

REV. CRISS  
"CRISSSES"  
ITTERMANN'S



**Building Internal Community**

# United Front: Recruits

## Building Internal Community

Rev. Criss Ittermann

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## **Also By Rev. Criss Ittermann**

Split Decision

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Case Histories

United Front: Rebels

United Front: Adventurers



*We really have to take our collective hats off to O. T. Nelson for *The Girl Who Owned a City*.*

*You imagined a post-apocalyptic world where only children survived, and showed how they could still thrive. The children in the story take a culture thrown into anarchy and recruit trusted allies, build a fortress, defend from saboteurs and gangs, deal with mutiny and rebellion from within the ranks, and still persevere.*

*You had no idea you were talking directly to a plural child who had been collectively abused, whose parents had blown themselves out of the ranks of trusted allies and “died” in our hearts, who had no one else to turn to and had to learn to survive in an internal anarchy full of myriad petrified children with limited resources.*

*Each of us read your book. Over and over our body turned the pages of our care-worn copy, we fell over ourselves to find each other in the dark, and protect each other, and root out our own doubts about whether we could survive in a world with no real parents and no adults we could trust. We built a fortress in our head, pulled everyone inside, and hid in the dark for years until we knew we were strong enough, until we could turn the lights on and throw a party.*

*So this book is dedicated to you, and your children Todd & Lisa. And to our children and their children... until parents and caregivers stop pushing themselves out of our inner world.*

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(null):

# Introduction: Welcome Aboard

I'd like to welcome you as guests on my spaceship, for a time. I'm really glad to meet you all. Every single one of you. I'd shake your hand, or take your coat, but you're only holograms — some human customs just don't work under these circumstances. Let me take you on a brief tour: to the left are the lavatories, which you won't be needing today. This is the bridge, with the great big view screen and the chair, which we call Front, which controls most of our ship's operations. Here we have a flex-space on either side; these are automatically retrofitted for a variety of needs, sometimes they're meeting rooms, sometimes they're used as a holodeck of sorts, and we have one set-up which is a test kitchen for trying out recipes.

Here, out of the back of the bridge we have our engineering facilities, memory banks for all the ship's knowledge systems, private quarters for the crew and passengers on the vessel. Between you and me, I think we still have some stowaways, and we make sure to turn off the security of the food replicators so they don't starve, and no one ever goes down to Deck D. This way they have some privacy and a lavatory of their own, just in case they're unable to join us.

Please have a seat here in our meeting room. I'm so happy you took the time to come to visit us. It can get lonely in here, with only about 100 of us on this vast spaceship, it's refreshing to have you all come by. We've been so excited anticipating this precious time for conversation with you.

You're wondering how we do it. How we've been getting on for 32 years as a crew of this vast vessel. Truth to tell, I think it started longer ago than that. Our body is 49, so we must have been living



together at least some 42 years or longer. We each did our own thing, and the lights weren't on, so maybe we'd bump into each other in the halls. A few would meet and have some uneasy truces — children will be children. They played games, sang songs, you know — hung out together. The lights started as a very dim glow maybe when we were 10, we'd hear each other, catch a glimpse.

But I think the story probably goes back further. At some point the lights were on and the kids all got along and worked together. Longer than 42 years ago, for certain. They covered for each other, flew the ship as a team, took turns at Front, pulled off some amazing maneuvers to protect themselves from enemies in Human Space. Many got burned out, many ran off into the halls and hid, from each other and themselves. They started dropping like flies, the poor tykes. It was too much for children to handle. Someone sent out a distress signal. That's when we adults came aboard. But we didn't know a darn thing about flying spaceships, and for a bunch of reasons it took us years to really be able to work out what to do. Those were some very dark years for our ship. Drifting along in space, not sure what was going on, bumping into bad situations, or barely skirting big threats. Nearly out of fuel and supplies, we just made it through.

Thus neither of our contingents are new residents: the folk who were born onboard, and those who joined in later. Most of the newer folk started "moving in" when we were a very young child, between ages 3 and 7 years old. It was like an exodus from a trauma-ravaged planet. We played various roles on the ship, hiding in storage holds, using personal cloaking devices to hide from other ship residents, or using holographic disguises when interacting with other vessels in Human Space on the viewport so we'd all look like the same person. We got our ship into trouble countless times, and somehow the right person took over as Acting Captain, saving our collective ass several times without most of the ship's residents even being aware of who did it. A number of us got really good at pulling off "being me" — and mind you that "me" is no one in

particular — that they even had **\*\*me\*\*** fooled. There were plenty of hints, some overt, some covert, but it was easier to overlook the hints than to question our ship's operations and our comfortable take on reality.

By 13 the ship's lights started to come back. They were about the light of a candle flame. We were making out shadowy figures, but we didn't know there was any other way for the ship to be — it's all we had ever seen happen. Someone would take the controls, fly the ship for a bit, all sort of haphazard, you know? None of us had the best sense of direction. Sometimes, though, the kids would get out of the way and one of us elders would take over, and set a course on autopilot for a bit, so we made some more progress. So over time, the lights got a bit brighter.

Ship's systems started coming back to full power when we were 16, but our situation outside the ship was deeply perilous. We had gotten "into the weeds" as it were. Basically, we were already fucked. Someone had hooked the ship up with fuel, but it was the wrong fuel. As much as a relief it was being able to communicate with others on the ship, the ship started breaking apart. We put our trust in the wrong helmsman, and she almost got the whole crew killed, and the ship wrecked. She didn't do it on purpose, she was trying to get us through a wormhole out of the horrible toxic environment the ship was in. But the wormhole wasn't big enough, or maybe it wasn't a wormhole at all. Whatever it was, it wasn't able to get us where she wanted to take us. The ship got damaged and ended up in a repair bay, we had to reassess our entire situation but most of the crew was in the infirmary. In fact for a couple months, the person who betrayed us was the only person left who could fly the ship. Thankfully, she didn't try to make an escape for another wormhole.

After this whole big debacle, we started to get our shit together. We had seen what happens if someone flies the ship alone without anyone helping or watching their back. We had enough of that. We quickly went from a crew of 8 and started to onboard new

shipmates as crew members, and started to work on how to train officers from our crew, people who could lead and make decisions. We found better and better ways to fuel our ship, learned the hazards of human space so we could avoid the worst of it, repaired our ship's defense systems and shields, and eventually got to the point where we could actually set a course.

Then we just had to decide where to go.

We've had plenty of bumps along the way, and are constantly upgrading, repairing, training officers, onboarding new crew members, making course corrections and upgrading our navigational systems. But now, we adventure through life.

I know, I know, that kinda tells you "how" we did it — but it doesn't tell you HOW we did it. That's what this book is for.

# Are You Really Ready?

## Being Trustworthy

“Simply put, trust means **confidence**. The opposite of trust — distrust—is **suspicion**. When you trust people, you have confidence in them — in their integrity and in their abilities. When you distrust people, you are suspicious of them — of their integrity, their agenda, their capabilities, or their track record. It’s that simple. We have all had experiences that validate the difference between relationships that are built on trust and those that are not. These experiences clearly tell us the difference is not small; it is dramatic.”  
— Stephen M. R. Covey, **The Speed of Trust**

Trust is sometimes a gift, sometimes earned, but always a vital ingredient in relationships. You and your shipmates are in a relationship with each other. How that relationship proceeds will be based on the trust that the parties have with each other. Hands down, trust is one of the most vital things.

And building trust starts from within the individual. A person has to work on themselves to become “trustworthy.” This is to have integrity within yourself. To take on values and principles that build your own confidence in your own ability to keep your word, to apologize and make up for things when you make a mistake, to know that your own word has meaning and value to it, to know

that if you're committing to something you will give it everything you can, maybe even all that you have. If you don't have that level of trust in yourself, it's harder to sell that you're trustworthy to anyone else.

The foundation of being trustworthy is "integrity". We Crisses define it as "doing the right thing whether or not anyone else is looking." Why? First, we're plural, and there's **\*\*always\*\*** someone looking. But lets say we had amnesiac barriers and we thought we were truly alone when fronting, so I, individually, say Moonlite to separate out one author — I'm certain no one is around and there's some form of temptation. Someone ahead of me on the sidewalk drops \$100 bill on the ground, and no one else is in sight. What do I do? What's the right thing to do? We could argue this philosophical question a million times over for nuances but the right thing to do is to try to give it back to them. And I would do that. I could have walked away with the money, sure. And this certainly is one of the reasons we're living in poverty. But even though no other Crisses were awake or aware, I would always be wondering if that person was even worse off than I was. Was that money for medicine? Groceries? To pay a vital bill? The point is that it wasn't the right thing to do if I had kept it, and I'd know I was not really trustworthy.

We don't behave this way for anyone else. We behave this way because it's what we want to do. Thinking someone's always looking doesn't matter. Thinking we will get more trust from others doesn't matter. We would do whatever we consider is the right thing even if we had the last body on earth.

This isn't to tell y'all how to live, or what values or principles y'all should stand on. There's other definitions of integrity, but it always revolves around honesty. There's other definitions of being trustworthy. And in some cases, there might be something more important or more right than giving that \$100 dollar bill back to that person. We can't judge that. We just know what our definitions and behavior are, and are using them to explain this intangible concept.

When you've lost trust in yourself, or proven yourself to not be trustworthy to yourself, it comes off in your attitude when you approach others. That lack of confidence, that lack of presence and surety of knowing that whatever comes along, you can be trusted.

Of course most people are in the middle of the road. They're not completely trustworthy, and they're not completely dishonest either. The issue with that is then people don't know when they \*can\* trust you. Now? Wait... now? Maybe now? For folk who have been traumatized, that inconsistency can be particularly nerve-wrattling. And if you do something dishonest, or erratic — it can be particularly tough to earn back trust again.

When someone is quite far from their integrity it can cause a great deal of issues. There's not many people who are aspiring to be untrustworthy out there, right? When your behavior is erratic, unpredictable, unstable, bullying, or even just self-protecting — or when you're lashing out at people — others become anxious. No one is at their best when anxious.

I can't picture any internal situation that is made better by distrust. Distrust leads to more attempts to control one another, more restrictive rules, withholding privileges, punishments, incarceration, lashing out at others, self-harm as a way to harm the others (including being passive-aggressive), etc. Even "good" people may accidentally act as "bad guys" in these ways — with name-calling, bullying, policing, making rules that others don't or can't participate in, creating a caste system or cliques, etc. The oppressed participate by acting out as well. Part of the reason for an internal reset and creating a new paradigm is to help get over the past and move into a new internal culture.

Being trustworthy gives people an opportunity to start over, to try again, to rise to a new level of integrity, to collaborate, communicate, to help each other get over hard feelings, to restore balance, equality, freedom, to understand and embrace each other's strengths and help shore up each other's weaknesses.

Being trustworthy is something you aspire to. Like everything else in life, you can make mistakes, and need to apologize and make reparations. It's not something that's "one and done" — it's a constant goal and the bar is ever-moving.

To become trustworthy you work on your influence over yourself. You build your own presence of mind (mindfulness), you work on your own character (by way of your personal values, self-confidence, skills-building, taking care of your own needs, and being honest with yourself), and you create your own personal mission and goals so that your desires can be known, so that your motivations, projects, and path are clearer to other people. You really know (and can readily share) what you need to become fulfilled as an individual. You don't have to work on your weaknesses so much as understand, accept, and make adjustments for them. You can focus more on building strengths and desires to have your own personal future path within the larger organization of your shared life.

This is not a time to be self-effacing and give up your personal autonomy "for the good of the collective" — but if you honestly come up short when it comes to a desire to really find and explore yourself, then I suppose that you might turn to your companions and ask for help in defining where you begin and end. Unless you're not ready to explore your personhood. I have to take this into account in my own system; a few given the opportunity to explore themselves have not risen to the occasion.

Once you become trustworthy, then others in the system can choose whether to extend trust to you. But that's not why to do it. You will be so much more comfortable with yourself when you really understand who you are, what you like, your choices, what you wish to pursue, and how to pursue it. You can have your own values and principles to uphold, and your own personal style and skills to help hold yourself to them. We'll come back to this idea of individual development in the next section.

This all adds up to beefing up one's personal integrity. Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is looking. Note that developing your personal integrity doesn't make you "less you" – it doesn't make Buck less gruff, or Taelee less curt and wild. They retain their individuality, but their personal integrity makes them more solid, more stable if you will, within who they are. They know their strengths and what they bring to the table. They know their weaknesses and when to tap out of a discussion because they aren't going to give effective input in that situation.

For others within our collective, building their integrity helps them present themselves as fully responsible and mature. We know if they take on a task we'd like to delegate, that they're going to get it done. We know they have our back. They have their personal goals and styles and mission, and there are times when we need them and would love their help with something, and they get to take on their own projects or collaborate with others in our system on shared projects, and they'll always pull their weight.



# What Do You Want Out of This?

What brings you here? Why are you reading this? We can only guess that you're fed up with the state of your head and how your shipmates are (or aren't) getting along. But we're not sure. Only \*you\* really know why you're reading this, what you expect to get from it.

