

***Exploring the Application of
Internal Family Systems (IFS)
in the Workplace
June 20, 2025 | Day 2***

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Buzz Groups

What are you noticing
as you reflect on Day 1?

- Insights
- Observations
- Questions?

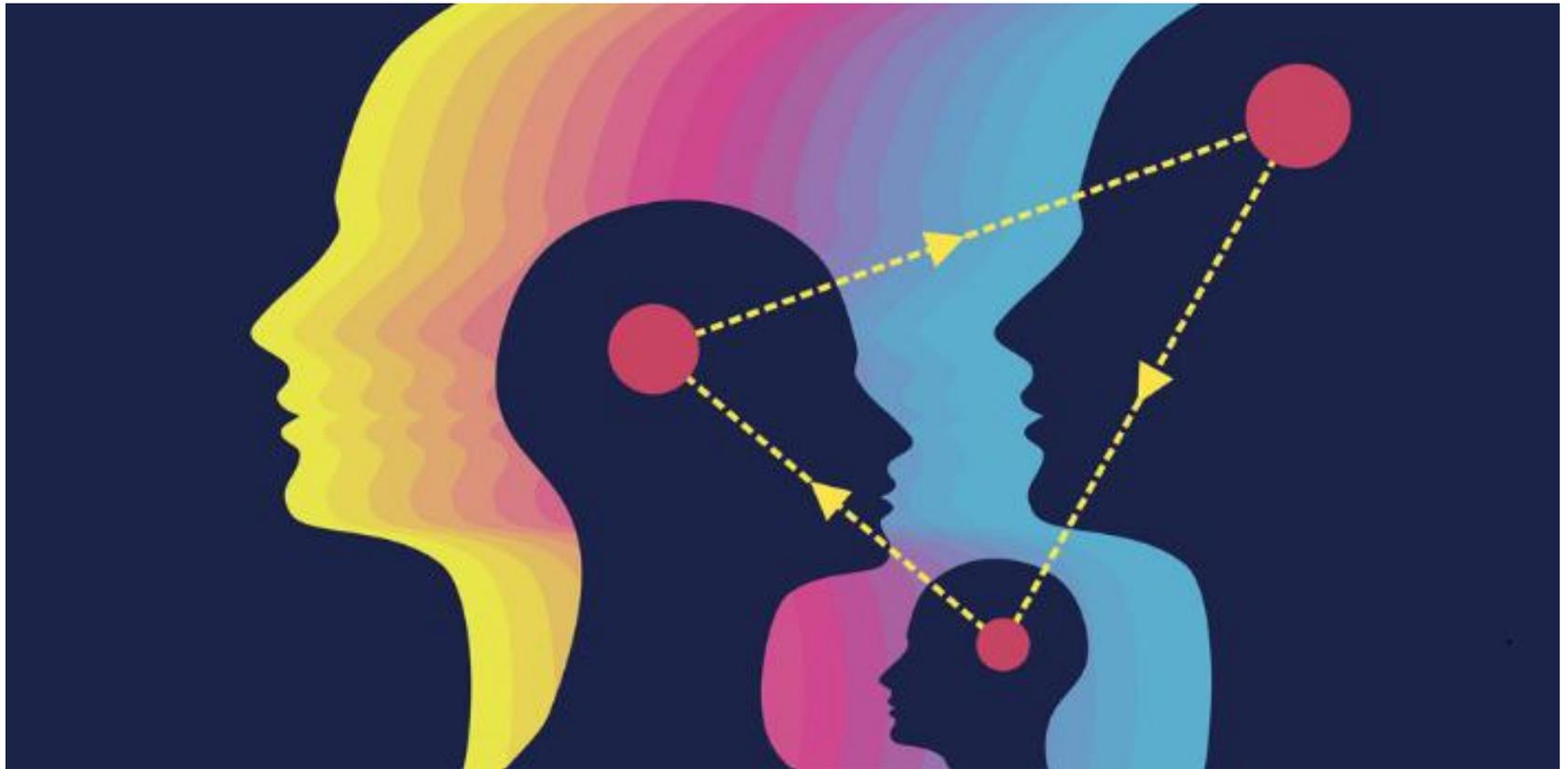
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Adaptive Systems & Leaders

with an IFS lens

**COUNTER
BALANCE**
CONSULTING, LLC



Self-Led Systems

Key Principle: When parts of an organization feel safe, Self-leadership emerges naturally

- **Self-Led Systems** operate from curiosity, compassion, and responsiveness rather than control
- **Self-Similar Patterns:** Teams that feel safe create space for individual authenticity; Self-led leaders invite Self-leadership in others
- **Natural Adaptation:** When one person/team shifts toward Self-leadership, it invites similar shifts throughout the system

