2007). *The Brain that Changes Itself: Stories of personal triumph from the frontiers of brain science*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Stankiewicz, A. M., Swiergiel, A.H., Lisowski, P. (2013). Epigenetics of stress adaptations in the brain. *Brain Research Bulletin*, 98, pp.76-92.



*CHANGE **WHAT?***

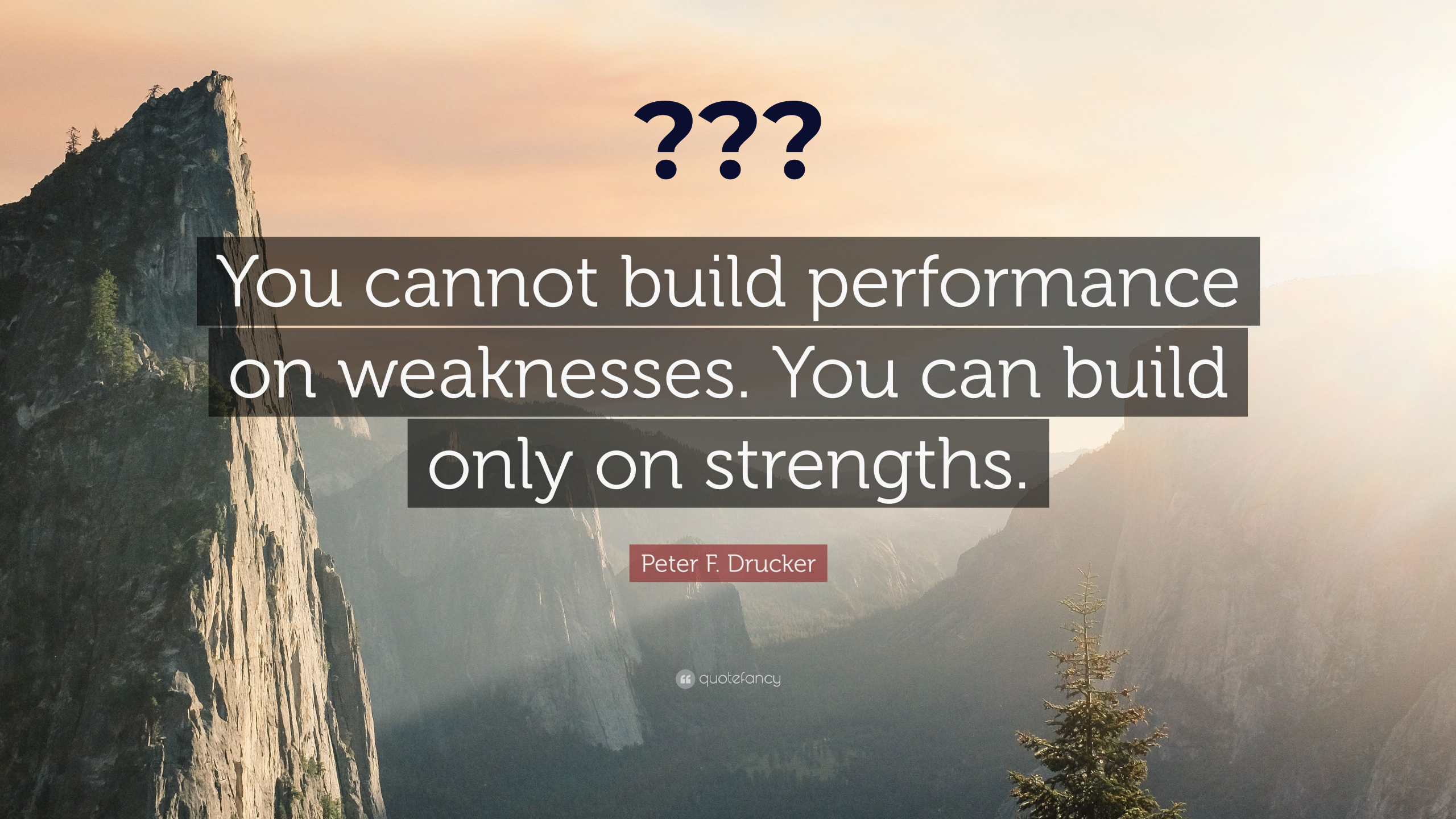
IF traits are...

- GENETICALLY HARDWIRED?
- IMMUNE TO CHANGE?

THEN...

- ACCEPTANCE
- STRENGTH IDENTIFICATION
- GRATITUDE
- ADDRESS PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOUR



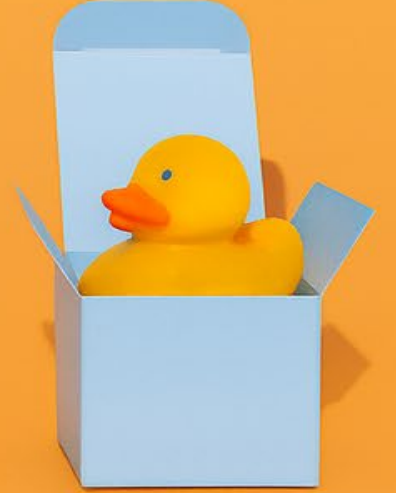
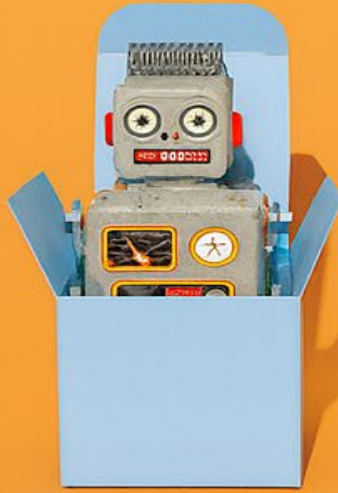


???

You cannot build performance
on weaknesses. You can build
only on strengths.

Peter F. Drucker

CHANGE WHAT?



PERSONALITY

CHANGE *WHAT?*

**TEMPERAMENT?
POTENTIAL?
PERSONALITY?**



CHANGE WHAT?

TEMPERAMENT

GENETIC/BIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES
IN **PHYSIOLOGY**

- E.g. sensitivity to light, sound, taste, smell, etc.
- Difficulties with the digestive, respiratory system, etc.



CHANGE *WHAT?*

POTENTIAL

GENETIC/BIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES IN MOTIVATION

- Some kids prefer to draw, some prefer to take apart train sets, some prefer imaginary play



CHANGE *WHAT?*

PERSONALITY

'TRAITS' AS EARLY SKILLS IN
LIVING WITH OUR TEMPERAMENT
& POTENTIAL WITHIN OUR
UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT



CHANGE **WHAT?**

**STRENGTH
PERSPECTIVE**

VS.

