

MENTAL ATHLETE

Leadership in a dysregulated world

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The Inspiration: CP

Visible (Parts)
Life of the Party

Known to most as the ultimate Optimist

Hidden (Parts)
Secretly carried some deep pain that ultimately took his life

*What got you here
may be holding you and your
team back*

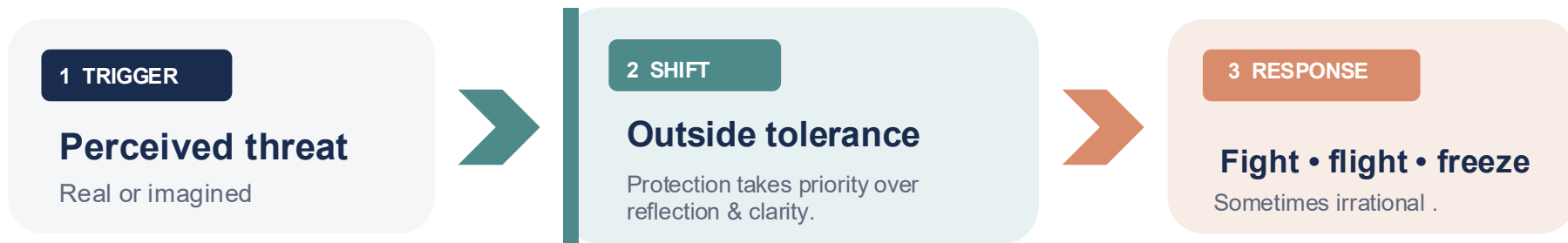
The superpowers that built your career may now be liabilities.
And the same is true for the people on your team.

Framework

- **Dysregulation**
- **Internal Family Systems (IFS)**

Dysregulation

When the nervous system leaves its window of tolerance, survival responses take the lead.



HOW IT CAN SHOW UP

PERSONAL

Fear, guilt or shame

Reactions feel larger than the situation

PROFESSIONAL

Hard things become much harder

Emotion or action is out of proportion

Dysregulation is a protective state—not a character flaw – Can be a Leadership flaw.

Internal Family Systems

Model created by Richard Schwartz: Treats mind as an internal system made up of different “parts.” We are not one single, unified voice inside; instead, we are made up of multiple inner perspectives, impulses, fears, protectors, and wounded areas.

PARTS

Protective inner roles

Emotions, impulses and strategies shaped by experience.

Achiever

Critic

Protector

Avoider

Scared child

People-pleaser

SELF

The grounded leader

A calm, compassionate center that can guide the internal system.

THE 8 C's OF SELF

Calm • Clarity • Curiosity •

Compassion • Confidence •

Courage • Creativity •

Connectedness



Parts & Dysregulation on Fire

Fear



Parts & Dysregulation on Display

Shame

The Hidden Root

ROOT

Fear left behind

Childhood wound (unworthy)

Parts:

Fear

She was leaving me

Over Deliver

Career became identity

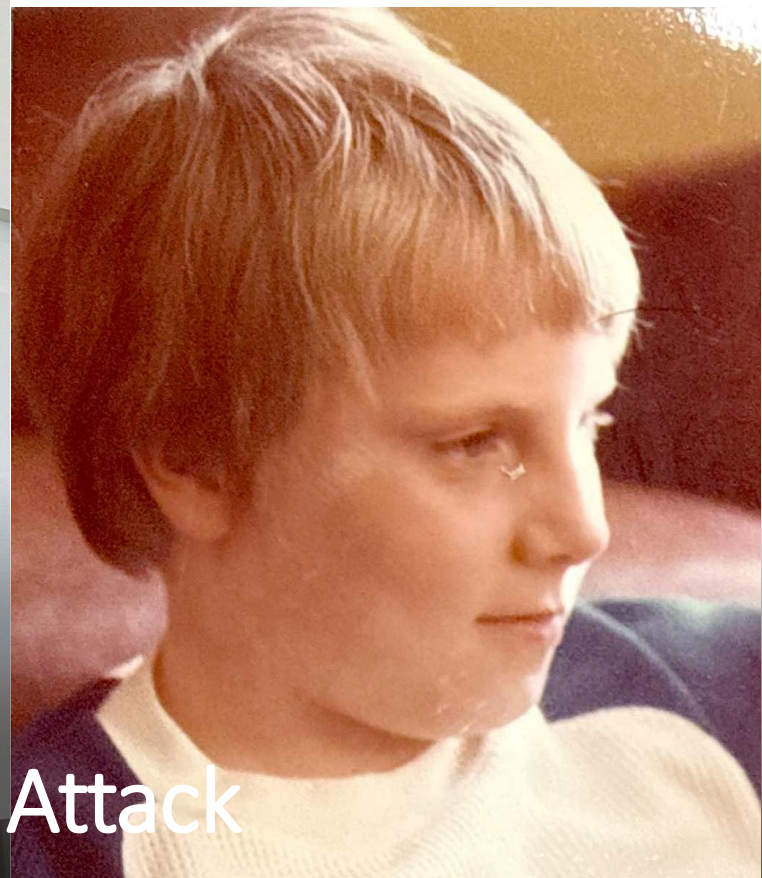
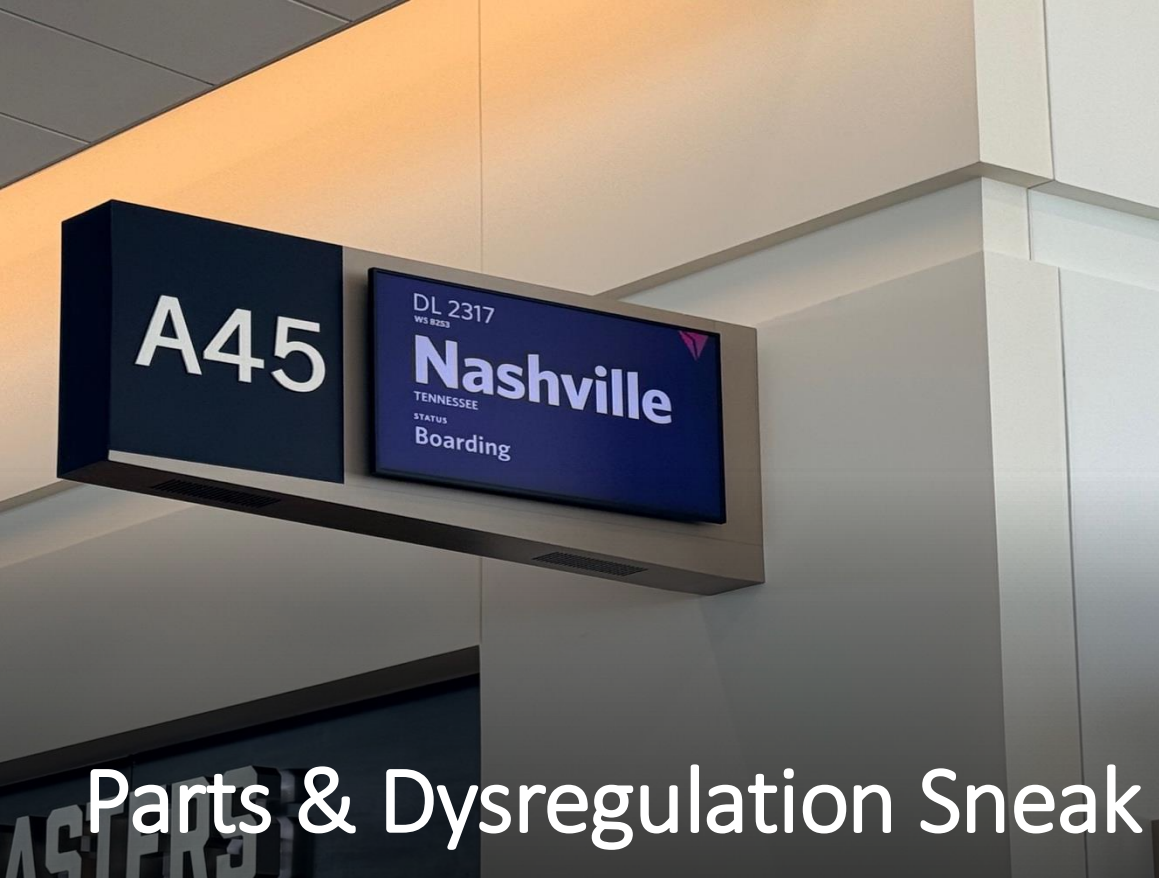
Overreact

