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DOWNTIME

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PURSUITS

Got Breath?

Skilled breathing may be the ultimate high-performance biohack. *By Meghan Walsh*



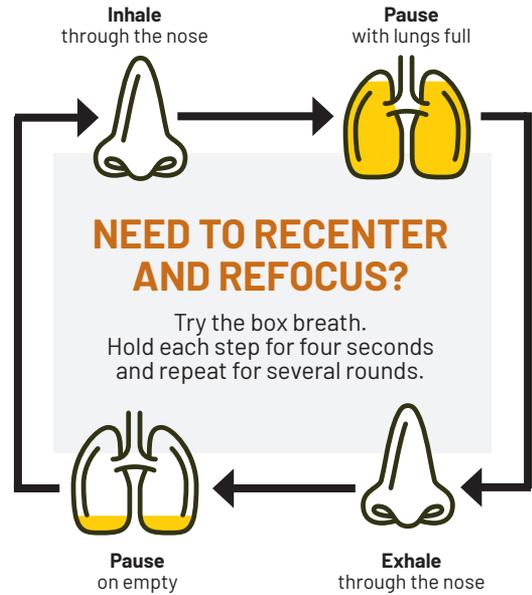
Anna Frank/Getty Images

Zee Clarke knew high-pressure environments. She completed her bachelor's in economics and an MBA at Harvard. She'd worked in senior positions at a number of Fortune 500 companies as well as Silicon Valley startups. She knew strategy. She knew marketing. She knew growth. She didn't know how to breathe.

"My shoulders lived in my ears," says Clarke, who authored the book *Black People Breathe: A Mindfulness Guide to Racial Healing*. "I had a constant level of stress in my body and I didn't even realize it. That was my normal state." In all her 43 years of elite education and professional development, no one had taught Clarke the craft of inhalation and exhalation. She would have to travel to India for that, which is exactly what she did. Ever the high achiever, Clarke took a two-year sabbatical to learn from the world's foremost experts on breathing: yogis.



Zee Clarke is bringing breathwork into the boardroom.



Today, Clarke is bringing that knowledge out of the Southeast Asian ashrams and into corporate America. Whatever an employee's ambition or malady—from improved focus to confidence to stress management—there is a breathing technique, Clarke says. More and more organizations are hiring breath coaches for their employees, including Nike, JP Morgan and Google. Meanwhile, executives are adding breathing exercises to their peak performance toolkit. When time is the scarcest of commodities, breathing is the ultimate take-anywhere bio-hack. And a bio-hack is truly what it is; with just a few full inhalations and extended exhalations, it's possible to regulate the nervous system, slowing heart rate, perspiration, and the fight-or-flight response.

"There is much more awareness of breath," says Megan Morrison, a business coach who incorporates into her work with executives and corporate teams the Wim Hof Method, which uses hyperven-

Courtesy of Zee Clarke

“Breathwork allows leaders to combat stress as it arises, increasing resilience.”

tilation, breath holds, and cold exposure to improve overall wellness. “Breathwork allows leaders to combat stress as it arises, increasing resilience,” she says.

While breathwork may not solve all of our multifaceted problems on its own, the consensus is that a daily breathing practice can do wonders for physical and mental health—and in a tense boardroom meeting or on the receiving end of a racially charged microaggression from a colleague, a deep belly breath and extra long exhalation may be the only option available. Clarke was serving as the vice president of product management and business intelligence at a \$2 billion global public company in 2020 when George Floyd’s murder prompted a reckoning that called on leaders of every public sphere to respond. That meant many hard conversations and still harder emotions. “I began paying attention to how I was feeling during the work day, then dealing with it,” Clarke says. “Breath was the medicine.”