We invite you to really dig down into it. Each one of you, if more than one are reading right now. Knowing why you're doing something helps you maintain your interest, your engagement, and your energy level. This goes for more than just working on your ship; getting in touch with your "Why" can help you in any area of life.

A deeper "Why" is more motivating. The more clarity you have when making decisions, the more clear your energy will be while following your path. This will help you stay focused, on-track, and motivated.

Dig into your Why by asking Why several times. As an example:

Why are we writing this book? To help others improve their internal relationships.

Why do we want to help others improve their internal relationships? It makes us very uncomfortable to watch others in distress.

Why does it make you uncomfortable? We know we have the answers they need.

Why does that matter? Because we really want to help people.

If you get to the same answers several times, you may have the answer you seek. Helping others is one of our life's highest motiva-

tions, so if we keep going we'll end up constantly coming back to helping others. Helping others is what we'd call our Big "Why." It is, in many ways, closely associated with helping ourselves.

You may not come to your deepest Why right away, that's ok. Do a few rounds of asking Why? And if you can't find the answer you seek, let it rest for a few days. Maybe it will come to you.

You may come to a personal/individual Why for one resident — or it may be a group Why or a Why that many can get behind amongst your shipmates. Keep the Whys of everyone in mind; they may not all be the same.

## Making Things Fun

Did you ever go someplace where people usually have fun, and everyone around you is having fun — but you're not. The miserable time you had at the circus, an amusement park, a beach, a playground, happy hour, etc. It wasn't because the things external failed in their job, it was because your head wasn't there with it. Something was going on and y'all couldn't allow yourselves to have fun. You were sick, miserable, tired, annoyed, angry, sad, or whatever your issues were, and no amount of partying outside your body was going to make it change.

Did you know the same thing can happen the other way around? External world can be boring. Adulting can be boring. It could be annoying, trying, ridiculous amounts of red tape or rote memorization, loads of little bubbles on an exam sheet to fill in, standing in line at the store, cleaning up your pet's poop for the zillionth time. Face it, life is full of stuff no one really wants to do that needs to get done.

But how you react to it is everything. You can drop a glass and get upset, or you can drop a glass and say "Wow, I haven't done that in a while!" or laugh at yourself, or be like hey cool how my floor

glitters now. Our biggest thing is keeping people, pets and ourselves from getting hurt and making sure we get up all the shards even the teeny ones. Being upset won't help with any of that.

It's not good to be ridiculously playful and optimistic all the time, but there are definitely times where it has its place and can be a real boon. Taking away the drudgery in the drudgery of life is important, no matter how you go about it. You can gamify it. You can play your favorite playlist and dance your way through it, you can sing whether or not you can carry a tune. We watch TV and cook or wash dishes, or do laundry. There's no need to sit and stare at the screen when there's work to be done. Well not for us all our TV is on a mobile device, we don't actually have a TV set.

Spring and Fall cleaning could be the new Winter & Summer Olympics in your head: sweep and picture you're doing the luge, or put a sponge in each hand and butterfly stroke the bathtub. We'll gamify just about anything we want or can. What's wrong with y'all dressing up like a fairy with a feather duster magic wand and blessing all your knicknacks?

We even went so far as to reframe our homelessness, and that's part of how we named the 3<sup>rd</sup> book in this series. We were on an adventure. Nomads. Listened to a lot of "Wherever I May Roam" by Metallica. Kept us out of some potential depression by putting as good a face on it as possible, finding the good things like heck we saved a lot in rent and utilities at the time.

Give yourselves permission to enjoy your life, make fun of it, make fun out of it. If you're going to do something anyway, why the heck not enjoy it? Make whatever you want out of something tedious, let your inner kids help come up with ideas, this make believe stuff is really their cup of chai.

You can help yourselves by leaning in on the idea of being explorers in your own life, and taking everything in these books as fun as you possibly can, be creative with it, you do not ever need to go by the book; we want y'all to believe yourselves more than us, and listen

to your own inner wisdom and each other. No matter how smart something we say may seem, or how authoritative we may appear, y'all are the experts on you and you do what you're comfortable with.

Even making it all fun. That too.

Start with the smaller things. One way we get ourselves into trouble is by making things too large too fast. By taking on the little stuff in life and making it more interesting it can help us circle around to other things.

## **Rhythms not Routines**

We have a lot of problems with routines. Even the word — we'll call it \*floppy\* for the moment because even we have trouble with the word to make it easier for y'all to read about this in case that word is a trigger. We have a feeling other plurals may have similar resistance to rock-steady patterns of behaving. We're not fitted out to be cookie cutters and do proscribed acts in a precise order. For some of us, it's trauma. For others, it's being predictable that can put us in harm's way.

Example from our real life; content warning robbery, non-violent, not explicit. Our apartment was robbed. Not once. I think we had 3 break-ins while we were a young child living in Brooklyn. We learned that having family-level floppies, being predictable, left our family vulnerable to abusers from outside the family, they shook our family security in our own home. We knew that our belongings could disappear, that the floppy we found safe — like going shopping for food on Wednesdays — became a point of access, a boundary that could be breached. That there was a possibility that we might come home and a stranger be in our home and that things could go sideways.

As adults, we don't have that level of predictability for a reason. Experts even say not to have family floppies that are that predictable; it's a point of vulnerability. So it goes against the grain to expect folk to have floppies, but floppies are touted as a cure for a bunch of issues. Every selves-help book everywhere talks about how you should develop good floppies and it will make managing your life easier.

Easier and more vulnerable.

So we don't do floppies. We do rhythms. BIG sweeping mega-rhythms and small tiny miniscule rhythms. We prefer our life to be a fun jazz jam to a tight orchestral predictable perfection. It's easy to adjust rhythms. They're flexible. Floppies are rigid and tight, and if y'all miss a step the whole floppy might fall apart. Rhythms — the drum can pause, can syncopate, can counterpoint, can have a solo, can weave in and out of the melody, supports, scaffolds, and in some ways defines the structure of the song of our life.

So what the heck are we talking about when we take our life's rhythms out of metaphor into concrete what does this look like?

Let's take NaNoWriMo - every November we spend 30 days writing with a goal of making 50,000 words or more. We don't have this as a daily habit or floppy. We would kinda like to write more, and write every day, but in the rhythm of our life, it tends to be a cold-weather pursuit for us more than a summer or spring thing. Fall is the perfect time to sit in bed (like we are right now) with our laptop or notebooks or whatever we're writing on at the moment, and scrawl, type and percolate. It's a seasonal rhythm for us. Nesting. Hibernating. Brooding. Does it look the same and predictable every year? No. Do we write at the same time of the day? No, but we are more productive early in the mornings most of the time, though we've busted 4000 words or more in a day by writing throughout the day or doing a 2000+ word morning peppered with write-ins and word-sprints with other people throughout the day and busting the top off our daily word-count records.

So that's not a habit or a floppy. It's a rhythm. It's something we do annually, not daily. It doesn't always look or work the same. Sometimes our write-ins are physically in person, sometimes online, morning, midday, night. Depending on which of us are writing, we can be more or less productive in a session, but we get the job done and by the end of the month we're at or over 50,000 new words on some project or other.

Another cold-weather rhythm we have is crochet projects, and sometimes knitting. We're too environmentally conscious to keep the house comfortably warm for our body (we have Reynauds which is basically a cold allergy — our hands and feet tend to get beyond just cold, and actually go numb, get white, lose circulation, etc. in the winter. So we have these competing needs to not expend excess energy versus dealing with New York winters with Reynauds where we can have numb toes all day and night which is not safe. Bundling up and nesting helps with this. So we crochet and knit, it also promotes our hibernating, thinking, working on internal issues, etc. We go out much less, see less people, hang out on social media less, etc. It's time for internal focus for us.

We're working on more rhythms in our life, like we've decided on a new one of doing kitchen tasks while waiting for something to heat up in the microwave or other equipment. Whether it's food prep, cleaning, doing dishes, straightening the prep counter, wiping things down, etc. We're using that "waiting time" productively rather than just sitting in a chair watching TV shows. We can still have the TV show and be up on our feet cleaning or cooking instead. It's not predictable what we'll be doing, but there's a framework (heating food) within which we have a list of potential tasks we could be doing (clearing out the fridge). It's not as rigid and unthinking as they say floppies would be, but we have a cue (heating food) and an intention of what types of things to do about it (caring for things in the kitchen).

So basically to us rhythms are positive, easily followed patterns but they can be unpredictable as to when they happen to the outside

observer. It's one of our ways of both feeling safe, but still having a method for performing a series of tasks or making sure that internal folk have time for their own projects throughout the year, or that things like bills getting paid happen before we get in trouble.

So we have a start-of-month rhythm, daily rhythms, weekly rhythms. We can rely on them because we have learned to find dependable prompts in our life. Weather changes. Daily light changes, calendar date changes, etc. Rather than go by the hands of the clock, we go more by natural prompts in our environment. We are trained herbalists who wildcraft products from outside in nature, and we used to have chickens and both of those teach a lot about daily and seasonal prompts. We're in the habit of paying attention to the weather, to the seasons. We know what time of year it is by what's growing outside or ready for harvest, the prevailing temperatures, when the sun rises and sets, days lengthening and shortening.

These sensory prompts are important when it comes to creating trains of outcomes as in the next section.

# **System Quick-Start Guide**



# Safety and Security

## How to Create a System Safety Plan

We have to say the life of a spaceship crew can be full of “exciting” moments. To be quite honest, though, “exciting” isn’t always fun. There’s a lot to be done to keep the ship airtight and warm in cold space — parts wear out and Amazon doesn’t deliver unless you’re in a port. Though I guess it will be neat if they upgrade their drone idea to work in space and their little delivery ships would rendezvous with y’all wherever you are.

So ship’s maintenance and constant quality control is necessary to make sure that the ship and crew are on top of things before they turn into a crisis. If you’ve watched any Star Trek there’s occasionally that lost guy with a tricorder (clipboard) that probably contains his checklist, or some nameless person in a corridor staring at a hand-held scanner running it over something. If there isn’t there should be. These aren’t “extras” — these are crew members doing vital routine maintenance. As important as the officers may seem to the casual glance (and the storylines), it’s really these vital daily and hourly tasks that make sure that the ship is still spaceworthy and that when the officers give life-saving orders the ship is capable of executing them.

In plain English: your mind, body, emotions, headaches, symptoms, etc. all telegraph signs that you’re under stress, and that your symptoms are getting worse. Being tapped into that sensory equipment is like having a heads-up-display. “Heads up! There’s an issue!” At that point you have the opportunity to get to it quickly while things are not so bad, rather than waiting for all the little things (pests, minor malfunctions, little aches and pains, annoyances) to turn into

big things (clue-by-fours, dysfunctions, flare-ups, debilitating pain) or even worse.

One aspect of becoming more functional, or “Recovery” as it’s called in some portions of the health and activism community, is to catch your minor issues before the moderate reactions kick in, and definitely before the really bad reactions. By tracking and noticing the minor things, y’all can develop a plan for how to take care of them before they get worse and y’all you can learn to be more \*proactive\* about your wellness [cross-ref proactive].

In this process we’ll help y’all become an investigative team scrutinizing clues about the uncomfortable or dangerous issues you want to head off in your own life. There’s no shame when things go sideways; happens to us, and most of the people we know struggle with this. We may not feel good, we may be doing things we’re not happy with, or that don’t match with our longer-term goals for ourselves or our shared life. That’s Ok, you noticed! That alone is worth celebrating. Don’t get hung up on when or how long it took to notice — the feeling bad and getting weighed down by it doesn’t matter so much as the amazing fact that you did notice.

Many plurals, mostly those with trauma but certainly not limited to us, are not hooked up so well with our sensory equipment. We Crisses have deliberately interfaced with our body but only after decades of having a pretty good relationship with our body did we realize it’s part of our system and that it’s our life support system and we need to take even better care to listen to it and care for it. Now we’re extending the same compassion and care to our body that we do our headmates. We do wish we had come to this realization much sooner, but better now than later. We realize we’d been taking pretty good care of our body or at least listening to it for a long time. We will do better in the future starting now.

Maybe you already have ways to tell when things aren’t going well with your ship or your external life, your internal functioning, and your headmate relationships. They’re potentially interrelated, or at

least none of these things exist in a total vacuum — they affect each other. This is part of the principle of AISOAVV.

You usually develop your system safety plan during good times or moments. Or at least better moments. You want to be in a place that you want to look into and delve into so y'all can see clearly where you want to come back to when things aren't going as well. So being in a good or better place is important to start with. If this doesn't describe y'all right now, then you can still read through all the instructions, and make some notes, but y'all may want to come back to this at a better time to really dig into it.

This process helps y'all turn around those not-so-good moments, spot the early signs of issues developing so they can be corrected sooner than later.

Did you know that the sailors in the 1800s scrubbed down the decks of the ship every day? I mean with sandpaper-like rocks and all. Someone determined that it was a major issue that needed to be kept on top of. Dry rot would set in, planks would weaken and break or splinter. Decks would build up dirt and grime and get slippery. Crew would get injured during bad weather because they couldn't keep their footing. When you're a part of a well-oiled ship-machine keeping the rigging up, shifting sails, raising/lowering anchor, reporting to stations for a fight, etc. it's very important that you can safely go places on board without risking slipping and going overboard into the ocean.

