Inner Sage Leadership Group

"Judgments are the most expensive way to think. They are valuable as signals, but costly as conclusions. Let them point you toward curiosity, not become the place where your thinking ends."

Dr. Joan Flora



I grew up in a tense household where we avoided conflict. When it surfaced, it was intense.

As a leader, I followed the playbook I had learned: explain, justify, defend. It projected competence, but it left me depleted.

Over four decades in education, I began to see a different pattern: conflict wasn't the problem. Getting emotionally hooked was.

When we're hooked, our choices narrow. We accommodate, defend, fix, withdraw, or push back before we've considered what actually matters.

Boundaries create space for choice: to take in what another person is saying, stay connected to what matters to us, and choose a response we can stand behind.

Through the Inner Sage Leadership Group, I help people develop that capacity. Hard conversations don't have to drain us. They can build trust, capacity, and connection.

Her most requested workshops include:

1. The Empathy & Attunement Studio, biweekly, Thursdays, noon-12:45 PM, PST
2. Boundaries That Build Trust, relaunches in 2027
3. Untangled: Finding Space Between Reaction and Response, begins Tuesday, Jan. 26th, 2027, 1:00 to 2:30 PM, PDT

Learn more and contact Joan at www.InnerSageCoach.com or LinkedIn

Body Intelligence

Temperature /Heat
Hot
Flushed
Warm
Cool/Cold/Icy
Cold Hands & Feet
Chills
Sweaty

Cardiovascular
Pounding
Heart racing
Rush
Energetic
Vitality
Fluttery

Pain & Tenderness
Tender
Sensitive
Bruised
Achy
Sore
Raw
Gnawing in the belly
Stomach knots
Queasy

Head/Cognition
Dizzy / Spinner
Scattered / Spacey
Urgency
Flood of thoughts

Nerve/ Electrical
Tingling
Electric
Prickly
Needling
Twitchy
Radiating
Buzzy
Itchy

Breath
Breathless
Suffocating
Dry Throat
Dry mouth
Tight Chest
Congested

Movement
Shaky
Trembling
Wobbly
Jittery
Restless
Shivers

Density
Heavy
Dense
Thick
Contracted
Constricted
Constriction
Clenched
Knotted
Tense
Stiff
Blocked
Closed
Shrinking
Cramped

Disconnection
Empty
Hollow
Disconnected
Numb
Weak
Drained

Expansion
Calm
Relaxed
Smooth
Open
Expansive
Spacious
Airy
Alive

Emotions & Feelings

🔴 High Energy + Low pleasant Angry, Anxious, Apprehensive, Concerned, Enraged, Frightened, Frustrated, Fuming, Furious, Irritated, Jittery*, Livid, Nervous, Outraged, Overwhelmed, Panicked, Tense*, Troubled, Uneasy, Worried *What boundary or value feels crossed? What need is signaling for attention?*	🟡 High Energy + High Pleasant Blissful, Cheerful, Ecstatic, Elated, Energized*, Engaged, Enthusiastic, Excited, Exhilarated, Festive, Happy, Hopeful, Hyper*, Inspired, Joyful, Lively*, Moved, Pleasant, Playful, Pleased, Surprised, Thrilled, Upbeat*
🔵 Low Energy + Low pleasant Bored*, Depressed, Desolate, Despairing, Despondent, Disappointed, Discouraged, Disheartened, Distressed, Down, Drained*, Exhausted*, Fatigued*, Glum, Lonely, Miserable, Morose, Sad, Spent*, Sullen, Tired* *What comfort, connection, or restoration is needed?*	🟢 Low Energy + High Pleasant At Ease*, Balanced, Calm*, Carefree, Comfortable, Content, Cozy*, Easygoing*, Fulfilled, Grateful, Loving, Peaceful, Relaxed*, Restful*, Satisfied, Secure, Serene, Sleepy*, Thoughtful, Touched, Tranquil*

*Felt states within the body

Adapted from Marshall Rosenberg's "Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life. Mood Meter adapted from Marc Brakcett's Mood Meter

Emotions signal whether our needs are being met. Ease (pleasant) often means alignment. Activation (unpleasant) often means something important needs attention.

About 2,000 English words describe emotions.

- About 1,400 (70%) describe unpleasant emotions.
- About 300 (15%) describe pleasant emotions.
- The remaining 300 (15%) describe neutral emotions.