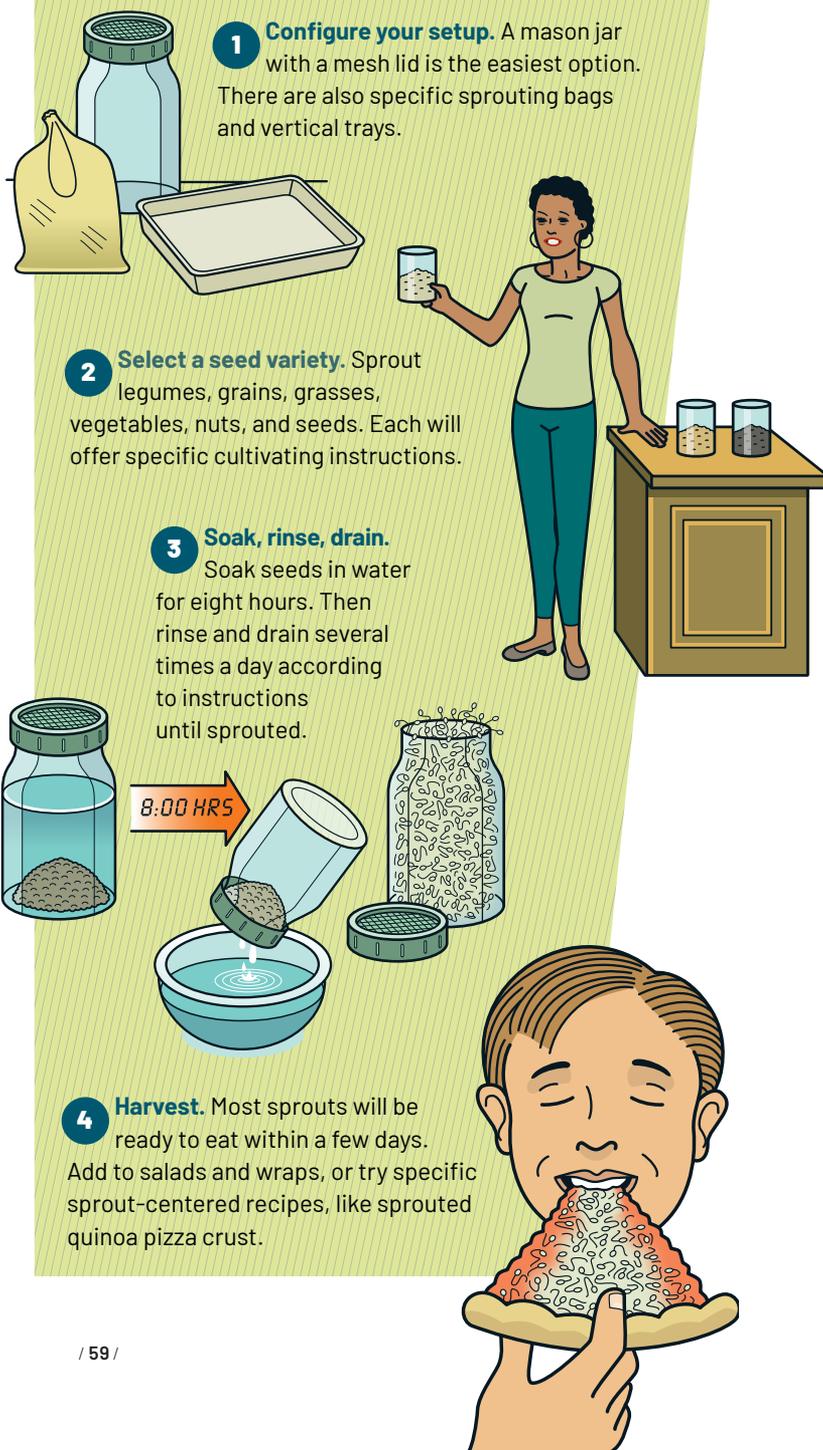
While Clarke’s emphasis began with teaching breathwork to people of color in corporate environments, she points out it’s also valuable for aspiring allies—and anyone who has to work in collaboration with other people. A deep breath offers a pause, an opportunity to respond rather than react, an opportunity to show up as a higher version of ourselves. And it’s contagious. When the boss audibly draws in air in a slow and controlled effort and then visibly releases built up physical tension, it signals to the entire team to check in with their bodies. It signals safety.

These days, when Clarke feels her shoulders climbing upward, she pulls them back down with an extra long exhale. If she’s distracted and needs to refocus, she’ll do two minutes of sama vritti pranayama, better popularized by Navy Seals as box breathing. And always before hitting send on an email, she takes a big belly breath. ▀

THE ART OF

Sprouting

Winter doesn’t have to mean forgoing fresh, organic produce. In fact, it doesn’t get any fresher than a countertop sprout garden, which provides nutrient-dense edible plants year round. What seeds will you plant for yourself in 2024?