So you learn, eventually, that letting grime build up is bad. And you start scrubbing more often until you learn that even one days mess is too much mess and it has to be a daily chore. The sailors knew why it was important, the officers ensured it happened.

You have the ability to get ahead of the issues, it is a process and takes time, and creating a safety plan in the meantime can help you log the cues, figure out the rhythms that are important to maintaining your whole ship and your adventuring operation. The process of building your safety plan can take months, tweaking and

refining it may take years, but y'all can start using it right away.

The process of building the plan requires some objectivity. If y'all get mired into the guilt and pain of the exercises then y'all are kinda missing the point. We're looking for factual information. Like let's take an example: a sign that things are not going well may be a headache. It's not time to analyze why y'all get the headache, to feel bad about the headache, or to try to blame anyone for the headache. Y'all identify a headache as a not great sign — next would be well what helps when we get a headache? What might we try? It's not we should have thought of this sooner. It's a brainstorming session, to come up with both what has worked in the past, ideas y'all may have heard of that y'all would like to try, and maybe if headaches are an extreme issue for y'all, y'all can ask around or do a little research on things other folk have tried that help with headaches. Make a list, decide what y'all might light to try.

Then if something doesn't help, y'all can either cross it off, or figure out whether that idea inspires new ideas that might help.

Y'all are kinda scientists tweaking how your shared life operates and what works for y'all, inside & out. Y'all are like the sailors who eventually figured out that scrubbing the deck daily was important and helped keep everything operating smoothly.

So the whole approach is not to look at what's going wrong or why it's going wrong so much as the signs, subjective or objective depending on the exercise, that things are going topsy-turvy and what y'all may be able to do to work with it, help with it and turn it around.

## **What is the System Safety Plan?**

On a ship, crew has “quarters” — aka stations — that they report to under different circumstances. When there's clear skies and smooth sailing, they have routine maintenance plans and tasks to perform,

when things get rough or enemies approach they have other things to do like manning battlestations, or trimming sail.

Each ship has its own culture and over time hones the stations and shifts that support the ship's mission and culture. They're a good role-model for discipline and the fruits of one's labor, as well as a cautionary tale learned over centuries about how good habits can keep a whole ship's operation afloat.

The technical part of our documentation in this section comes out of safety plans that have been around for some years (published circa 2002) under contract with the US government and have been shown to help folk in recovery, neurodivergent folk, or folk with certain types of chronic conditions or disabilities to plan and cope better with whatever they've got going on. Why fully reinvent the wheel when the wheel just needs to be tweaked?

Of course the instructions that have been published are notably singular-centric, the example ideas or prompts are not really made for plural systems — but this doesn't mean that the safety plans we make from those instructions are any less helpful for us because we make the plans for ourselves. We can get caught up in the language and original intent and end up feeling like we ought to follow their directions to a T, and end up creating a limited, biased external-world-only point-of-view in our document, and neglect internal world issues and dynamics that can play into our safety and security as well as missing out on tapping into inner world tools or headmate's skills, input or perceptions that can help to dig us out of the situations we find ourselves in.

So we're reworking the instructions here, into a series of exercises that y'all can go through in order to come out with a system safety plan rather than just a singular safety plan. We have shamelessly based our instructions on the US publication called "Action Planning for Prevention and Recovery" (SMA-3720) — a public domain document so there's no limitations on us doing so — and updating it for plural & multiple systems, using our own community's lan-

guage and safety as it pertains to plural systems rather than singular systems. We use the United Front spaceship paradigm language & the ideas we have already introduced in Recruits, but also know that you may be coming back to this exercise to update your safety plan over and over again — no matter whether y'all are currently a functional multiple system or if y'all are still at the start of your recovery.

A little background about the US government's safety plan document: it was prepared by Mary Ellen Copeland, M.S., M.A. Under US contract, then she also trademarked it under a different (and quite a bit more popular) name — but it's the same document and idea behind it. In our case we're exceptionally happy to take the ideas and pluralize them and create a document that applies to and speaks to plural systems better.

We're rewriting these exercise not only for DID or "traumagenic" systems (folk who attribute their plurality to trauma), but for anyone who has a lingering or recurring reaction of any type to stressful situations. A system safety plan (and the crisis plan one can create to follow it) will help anyone who experiences recurring and escalating troubles whether physical, mental, emotional, and may face a loss of some type of control or be in need of medical intervention due to those troubles if they continue to escalate.

Thus a system's safety plan can revolve around addiction, autoimmune diseases, sensitivities & allergies, autism, anxiety, etc. If you have any related issues that get progressively worse and could be helped by being caught sooner, where prevention is key, and where you might need someone to care for you if your issues or symptoms go unchecked too long and progress beyond your control — then this is the document y'all can build as a team to help out.

So for example when our anxiety goes up we stim more. Some of our stims are reasonable and healthy, like rocking and swaying. Some are kinda meh like we have EDS and crack our joints a lot, and that's definitely a stim. It can disturb people like nails

on a chalkboard. We get it, we have some triggers around similar things. If we were totally unplugged from masking and suppressing our stims, they would include tongue clicking and popping noises, humming, whistling, talking to ourselves, bouncing, etc. depending on how much anxiety we have (or how excited we are) and who is fronting.

So we have several paths on how to deal with our own comfort level with our need to stim. To simplify let's say we have the choice to mask or unmask, and of whether or not we are attempting to be less anxious or not so that we just don't need to stim so much. The reality is life is much more complicated than illustrative binaries like this.

Masked and less anxious works. Unmasked and less anxious also generally works. Masked and more anxious doesn't work so well – it eats up a lot of energy. Unmasked and more anxious may be better on my own energy physically and emotionally, but then there's social loss, which can lead to another issue with emotional or even physical energy.

So whether or not we mask, our outcome will always be better if we can lower our anxiety. So that's part of our safety plan: what can we do to notice that we're starting to get anxious before we're doing things we don't want to do?

Your system's safety plan ends up becoming a document where you store important information about your system. The safety plan portion is for y'all's own use. You would keep it handy, but not where others would get to it. You might carry it with you everywhere. You could keep it in an app on your phone, for example. Or you could put it in the designated sections of your \*United Front Ship's Log Planner\* if you have one.

The important thing is that y'all can refer to it, update it, and use it as part of your own wellness plan on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. It could be helpful when onboarding new headmates and especially when introducing new folk to fronting, for example. You

could use it to help teach them what your life is like when things are going well, or so that they are aware of the important things that help keep y'all's life in good order.

So the plan becomes a way to help whomever's fronting what the clues are for your system's status, and what to do about maintaining good system functioning. It's almost a captain's cheat sheet or reference guide for how to maintain the ship and crew.

And this is why it doesn't really matter what y'all have going on, it could be a good idea even if y'all don't have trauma, immune disorders, autism, or anything that flares. Everyone has a bad day sometimes and could use a reminder of things that work to help lift their spirits. And y'all never know when y'all would have a really bad day and it might be nice to hear from "you in a better place" for some advice on things to try to help y'all feel better and take better care of yourselves.

To start with, we suggest some scrap paper, and for your plans to be most useful, use pencil especially if y'all are bugged by crossing out or have limited space — this way it's neat and easy to update later.

This document is best worked on while y'all are in a really good place, and or as good as it gets right now. Take your time and try to have fun with it. It can seem overwhelming which is why it's broken down into a series of exercises. Y'all can read through them all at once, but take your time doing them, or jot a couple ideas for each section and come back to them all again later or as new things come to your attention and y'all want to add them to your plan.

Another good idea is to work on a habit of reviewing, tweaking, and updating your plan on a regular basis so that it's kept up-to-date. We're using a looseleaf binder because we have pretty long lists to add to ours. Yours might be very simple. And that's all perfect. It's yours, all that matters is that it helps y'all.

Y'all can also have a full "master" system safety plan and keep a satellite "mini" version that's more easily portable, such as a cheat



sheet that's folded up into your wallet, or a small notebook you keep in a bag or purse. The abbreviated plan can be a good starting point and can include other relevant information y'all might need if things get bad like a list of your medications.

If y'all lose time or have had issues with headmates fronting who are confused or non-verbal and it's given you trouble in public places, consider carrying around a wallet-sized card or business card that explains what's going on (to whatever degree y'all feel safe) and directs someone to call one of your emergency contacts so y'all can be safely assisted until y'all are able to take care of yourselves again. Y'all can also have this crisis card laminated if necessary.

Contents of safety plans are usually things that "make sense" when y'all are doing well. Y'all may end up feeling like y'all are kinda stating the obvious at times — try not to judge it by your ability to self-care and self-regulate or realize what's going on when y'all are doing well. Consider instead how a new child alter might feel, folk stuck in the past, or someone who has been triggered to the point of panic.

When we panic, our brain narrows our focus. We don't have a choice in this; it's a psychological process. We see less options so we can make faster decisions in a life-or-death situation. Of course panic can happen even when it's not a life-or-death situation! And that's when that narrowing of perception, options and choices doesn't serve us anymore.

The best thing to do is have a plan that was made when your options and considerations were wide open, and y'all could be inspired by what might seem obvious. Say one of the things y'all might write down about how to feel better is "If you're hungry, eat." Part of your head is probably screaming about that being too easy and how would y'all forget that! Or maybe y'all are nodding along. Just trust us y'all want to be that simple and simplistic — both.

## System Safety Plan Notes

Our information is based on the U.S. DHHS, SAMHSA, & CMHS publication SMA-3720 Action Planning for Prevention and Recovery (“APPR”)— a pamphlet you can get for free and the information is in the public domain (uncopyrighted) for use without limitation. We have it available for download in the \*United Front Ship’s Log\* section of <https://kinhost.org/Books>.

If y’all are referring to the government pamphlet instructions, their sections (bold) apply to the following sections in the United Front materials (italicized):

Action Planning for Prevention & Recovery      \*United Front\* books

| —: | :-- |

**\*\*Developing a Wellness Toolkit\*\*** | **\*Crew Equipment Review\***

**\*\*Daily Maintenance Plan: Feeling Well\*\*** | **\*Safe Water Mark\***

**\*\*Daily Maintenance Plan: Dreams & Goals\*\*** | **\*Staying in Ship Shape — Annual Planning\***

**\*\*Daily Maintenance Plan: Daily List\*\*** | **\*Staying in Ship Shape — Daily Planning\***

**\*\*Daily Maintenance Plan: Reminder List \*\*** | **\*Staying in Ship Shape — Quarterly & Monthly Planning\***

**\*\*Triggers\*\*** | **Foul Waters\***

**\*\*Early Warning Signs\*\*** | **\*Navigating Dangers\***

**\*\*When Things Are Breaking Down or Getting Worse\*\*** | **\*Batten the Hatches\***

## Introduction

The ship's steward doesn't come to the captain while the ship is in a storm and say "By the way, I've been thinking about how we can reorganize the cargo hold..." Plans are made and discussed during good weather and smooth sailing, when the crew has leisure time, and the captain is well-rested and unharried. Then the steward and the captain can go below deck, pour themselves a thumb's worth of undiluted rum, and pour over a map of the ship and explore the ideas of how to better stow and balance their cargo belowdeck. If a gunman has an idea to improve aim that comes to him while he's at his battlestation, unlike the movies he will wait and share it with other crew or officers once the battle is over. Movies try to sell us the "sudden inspiration that turns the tide of war" but that's when people act, not when people plan.

In essence, the purpose of creating a System Safety Plan is so that you utilize the clearer thinking and broader options available to y'all when you are in a good space to help plan for what to do when y'all are not in a good space, when it's much harder to think, plan, and see options.

It's perfectly ok to not be ok. But when our brains start to close off options, or get locked into a pattern of worsening outlooks and panic sets in, sometimes the only way we can see is getting worse. Having a pre-made plan to feel better and see more options can help break a downward spiral.

Your system safety plan is created by y'all. All we're doing is providing a framework. Examples are not suggestions, but there to help y'all see possibilities. Anything that works for y'all is valid so long as y'all choose things in your locus of control, or make agreements with others (inside and out) to help in the ways that you need when you need it.

We suggest coming up with a group plan, because much of the issue is that y'all share the same ship hardware. While one of y'all might

start a spiral, at some point it affects the whole ship and all the residents, and it may well take a concerted effort to set things on a better course again. This isn't to blame anyone; we've all had our moments of something slipping out of place, or bumping into a situation or trigger and not being able to help what happens afterwards.

That said, it's also entirely about y'all: your abilities and capabilities, your particular stressors, situation, triggers, etc. Y'all can customize it to your own situation. You may find y'all already had some things in place that resemble this more formalized externalized version.

Part of the purpose of this document, and building it over time, is that it can help with communication: y'all can create a plan in spite of amnesiac barriers, y'all can get input from distant headmates, y'all can use the plan to discuss issues or warning signs with friends, family, partners, professionals, etc.

If y'all cannot create a physical external safety plan, then create one internally. It still may be helpful to brainstorm externally in password-protected or temporary documents, or on paper y'all shred or destroy afterwards. But if y'all must, do it entirely internally on whiteboards, on paper, using whatever y'all have handy. We know there are situations where y'all may not be able to create written documents at all.