Criticism didn't just sting -- it felt like a physical threat

Overly Critical

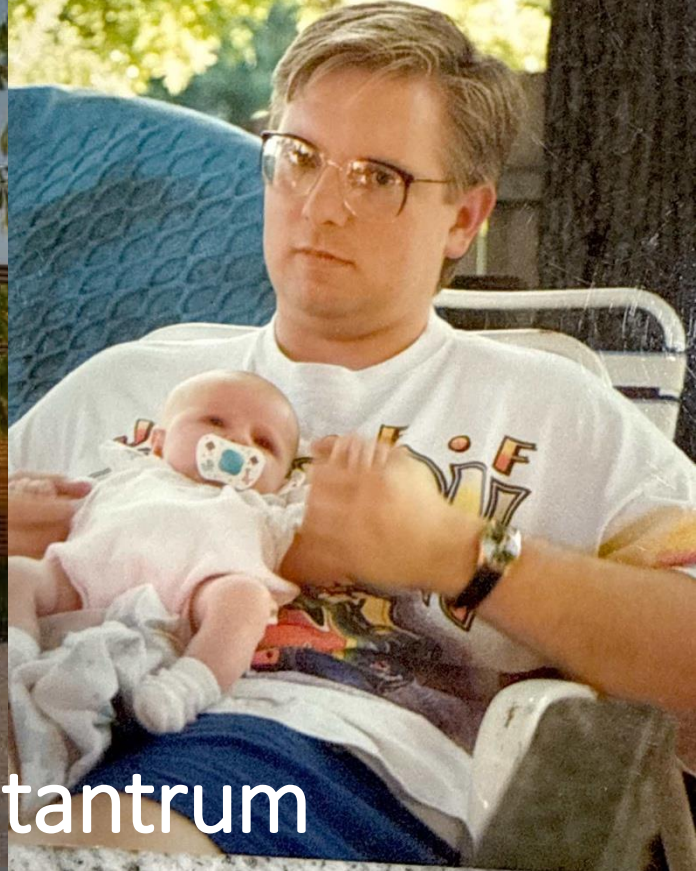
Self-awareness borderline abusive





Parts & Dysregulation Sneak Attack

Guilt



Parts & Dysregulation Temper tantrum

Scarcity & Betrayal

The Hidden Root

ROOT

Scarcity & Betrayal

25 yr old father broke and alone

Parts:

Fear

Money drama ran my life

Insecurity

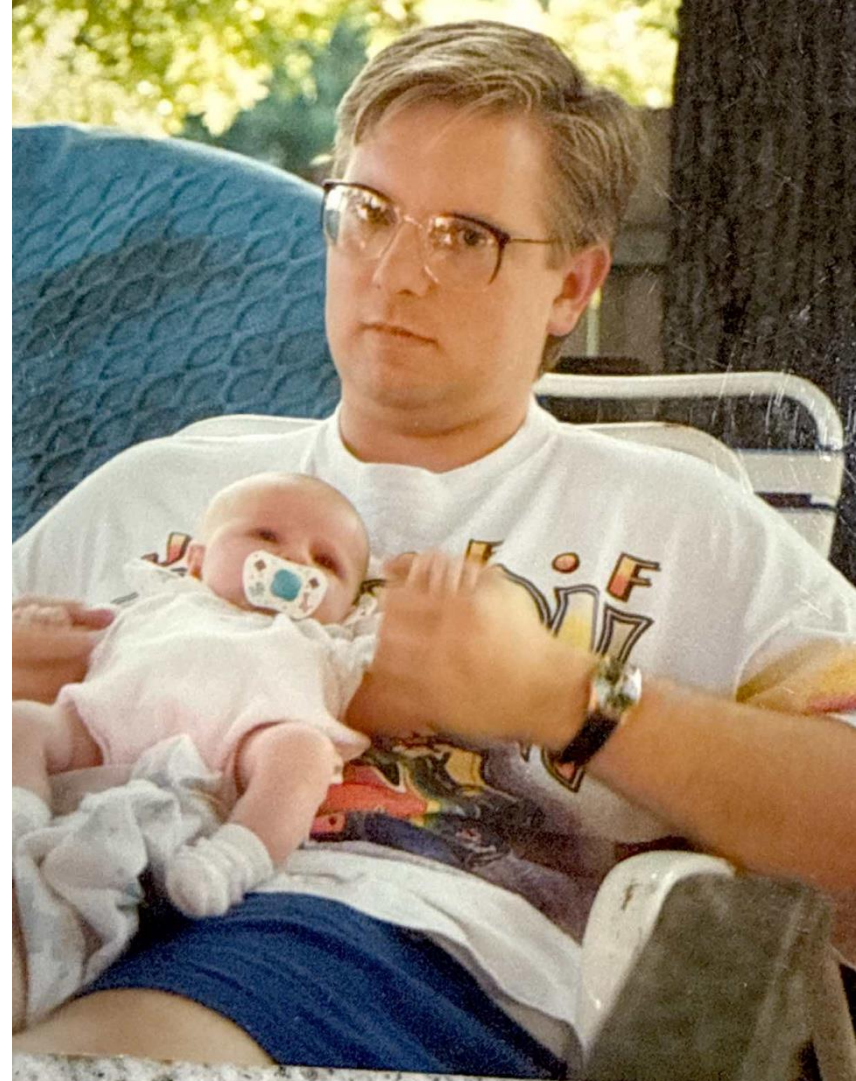
Food and Shelter

Betrayal

Spouse and I were misaligned

Anger

Belief wife did not respect family needs

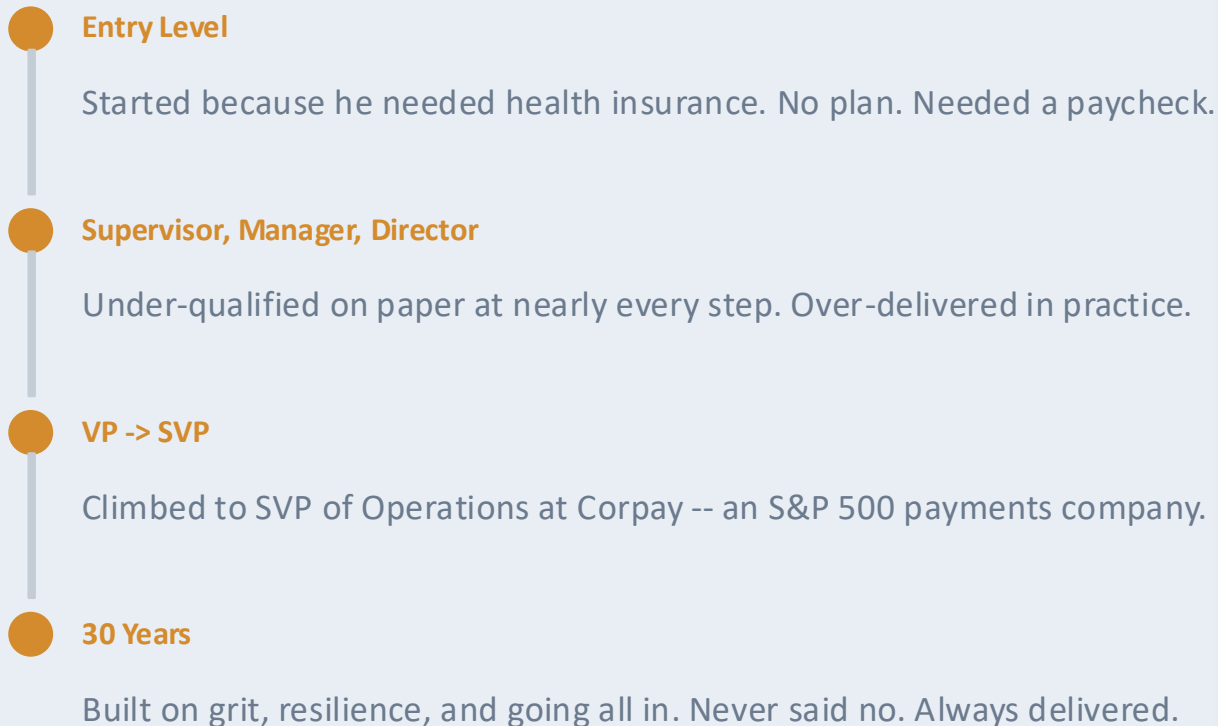


**“Trauma is not what happens to you,
but what happens inside you”**

- Dr. Gabor Mate, The Myth of Normal, 2022

Dysregulation also got me here

“parts” of me: Overachieving, never say no, relentlessly creating proof



Consistently under-qualified on paper

Over-delivered in practice

The gap between credential and contribution became a defining pattern

Superpower was really my protection

Protective Parts: *What once protected you may now be holding you back*

PART ADAPTATION	WHAT WAS PROTECTED	COST & DYSFUCTION
Over-achieving	Protects from shame: Feeling good enough	Rest, recovery, authentic self-worth Long Term Health
Never saying no	Built career, proved worth: Feeling worthy	Delegation, strategic focus, sustainability Career Scope
Hyper-independence	Avoids disappointment: Fear of Identity loss	Collaboration, support, interdependence Team engagement & creativity
Constant firefighting	Feels necessary & valuable: Fear of losing job	Vision, planning, people development & Investment
People-pleasing	Avoids conflict: Fear of Rejection	Honest feedback, real influence Real Team-member Development

The Business Cost of Unaddressed Dysregulation

Part-led leaders create part-led cultures.

Silent Attrition

High performers leave quietly. You lose them months before they resign -- and never understand why.

Misapplied Energy (the BIG one)

Too narrow focus will miss whole picture - Forest / Trees

Fear-Based Decisions

Teams optimize for not being blamed rather than the right outcome. creativity, speed and clarity suffer.

Firefighting Over Strategy

Chronic urgency crowds out vision, hiring quality, and people development.

Hidden Problems

Bad news travels up late, if at all. By the time you know, the damage is done.

Invisible Morale Decay

By the time engagement scores drop, the culture damage has been building for months.

*Great Leaders meet dysregulated
patterns in others with trust and
grace*

Your Team

Dysregulation Patterns -- What's Underneath -- What to Do

This is not employee diagnosis, this is becoming a more informed & curious leader

The Warrior: Urgency & Intensity as an Identity

UNDERNEATH

- Belief value is only real when they're solving something, earning worth. Feels need to earn worth daily.

WHAT THEY NEED

- Explicit acknowledgment - they are valued not just the work

The Over-Explainer: Credibility is Safety



UNDERNEATH

A fear of not being believed --
not seen as smart enough or
worthy enough.