**DEVELOPMENTAL
PERSPECTIVE**



CHANGE **WHAT?**

OUR DEVELOPMENT IS AT THE
OPPOSITE POLE OF OUR
STRENGTHS



CHANGE **WHAT?**

DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

HUMANS HAVE MULTIPLE
POTENTIALITIES AT DIFFERENT
STAGES OF THE DEVELOPMENT



CHANGE **WHAT?**

DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

ENGAGEMENT AND FULFILLMENT
COME FROM THE 'CLIMB', NOT
FROM 'ADMIRING THE VIEW'



CHANGE *WHAT?*

DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

TO GROW UNDEVELOPED
PARTS OF THE SELF, WE HAVE
TO FOCUS ON THEM



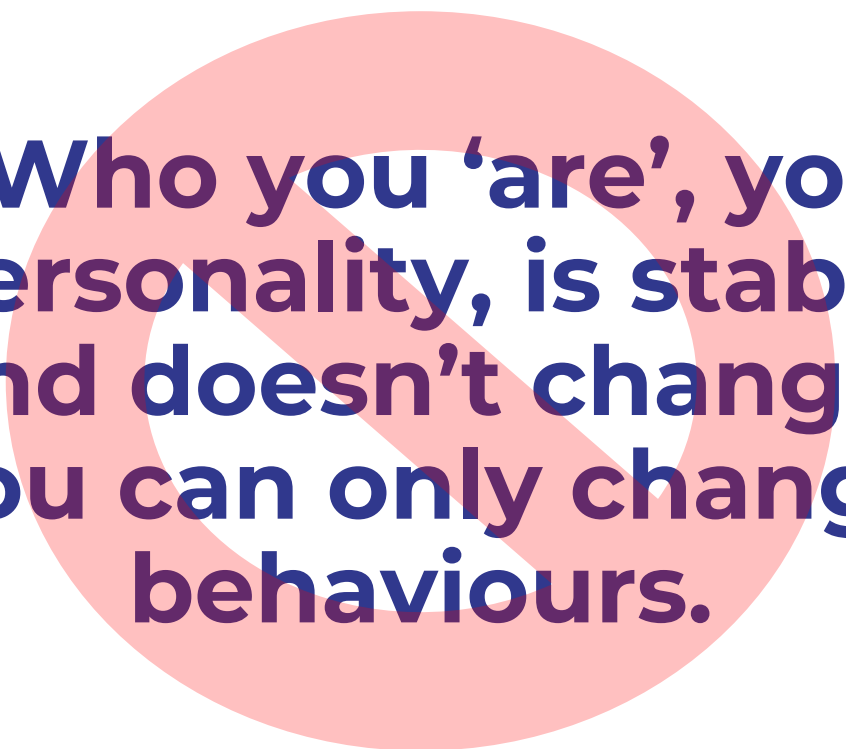
CHANGE WHAT?

STALLED PARTS OF SELF?

- REPEATED FAILURE, DESPITE
BEST EFFORT
- FEELING 'BEHIND SCHEDULE'
- ENVY
- ADVICE THAT NEVER WORKS
- IMMATURITY



CHANGE WHAT?

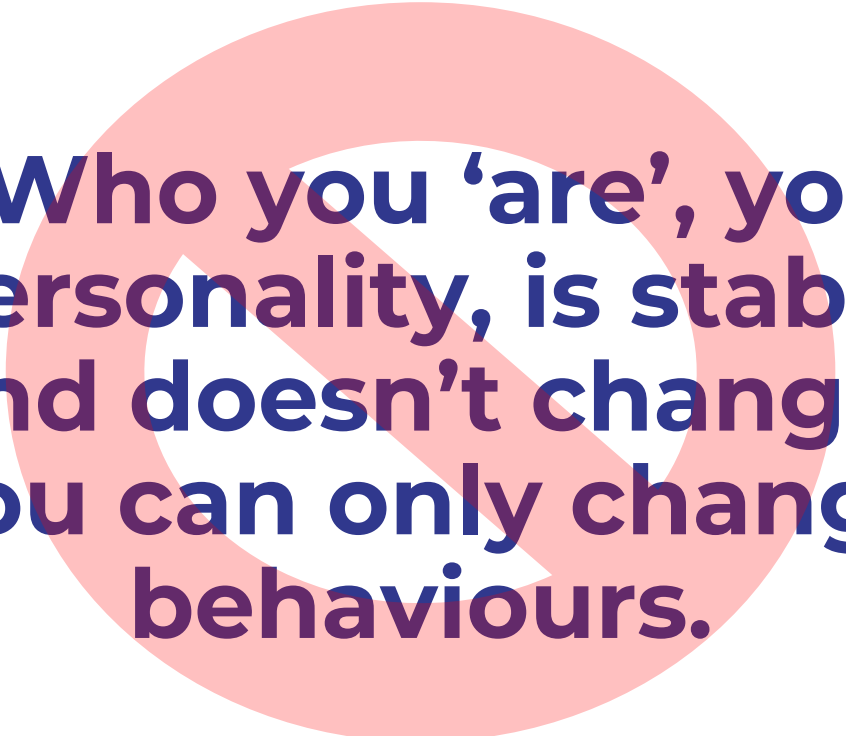


1. Who you 'are', your personality, is stable and doesn't change. You can only change behaviours.

WE HAVE EVOLVED TO NATURALLY GROW AND CHANGE, NOT JUST BEHAVIORS BUT OUR WHOLE SELF.

WE CAN BENEFIT MOST FROM CHANGING THE LEAST DEVELOPED PARTS OF SELF.

CHANGE *WHAT*?



1. Who you 'are', your personality, is stable and doesn't change. You can only change behaviours.

CHANGE *HOW*?