Another great feature of your System Safety Plan is to lend perspective, shine a light on hope, let y'all know that you have more control than y'all think, and that y'all can improve your own situation and help things in your life get better.

## **Getting Set Up to Start**

We suggest starting out with blank or lined paper for brainstorming and creating lists, that y'all can transfer to a 3-ring binder, a journal

that you set aside for your System Safety Plan, or to your \*United Front Ship's Log\* planner.

Y'all will also want pencils, pens, crayons or markers for brainstorming on big paper, erasers, etc. Maybe all of the above.

Please don't judge yourselves as y'all do the exercises. If y'all have to bail as y'all get to the trigger questions, self-harm and crisis questions, it's totally understandable. Y'all may need to work on some of these exercises with your support team, close friends, or in a supportive group environment. It may help to have folk to talk to or help y'all stay grounded if y'all find some of the exercises difficult or destabilizing. This is one of the reasons why y'all should work on these exercises when y'all are doing fairly well.

Keep these lists in a safe place. Your& answers should always be private unless y'all choose to share them. You may not want to answer these questions on paper or in a journal or planner — if so, do them in a password-protected application on your phone or in a document in an anonymous online account only y'all know about, etc. Your safety is the priority, here. And as great as it may be to have all the answers in one place and easily accessible, there may be information in these plans that could be used to manipulate and harm your& system. Keep your answers safe from prying if needed.

In the Ship's Log we have 6 sections, and later you'll compile the last section on the computer ("Heavy Weather" or the crisis plan) or make a neat copy that can be scanned to give to potential caregivers.

## **Crew Equipment Review**

**\*\*APPR Section: Developing a Wellness Toolbox\*\*** | brainstorm alongside your safety plan

Every day the ship's crew checks that their tools are stowed exactly where expected. When weathering a storm in the dark of night, you have no way to see your way to the things you need: you must know

precisely where every tool is stowed and every rope is lashed. Not only that, it's not a good time to find out your favorite knife is dull, a rope has frayed beyond usefulness, or that a sail in need of repair was neglected too long.

Every ship that's going to set out to sea must be provisioned, and inventoried. The crew, especially the officers, is selected for their depth and breadth of skills and knowledge and if there's a skill lacking then they seek out someone who has it. After all once you're out of port, your life depends on having enough food, drink, skills, sailors, and the right tools and complement of officers to make sure that y'all reach the other side.

Even on your plural "Ship" — y'all need to know what you have to work with, to keep things going well, and in times of trouble. Skills, attitudes, behaviors, interests, values, ethics, passions, drives, curiosities, hobbies, talents, dreams, goals, projects, emotional tools, mental tools, physicality, etc. There's no end to what y'all could have (or develop) that could help your ship sail off on adventures in the future.

The first step will be to brainstorm and catalogue your ship & crew's resources. The main idea is to list the things y'all all use or do to help yourselves feel better when y'all are having a hard time. But y'all can get very creative and write things down that y'all have never tried before, that might help. An air of curiosity and creativity can help a lot in this exercise.

Go for writing down even the totally obvious things like things y'all already do every day when y'all feel well. In fact, those are likely to be the things that y'all use from this list first, so make sure to include them.

Start to catalogue things y'all already do or might do that:

- help y'all stay well or feel better
- y'all would like to try; things y'all have heard may help

- affirm your& crew's strengths, abilities, talents, positive qualities, interests
- utilize skills that help y'all get well
- your shipmates find enjoyable
- affirm your internal goodwill, compassion, trust
- connect y'all with each other (meetings, collaborations)
- bring y'all more into the Here & Now
- accomplish shared passions or purposes amongst shipmates
- highlight inner world assets; tools, structures, mechanisms, people, friends, allies
- ameliorate your& pain, boredom, sadness, anxiety, loneliness, agitation
- encourage headmates who handle adverse conditions better to front

It may help to run down a list of your crew or shipmates and catalogue things they like to do. Some may have things in common (i.e. sing, sculpt, swim). Y'all could also take note of the things y'all already happen to do through the day. Don't forget routine items of self-care for your system and body. Y'all can ask friends, family, etc. for ideas about what they know y'all already do and consider them for y'all's list. Some items should be entirely portable and so-called easy, like breathing exercises, and some may be things that are infrequent or require external resources like getting a massage.

Note that while y'all eventually want the list to be exhaustive, y'all never have to allow it to be exhausting. Y'all can do this in many sessions, or say "that's good enough for now" and move on. Y'all will come up with more ideas eventually, and y'all can add them to the list. It's a living document. Y'all may never be "done" tweaking or re-creating it. That's half the point — it needs to be a current playbook, not a perfect playbook. Y'all are trying to describe an evolving process (your system); y'all won't be done with it. So don't worry about being perfect and getting absolutely everything down.

And if y'all don't know each other well enough yet don't worry about it. Here's some of the singular government document suggestions; ideas for your list might be:

- eating three healthy meals a day
- drinking plenty of water
- getting to bed by 10:00 pm (or at a good regular time for y'all)
- doing something y'all enjoy — like playing a musical instrument, watching a favorite TV show, knitting, or reading a good book
- exercising
- doing a relaxation exercise
- writing in your journal
- talking to a friend on the telephone
- taking medications
- taking vitamins and other food supplements

In terms of plural reality we would add things like:

- having an internal party
- hugging your headmates (or perhaps a particularly hugable headmate)
- reading your system kids a story
- stimming (pick y'all's favorite stim) like rocking
- a ship's crew meeting

So as y'all can see, you can list anything & everything whether mundane or singular external-world-centric, or absolutely positively plural like inner world amusement park trips and re-painting your internal safety space or doing inner-world art projects and hanging them in an inner-world art gallery. Anything goes.



## Using Your List

Y'all will be using this list as a reference while working on the remaining exercises in y'all's safety plan, so doing this work up-front is very helpful for the remainder of the process. Y'all want to look at the list and go wow, we came up with a lot more than we thought we would! Or basically as they put it in the guidelines "an abundance of ideas" so that y'all have a good bit of fodder for several exercises yet to come.

They also say one should feel "positive and hopeful" when looking at your& list.

We crossed off items from the big brainstorm as we poured them into other topics; also cross off or erase items that no longer work for y'all or things that are one-time and y'all have accomplished.

## Things that help us feel better.

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## Safe Water Mark

\*\*\*APPR: Daily Maintenance Plan: Feeling Well\*\*\* | \*Safe Water Mark\* both columns, with the

modification of specifying internal vs. external.

A safe water mark is a buoy (a floating object that serves as a symbol with color stripes on it) that lets ships know they are entering calmer waters and that there's less dangers afoot. Like a signal beacon that announces y'all are entering the Neutral Zone after being in enemy space, or flying out of a nebula into open space, the crew can find some relief from stressors and enters a routine of

daily maintenance and repair tasks to both prevent troubles and prepare for future crisis or dangers.

What are our “safe water marks”? These are the signs we look forward to when we have been in danger or sailing on rough seas — reprieve. The crew can have more time off. What signs do we have when things are calm and safe, when we’re doing well, when we can go into maintenance & repair mode and work on improving our skills and knowledge? When can we let our guard down a little bit?

Since we’re plurals, we’re going to create 2 lists — one for external or body-wide signs, and one for the internal, headmate, inner-world signs — for what signs we have to know we’ve reached “safe water”.

Hopefully y’all are in safe waters right now, and that will help to make this a little easier, because y’all are “in it” right now y’all can figure out what it feels like right now — what’s going on right now that doesn’t happen when things aren’t going so well?

So, in this section describe how y’all are feeling and what signs y’all have when y’all are feeling alright. Honestly feeling alright, not when you say y’all are “fine” to the world and know y’all are fooling yourselves but being polite.

If y’all are having trouble thinking of things, then describe the way y’all think you would like to feel when things are going well for y’all. Something inspiring, a good place to be for a while.

What do you do, who fronts, how do y’all feel, how do y’all or other people know that y’all are doing just fine?

We allow for y’all to divvy this up to internal signs and external signs, often there can be many different things going on inner-world when we’re feeling good and that’s one of the beautiful and brilliant things about being plural. Our inner world can give us insights to what’s going on and how we’re doing.

The government pamphlet suggests some folk have used words

like: “bright, talkative, outgoing, energetic, humorous, reasonable, argumentative” and the study group we were in came up with some additional suggestions and ideas (or we did, but whatever):

- external signs like things you do or can do
- what comes easily
- things you enjoy doing
- who fronts
- spoon use - spoons go farther, have more spoons, replenish quicker
- hobbies y’all enjoy in these times
- things y’all do for fun

Here’s some ideas or examples of “signs we’re doing well” for the Crisses:

- headmates are bright, talkative
- loads of spoons like we can handle being around people and doing things
- excited to face the day
- laughing in good jest when we make mistakes
- showering comes easily
- enjoy cooking
- Moonlite is fronting
- want to draw and color
- we quit all or almost all of our streaming services

Of course your system’s list would be your& own. The idea is that this is a goal from now on: to be aiming to get back to this place — but not in terms of guilt or judgement or failure. Y’all should find the idea of this list comforting; y’all have been there before, and when rough sailing is done y’all will be back there. Y’all always have something to look forward to that serves to remind y’all of how y’all want to feel and what feels good when things are working out well for y’all.

## **External signs we're doing well.**

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## **Internal signs we're doing well.**

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## **Staying in "Ship Shape"**

Ships — whether seafaring or space-exploring — need to handle routine tasks when things are all well. Scrubbing decks, lashing hammocks, checking in on storage, soaking tomorrow's salted fish, checking the ropes, inspecting the sails, the changing of the watch, the ringing of the bells to tell time, etc. In space, there's equipment maintenance, repairs, crew health tasks, and so on.

When travel is going well, it's not time to kick back and let things go. It's just as important to make sure that everything is in good working order when things are going well.

Operating a ship is in itself work. Keeping your vessel spaceworthy requires constantly addressing little things, some well below your conscious notice, and making adjustments for various circumstances. When you do it, it might seem like it's almost a miracle; things have fallen into place, the things are getting done, and it's smooth sailing. But trust us, a lot of things are going on and y'all have a lot more to do with those good moments than y'all might think or know.

Everyone hopes they'll never need to report to their battlestations, but everyone wants and needs the equipment in good working order before there's a problem. When you're at your Safe Water Mark — that's a great time to make sure that everything remains in good repair, that y'all have inventoried the supplies and make sure to inspect and repair all the equipment.

Where the “Safe Water Mark” are the signs y’all can point to that things are going Ok, keeping your system in Ship Shape is something y’all actively and deliberately do and monitor constantly, even if y’all have never really thought about it. Or maybe sometimes y’all know y’all ought to be doing some really important selves-maintenance, but it’s getting lost and so things start to slide or fall apart.

So now that y’all know what y’all would like to feel like, be capable of, and what y’all would like to return to when things are going less-than-well — it’s time to figure out the things you& need to do in order to stay in that state when y’all get there.

[Callback to the Being Proactive section of “Cool & Collected” — rather than reactive]

The idea in this section is to make some of these acts that help us feel good a deliberate act, so that we all can get more reliable results. The first step was determining what “good” looks and feels like in the Safe Water Mark section.

The next part is determining what really motivates y’all — as a team, and individually — to be sailing at all. Imagine all the work that a crew does on any sailing or spacefaring vessel and whether it’s just being done to enjoy the sun and wind, or if there’s an actual goal in mind. Ships past and present, or fictional ships of the future have goals such as get to the other shore, explore, gather loot, defend one’s homeland. Our sperm donor invested in some research vessel’s mission to discovered sunken treasure once; the exploration team was very certain they had calculated where a particular ship had gone down and they were going to set sail with divers and see if they could recover the treasure. The stuff movies are made of.

So the first part of staying in Ship Shape is determining why y’all are sailing. If y’all don’t have a life’s purpose that’s Ok, not everyone has something handed to them from on high and they’re overrated anyhow. What we really mean is that y’all can set short term goals or long term goals, create and craft dreams, or make shit

up that motivates y'all.

If y'all are just treading water, you can put this off. You're in port, you're waiting for motivation, shore leave time, not ready to sail out on an adventure. Y'all can put this aside until you're inspired. But it's likely that you have some types of goals that may or may not motivate you. "Finish school" "find a job" "get healthier" or since y'all are reading this book — "building our internal community."

We find we work better when our goals are explicit and we're all engaged and interested.

We generally work from our "longest and strongest" to our short-term projects although it's definitely possible to start with the short-term if y'all don't have an idea of a bigger picture in your life. So we usually look at our shared life purpose (helping others, especially plurals), then narrow the scope to our current group goals (helping plurals who use therapy shorten their time in therapy), then narrow down to a specific project like say writing this book series for a "short-term" goal.