1 Configure your setup. A mason jar with a mesh lid is the easiest option. There are also specific sprouting bags and vertical trays.

2 Select a seed variety. Sprout legumes, grains, grasses, vegetables, nuts, and seeds. Each will offer specific cultivating instructions.

3 Soak, rinse, drain. Soak seeds in water for eight hours. Then rinse and drain several times a day according to instructions until sprouted.

4 Harvest. Most sprouts will be ready to eat within a few days. Add to salads and wraps, or try specific sprout-centered recipes, like sprouted quinoa pizza crust.

Its economy experienced some of the nation's healthiest growth in 2022, while it ranked second in job creation for the decade from 2010 to 2019. Music City has the highest concentration of music industry jobs in the country.



VISIT

Nashville, Tennessee

Live. Work. Play.

Nashville is the place to be—and do. Roughly 100 people a day are moving into Music City, making it the 10th fastest growing city in the United States with a population of at least 1 million. It's both the lyrical charm of the southern metropolis as well as the booming job market that's luring people. Nashville has become a hub for the healthcare, IT, banking, and transportation industries. And an added bonus: the cost of living is well below the national average. Meanwhile, the migration influx has spurred an urban development boom that is striving to intentionally integrate office, retail, dining, outdoor, and residential spaces, so residents really can have it all in one place. ▀



In 2021, the National Museum of African American Music opened downtown.



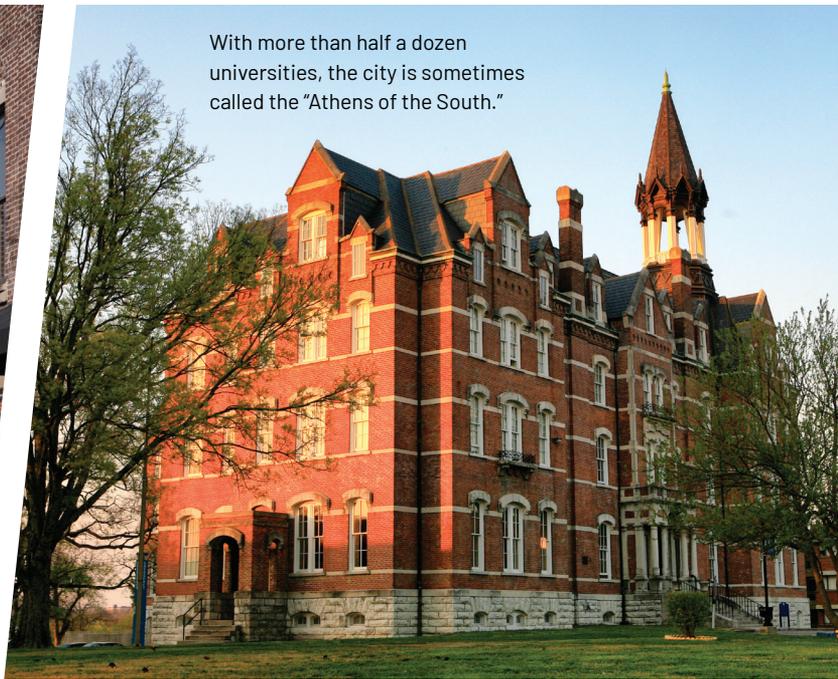
Nashville is considered the health services capital of the US and hosts the corporate headquarters of 17 publicly traded healthcare companies.

In 2022, Nashville broke a tourism record, with visitor spending reaching nearly \$9 billion.