Working with Parts & Tensions

Key Principle: Resistance carries protective wisdom—get curious, not controlling

- **Parts Tensions:** Different organizational parts carry different protective strategies and concerns
- **Welcome Resistance:** Get curious about protective intentions behind pushback before asking parts to change
- **Sustainable Change:** Happens when parts feel heard and their gifts are accessed, not when they're forced to step back

Creating Conditions for Self-Leadership

Key Principle: Leaders create conditions; they don't control outcomes

- **Containers:** Provide psychological safety for parts to relax protective roles while maintaining enough challenge for growth
- **Self-to-Self Connection:** Most powerful conversations happen when people speak and listen from Self
- **Leader's Role:** Notice activated parts, maintain experimental curiosity, facilitate authentic dialogue, model Self-led qualities

Creating Self-Led Systems in Action

Instead of: *"We need to get everyone aligned on this initiative."*

Try: *"What parts of this initiative feel concerning to different teams?"*

"Let's get a better understanding for what might be behind those concerns before moving forward."

What this looks like:

- Start meetings by checking in with resistance rather than pushing past it.
- Ask, *"What would need to be true for your concerns to feel addressed?"* instead of *"Why can't you get on board?"*
- Create space for skeptical voices without requiring them to become (unnaturally) enthusiastic.

Working with Organizational Parts & Tensions

Instead of: Managing conflict by minimizing differences

Try: Getting curious about the concerns/intentions behind different positions

What this looks like:

- When departments clash, ask each side, *"What is it you're trying to protect for the organization?"*
- Frame resistance as information: *"The pushback from IT could be telling us something important about implementation risks."*
- Look for the gifts: *"Finance's caution may help us avoid costly mistakes; the intention of Marketing's urgency is to help us stay competitive."*

Self-Led Leadership Behaviors

Instead of: Having all the answers and driving outcomes

Try: Creating conditions and staying curious about what emerges; participation breeds commitment.

What this looks like:

- **When facing resistance:** *"Can you help me understand what feels risky about this approach?"*
- **In decision-making:** *"What perspectives are we missing? What parts of the organization haven't been heard yet?"*
- **In difficult conversations:** *"I notice I'm getting activated from this conversation. Let me pause and get curious about what's happening here..."*
- **During change:** *"How can we honor what's working while creating space for what wants to emerge?"*

Practical Tools for Systems-Aware Leadership

Meeting Design:

- Begin with: *"What's on your mind as we start this conversation?"*
- Include: *"What concerns do we need to acknowledge before we can move forward?"*

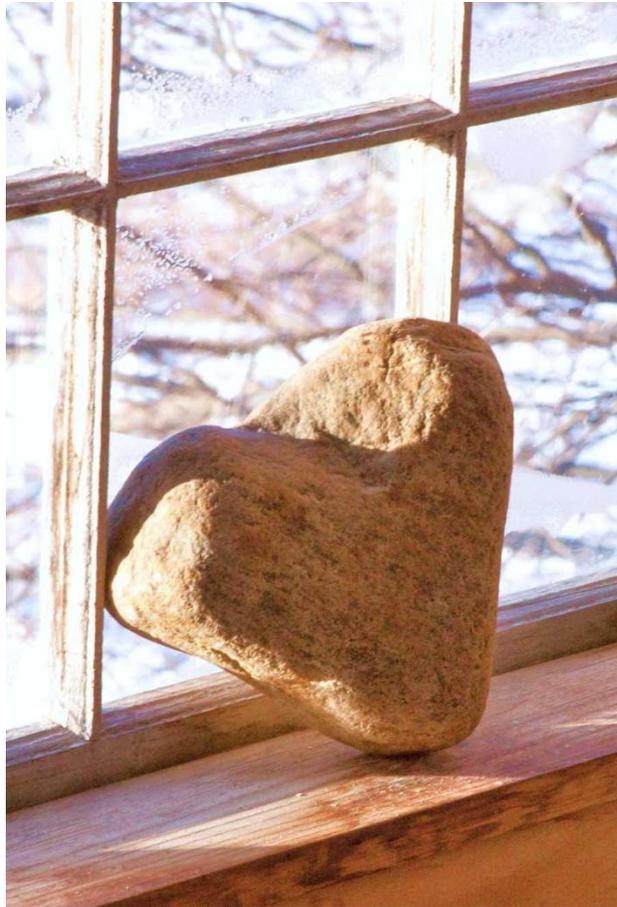
Feedback Conversations:

- *"What was your reaction when X happened?"*
- *"What felt at stake for you in that moment?"*
- *"What would need to be different for you to feel more comfortable with this?"*

Change Management:

- Map stakeholder responses: *"Which groups/individuals are excited? Concerned? Skeptical?"*
- Understand the wisdom behind resistance before asking for different behavior.
- Create implementation plans that address underlying concerns and risks people are sensing.