We also have individual goals and projects. Buck often comes up with advocacy and (external) systems change goals. Like he started thinking yesterday whether or not there could be a class action lawsuit against the American Psychiatric Association for allowing dissociative identity disorder to be suppressed in both teaching and diagnosis across the majority of their field. He's thinking how this is industry wide almost the rule (there are individual psychiatrist exceptions) where many folk rely on psychiatrists for a "proper" or "official" diagnosis. It would be a direct challenge of their diagnostic capabilities, and their gatekeeping of the whole industry. So he is chewing on this idea and trying to see what merits the idea has and what actions he might take. He's also responsible for us talking to the ISST-D and spurring them on to revise their outdated treatment guidelines. It's not that others in here don't care about these things (and we certainly support Buck in this both by giving him front time and by occasionally participating in and helping him with his

rants and planning), but it's really his way of doing things and not many of us are motivated in that way in particular. He thinks both top-down and bottom-up where many of us have our heads full working bottom-up to create change.

If y'all have the \*Ship's Log Planner\* there are several long-term forward-facing exercises in the planner that we'd like to also cover briefly here.

## Annual Planning

\*\*APPR: Daily Maintenance Plan: Dreams & Goals\*\* | \*Annual Planning\*

Each year we like to set some type of goal or theme for the year. For example one year our theme was "Create". We chose projects throughout the year that emphasized our annual theme, like I believe one of them was rebooting our podcast.

So our first question in the planner is "What do y'all Hope for?" which directly leads into the \*Life List\* exercise. Y'all can answer the big question or work out the other question suggested there: What do y'all want to accomplish in your shared lifetime?

So whether y'all are thinking in terms of a shorter-term hope or wish, or the longer-term what would y'all like to accomplish in your lifetime, the idea is to come up with a list, however far-fetched, of things that y'all have to look forward to.

Y'all are looking for things that would bring you& peace or comfort knowing that y'all had accomplished them. We called it a "Life List" because we decided "Bucket List" is too morbid — things y'all want to do before you& kick the bucket — but the idea is the same. When y'all look back on your shared life, what would y'all like to have checked off on your list? Reach for the stars, make it a list of stretch goals, of things that y'all would look back on in pride or amazement that y'all had accomplished these things. Or pour out a list of things y'all have already done that y'all would like to do more of. We

always have write more books on the list. It's something I'm not sure we'll ever grow tired of doing, regardless of the genre because we really can't wait to get back to scifi/fantasy writing some day.

So y'all can dedicate a whole page in your safety plan to these big, lofty, dreamy, inspiring ideas. Don't judge them like "But we'll never be able to do that." These are dreams, and they don't have to be possible.

When we were growing up we thought we wanted to be a teacher or a healer. That went through so many iterations and disappointments over the years. Kids in school abused us so we didn't want to teach kids. Maybe special ed for high schoolers we thought. We wanted to heal people, and while we admired nursing that wasn't quite what we were looking for. The answer jumped out at us during a business networking event when we met the person who became our coaching instructor — life coach. That was what we wanted to be when we grew up. Someone who sometimes teaches, but always helps people to get out of their own way, learn how to heal and take care of themselves better. Occasionally teaching and presenting, mentoring, etc. but usually just coaching people towards health and getting out of their own way. Perfect. Life-altering for us to finally come full circle to finding a way to both be a teacher and a healer.

So write down the big lofty amorphous things that y'all don't think are possible but be curious "I wonder whether or how we will accomplish this!" and allow that to be motivating in itself rather than judging or shaming. We still have trips to Africa and Australia on our list, though we're not sure whether we'll ever accomplish them. The idea of adventure and exploration (of places we've never seen or been to, not trailblazing unexplored "new" areas) is still enormously motivating to us, and it might guide us to something different than we initially pictured — like a virtual augmented reality tour of Melbourne or teaching a tribe in Africa virtually like our friend at Farm-A-Yard has done.



Another thing we do is a shorter-term list along similar lines we call our “Wishlist” — an annual braindump of things we want or are looking forward to in the coming months that we will often add to and cross things off of. Often these are items or services that we’re waiting on due to money issues, but not always. Sometimes they’re things we need spoons for, or that require a multi-step process we’re not ready to undertake.

Both of these lists have parallels to David Allan’s “someday/maybe” projects in *Getting Things Done* except they’re all things we really want on some level and when we used GTD a lot we ended up with enormous piles of someday/maybe ideas that we didn’t necessarily see as life-purpose-driving hopes for long term or as shorter term “we would like this as soon as we can” items. As a team of brainstormers we could come up with “someday/maybe” ideas at the tune of 5-10 decent ideas a day, way more than we could ever accomplish in a lifetime. So we keep those somewhere else not in our planner. These ideas may be better off given away or sold (which is why we offered paid business brainstorming sessions for a while) because we won’t get around to them.

So we generally hold our goals and projects against our life purpose and say “Does this fit?” many of our “ideas” are so out of place in our life, we have decided no they don’t fit. We still have someone in here who dreams of converting a food truck into a mobile herb shop and selling cooking/baking spice kits to the masses in parking lots throughout the area. But it really does not fit with our life’s purpose (“helping others, especially plurals”) as well as the other projects we are doing. It would help others, for sure, but would have a low chance of helping plurals. So for now it’s been a fantasy that the interested person(s) like to go to at times. It made a little more sense when we were homeless and not able to make as much progress on our life’s goal, but that’s not the case right now.

Y’all can go through your Life List and your Wishlist and decide what items y’all would like to tackle or create projects based on accomplishing the ideas that y’all have there. Sometimes y’all may

need to break down the dream into a goal or set of goals, then create projects based on accomplishing the bigger goals.

Let's say we were going to decide we are definitely going travelling. We've had enough of being held to one place; let's see the world. We'd have to look into how to do so affordably, probably get a more road-worthy laptop (lighter, newer, slimmer), reduce our belongings by a huge deal so we could get rid of our apartment, save up the money for a storage unit for the things we absolutely cannot allow ourselves to get rid of or scan boxes of papers and journals to make a digital copy of important things so we could really purge our whole life, etc. We would brainstorm all the factors that go into "see the world" — like what's really in our way? If we didn't have a passport, that would be on the list as well and we'd write down the fees involved or look into whether we qualify for some type of fee waiver due to being on public assistance.

Each of these is a separate project that all get us closer to the big dream/goal of travel. We would have this list, then look for the "low-hanging fruit" as we call it, the items that we can accomplish now. The price of a passport may not happen at that moment, so it's on our wishlist — we might decide that research is the first order of business so we might say "Ok, we'll research how to travel the world inexpensively in January." and we'd write that on another sheet of paper (or in the Quarterly Plan if we're using the \*Ship's Log Planner\*). We also might want to have a subcommittee meeting about whether we're OK with scanning our journals and dumping the original papers, and see what they come up with in terms of eliminating our hoard of belongings (there is a dragon in here).

[Exercise]

What do y'all Hope for?

[space]

Life List

[full page]

Wishlist

[full page]

### **Daily Maintenance that helps us stay well.**

**\*\*APPR: Daily Maintenance Plan: Daily List\*\*** | \*Staying in “Ship Shape”\* right column.

[Cross-reference to implementation intentions chapter whatever we decide to call it]

The next thing we’re going to do is create a list of the bare-bones things that we need to do every day to stay well. Some of these may seem obvious when y’all are well, but also consider how when y’all are not well these things may not be getting done, and it contributes to things getting even worse.

So these are daily prevention measures. Self-care items that are vital to your overall well-being.

If you have a feeling you’ve already done this exercise, you’re mostly right. Most of these items are already in the brainstorm list from your Crew Equipment Review. So look at the list y’all already made, and locate the items that y’all know you must do every day to stay OK. It may be things like eating, drinking, sleeping. That’s Ok.

Also consider inner world stuff that if y’all miss it things get worse. For us, if we don’t have internal communication every day, it really hurts us in a bad way. So if we have to remind ourselves to check in with each other and make sure we’re communicating and taking the time and space to do so, so be it. It’s just that vital to our overall health.

Also logistical stuff goes onto this list. If y’all need to look at the calendar, plan meals for the day, set alarms for taking your meds every day — whatever it is y’all need to ensure you’re in tip-top shape goes on this list.

Here's our list for inspiration:

- check our planner, hold meeting, check calendar (this is one item for us — it's the agenda of our daily internal meeting)
- 3 square meals (when hungry)
- hydrate (8+ glasses H<sub>2</sub>O)
- sleep on time: 10:30pm
- connect with our “why”
- care for our inner kids (internal caregivers report to the inner world nursery daily)
- speak with each other
- be compassionate with ourselves
- connect with our companion system
- music every day (we have decided that any day where we play absolutely no music all day is a spoon hit the following day)

Keep this list light; bare essentials only. Ask whether y'all really **\*\*need\*\*** to do this thing every day. This list does not have to be long, but if y'all discover something new that is detrimental if it falls by the wayside, add it to the list. Another way to look at it is to answer: “What is likely to keep us feeling our best if we do it every day?”

You& might cross these items off the big brainstormed list as they're pulled onto this daily list; y'all can always refer to this list to make sure y'all have done these things if y'all aren't doing well.

One thing we like in the government document is: “When you start to feel ‘out of sorts,’ you can often trace it back to ‘not doing’ something on this list.” So as y'all consider what to put on this list really think “How much will it hurt if we don't do this every day?” Like we can't afford to neglect our inner world kids — that would be a disaster! There are abandonment/neglect issues already, and failing to show up for them and give them the love and attention

they desperately need would result in internal community issues that would definitely show up in our body, our mind, our emotions, our anxiety level, our physical and mental health, etc. So it's just not negotiable to take a day off. That's why we have so many adults caring for the kids; the adults can rotate time off as needed.

So keep this list to the things you must do every day, not the things you would like to do. When y'all are having a not-so-great day, y'all may well need to do the absolute minimum and not have to remember what the minimum is — having it already written down will help with spoon management on those days.

And we slip into worse and worse issues, because one thing we neglect when we are low on spoons is our daily meeting. They're not optional, and we should at least attempt to hold a meeting and check our planner & calendar even on days when we're sick, fevered, sleeping tons, etc. We allowed for skipping meals if we have no appetite.

Here's the singular-centric or external-centric items from the government's list:

- eat three healthy meals and three healthy snacks that include whole grain foods, vegetables, and smaller portions of protein
- drink at least six 8-ounce glasses of water
- take medications and vitamin supplements
- have 20 minutes of relaxation or meditation time or write in my journal for at least 15 minutes
- spend at least half an hour enjoying a fun, affirming, and/or creative activity
- check in with my partner for at least 10 minutes
- check in with myself: "how am I doing physically, emotionally, spiritually?"
- go to work if it's a workday

Other items we jotted down that came up from internal and external brainstorming to help spur other ideas:

- affirmations / prayer
- gratitude journal
- sleep on time
- nap or rest daily
- play with, cuddle, or care for animals/plants/stuffies
- exercise, walk, nature walk
- acts of kindness or connection

The other thing we're finding helpful is to go back to the idea of rhythms. How can we remember to do all of our "things" every day? Some things have cues built-in (like eating when we're hungry — our body will prompt us). Others need a little more explicit work like when to hold our meeting, and if we chain together a few things we can come up with our daily meeting agenda to meet several of our items on our list, now all we need is to figure out a prompt for our meeting and there are several of the items on our daily maintenance list that will get taken care of.

So for example our daily meeting agenda right now says:

- check calendar/update planner
- speak with each other
- Engagement executive session (at minimum)

\*\* connect with "why"

- Exit with a music choice for the day
- adult carers escort system kids to the nursery

So at the very minimum, on a "sick day" our executive group called the Engagement — basically system elders — will meet and if they're in a sick-day session their minimum agenda will be making sure we're still connecting with our Why. Which is our calling to help reduce pain and suffering for plurals in distress — why y'all

want to get better is always a worthy thing to connect to when feeling unwell. And to ensure that we always play music every day, the meeting will end by selecting some type of music to play while we move on to our next activity. And if adults escort the kids who show up to the meeting to the nursery, then we know there will be adults spending time with the kids there.

So write your bare-bones must-do daily maintenance items that help y'all stay well here or transfer the list to a place where y'all can track them every day:

[space to write]

## Checking for Barnacles

**\*\*APPR: Daily Maintenance Plan: Reminder List\*\*** | periodic checklists to refer to and plan ahead.

On occasion, a smaller ship would be hoisted out of the water and scrubbed down on the outside, or crews would lower themselves on ropes while in port to scrub the outside of larger vessels. Space-faring ships may need to do hull repairs, scrub down the space dust and check for dings from asteroids and space junk.

These are the things that are “next in line” or periodic in the fabric of y'all's shared life. Sometimes these tasks are held in your head, where they create clutter and get in the way of creativity and concentration — they cost spoons to remember. Or y'all can get them out of your head into some trusted external tool or device to “remember” them for you. Y'all might use a to-do app on your phone, a planner or journal, post-its, a whiteboard, or just a piece of paper. Whatever helps y'all get it all out of your noggin into some external form.

When y'all are doing well, there are activities that y'all want and need to do from time-to-time to stay on course. This includes the recurring tasks that are not daily rhythm items, but that at some

point it will be time to do — like say annual recertification for benefits, finishing a paper for school, making your next doctor appointment, getting groceries, or doing your laundry.

Once they're out of your head, y'all don't have to worry about forgetting these items any more and can spend that energy on figuring out which one to tackle next and gathering up the spoons to actually do it.

