



THE GROUNDED ENTREPRENEUR TOOL KIT

BUILDING A BUSINESS WITHOUT LOSING YOURSELF





Entrepreneurship is more than economic activity—it's a powerful way of shaping our communities and the world around us. As feminist entrepreneurs, we are doing more than launching products or offering services.

We're creating inclusive spaces, challenging the status quo, pushing boundaries, and investing in justice, care, and community well-being.

And yet, the path is not easy.

We often carry a heavy mental load: managing businesses, caregiving, navigating systemic inequities, and responding to a world in crisis. For many of us, this brings up doubt, fear, and the persistent whisper of an inner critic.

It tells us we're not enough. That others are doing it better. That we don't know enough, aren't ready, or are too late. Sometimes the inner critic isn't a voice—it's a tight chest,

a restless body, a constant edge of exhaustion. These thoughts and sensations can stop us from showing up, asking for support, or claiming our place in the world.

The practices and reflections in this tool kit are rooted in the teachings of Vimalasara Mason-John—award-winning author, co-founder of Mindfulness-Based Addiction Recovery, and internationally recognized leader in mindfulness and recovery.

This tool kit is here to support you when things feel difficult, when your thoughts spiral, or when self-doubt creeps in. It includes grounding practices, somatic tools, and mindset support to help you stay connected to yourself as you grow your business in a way that is sustainable, rooted, and aligned with your values.

BREAKING FREE FROM OUR THOUGHTS

We often become trapped in what some call “stinking thinking”—negative, repetitive thought patterns that reinforce shame, guilt, and distress. These thoughts may have roots in trauma or harmful cultural narratives, but the way we engage with them can prolong the cycle of suffering.

Understanding that our thoughts are not facts—and that we can shift how we respond to them—is the first step toward breaking the cycle. The mindset shifts that follow offer simple but powerful ways to relate to your thoughts with more space, clarity, and compassion.



Our thoughts are not facts. They are mental events that arise and pass, like clouds drifting through the sky. Some are light, others dark—but all are temporary. Accept that there may be dark thoughts and bright thoughts and they too can pass through the mind.

Hold your mind like the sky: spacious, open, and non-grasping. Allow your thoughts to come and go. Don't push them away, and don't cling to them.

Thinking and rumination are often old stories—well-worn loops. What are some of your recurring go-to stories or thought patterns? Maybe it's “I'm not good enough,” “I always mess this up,” or “Everyone else is doing better.”

» Pause and Ask

- *Is this true?*
- *Is this helpful?*
- *What would it mean to let go of the story?*

Emotions, like thoughts, are not permanent. Think of them as waves in the ocean. They swell and fall, and they, too, pass if we don't cling to them or define ourselves by them.

You are not your thoughts. You are not your emotions. And neither needs to be feared or demonized. In fact, these thoughts are often trying to protect you. Thank them for their intention—and let them go.

UNDERSTANDING THE VICIOUS CYCLE OF THOUGHTS

By Vimalasara (Dr. Valerie Mason-John)

When we're overwhelmed or in distress, it can be hard to separate what's happening from what we think is happening. Our minds spin stories—often rooted in past experiences or trauma—that reinforce shame, fear, and self-doubt. These patterns can become so familiar we barely notice them. But when we learn to recognize the cycle, we create an opportunity to interrupt it.

Understanding what's happening in our body, emotions, and thoughts is the first step toward breaking free.



Learn more about the Vicious Cycle

This [short video](#) features Vimalasara Mason-John explaining the vicious cycle—how our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours feed each other, and what we can do to shift the pattern.

How it works

1. TRIGGERING EVENT OR THOUGHT

Something upsetting happens. It's important to focus on the actual event, not the interpretation. For example, "My friend didn't show up when she said she would" is the fact. Saying "I was abandoned" is an interpretation—part of the story we create.

2. BODY

The body reacts to the trigger with stress symptoms like a racing heart, tension, heaviness, or fatigue. These sensations can make our thoughts feel more urgent and true.

3. FEELINGS

Feelings are physical sensations in the body—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. When we say, "I feel like I'm failing," we're describing a thought, not a feeling. Instead, we might notice: "My chest feels tight," or "There's a heaviness in my stomach."