What is Self-Coaching



Self-coaching is the process of guiding your daily perspectives and decisions by becoming more aware of your thoughts, feelings, beliefs, assumptions, words and behaviors, and then making choices and adjustments to align with your values & goals.

This process often requires a **reframe*

What is Self-Coaching

- **Be your own guide:** Apply structured questioning and reflection to yourself
- **Think athlete + coach:** You're simultaneously in the game and calling the plays
- **Build your internal compass:** Navigate challenges without always seeking external validation

Why Self-Coaching Works

- **Available 24/7:** Your internal coach knows your full history and genuinely cares
- **Strengthens core skills:** Self-awareness, emotional regulation, and decision-making
- **Learn to fish:** Develop sustainable problem-solving rather than depending on others

Questions?



Dialogue vs. Discussion

Dialogue emphasizes understanding and shared meaning, often through deep listening and suspending judgment

Discussion focuses on exchanging ideas to reach a conclusion or agreement, sometimes involving persuasion and debate

How to Shape the Inner Team

Similar to the way you build a team to get a job done - at work or in your community - you can shape the Inner Team as well



Your Motives Matter

Unhealthy Motives	Healthy Motives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be Right/make others wrong• Convince• Look good/save face• Defend/Win• Point Fingers/place blame• Attack or punish	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn/grow• Be curious• Find the truth• Produce helpful results• Strengthen Relationship• Assume positive intent

What do I really want long term? For myself, the other person, our relationship?

How would I behave if I really did?

When someone 'presses your buttons'

1. Take a **breath** to become more aware & present

- Step back
- Turn off your external speaker (no words involved)
- Breathe deeply

2. Notice

- Get curious about what is going on inside you
- Pay attention to which part(s) of you is surfacing
- What is it trying to do? (give you a nudge or take over and flood your system)

3. Reflect on the moment

- Maintain perspective & consider the situation/context
- Consider why it is landing with you the way it does
- What was it touching that seemed to activate your inner system?

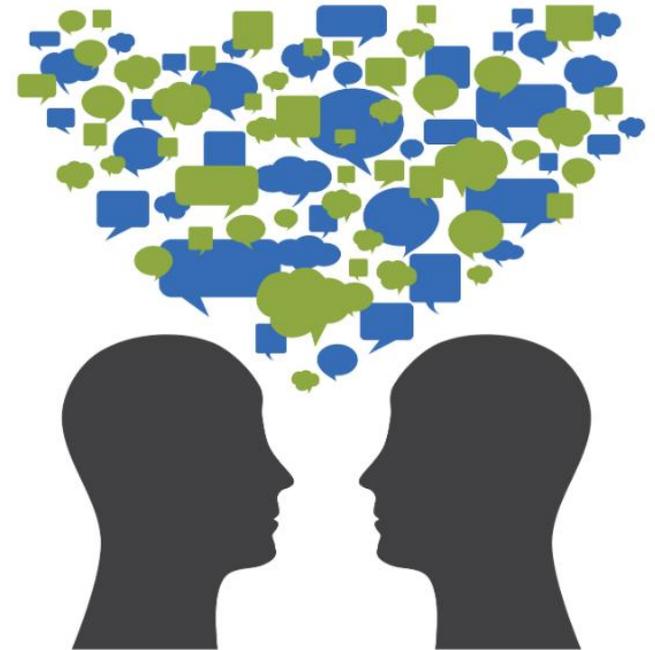
Talk About (almost) Anything

BEFORE the conversation:

- Lead from your Core
- Check Your Motives
- Separate Facts from ‘Your Interpretation’

DURING the conversation:

1. **State the Facts**
2. **Offer your Perspective**
3. **Ask for the other’s perspective**
 - Use a collaborative mindset
 - Talk cooperatively
4. **LISTEN DEEPLY**



Building Habits

1. Identify the specific situations, thoughts, or feelings that cause a strong emotional or behavioral response in you
2. Create “micro-habits’ that are simple, realistic and easily repeated
3. Deliberate Deep Practice (builds neuropathways)
 - **Chunk** your new habit into smaller bits
 - **Repetition....repetition...repetition**
 - **Sense it:** when it’s working...working **WELL!**