Some things are so routine that y'all can make a list of these "occasional duties" as a kind of external checklist of things y'all need to occasionally consider. We're calling this list "Checking for Barnacles" — because these crustaceans attach to the outside of ships and roughen or scar the hull of the ship, not so great for the mileage and could end up damaging the hull.

So there's a periodic checklist. Maybe weekly, monthly, quarterly checks that y'all might do. Brainstorm a list of these types of items and head it with "Do we need to...?" and y'all can figure out where to deploy this list — whether these are annual, semi-annual, quarterly, monthly, or weekly items, y'all might decide to separate them out into weekly vs monthly reminders for example.

By externalizing this checklist and keeping it in a place y'all will actually use it, you& can head off the "worrying" about forgetting.

The government's example, answering "Do I need to...?":

- set up an appointment with one of my health care professionals
- spend time with a good friend or be in touch with my family
- do peer counseling
- do some housework
- buy groceries
- do the laundry
- have some personal time
- plan something fun for the evening or weekend



- write some letters
- go to support group

Things change, so these lists may eventually need tweaks, like adding in new items or taking out obsolete items, but otherwise these are reference lists y'all will want to keep on hand on a post-it on the fridge, in your bullet journal, or in your planner.

We don't want to see a large list of things in front of us all the time. It's off-putting. We actually like our lists to be much more agile and work them into the flow we already have going on. So here's some of our periodic reminders and how often we would like to think about them:

- check on what doctor appointments we need (quarterly)
- schedule dental (annually) and eye exams (every 2 years)
- ask ongoing customer for their tasks or calendar for meetings for the following year (annually)
- look ahead for calls for presenters to answer (quarterly)
- check smoke & CO2 detectors (quarterly)
- do grocery shopping (weekly)
- pay bills (weekly)
- do monthly planning (monthly)
- do weekly planning; check monthly planning (weekly)
- check on therapy schedule (weekly)
- plan coaching groups (quarterly)
- create next year's planner (annually)
- check in on our (external) kids (weekly)

Next we sort these questions out and distribute them through our planner as needed. We'll probably also revisit this list and add things to it for internal system maintenance, such as updating headmaps or headmate lists periodically. We use little sticky repositionable flags and pick a day of the month to put a monthly

reminder and stick it on a day or stick it on a week of the month. Then when we do it, we move the sticky note to the next month.

So for example we might make a “Laundry?” flag and put it in our weekly plan next week. All we have to do is ask ourselves “Is it time to do laundry yet?” and if the answer is no, we move it to next week. As we’re actually hand-washing items during lockdowns and quarantines, we might make it a daily reminder, because we can wash a handful of garments every day and pretty quickly catch up on all our laundry. The repositionable flag makes that easier and more agile.

Quarterly reminders and reminders that belong to a specific month we put into our Quarterly Plan in our planner. For example if we want to check on our smoke detector every 6 months, we could jot that into our Quarterly Plan say in April & October.

If y’all don’t have a quarterly plan, y’all can create a sticky that says “Periodic reminder? (3)” and put it into your planner. The 3 is to remind y’all that once y’all have done it, you can move it ahead 3 months. Or if y’all have a benefits recertification in say June and December each year, y’all could make a sticky that says “Recertification coming! (May/Nov)” and once y’all have gotten the warning and mentally prepared for the onslaught of red tape and hoop-jumping y’all can move the reminder flag ahead to the other month.

When we do our monthly planning (which we like to do on the 1st of each month), we would check back to our Quarterly Plan to see whether there’s anything we need to take into consideration this month. For us that sometimes means checking conferences to see if they have a call for presenters listed yet, or preparing for annual events, travel, or whatever our rhythm will be for that month.

This was a suggestion out of the government document with some of our own take on how to utilize the information. However, if y’all are total time management/productivity geeks like we are, there’s a whole website of hacks based around David Allan’s \*Getting

Things Done\* and other ideas called [43folders.com](http://43folders.com)<sup>1</sup>. While it's obviously singular-centric, they've been around a very long time and so there's a lot of articles and ideas. Try not to get so obsessed about task tracking that y'all spend more time worrying about how to track the things to do that y'all don't actually get them done. We've been there, busy tracking the ever-growing pile of things we could be doing better. The important thing is to get the lists out of your head. The lists do not need to be perfect so long as y'all don't lose them and y'all actually use them once you get them out of your head.

## Foul Waters

**\*\*APPR: Triggers\*\*** | **\*Foul Waters\***. Identifying in the left column, Action Plan in the right column.

Content Warning: this is where things start getting uncomfortable.

Some people call these hot spots, we could call them stimulus, evokers, spurs, spikes, needles.

These are innocuous things (usually) that increase your distress load disproportionately. They're environmental or situational events or circumstances that activate your autonomic nervous system, and may have consequences for you.

Your body and mind have latched on to things as "signals" that danger is coming. Whether it's the smell of something y'all are allergic to that activates your immune response, or the sight of a red folder that brings you back to an incident at school.

We don't always know why we get triggered or activated. The responses to these signs is not something we want, and may put our brain or body into a state that is highly uncomfortable, or bring on

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<sup>1</sup><http://43folders.com>

symptoms we will need to tamp down on in order to function and become stable again.

We can't help but react to triggers in some way, although we may have more or less control over directing that activation energy in less harmful reactions. But essentially when we "get triggered" it's because our body and brain believes that there's dangers in our environment from past experiences. It can be totally wrong; the problem is that it's in our nature to find patterns and when we have trauma, our brain and body look for what came before the trauma to find cues to be prepared for trauma to happen again in the future.

We see a red folder at the library, but that's close enough to "at school" that our body and brain becomes hypervigilant, scanning our environment for additional cues that trouble is coming. It's possible that we can see red folders at the store, at home, etc. having no problem with it. But a red folder on a desk like that, with a person standing behind it, and the clock on the wall... it's so similar our brain starts freaking out.

Somewhere along the way the word "trigger" itself is being coopted by society to mean "upset or angry" and that's not quite what we're talking about, although an authentic trigger can lead to irritability and emotional outbursts. The difference is that some people are using it for things that really ought to piss people off. The concepts of deadnaming, racial slurs, or ableism...these are authentic things and the mere existance in the abstract can piss many people off but they're not activating your immune system or throwing your body into prepare-for-panic mode. However, someone using your deadname or aiming a racial slur \*at you\* can very well be an authentic trigger, causing a nervous system response of some type.

So we're not talking about things that are an annoyance here, but the little things that threaten to increase your symptoms (i.e. flares, anxiety, depression, self-harm, panic, despair, intrusions, flashbacks...)

When we're in a good place, and resilient, sometimes we can handle a few of our triggers without detrimental effect. A momentary flinch, or nothing happens because the trigger itself is out of its triggering context (the red folder at the store). Pills are a trigger for us. Seeing pills doesn't bother us. Pill bottles, don't bother us.

However, triggers can be cumulative. Once we actually think about taking the pills we have a nervous system reaction. Our brain doesn't really know much difference between imagining taking them versus actually taking them. So if we're going to do it we don't think about doing it before doing it, because then we'll already start to be triggered. We "just do it" asap and then at least we don't have to "go through it twice". Thank goodness for dissociation, we can just allow our body to do all the movements without having to dwell on it.

In any case, the idea of this exercise is to catalog some of your triggers so that it helps y'all develop plans to avoid or deal with them.

Oh — a worthy note here. Exposure therapy can help with phobias — which are irrational fears of things that y'all have not actually had a traumatic encounter with. The classic example would be a person who is afraid of snakes (say on TV) but has never met or encountered a snake in person. Actually being in the presence of a snake can then be worked on via exposure therapy.

But exposure therapy doesn't work for the types of triggers we're talking about. You can't use exposure therapy on deadly allergens, and exposure to sensitivities can create deadly allergies. It's not the way these things work. It doesn't work that way for trauma-based triggers either. Your body and brain have really good reasons to be alert and hypervigilant when that trigger is around: something really did happen.

A non-exhaustive list of signs that y'all have been "activated" by a trigger can include: rash, swelling, pain, inflammation, migraine or headache, any type of symptom flare, or increasing anxiety or

depression. There was a point we would eat a potato and gain 5 lbs of water weight from inflammation. That's a sign that the potato was some type of food sensitivity for us, and we ought to not do that to our body.

The government's examples of "common triggers" are mostly what we would consider to be problems for almost everyone — but still helpful for y'all to look at:

- the anniversary dates of losses or trauma
- frightening news events
- too much to do, feeling overwhelmed
- family friction
- the end of a relationship
- spending too much time alone
- being judged, criticized, teased, or put down
- financial problems, getting a big bill
- physical illness
- sexual harassment
- being yelled at
- aggressive-sounding noises or exposure to anything that makes you feel uncomfortable
- being around someone who has treated you badly
- certain smells, tastes, or noises

We would say that all of these except the first & last of them are actual harm. They're trauma actually happening right now, not just tripping over triggers. Trauma anniversaries and innocuous "things" in our environment can be triggers while not in themselves having caused any harm or trauma. Here's some of ours:

- any landlord issues (after having been evicted & homeless for 3 years)
- the smell of coffee

- the smell of ozone and hot tires on summer pavement
- “new car” smell
- our partner getting off the phone abruptly
- caring for new client’s pets (after a very very traumatic dogsitting incident)

As you can see these things are not actively traumatic: our new landlord hasn’t done anything wrong but even him being around is a trigger because we’re so afraid of being kicked out of housing again. The coffee never hurt us — but our egg donor brewed a cup of coffee every day so whenever we smell strong Colombian coffee we get on edge. And so on.

So whether your particular triggers are active abuse in the here & now, or directly parallel real trauma (like being yelled at or scolded, whether or not the person has power over y’all), or they’re the innocuous things that by accident of circumstances happened to be present immediately before incidents of trauma, now is your time to identify some of them (don’t even try to get to all of them — that’s for y’all and your therapist) so that y’all can do the next part of the exercise.

A list of some of your& triggers:

[Space to write]

### **What y’all will do to comfort yourselves?**

So now y’all can think about some of those triggers and what has worked to help y’all comfort yourselves, and prevent your reactions to your triggers from going out-of-control?

One thing we’ve done is close the door to the room when our partner is making coffee. We sit far from where the coffee is in a lecture hall or workshop room. We still may have to contend with coffee from the person sitting next to us.

## Navigating Dangers

**\*\*APPR: Early Warning Signs\*\*** | **\*Navigating Dangers\*** identifying in the left column, planning in the right column

Some of the most dangerous places to take one's spaceship is into an unfamiliar star system. With all the orbiting bodies, gravity wells, comets, moons, and then being able to line up with and dock with space stations, or safely take orbit around an inhabited planet in spite of its other satellites it takes a steady hand, or someone already familiar with the territory.

A maritime pilot, in terms of seamanship, is native to or an expert in navigating vessels in the local areas, especially bays and harbors, and understands the local area's particular dangers, thus they are a consultant who helps ships navigate in to and out of port. They board the vessel and assist the captain in navigating through shallow waters, shoals, sandbars, and protect the local ecology by safely steering through reefs and protecting local wildlife.

This special pilot intensely studies the local area and its very particular features and pitfalls, and gets a license from the local authorities to assist ships in safe navigation.

Once there are myriad inhabited planetary systems, we can readily imagine similar pilots for spacefaring — locals who help guide you through asteroid belts into their star system, who help you chart a safe course, stick the perfect orbit in spite of a planet's 20 moons and myriad constructed satellites, or a pilot who will rendezvous outside of a spacestation and helps navigate ships to dock.

To become our own maritime pilot, we need to learn our inherent pitfalls and danger signs, where our emotional waters are shallow, where the reefs of our unconscious come closer to the surface, how big the iceberg tip of triggers is, and how large the underbelly of past traumas are under the surface. We figure this out by starting to catalogue what is going on with our body, our mind, our moti-



ventions, our intuition, our innate reactions to stress, and learning how to respond in a way that is beneficial and promotes our group's safety, this way we can more reliably navigate during stressful times in our life.

In this exercise we're specifically looking for internal reactions, the early warning signs that things are starting to go not-so-well for us; those things that, if ignored, will surely cause a lot of trouble later. They can be universal human signals (anxiety), or they can be plural-specific (loss of communication with headmates), but they're things that "happen" not more conscious or notable changes in the things you do; that's the next section.

When these signals arise, they are letting us know that we're (for example) getting needled with triggers, that there are too many plates spinning, that our inflammation is increasing, that our anxiety is mounting, and that we are approaching a tipping point into even more dangerous territory if we ignore the signs. We may not always be able to put a finger on "why" — in this case it's not "why" that we're looking for at all: we're looking for "what".

By being aware of our specific signs, body-wide and system-wide, we can be alerted to situations and responses that need our attention before things get worse.

Getting an exhaustive list is generally not possible, so this is going to be an exercise where you jot down your more obvious and notable issues at first, but then over time you can come back and add in and update the list as more signs come to your attention. It's also a good idea to review your lists occasionally and check that y'all aren't heading into danger.

## **Signs that we're heading into danger.**

Whether y'all work on this as a meeting or just a committee or smaller group, this is a brainstorm for the signs y'all have noticed in the past, or as they come up.