2. The way to change behaviours is incrementally, by employing willpower, with the aim of building better habits.

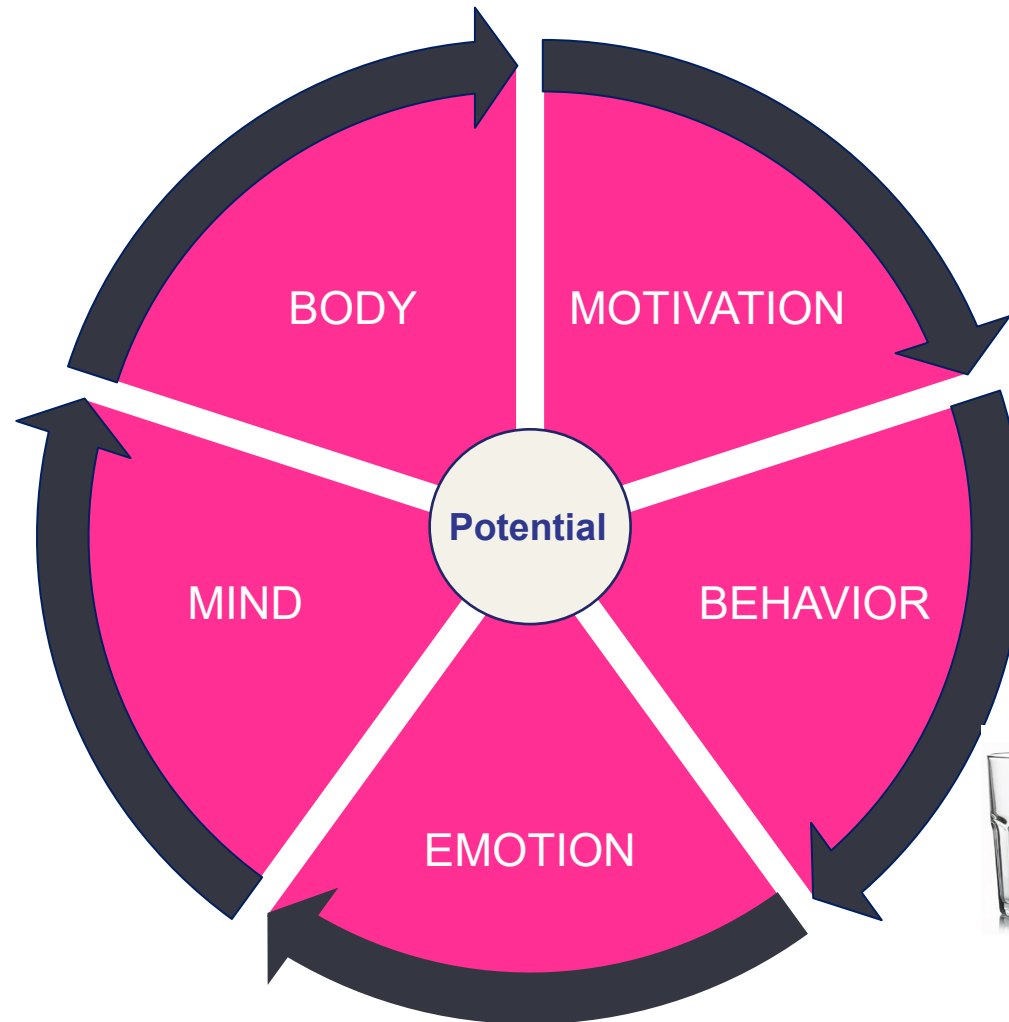
???

**You should not change yourself, but
create yourself, that mean build around
your strengths and removing bad habits.**

Peter F. Drucker



THE WHEEL OF SELF

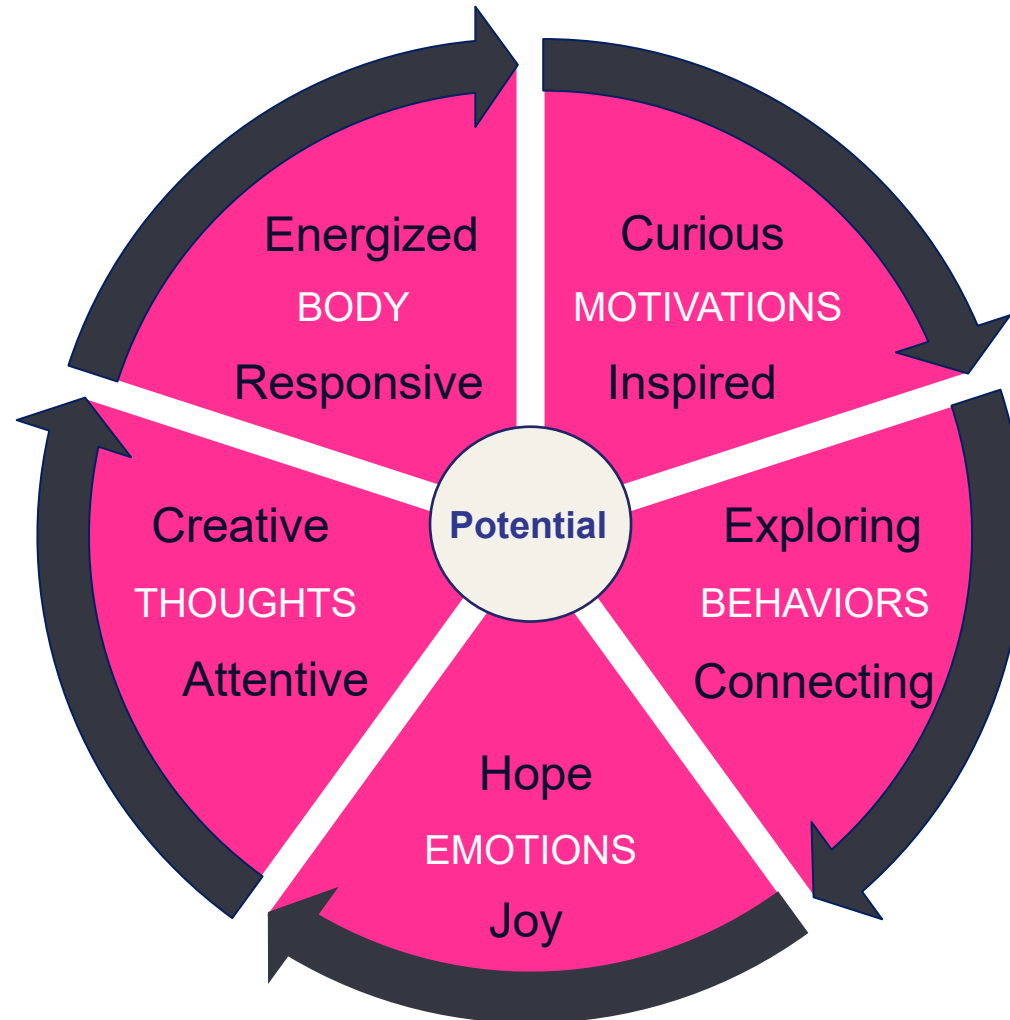


CHANGE HOW?