Noticing how a feeling shows up in your body can be a powerful way to interrupt the cycle. Simply acknowledge it: This feels uncomfortable. Then pause. Breathe.

4. THOUGHTS

The mind assigns meaning: *They don't like me. I'm not good at this.* We don't need to demonize our thoughts—but we can notice when we start to identify with them. Becoming an observer helps us avoid becoming overwhelmed and move out of the cycle.

5. EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

Negative thoughts often trigger emotional reactions like shame, sadness, or fear. These emotions reinforce the belief that the original thought was true.

6. RUMINATION & REPETITION

We replay stories from the past or imagine worst-case futures. The mind digs for solutions but gets stuck in old loops. We may start acting out or shutting down.

7. WHAT WE DO

In response to our feelings and thoughts, we might avoid people, overwork, withdraw, or engage in behaviors like doom scrolling, substance use or perfectionism to cope.

8. COST

These behaviors may provide momentary relief, but they often bring deeper costs—burnout, anxiety, disconnection, or loss of confidence. And those costs can keep us trapped in the cycle. We may feel the emotional impact of those consequences—guilt, shame, fear—and start the cycle again at a different point. At this stage, it's no longer a straight line; we're caught in a loop.

9. GAIN

There's sometimes a small, short-term payoff—like feeling more in control or certain. But the long-term impact can deepen our pain.

➤ Example

Trigger: *My friend didn't reply to my text.*

Body: *I feel tension in my stomach. I feel activated.*

Feeling: *This feels unpleasant.*

Thought: *She must be mad at me.*

Emotion: *I become anxious and doubt myself.*

Rumination: *Did I do something wrong? Maybe she hates me.*

Behavior: *I start avoiding her or obsessing about the last interaction.*

Cost: *I feel more anxious and disconnected.*

Gain: *A brief sense of certainty—but more emotional distress overall.*

Interrupting this cycle is possible. The next section introduces one simple, powerful practice to support you to break this cycle.

A PRACTICE FOR WHEN YOU FEEL STUCK

By Vimalasara (Dr. Valerie Mason-John)

RUST is a grounding practice to help us when we're overwhelmed by thought loops, emotional distress, or the "second dart" of suffering—the stories we tell ourselves after something painful happens.

The mind can become rusty—stuck in old patterns, reactions, and unhelpful narratives. If we can remove the RUST we have the potential to act from a place of wisdom and compassion.

- R** Recognizing what is activating us right now, what is triggering now
- U** Understanding that we are just caught in a story, often full of judgements and perceptions
- S** Sitting with the sensations in the body
- T** Trusting that this too shall pass, tell the story to relax

When we are afflicted by the second dart of suffering we need to pull it out before our minds accumulate more RUST.



We begin by bringing the word RUST to your mind. And let's give it this whole new meaning, one letter at a time.

Relax and recognize what is activating you right now.

- Pause and really see if you can catch what is whirling around your mind.
- Recognize that whatever is activating you is full of subjective perceptions and judgements.

Understand that you are caught up in a story.

- A very old story full of judgements, perceptions, resentments.
- Ask yourself “why am I still holding onto the story? What is it doing for me?”
- Understand that the mind often returns to old stories to feel safe or in control—but they're not always helpful or true.

Sit with the sensations in the body.

- Where are the sensations located in the body? Place a hand where you feel these sensations and give this part of your body some kindness.
- Move if you need to—stretch, sway, stand, or breathe deeply. Sing or even silently scream with the sensations. Let the body express and release what it's holding.

Trust that this too shall pass.

- Trust that these sensations are changing all the time. You won't always feel this pain or discomfort.
- If the story of what happened is still playing in your head, tell it to be quiet. Ask it to relax, so you can let go of all the rust that has accumulated in your life. So you can be at peace.

Want to hear more?

Watch this short clip of facilitator Vimalasara sharing the practice in their own words.

This practice is not linear. When you're overwhelmed, you may only remember one part—S for sit, U for understand, or R for recognize. That's enough. Each piece holds power. Each one can bring a moment of clarity, relief, or kindness.