-Marc Brackett, Permission to Feel (2019)

Universal Needs

"At the heart of every behavior is the desire to meet a precious need."

" Dr. Marshall Rosenberg

Physical Well-Being: Air · Exercise · Food · Movement · Nature · Rest · Safety Sensuality · Shelter · Sleep · Sunlight · Touch · Water

Autonomy: Agency · Choice · Choosing/planning one's dreams, goals, values · Freedom Honesty · Impact · Independence · Self-Determination · Self-expression · Space · Spontaneity

Relating: Acceptance · Affection · Appreciation · Belonging · Being seen/heard Closeness · Communication · Community · Compassion · Companionship · Connection Consideration · Contribution · Cooperation · Empathy · Feedback · Inclusion Interdependence · Intimacy · Love · Mutuality · Participation · Respect · Sexuality· Shared reality · Sharing · Support · Transparency · Trust · Understanding

Self-Connection: Authenticity · Awareness · Celebration · Clarity · Competence· Consciousness · Creativity · Growth · Integrity · Meaning · Mourning · Presence Purpose · Self-acceptance · Self-expression · Self-realization · Self-respect · Spirituality

Joy of Life: Adventure · Beauty · Comfort · Diversity · Ease · Hope · Humor · Inspiration Joy · Play · Well-being

Connection with the World: Challenge · Clarity · Coherence · Consistency · Exploration Flexibility · Harmony · Learning · Meaning · Order/predictability · Peace · Stability Stimulation · Understanding

Empathy Guess Prompts:

- *"Was the need for ____ met for you?" / "Did that experience give you _____?"*
- *"Do you feel _____ because you (need, value, what's important) _____?"*
- *"Sounds like you're wanting___(guess a need). Is that right?"*

Adapted from Marshall Rosenberg's "Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life. Compiled and formatted by Dr. Joan Flora.

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Expressing boundaries can feel difficult, frightening, or uncertain, especially when we can't predict how others will respond.

What people say	What might be happening underneath
"I tried setting a boundary, and it made everything worse."	The other person reacted with anger, hurt, or resistance
"They just ignored my boundary."	I expected my request to change their behavior
"I feel selfish saying no."	I'm uncomfortable prioritizing my own needs
"I don't want to hurt their feelings."	I'm anticipating responsibility for their disappointment
"I tried, but I couldn't find the words."	My capacity to express myself decreased under pressure
"I set a boundary, and now they won't talk to me."	There may be a genuine relational cost
"I shouldn't have to explain myself."	I'm tired of feeling that my needs require justification; I may benefit from an empathy buddy
"I keep having to set the same boundary."	The situation may require a different choice, not another conversation

When Boundaries Feel Difficult

1. Understand Why This Boundary Matters

- What need, value, or concern are you trying to honor? (see needs list on page 4)

2. Decide What You Are Willing to Do

- What will you do differently?
  You can express your needs and make requests, but you cannot control how another person responds.

3. Prepare for Your Own Reaction

- What feelings or familiar reactions might arise when you make this choice?
  You might feel selfish, guilty, or uncertain. You might question whether you're being too rigid or feel responsible for someone else's disappointment. These feelings are worth noticing, but they don't necessarily mean your boundary is wrong. They may reflect the discomfort of changing a familiar pattern.

4. Pay Attention to What Happens in the Relationship

- What might you learn from the other person's response, even if it isn't what you hoped for?
  Usually a relational boundary creates greater clarity and trust. Sometimes it brings disappointment, resistance, or distance. And sometimes the relationship feels worse because you're seeing patterns you previously accommodated.

The other person's response is information, not an verdict on your boundary. Stay curious about what you're learning, including whether your boundary still reflects what matters to you.

When Boundaries Don't Seem to Work, Slow Down and Consider:

- Am I making a request or a demand? Am I allowing the other person to say no?
- Am I trying to control the outcome? Am I expecting the other person to behave or feel a certain way?
- Am I clear about my own choices? Do I know what I'm willing (and unwilling) to participate in?
- Am I hoping my boundary will change the other person, prevent disappointment, or fix the relationship?
- Am I listening to what matters to both of us? Is there room for self empathy, empathy for others, understanding, or another solution?
- Am I interpreting discomfort as failure? Could this be the unfamiliar experience of changing an old pattern?