WILLPOWER



THE DEVELOPING SELF



WILLPOWER



THE STALLED SELF



WILLPOWER

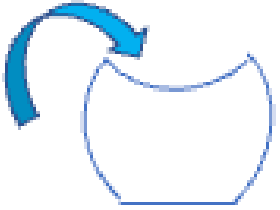


DEVELOPMENTAL WHEEL OF SELF

Neural system
adaptive and
responsive

Core wants
fulfilled directly

LEARNING



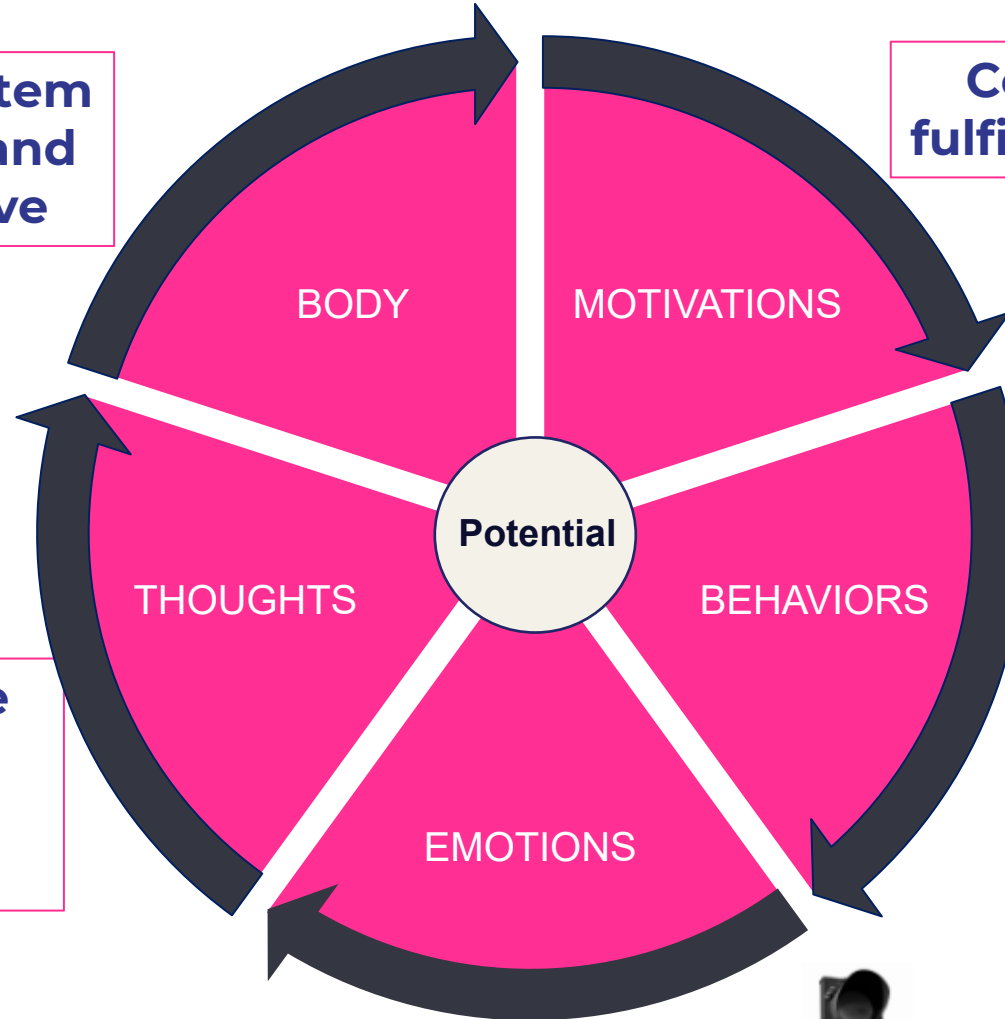
Constructs are
accurate and
open to new
information