RUST has the taste of freedom. It invites us to step out of the prison of our minds—and into a place of spaciousness, compassion, and choice.

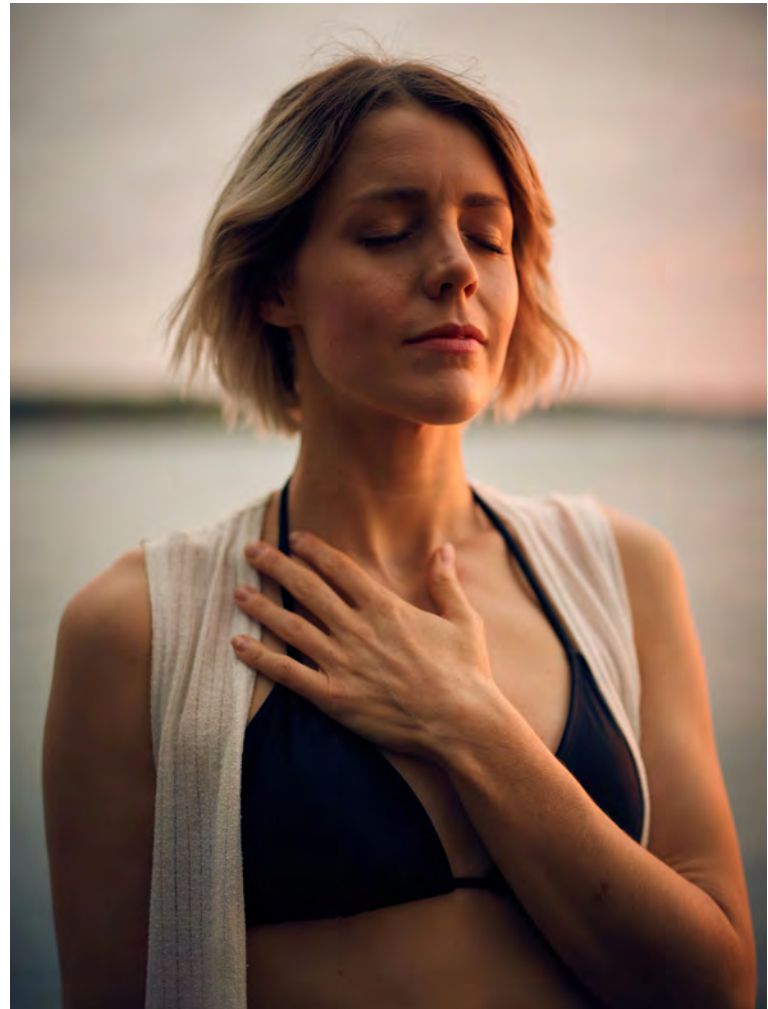
INNER COMPASSION IN ACTION

Self-compassion isn't fluffy. It's a bold refusal to abandon yourself when things get hard. It might feel awkward at first, but over time, it can become a powerful source of resilience and grounding.

WHAT COMPASSION MIGHT LOOK LIKE

- Taking a long shower, or a walk without your phone.
- Sitting in a chair and gazing up at the sky.
- Placing a warm hand on your chest or stomach and breathing into it.
- Reaching out to a friend you haven't spoken to in a while.
- Telling yourself: *"Nothing is wrong with me. This is hard, and I'm doing my best."*
- Saying aloud: *"I love myself. I believe in myself."*

Self-compassion helps soften the edges of our inner critic. It creates space to pause, choose differently, and come back to our center.



Practising Inner Compassion

In this video, Vimalasara Mason-John offers a gentle, grounding invitation to return to ourselves through the practice of inner compassion, especially when we feel overwhelmed, disconnected, or emotionally exhausted.

WHEN IMPOSTER SYNDROME SHOWS UP

Many of us live with internal messages that make us feel small, doubtful, or out of place. These messages are often old, recycled thoughts rooted in fear, trauma, or comparison. Imposter syndrome often arrives during moments of vulnerability, transition, or visibility. They sound like:

- I'm not doing enough.
- Everyone else has it figured out.
- I don't belong here.
- My ideas aren't good.
- People will find out I'm not qualified.
- I'm too old to start again.
- I should know more by now.