WHAT THEY NEED

“I believe you”

The Invisible High Performer: Smallness is Safety

UNDERNEATH

Making themselves small felt safer at some point in their life or career.

WHAT THEY NEED

Name their contribution out loud



The Emotions-at-Work Employee



UNDERNEATH

Their identity is closely tied to their work product

WHAT THEY NEED

Separate the person from the performance.

This feedback is about the work, not about you.

The Chronic Underperformer: May be protection, not defiance



UNDERNEATH

Maybe freeze state & nervous system has gone offline to protect them.

WHAT THEY NEED

Be a safe place with clear performance expectations

For Your Team: Lead the Person, Understand the Parts, Hold the Standards

CREATE SAFETY FIRST

Psychological safety is a biological requirement for performance -- not a culture initiative.

Safety is built in small moments: how you respond to bad news, how you give feedback.

Ask yourself: does my team bring me problems early, or hide them until they're emergencies?

RECOGNIZE THE SIGNALS

Withdrawal after feedback -- shame response, not attitude problem

Constant urgency, can't delegate -- firefighter adaptation, not incompetence

Perfectionism + missed deadlines -- fear of being wrong is more paralyzing than laziness

SECTION 3

AI Factor & What to do

AI activates every protector parts in the room

The AI Layer / What To Do Tomorrow

AI Factor: Challenges Parts that Built us

This is not just a business story. It is a mental health story.

Survival Instincts Overdrive

Being more informed creates more pressure to be optimized.
The body may read this as threat.

The Heroic Firefighter is Obsolete

The '1-man model' becomes an obstacle in an AI-augmented org. The superpower becomes a liability.

Your Team is Anxious

Their survival systems are activated. They need a regulated leader -- not a dysregulated one amplifying the fear.

Regulated Presence = Leadership Asset

You cannot calm a dysregulated team from a dysregulated body. Your nervous system is contagious.

**“Trauma is a fact of life. It does not
need to be a life sentence”**

- Dr. Peter Levin, Waking the Tiger, 1997

Self Work builds Self-Leadership

Notice the protective part, understand its intent, and restore trust by leading from Self.

0

RECOGNIZE

Notice the part and name what is happening — without judgment.

0

RELATE

Get curious about the protective role and the need underneath it.

0

LEAD FROM SELF

Liberate the part from its old job and choose a grounded response.

Emotional Intelligence & Internal Leadership is the Real Differentiator

RECOGNIZE

Notice the Part

See your own anger, pain, and unresolved emotion clearly. Not as weakness -- as data.

CARRY

Don't let part become you

Hold it without suppressing it. Suppression is not strength. It leaks in other ways.

DON'T

TRANSFER

Lead from Self not Part

This is the work. Don't make your people pay for traumas that have nothing to do with them.

Becoming a Mental Athlete: More Self-led

1 LOOK WITHIN

Build Awareness

Notice triggers & parts

Journal & reflect without judgment

Clarify values, needs, and intentions

2 REGULATE

Invest In Self

Meditation and mindfulness

Breathwork and body-based practices (move)

Sound therapy and restorative rituals

3 INTEGRATE

Go Deeper

Internal Family Systems (IFS) work

Trama Therapy

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing)

*Great leaders don't make their people
pay for traumas that have nothing to
do with them.*

The work shows up

01

PRESENCE

Personal note appreciating “new and calming presence”

02

CAPACITY

Teams call pause and pull over

03

REGULATION

Body rest when team threatened

04

STRATEGY

Wider Lense

8-9 C's

Curious – Open not defensive

Calm – Regulated under Pressure

Confident – grounded no rigid

Compassionate – for self & others

Creative – access new thinking

Clarity – See situation clearly

Courage – faces what's hard

Connection – presence

Capacity – (all the above)

Mental Athlete

Every person you lead has parts watching to see if you are safe.

Look inward, lead less from parts and more from self

Create Mental Athlete Results

Mental Athlete

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