Emotional system
correctly guides
toward action



Abundant
willpower



STALLED WHEEL OF SELF

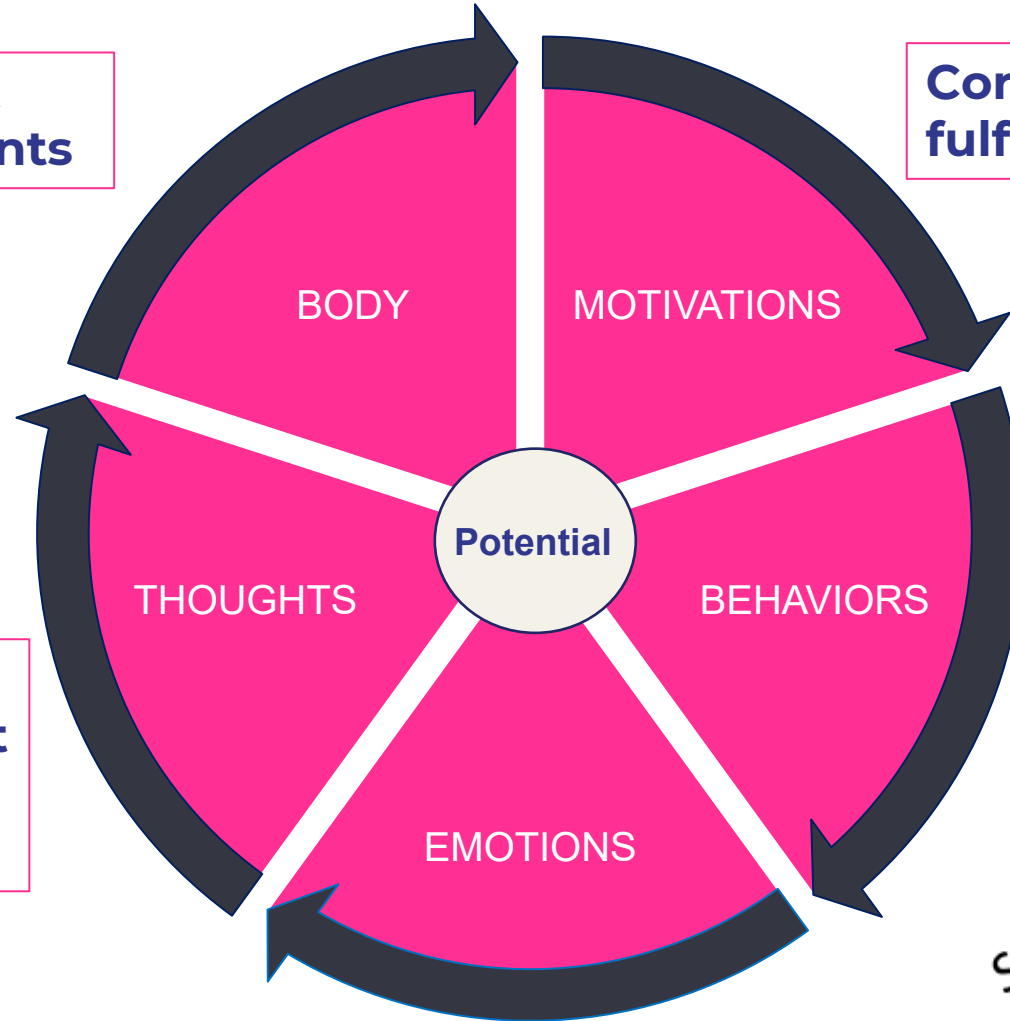
Significant
neural events

Core wants not
fulfilled directly

OVER-LEARNING



Construct is
closed, and can't
accept new
information



Distraction and
overdoing

SAME



Emotions respond
to the past rather
than the present

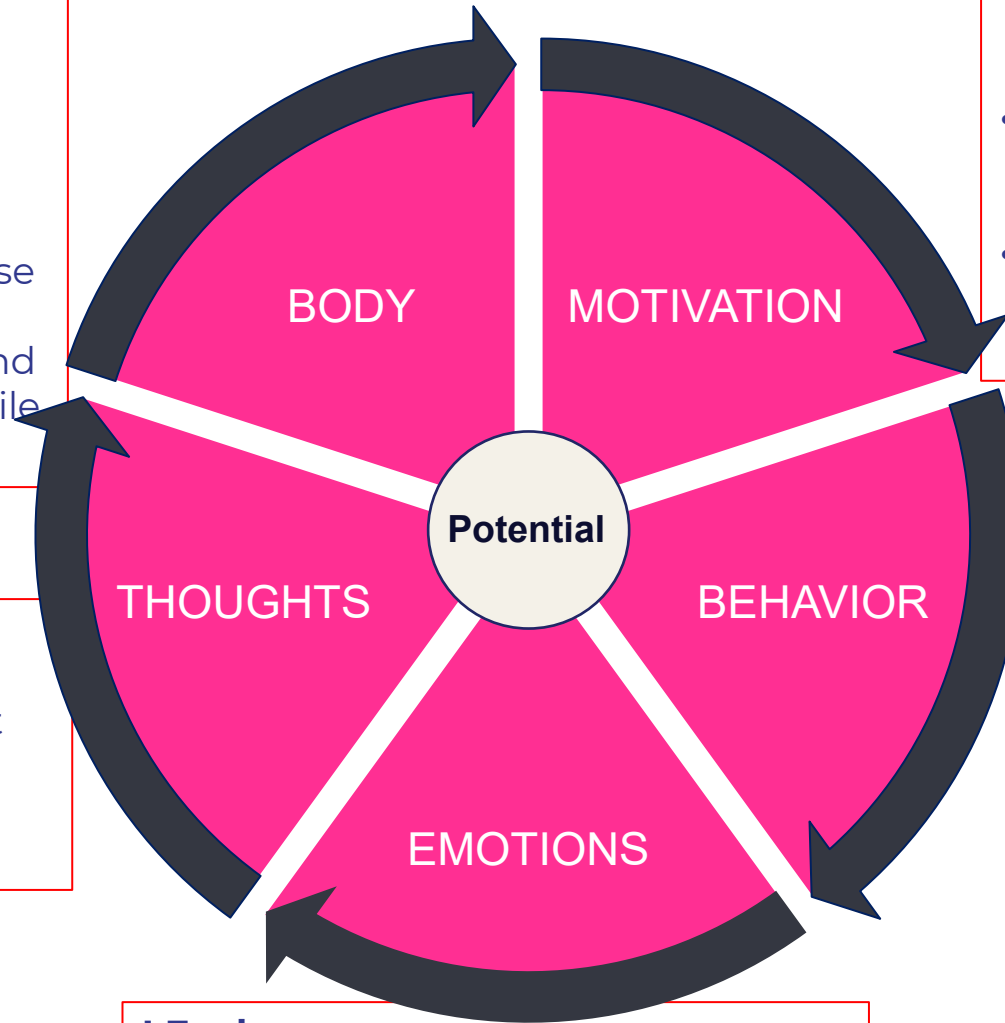
ANNA

Significant events:

- Once, at a family gathering, my older cousin made fun of me for not pronouncing a long word correctly, and the whole family laughed;
- When I was 10, my grandmother told me not to worry about grades because no one expects much from me;
- My father would harshly shush me and my siblings if we interrupted him while he was speaking

My thoughts:

- I shouldn't try to say complex things
- No one expects much from me, I'm not good enough to lead
- If I raise my opinions to people in authority, they will shut me down.



I Want to :

- Be seen as someone who has the potential to lead a department/organization
- I want to speak freely when around people in positions of authority
- Have a sense of self-worth and confidence

Distracting behaviors

- Scroll LinkedIn
- Eat, drink wine
- Watch TV

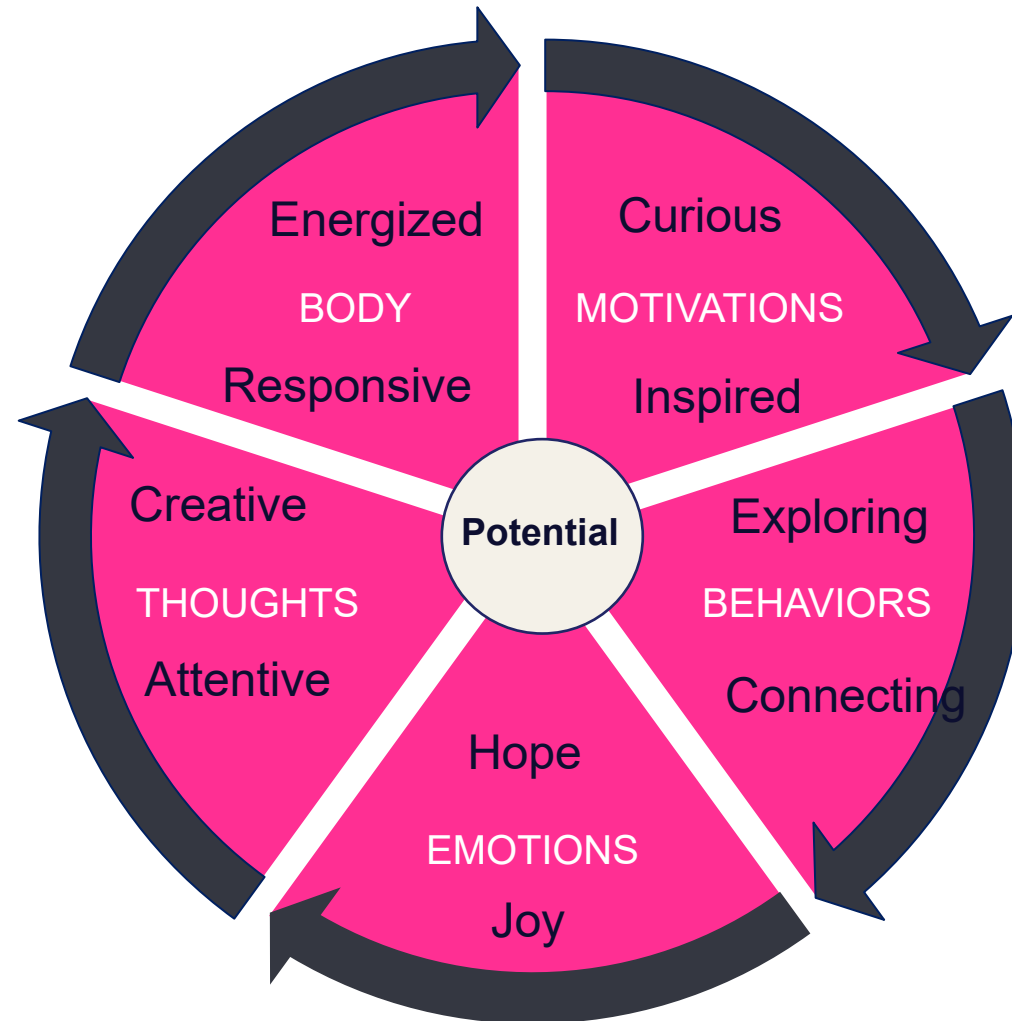
Overdoing/forced behaviors:

- Try to modify my body language to seem more confident
- Try to speak up at every meeting;
- Positive affirmations

I Feel:

- Anxious
- Sad
- Angry
- Envious

HOW WE BEGIN: THE DEVELOPING SELF



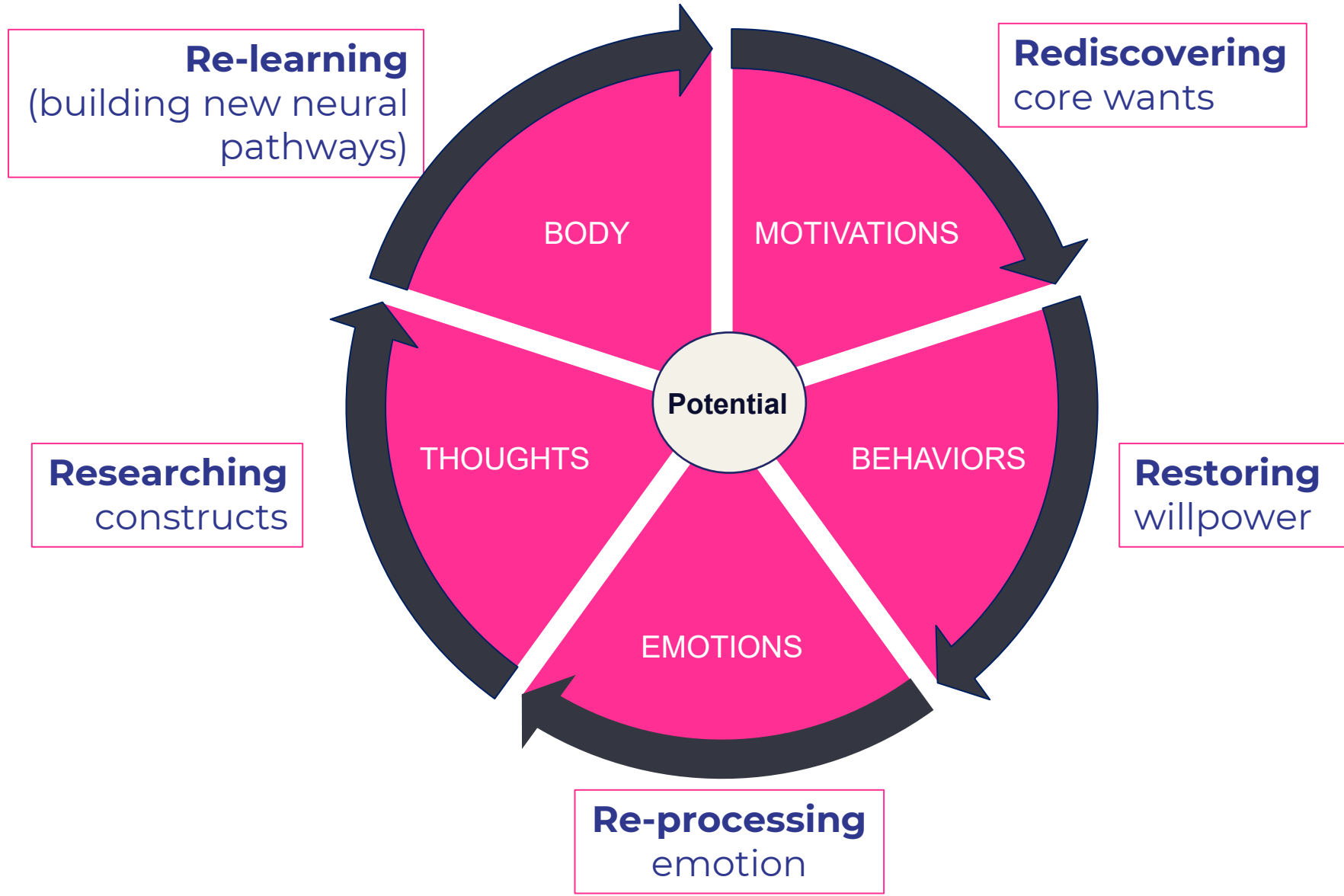
AND THEN...