What's going on — how do you feel, what issues come up — when y'all know things are not going well? These are the things that you feel or notice before your habits, rhythms, floppies, etc. change. Increases in mental or physical health symptoms, erosion of your mood or resilience problems (getting more irritable or shorter fuse, increases in frustration level or decrease in your patience, etc.).

Y'all might ask friends, headmates, therapist, family, etc. if they know some of your signs, but mostly y'all want to notice this stuff from the inside. The external stuff could be helpful too, though, especially if and when y'all are writing up a crisis plan for other people to hold onto for y'all.

The government's examples, although I think it's even better if you put down what you actually see or feel rather (“increase in stims”, “biting our nails”) than a more abstract concepts like “anxiety”.

- anxiety
- nervousness
- inability to experience pleasure
- lack of motivation
- feeling slowed down or speeded up
- being uncaring
- avoiding others or isolating
- being obsessed with something that doesn't really matter
- displaying of irrational thought patterns (worded weird, right?)
- feeling unconnected to my body
- increased irritability
- increased negativity
- not keeping appointments
- changes in appetite
- restlessness

Some of our warning signs are:

- losing connection/communication with headmates

- missing appointments
- dissociation - micro time-loss
- “too busy” for internal meetings (i.e. we have overbooked ourselves and selves-care is suffering)
- brooding
- passive-influence bursts

List several things if y'all can, and add to it over time as things occur to you&. Replace more abstract ideas like “insomnia” with more specific ideas like “waking up exhausted but unable to fall back asleep”.

Y'all may also have individual headmates who exhibit specific warning signs when things are not going well such as disappearing or going deep, becoming non-verbal, acting out, certain folk exerting passive influence, protectors getting agitated, etc. Make note of what folk in your system do when things get too stressy.

## **Ways we'll help ourselves navigate through.**

The next brainstorm that y'all want to complete this exercise will help create an action plan for what to do about these warning signs. These are things y'all plan in advance to do if y'all start spotting warning signs. In other words, this is y'all calling ahead for a maritime pilot because y'all are heading in to port. Try to be specific if possible, because when y'all start having reactions, your ability to reason and think starts to degrade.

Or y'all can refer to the other lists like the government folk do in their “do the things on my daily maintenance plan, whether I feel like it or not” sample idea.

Here's the government's other ideas:

- tell a supporter/counselor how I am feeling and ask for advise. Ask them to help me figure out how to take action

- peer counsel at least once each day
- do at least three, 10-minute relaxation exercises each day (simple exercises described in many self-help books that help you relax through deep breathing and focusing your attention on certain things).
- write in my journal for at least 15 minutes each day
- spend at least 1 hour involved in an activity I enjoy each day
- ask others to take over my household responsibilities for the day

(their “I also might, depending on the circumstances” suggestions:)

- check in with my physician or other health care professional
- read a good book
- dance, sing, listen to good music, play a musical instrument, exercise, go fishing, or fly a kite.

They suggest you write a plan and try things out, and if it doesn't work it's not the idea of having a plan that's wrong — it's that particular idea on your plan. So revise it, tweak it, and take things off that aren't working. Eventually you find more things that actually work for y'all. It's a living document, and needs to be flexible.

Harbors are full of dangers and the landscape changes as silt is deposited from streams and rivers, or as tides change during the day. Be ready to update and change your plans as you find things that do/don't work for y'all.

Some of our ideas are:

- creating artwork or coloring
- re-read something inspirational that we've written
- seek out who in our system is triggered and leaking, comfort them, be compassionate
- play a specific playlist (our fronting team's ballots) - and, more importantly, sing!

Y'all can look for ideas in your full "Crew Equipment Review" brainstorm, or refer yourselves back to your other lists for ideas, use self-help books, suggestions from health care providers, and ideas from folk who experience similar issues. Y'all can also add some "if" items to the list such as "if I'm showing signs of a medication sensitivity, contact my doctor" to create some optional plans.

## Batten the Hatches

APPR: When Things Are Breaking Down or Getting Worse | Batten the Hatches: Signs in the left column. Selves-directives in the right column.

As conditions worsen on the seas, as solar energy storms overtake spaceships, their crew prepares for rough seas and will secure the hatches so that their ship doesn't take on water and lose buoyancy. They may lash down things on the deck, or lower sails, raise the anchor, and do their best to point their nose into the wind so the ship is more streamlined and less likely to be pushed around by the winds.

Sometimes despite our best attempts to prepare for "the worst", things do get worse. It's not a moment to be harder on ourselves; it's a time to prevent even worse problems and damage.

This is for the space where y'all may be heading towards crisis, but y'all are not past the point of no return yet. There's ample signs that your behavior is degrading and definitely danger on the horizon — but in spite of roughening seas and the dark clouds, the storm is not here yet. What can you do to weather the storm, to reverse vulnerabilities, to change your course or heading, to navigate around the worst dangers, and minimize damage to your& system?

So y'all will hold a brainstorming session asking yourselves what behaviors y'all have, conscious or unconscious, or what signs there

are that mean things are degrading & that y'all may lose control. The idea is to identify these signs then give yourselves concrete things to do, basically advance directives to your& own system on what to do, before y'all have a major life disruption.

This is crisis aversion. There's unfortunately no way to pussyfoot around this topic and the possible consequences if this phase goes unchecked — so consider this a content warning. Stay focused on the fact that y'all are working to **\*\*prevent\*\*** crisis, in-patient or jail time, and try not to indulge in too much fantasy or projection about this. Think back to some recent times when y'all were being driven to the edge, and what the signs were that y'all can see more clearly now, and jot them down. If y'all feel there was a time when you& should have been hospitalized even if y'all were not, that may be a good choice. Or if y'all did something y'all could have been arrested for, even if y'all were not — if it's a behavior that would put your lives, freedoms, or others in danger, that's a time that can serve as an example for y'all.

To be more specific: in this case y'all are looking for the signs that happen before y'all reach the tipping point into needing professional help, inpatient assistance, are guilty of legal or criminal activity (such as assault or robbery), or do serious selves-harm or attempt suicide. Y'all may escalate the behaviors in “Navigating Dangers” or consider what happens if y'all ignore those signs for too long. How do your behaviour or internal signs change when y'all are getting closer to the breaking point? What are the signs that y'all are being driven to the edge of putting yourselves or others into harms way?

If y'all have never been in crisis before, do your best to figure these things out. What would be a sign that y'all are losing it and may be a danger to yourselves or others. Most of the time folk reading this book would self-harm. Broaden your definition of what serious selves harm is, or consider selves harm from an external point of view.

Content Warning: a wide variety of selves-harm tactics can include depriving yourselves of food or drink, escalating your use of substances, smoking excessively, eating excessively, scrubbing your body too much, imposing extreme dietary restrictions, exercising excessively, exposing yourselves to excessive cleaning chemicals, isolation, extreme passive-aggressive behaviors, jailing headmates or removing their freedoms or privileges, oversleeping, making suicide plans or contemplating suicide methods, exposing yourselves to abusers y'all may not normally see or deal with, performing "check-ins" with estranged SRA handlers, imposing new or escalating rules on y'all's behavior that restricts positive influences or healthy activities, denying yourselves pleasure, fun, or pleasant activities, negative selves-talk like telling yourselves that y'all aren't worthwhile or do not deserve a good life, etc.

The above list is far from exhaustive. Folk can get mighty creative about how to hurt themselves, and so it may be a good idea to get creative about y'all's definitions of selves-harm and watch out for behaviors that increase our shame, discomfort, increase the burdens of life, increase our pain on any level (social, mental, emotional, physical, spiritual), etc. Be aware that y'all can readily be in denial of these signs and so being as specific as possible about when y'all are hurting yourselves or damaging your collective life is important.

## **Signs that we're in over our head.**

Consider the signs that y'all are heading down this steep slope and what y'all should watch out for — what behaviors or signs of impending complete overwhelm are there?

These are things that are very uncomfortable, unsettling, serious, and some may even be dangerous signs — but ones that would not have y'all asking for help as of yet, or that y'all still may be able to handle without having to go inpatient.

Keep in mind that these signs may vary between individuals, both internally and externally. What is normal for one headmate may be a sign of impending crisis for another. Also where things may escalate across your whole system, there's also the possibility that one headmate approaches crisis and the others do not. So if there are individuals in y'all's system who in themselves are a danger to themselves or y'all's system, it's a good idea to work out a way to keep tabs on their health and make sure that y'all support them so that they can remain out of crisis themselves, as well as making sure they don't put your& body in harm's way.

The government's example list is:

- feeling very oversensitive and fragile
- responding irrationally to events and the actions of others
- feeling very needy
- being unable to sleep
- sleeping all the time
- avoiding eating
- wanting to be totally alone
- substance abusing
- taking out anger on others
- chain smoking
- eating too much

Some of ours include:

- totally isolating & shutting out the people closest to us — including internally
- nightmares and insomnia
- suicidal ideation

However, this may not be true of everyone. Y'all may have a headmate who frequently has suicidal ideation even when things



are going fairly well for everyone. They may be stuck and leaking thoughts, etc. and that's just how y'all are. So for y'all it might be when y'all move to planning rather than just ideation. Where for us it's nightmares, that may be part of y'all's norm and it may be getting no sleep at all is your sign of getting in over y'all's head. This is entirely up to y'all not us — these are just examples to help y'all think about it.

## **Directives for whomever is fronting**

It's well known that when folk are this far gone, they are not going to be able to think and plan well. It's not a time for a long list of things to pick from or choose — this is a time to give yourselves advance directives on what precisely to attempt to do to dig out from the problems that y'all are experiencing and avoid things getting any worse than they already are.

Basically this is your “How we stay out of the hospital or jail” list. There's nothing wrong with going inpatient, by the way. If that's what y'all need — then please do feel free to do that. What we're concerned most about is the loss of freedom and autonomy most folk experience when they go inpatient. Sometimes people go in voluntarily and have their rights taken away such that they're held against their will. That's not a situation anyone wants to be in so we (and the government, by the way) are of the mind that y'all should avoid it if y'all can at all, and retain as much freedom and autonomy as it is safe for y'all to do.

Thankfully there's one more step before y'all might end up in the hospital or jail, and that's the actual crisis plan itself that y'all give to caregivers, friends, partners, etc. to help y'all when y'all are not able to make decisions and your issues have outstripped your ability to care for yourselves at all (which we outline in “Heavy Weather”).

So in this case now-y'all is giving instructions to future-y'all — the instructions are 100% up to y'all. Y'all don't have to follow the

government or our examples, we're giving them for data points and to help y'all brainstorm or consider ideas.

So in this section y'all give advance directives to your future selves that are basically "Don't think; do this." Keep the list short, low-spoon activities with high payoff, things that will keep y'all safe, remind y'all what y'all have to fight for, low-hanging fruit, etc.

Also make sure that the list of things to do is direct, clear, step-by-step if possible. Try to eliminate choices or options that may boggle a pre-crisis mindset or cause too much indecision and bailing from the whole idea altogether and giving up. If y'all are in that much distress y'all may not be able to think, decide or make choices.

The government's example ideas:

- call my doctor or other health care professional, ask for and follow his or her instructions
- call and talk for as long as necessary to my supporters
- arrange for someone to stay with me around the clock until my symptoms subside
- make arrangements to get help right away if my symptoms worsen
- make sure I am doing everything on my daily check list
- arrange and take at least three days off from any responsibilities
- have at least two peer counseling sessions
- do three deep-breathing relaxation exercises
- write in my journal for at least half an hour
- schedule a physical examination or doctor appointment or a consultation with another health care provider
- ask to have medications checked

Our ideas include:

- Do our daily maintenance list right now.

- Hold an internal meeting, even if written or only 1 person attends. Agenda: Who is able to show up? Who is having the worst issues? What can we do to support or help them? Does someone need a rescue mission? How can we resume power & control in this situation?

Just a note, our daily maintenance list includes holding an internal meeting also, so we would replace that meeting with the one listed above and specifically see if we can figure out whether there's someone in here specifically who is having issues and if so how can we help them, whether they're a stuck alter, and whether our being near crisis is an opportunity to help someone get into the Here & Now. This may or may not be "too advanced" for y'all when y'all are in this state, maybe this is something that doesn't fit y'all at all. So don't worry about it. We're just showing how we plan to handle this situation, and figured we'd include that as an example because it's so plural-centric; singular folk don't even think of these things.

As usual, this is a living document and y'all may have to play around with these ideas and see what works or what does not work well for y'all. Refer back to your Crew Equipment Review for more ideas and look back at other exercises for ideas that may stand out as being particularly effective if y'all are so out of sorts.

## **Staying in "Ship Shape" Redux**

**\*\*APPR: Developing a Wellness Toolkit\*\*** | **\*Staying in "Ship Shape"\***  
other column.

If y'all do the exercise in the United Front Ship's Log Planner, then y'all will see that y'all still have one column that isn't completed. This is for the spare items from your Crew Equipment Review that didn't get used in other exercises. This way y'all always have some extra inspiration on-hand when y'all need new ideas.