****Don't take on too much!****

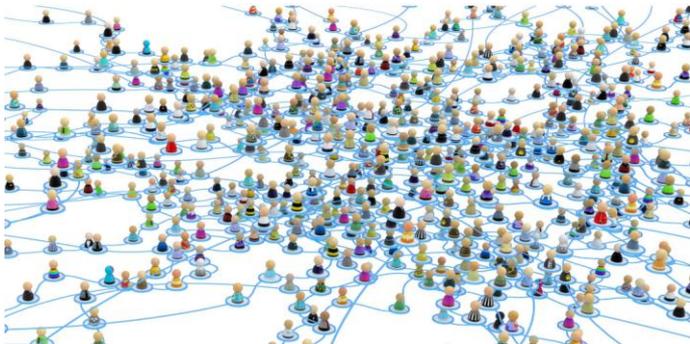
3 Habits of Mind That Contribute to Personal Resiliency



1. Asking Different Questions

2. Taking Multiple Perspectives

3. Seeing Systems



The Station

Tucked away in our subconscious is an idyllic vision. We see ourselves on a long, long trip that almost spans the continent. We are traveling by passenger train. Out the windows, we drink in the passing scene of cars on nearby highways, of children waving at a crossing, of cattle grazing on a distant hillside, of smoke pouring from a power plant, of row upon row of corn and wheat, of flatlands and valleys, of mountains and rolling hillsides, of biting winter and blazing summer and cavorting spring and docile fall.

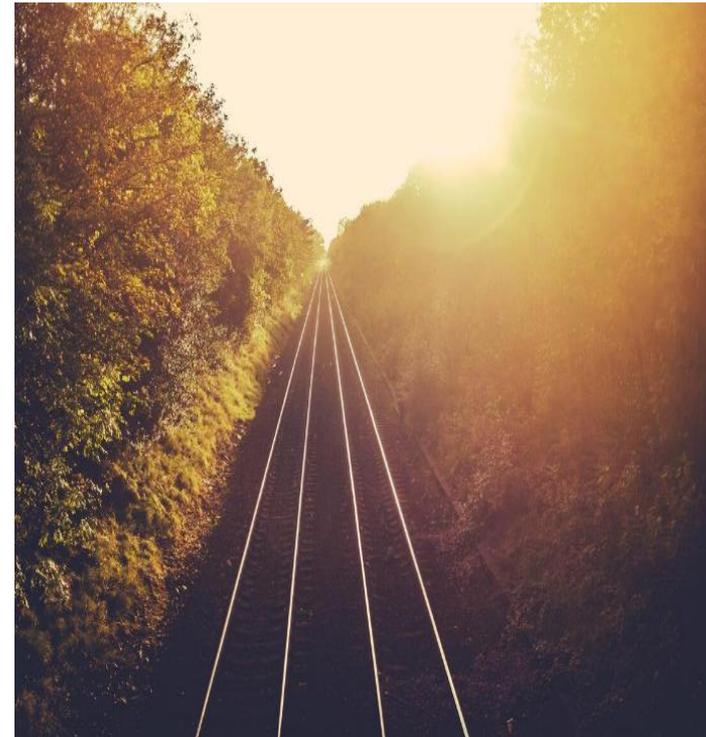
But uppermost in our minds is the final destination. On a certain day, at a certain hour, we will pull into the station. There will be bands playing and flags waving. Once we get there, so many of our dreams will come true. So many wishes will be fulfilled and so many pieces of our lives will finally fit neatly together like a completed jigsaw puzzle. How restlessly we pace the aisles, damning the minutes for loitering ... waiting, waiting, waiting, for the station.

"When we reach the station, that will be it!" we cry. "When I'm 18, that will be it." "When I buy a new Mercedes Benz, that will be it!" "When I put the last kid through college, that will be it!" "When I have paid off the mortgage, that will be it!" "When I get a promotion, that will be it." "When I reach retirement, I shall live happily ever after!"

Sooner or later, we realize there is no station, no one place to arrive at once and for all. The station somehow hides itself at the end of an endless track. The true joy of life is the journey. The station is only a dream. It constantly outdistances us. So stop pacing the aisles and counting the miles. Instead, climb more mountains, eat more ice cream, go barefoot more often, swim more rivers, watch more sunsets, laugh more, cry less.

Life must be lived as we go along. The station will come soon enough.

- *Adapted from a Robert Hastings' poem*



Leaving with tools

- **Listening & Dialogue Skills**
- **P.A.U.S.E.**
- **Mapping**
- **Awareness of an Inner Resource**
- **Power to Reframe** your Point of View
- **Ability to Reportion Distortions**
- **New Habits** taking shape