These thoughts convince us we're not enough—and keep us from seeing how much we already offer. They stop us from taking risks, sharing our work, or asking for what we need. Over time, they limit our creativity, our confidence, and our ability to lead with courage.

But these thoughts are not the truth. And they are not you.

They can be met with gentleness. They can be softened and slowly replaced with thoughts like:

- I am enough.
- I'm doing meaningful work at my own pace.
- My presence matters.
- My ideas are valuable.
- I don't need to be perfect to be impactful.





SUPPORTIVE PRACTICES

- Start each morning with a moment of gratitude. It doesn't matter if it's the same thing - just think or verbalize something you have gratitude for.
- Anchor into your body: feel your feet, your breath, your aliveness. When you hear the phrase I don't belong - remember the place you always belong is in your body - so think into your feet - and remind yourself you do belong
- Reframe: *"I got lucky"* → *"My work opened this door."*
- Reframe: *"Anyone can do this"* → *"My unique skills made this possible."*
- Recognize imposter syndrome as a sign you're stretching into new territory.
- If the voice is loud, imagine turning its volume down. Ask it to relax.
- Ask: Whose voice is this? A parent? A teacher? An old boss?
- Keep a record: each month, write down one thing you accomplished.
- Watch for overworking. Rest is essential—not a reward.
- Remember: Mistakes are opportunities to do something different - they are growing pains.

RETURNING TO YOURSELF: EVERYDAY TOOLS & PRACTICES

By Vimalasara (Dr. Valerie Mason-John)

These are everyday, practical ways to ground yourself when things feel difficult. Sometimes the smallest actions—done with intention—can help us reconnect with our bodies, interrupt self-doubt, and return to a place of inner steadiness.

SOOTHING THE BODY & NERVOUS SYSTEM

- **Be aware of your posture.**
Moods and emotions shape the body
- **Stretch your body.**
Open your posture and make space.
- **Try straw breathing.**
Purse your lips and exhale slowly, like through a straw.
- **Yawn.**
Let it be loud, even dramatic—a silent scream.
- **Bone striking.**
If compassion for yourself really feels far away - do some **bone striking**. This is a somatic practice to release stuck energy and awaken compassion.
- Stand up and bend your arms and flap them rapidly against your torso, while stepping up and down and breathing heavily.
- If you're unable to stand, sit in your seat, and bend your arms and flap them up and down like wings against your torso, and breathe heavily.



Want to try it?

Watch this short clip demonstrating straw breathing—a simple technique to calm your nervous system.

SUPERVISION AS SELF-CARE

- **Find or offer supervision.** Talk to someone you trust every couple of weeks about your work—especially the hard parts. This can be a friend, colleague, or mentor. Take turns listening and speaking. You don't need to fix anything for each other. Sometimes being witnessed is enough.
- **If you're able, pay for professional support**—this could be a coach, counselor, or supervisor. It doesn't have to be therapy—just someone who helps you reflect and stay resourced.



EVERYDAY ANCHORS

- Write morning pages: free-write for five minutes.
- Move gently—walk, stretch, swim, or sway.
- Hold a warm mug and sit with it quietly.
- If you don't have a lot of time, just stand at a window and look beyond the buildings into the sky.

These everyday practices are designed to support your nervous system, soften your inner critic, and nurture compassion.

Your business is an act of courage.
Your care is a contribution.
You belong in this work—and your well-being matters.

Use these tools when you need them.

Share them with others.

And remember: you are already enough, exactly as you are.

This tool kit was developed through The Grounded Entrepreneur workshop series, hosted by the Canadian Women's Foundation and made possible through funding from GreenShield. The practices and reflections shared here are rooted in the teachings of Vimalasara Mason-John (www.valeriemason-john.com) offered with deep respect for their wisdom, guidance, and lived experience.



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National Office

1920 Yonge St., Suite 302, Toronto, Ontario, M4S 3E2

Toll free: 1-866-293-4483 | TTY: 416-365-1732

www.canadianwomen.org

info@canadianwomen.org

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