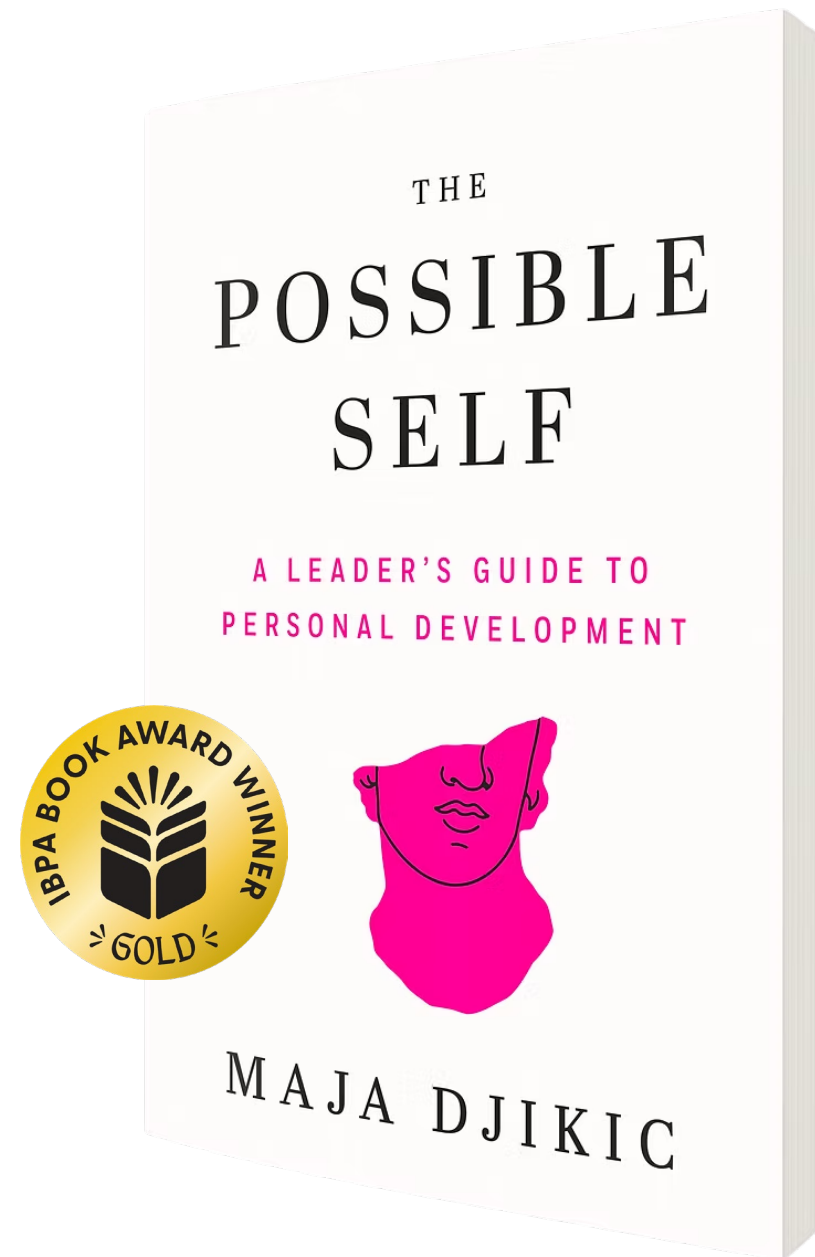
THE STALLED SELF



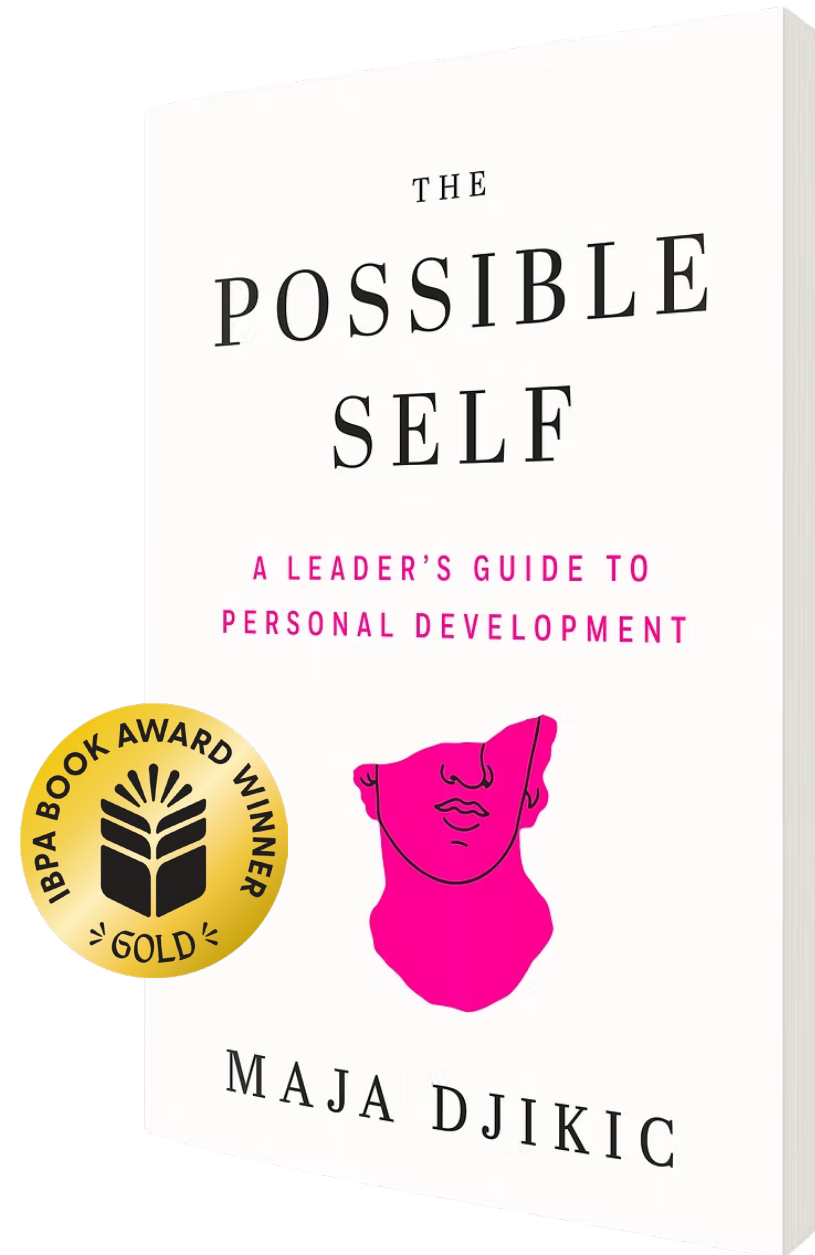
TOOLS: WHEEL OF CHANGE



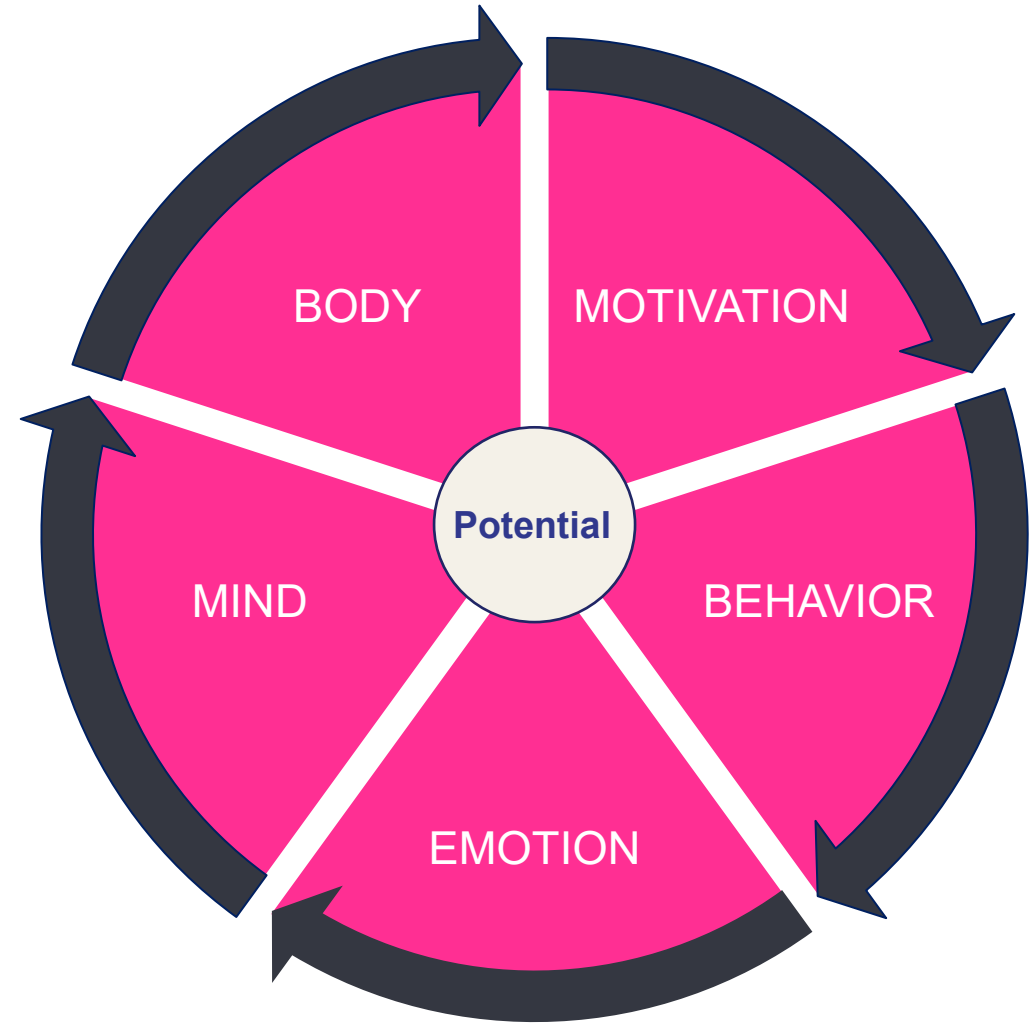
Inform

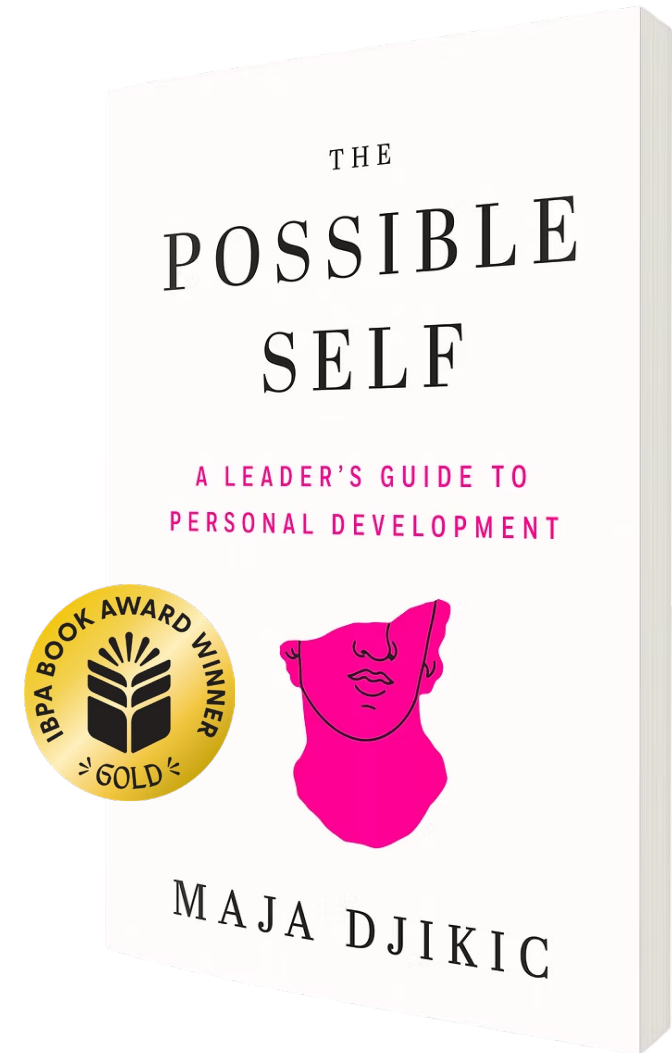