So when y'all are done with all of the plans, take the items y'all have left over from your Crew Equipment Review brainstorming

and any other lists and activities that haven't ended up in any other section yet. These are a counterpoint to the things you really need to do every day: they're options that y'all can add in, or items y'all may swap in for things that don't work in other sections later. Y'all will want to make a list of these items and keep them handy as well; they may come in handy or help y'all feel like y'all aren't stuck in a rut doing the same routines over and over again.

That's a value in and of itself; so preserve them with your safety plan, and add to them when more ideas come to y'all you may use them during safety plan reviews.

Here's some of our spare ideas that made it into our planner as "Things that help us feel better":

- work on a passion project
- take a shower
- do EFT on triggers
- take our vitamin supplements

These are things we don't absolutely need do daily in order to stay well, even though we would definitely benefit from doing them daily. It helps to keep our "must do daily" list reasonable and achievable.

We had too many miscellaneous ideas to put into the planner section, so we split up the list into some sub-lists and we will keep items on the side such as our resilience assets that aren't really actionable but still serve as inspiration. And there are items that we might use at some point in the future but probably don't need to be carried around with us everywhere in our planner.

So some examples of things we didn't end up putting into our planner includes:

- baking
- divination techniques (spiritual)

- foraging (for herbs/wild food & medicinals)
- rock collecting
- creating & filling in forms
- reading or collecting maps (like of physical locations)
- whittling, sculpting
- playing with new software
- drumming

But maybe these ideas will be handy some time, so we're leaving them in the notes we used to create the lists that are in our planner, and may come back to them if/when we need more ideas.

## Heavy Weather

**\*\*APPR: Crisis Planning\*\*** | not included in the **\*United Front Ship's Log Planner\*** deliberately.

Sometimes a ship finds itself in a storm despite all attempts to avoid it, and in spite of all preparations for inclement weather or the skill level of the crew it can still sometimes become a matter of lashing oneself to the deck of the ship and hoping that y'all make it through the storm.

This is called "Heavy Weather" — those times when things are so bad that ships either go to port or hang on for dear life.

Note when it comes to the "Heavy Weather" exercises, aka your system's crisis plan, you're probably going to want to type things up. You may need to update it often, keep it organized and tidy, and print out or send out copies of it to other people.

We intentionally did NOT put the "Heavy Weather" section into the United Front Ship's Log Planner because it is going to be handed to external people. That's the whole point of it. So where the rest of the plan is y'all's System Safety (and wellness) Plan, once you

get to this section you're actually in the crisis plan section of the government document.

Think about this as planning ahead for when y'all are so unwell y'all can't care for yourselves or be trusted to make safe decisions for yourselves.

So we deliberately do not include this section in the planner.

In the worst of times when y'all can't take care of yourselves, these are pre-written instructions for your& care y'all already gave to others when y'all were OK. So this is a packet y'all should create for mental health proxies or supporters to help you when things go sideways in spite of your& best efforts to prevent it, and y'all can no longer care for yourselves. When y'all make one, make extra copies & carry one with y'all, and to give one to each of your& mental health proxy or carers. It is not a legally binding document; for that you want to look into Psychiatric Advance Directives (consult a lawyer because we are not a lawyer, and they're often contested).

## **Communication Techniques**

When it comes to being able to have a conversation in your system, any technique that results in being able to hear each other out is better than complete silence between residents.

The following are some possible techniques to help a system build internal communication. Generally speaking, they're listed in an order that is progressive so that systems with very little internal communication can try the first few methods and work their way up through the chain. However it's not necessary to abandon earlier techniques when you find you're able to utilize others. In fact, even though we can talk inside, we still use all of these methods at various times. We use bulletin board methods for brainstorming sessions, we use litmus tests (mentioned earlier in the book) and occasionally utilize the pendulum method because not everyone

in our system is equally co-aware, we use journaling, Anything Books, autowriting. We even alternate between the various “talking” methods — playing telephone (talking-through), talking out loud amongst ourselves, and talking inside. Using several methods of communication is necessary because various headmates are at different stages of progress, and it all makes for more lasting memories of events, information, and communications for our entire system.

We have an internal logbook, but we’ve found that taking notes, for example, which is like the bulletin board method we describe below, helps in an AISOAVV way. Taking physical notes is parallel to writing in our log book, and makes for better recording of events and information.

We play a little bit of a game of “spot the multiple moment” in our life, and actually kinda look forward to finding entries we don’t remember making, seeing our handwriting changes, or watching our hands move to write words we’re not thinking up when we autowrite. I suggest you also look at this with curiosity and excitement. You’re communicating!!! That’s an amazing and wonderful thing. Yeah, sometimes it may be an overwhelming amount of hard evidence and proof, but make it into a game. It’s amusing!

## Meetings, Redux

I know that Meetings were covered earlier, however we do need to revisit the idea and execution of meetings. What types of things should you put on your agenda? How do you handle problems at meetings? Did you do the exercises? Is it time for more?

Also, if you have been having meetings, things have probably shifted for the better. There are other areas of the book that you may want to revisit, and exercises that follow are linked to other chapters.

## Suggested Agendas

- Whether or not to hire (or fire) a therapist. Or alternatively, you could consider (life) coaching or other helpful modalities.
- What to bring up at your next meeting with a therapist, coach, etc.
- Safety – both internal and external issues.
- Internal compliance.
- Implementation intentions.
- Time tracking issues i.e. keeping appointments, time loss.
- Triggers, fronting, depersonalization issues.
- [Hiring and Firing and Self-Advocacy](#)<sup>2</sup> - You might have a meeting about issues with your counselor or therapist, and agree on what you will or will not share with someone who is a new member of your team.
- [Always Lock the Door When You Leave](#)<sup>3</sup> - Working on safety rules pertaining to the world outside your body.
- [Knives Point Down in the Dishwasher](#)<sup>4</sup> - Working on safety rules to modify and monitor internal behavior. You might also refer to [That's MY Shampoo!](#)<sup>5</sup> on this topic.
- [You Can't Make Me!](#)<sup>6</sup> and [Who Stole My Money?](#)<sup>7</sup> both deal with how to get compliance so that people follow the rules – from inspiring them to follow rules voluntarily to holding meetings to determine disciplinary measures for rules violations.
- [You're always making me late!](#)<sup>8</sup> deals with avoiding time loss through time tracking, and you might discuss different means of tracking time with your fellow residents at meetings.

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<sup>2</sup><http://thecriasinglink.com/Blog/HiringAndFiringAndSelf-advocacy>

<sup>3</sup><http://thecriasinglink.com/Blog/AlwaysLockTheDoorWhenYouLeave>

<sup>4</sup><http://thecriasinglink.com/Blog/KnivesPointDownInTheDishwasher>

<sup>5</sup><http://thecriasinglink.com/Blog/ThatSMYShampoo>

<sup>6</sup><http://thecriasinglink.com/Blog/YouCanTMakeMe>

<sup>7</sup><http://thecriasinglink.com/Blog/WhoStoleMyMoney>

<sup>8</sup><http://thecriasinglink.com/Blog/YoureAlwaysMakingMeLate>



- [Don't shove me around!](#)<sup>9</sup> and [Is this a home or a prison?](#)<sup>10</sup> help you deal with the issue of stealing front (ie. "time loss") so you might hold meetings to discuss how you can share time with your other residents.
- [Can we talk this over?](#)<sup>11</sup> covers methods of improving internal communication. You might hold meetings to brainstorm new ideas for how to improve communication.
- [We're so glad you could join us!](#)<sup>12</sup> addresses how to help get stuck guests to become less stuck so that your other methods of improving internal relationships will help the stuck guest; this can involve some meetings or committee meetings to set up ambassadors to approach the stuck guests.

There's many ways to use meetings, not limited to this list. Eventually internal communication can become so natural that you no longer need to hold formal meetings, and the votes and internal communications "just happen" and there's less rules violations, the rules list is pretty stable, and you have such good relationships and clearly identified goals and roles that you no longer need to monitor everyone's behavior so closely or hold meetings over every little decision. Until you build a solid sense of trust, however, these explicit meetings help you turn the chaos in your system into a more orderly community.

If your system is running this smoothly, there are many other things you can turn your attention and energy to, some of which will be addressed as this boot camp continues.

## Seeking Out the Small Voice

Sometimes there are people in a system who lurk and don't participate the way everyone else does. They don't speak up, they don't

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<sup>9</sup><http://thecrissinglink.com/Blog/DontShoveMeAround>

<sup>10</sup><http://thecrissinglink.com/Blog/IsThisAHomeOrAPrison>

<sup>11</sup><http://thecrissinglink.com/Blog/CanWeTalkThisOver>

<sup>12</sup><http://thecrissinglink.com/Blog/WereSoGladYouCouldJoinUs>

think their opinion is worth sharing or that anyone is interested in hearing them out.

This person's input is as important as anyone else's. While we want to hear them out, we don't want to frighten them away or make them overly self-conscious at the same time.

Try to find ways to make the person with a small voice heard. Allow them to drop a note into a suggestion box, ask whether they can write it down, maybe they can whisper to someone else, but somehow find a way that they can share in the meetings and the governance of your system. Everyone's opinion is valuable and needs to be heard out, even if it's them saying that they love everything about it except the color.

As for the small voice, now I'm talking to you: there may be many reasons you have trouble participating in conversations and meetings. You might not be able to speak up due to abuse and triggers. Many systems end up with mute folk in the system for a variety of reasons. Experiment with other ways of communicating: writing notes, sign language, drawing, cutting words out of papers and magazines, telepathy, mime, song playlists — whatever it takes to get your message out there. It may mean playing 20 questions, or someone else writing words on cards that you can arrange into sentences, etc. — but work with others to make sure you can offer your opinion.

Another possibility is that you aren't sure how to state your opinion in a way that won't hurt anyone's feelings. So here's a little coaching in the sandwich method:

People usually emphasize and remember the first and last thing in a list more than the middle. If you start off with a compliment, give your feedback, and then leave off with something positive it can go a long way towards softening what you disagree with and help folk hear it better. The sandwich technique has a simple formula:

I appreciate this. I have trouble with that. I also appreciate this.

Notice that everything is in “me” language and “you” doesn’t come into play so that you avoid any potential for sounding criticizing. So for example: “I love the values of Service and Creativity. I’m really having trouble with the value of Worship. Could we change that to a value of Spirituality? This is amazing work — and I’m excited to be represented.”

Of course, it’s up to you to find your own voice — no one can make you speak up. But having a good idea of things that can be said in a safer way may help you.

Another helpful technique is the “feedback technique” — I can’t claim credit for this one, I learned it through the Manager Tools podcast. This is a way to soften the blow when trying to describe a problem so that it doesn’t sound overly criticizing. It’s a variation of sandwich technique, with its own formula:

When this thing happens + I react this way. Question about working together to fix it.

Again, avoiding ‘you’ when possible: “When I hear ‘Did you brush your teeth?’ I feel little, confused and maybe a little triggered. Can we find another way to ask whether I’m done with my bedtime routine?” That’s a real-life example of our partner triggering us, by the way.

So there are ways to approach others that are less likely to create friction, and maybe you’ll find that useful and it can help you find your voice — whether you have to write it in notes or type it, sign it in sign language, or whisper it in someone’s ear.

Your input is as important as anyone else’s and everyone — yourself included — should make sure that you’re able to communicate in some way.

## **It's OK to Have a Party!**

When you get to this point in the United Front Boot Camp, you're almost halfway to the end. I think we both have earned a well-deserved break. Keep your agreements, and be respectful, but also just maintain the status quo for just a moment.

When you get this far, you've already made great changes and have improved the relationships you have with others in your head. You might want to take some time just reflecting on the prior steps and exercises, and maybe try a few of them again to see if the results change from this new place.

But when you get this far, don't give up! And make sure you honestly change your relationships with your others because then you have less work to do when you finish all the steps! Good habits are just as hard to break as bad habits, so if you're going to have a habit – make it a good habit!!

The great thing about habits is that they make it so easy to get out of the other end of changes. With habits, you don't I go through this process and then say "I'm done!" and let it all fall apart. If you build habits, you keep at it a little longer until you don't even notice it anymore.

So congratulations on getting this far. Tomorrow we're going to keep on going because like everything in life, if it's worthwhile it's both fun AND challenging!

## **Christening Your Ship**

Unless you want to have your ship called the "Hey You," you probably want to name your ragtag outfit as a whole. While your crew is out exploring the external universe, you might be looking for some time with fellow plurals on the Internet – email lists, in-person at conferences, local meets, support groups, etc. Consider your privacy, safety, and reputation before you join a community;

you may want to use an alias — your ship’s name or “plural system name” so you do not inadvertently out yourselves on the Internet. We dubbed our ship “The Crisses”, but we’ve also decided to come out of the “storage facility,” so you can find us mentioning plural issues as (Rev.) Criss Ittermann, too. Some people take on a second Facebook profile as a plural outfit, and so on. If you choose to do that, look us up and let us know you found us through \*United Front\*. We can point out some good groups so you can hang with other adventurers.

And as always, be cautious about meeting people in person. If we ever arrange to meet people from the Internet whom we have never met before, we always meet them in a very public place like a restaurant. This applies to fellow plurals as well.