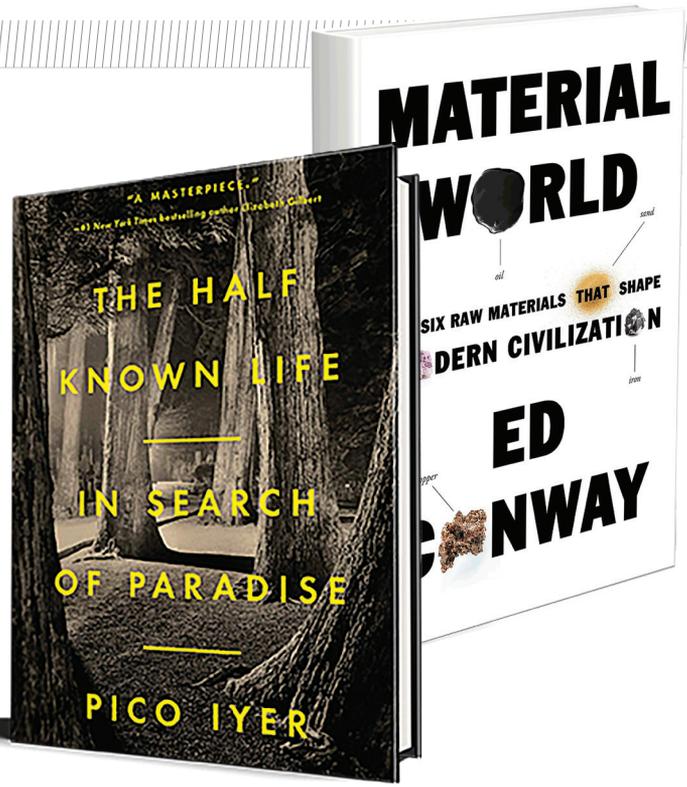
National Museum of African American Music

With more than half a dozen universities, the city is sometimes called the "Athens of the South."



READ, LISTEN, WATCH

Books for Leading into an Uncertain Future



“It’s not personal ... It’s strictly business.” This quote has echoed throughout capitalism since its infamous declaration in *The Godfather* in 1972. But roughly 50 years later that sentiment is shifting, which is evident in today’s most influential business and leadership books. The ruthless pursuit of financial and professional gain is no longer shielded by the doctrine of “strictly business.”

Instead of publishing myopic manuals on how to win influence, today’s authors are urging readers to examine the structures they operate within and to exert influence to reorganize those structures in service of a better world and future. The subtext: to be a better leader requires first being a better human. This collection of recent titles will educate and inspire executives to both be and do better. (Because, spoiler alert, it didn’t end well for the source of that infamous quote—or those around him.)



THE COMING WAVE: TECHNOLOGY, POWER, AND THE 21ST CENTURY'S GREATEST DILEMMA

By Mustafa Suleyman
A path forward into a rapidly changing future.

THE PERFECTION TRAP: EMBRACING THE POWER OF GOOD ENOUGH
By Thomas Curran
How vulnerability

and acceptance nurture abundance and equity.

THE CASE FOR GOOD JOBS: HOW GREAT COMPANIES BRING DIGNITY, PAY, AND MEANING TO EVERYONE'S WORK

By Zeynep Ton

The competitive landscape is changing—and for good reason.

MATERIAL WORLD: THE SIX RAW MATERIALS THAT SHAPE MODERN CIVILIZATION

By Ed Conway

A journey to uncover the invisible underpinnings of modern life.

THE HALF KNOWN LIFE: IN SEARCH OF PARADISE

By Pico Iyer

What we strive for and where it leads.

SAVING TIME: DISCOVERING A LIFE BEYOND THE CLOCK

By Jenny Odell

An urge to revise conceptions of time and value.

SUGGESTED

From Parlor Game to Parlor Statement

Mahjong, a four-player tile game that emphasizes both luck and skill, has been a global phenomenon for more than a century. Not just an anchor to home for the Chinese diaspora, it's been a cherished community pillar among Jewish and Black American women for decades.

Today, Asian American millennials and Gen Zers are renewing the game's cultural relevance. And the boards are as varied as the players. While some may prefer the emerald tones of traditional sets, Aerin offers a modern elegant twist with white tiles inside a luxurious shagreen box with brass hardware.

Shagreen Mahjong Set, \$1,750



PRO TRAINING

Mobility is having a moment. There are Insta mobility influencers. Gyms are opening dedicated solely to stretching. **Dr. Grayson Wickham**, founder of mobility app Movement Vault, explains the hype.

WHAT IS MOBILITY?

"Mobility is the body's active range of motion, which improves through a combination of muscle activation and stretching, instead of just static stretching."

WHO SHOULD DO IT?

"Toothbrushing is tooth maintenance; active stretching is joint maintenance. If you've got joints, you should be doing mobility."

HOW WILL IT HELP?

"The big benefits are decreased injury risk and increased performance—in anything you do in life, whether gardening or running."

For more information, visit movementvault.com.

Courtesy of Grayson Wickham