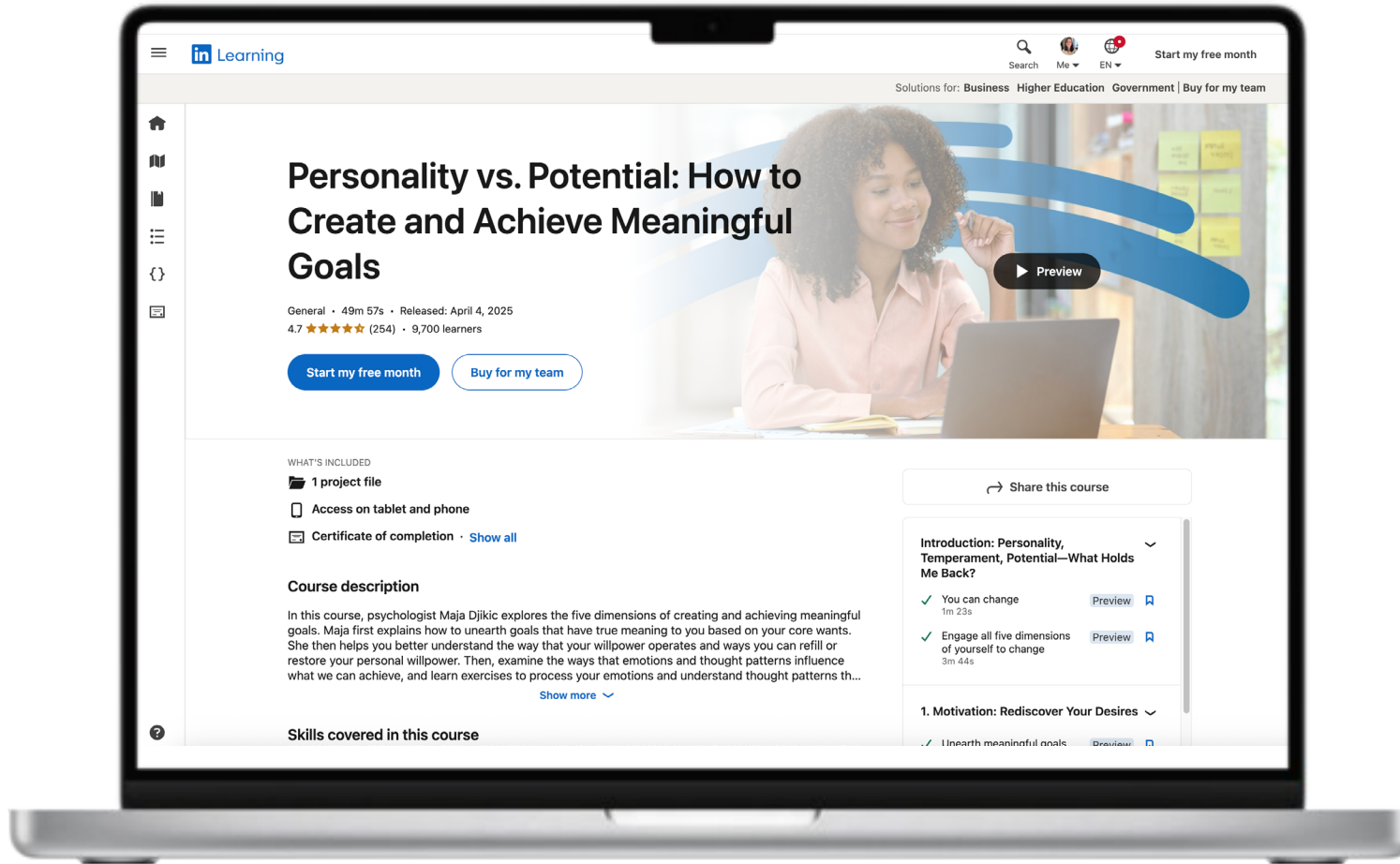


Transform



**Coach for
transformation,
not behaviour
change.**





THANK YOU!



International
Coaching
Federation

coachingfederation.org