KESTON SCHOOL

MIND & EMOTIONS · FREE SAMPLE

Calm Under Pressure

Stay steady and think clearly when the stakes suddenly rise

CHAPTER 1 + WORKBOOK SECTION

BEFORE YOU START

How to use this book

By the last page you will have a short reset for the first ninety seconds of a pressure moment, a way to shrink any crunch to the next step, rehearsed responses for the moments you dread, and a simple routine that keeps you steady on deadline days, in tense meetings and when things go wrong.

1. Read one chapter at a time. Each one gives you a single idea and a single action.
2. Open the Calm Under Pressure Workbook and complete the matching section while the chapter is fresh.
3. Do the “Try this” action within seven days. Reading changes what you know; the action changes what you do.
4. Finish with the checklist in chapter 12 and come back to it whenever you slip.

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CHAPTER 1

When the Heat Is On

Recognize how you react when the stakes suddenly rise, and why telling yourself to relax almost never helps in the moment.

It is 4:40 on a Thursday. The report is due at five, the numbers in one table do not add up, and your manager has just sent a message that says only “Call me.” Your heart is going faster than it should. You open three windows, close two of them, reread the same paragraph four times and then type a reply you delete. Somewhere in the back of your head a calm voice is saying that this is fixable. You cannot quite hear it over the noise.

Everyone has moments like this. A presentation where the first slide will not load. A meeting where someone challenges your numbers in front of the team. A client on the phone who is angry about a mistake you made. The stakes rise quickly, and the person you are on an ordinary Tuesday seems to leave the room.

This book is about staying in the room.

Four ways pressure shows up

People tend to react to pressure in one of a few familiar ways. Most of us have a favorite, and a second one we fall back on when the first does not work.

The freeze. Your mind goes blank. You stare at the screen or the question and nothing comes. In a meeting, you go quiet and agree with whatever is said, then think of the perfect answer an hour later.

The rush. You speed up. You talk faster, click faster, skip steps and send things before they are ready. You feel productive, but you make small mistakes that cost time later.

The snap. You get sharp. Your tone turns curt, you interrupt, you write the email in capital letters in your head even if you do not send it. People around you feel the heat and back away.

The over-control. You try to hold everything at once. You check and recheck, take over tasks from other people, and refuse to let anything go out until it is perfect, which under a deadline often means late.

None of these makes you a bad person or a weak professional. Each one is an attempt to deal with a threat. The problem is that each one, in its own way, makes the moment harder.

> **Key idea:** Pressure is not a personality trait. It is a moment, and moments can be prepared for.

Why “just relax” fails

When you are visibly tense, someone usually tells you to relax. You may tell yourself the same thing. It almost never works, and there are good reasons why.

First, relaxing is not a switch. When your body is already speeded up, an instruction to feel calm does not reach it. You notice that you are still tense, and now you feel tense and like you are failing at relaxing.

Second, “relax” gives you nothing to do. Under pressure, the mind wants an action. If you do not hand it a useful one, it grabs a less useful one: rereading, rushing, snapping.

Third, the goal is wrong. Many high-pressure moments deserve some nerves. A presentation to the board, a job interview, a conversation with an upset customer: these matter, and a bit of tension keeps you alert. The aim is not to feel nothing. The aim is to stay able to think and act well while you feel something.

The rest of this book gives you simple, concrete things to do instead of trying to relax: a short reset for the first ninety seconds, a way to shrink a crunch down to the next step, and a way to rehearse the moments you dread so that your best response is ready before you need it.

Pressure is predictable

Here is the encouraging part. Pressure moments feel random, but they are usually not. For most people, they cluster around a handful of situations that repeat.

Some common ones:

- Deadlines, especially when something goes wrong close to the end.
- Speaking in front of others, from big presentations to being asked a question in a team meeting.
- Conflict: a heated meeting, a tense call, a partner who is upset.
- Mistakes: discovering an error, having to tell someone about it, or being blamed.
- Being watched or judged: interviews, reviews, a manager looking over your shoulder.
- Too many things at once: a full inbox, a sick child and a late train on the same morning.

If you look honestly at your last month, you will probably find that two or three of these account for most of your hard moments. That is useful. It means you do not have to become a calmer person in general. You only have to get better at a few specific situations, and you can practice those.

A note on what this book is

This is a practical book about everyday pressure: the kind most working adults deal with every week. It is not a treatment for anxiety, panic attacks or long-term stress. If you often feel panic, if worry affects your sleep, health or daily life, or if pressure feels unmanageable most of the time, talk to a doctor or a mental-health professional. The tools here can sit alongside that help. They are not a substitute for it.

Try this

For the next seven days, keep a simple pressure log. It takes about two minutes a day. Each evening, note any moment when the stakes suddenly rose. For each one, write:

1. **The situation.** What was happening, in one line.
2. **Your pattern.** Freeze, rush, snap or over-control.
3. **The first signal.** The first thing you noticed in your body or behavior: a tight chest, a faster voice, a clenched jaw, a sudden urge to check something again.
4. **The result.** What happened, and what you wish you had done.

Use the log page in your workbook. At the end of the week, circle the two situations that came up most and the one first signal you noticed most often. You will use both in the chapters ahead.

You do not need to change anything yet. Noticing is the first skill, and it is easier than it sounds once you are writing it down.

In the next chapter, we look at what is actually happening in your body and mind in those moments, because once you understand the mechanism, the tools make much more sense.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Most people have one main pressure pattern - freeze, rush, snap or over-control.
- Pressure is a moment you can prepare for, not a fixed part of your personality.
- A one-week pressure log shows you where to start.

→ Workbook, section 1

01 When the Heat Is On

Log one week of pressure moments before you change anything.

FILL IN

My one-week pressure log

Day	Situation	Pattern	First signal	Result

CHECKLIST

My usual patterns

- [ ] The freeze: my mind goes blank
- [ ] The rush: I speed up and skip steps
- [ ] The snap: my tone turns sharp
- [ ] The over-control: I check, recheck and take over

CHECKLIST

Where pressure shows up for me

- [ ] Deadlines
- [ ] Speaking in front of others
- [ ] Conflict
- [ ] Mistakes
- [ ] Being watched or judged
- [ ] Too many things at once

Do I often feel panic, or does worry affect my sleep, health or daily life? If yes, when will I talk to a professional?

YOUR NEXT STEP

Want the whole book?

You just read chapter 1 of Calm Under Pressure and tried the first workbook section. The full e-book has 12 chapters, a complete workbook and a final checklist. Here is everything inside:

01 When the Heat Is On

02 What Pressure Does

03 The Price of Losing It

04 Steady, Not Fearless

05 The Ninety-Second Reset

06 Shrink It to the Next Step

07 Rehearse the Hard Moment

08 Four Pressure Moments

09 When Pressure Keeps Coming

10 Your Steady Routine

11 The One People Trust

12 Mistakes & Checklist

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