

Coffee Talk: Two Sugars One Life I Didn't Think This Would Work

Clayton M. Myhill

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I rolled my eyes at the Emergency Brake.

Not a polite, subtle eye-roll. A full-body, soul-deep, here-we-go-again eye-roll that started in my toes and ended somewhere around the back of my skull. The kind you reserve for people who tell you mercury is in retrograde like that explains your credit card debt.

Because I'd tried everything. And I mean everything.

Meditation. Three different apps. I'd sit cross-legged on my bedroom floor, trying to "observe my thoughts without judgment" while my thoughts judged me for sitting on the floor like a failed monk. Therapy. Which helped, genuinely, but my therapist wasn't available at 2 AM when I was composing emotionally catastrophic text messages. Journaling. Breathing exercises. That thing where you hold ice cubes. Essential oils that made my apartment smell like a spa having a panic attack.

I had a drawer full of self-help books, a phone full of wellness apps, and a nervous system that hadn't gotten the memo about any of it.

If you've ever downloaded a mindfulness app during a meltdown and then had a meltdown about the app not loading fast enough, you're my people.

So when I came across "Stop, Drop, Roll" and "13 seconds," I did what any reasonable, battle-scarred veteran of the self-help industrial complex would do.

I laughed.

Thirteen seconds? Sure. Right after I manifest abundance and align my chakras. Let me just consult my vision board and check what my horoscope says about breathing techniques this week.

I tried it the way you try gas station sushi — low expectations, high regret potential. Not because I believed in it. Because I was running out of things to be cynical about, and at some point you either try the last thing on the list or admit you'd rather stay miserable than risk being wrong.

The spiral hit on a Wednesday. Because spirals love a Wednesday.

My ex had texted something about the kids' schedule that wasn't really about the schedule. You know the kind. Perfectly reasonable on the surface. Weaponized underneath. The sort of message where every word is technically fine and the subtext could strip paint.

I felt the surge. Gary (my right eye twitch, my body's built-in panic detector) started going off like a car alarm in a Costco parking lot. My thumbs were already hovering over the keyboard, drafting a response that would've been accurate, justified, and absolutely devastating to my co-parenting relationship.

And somewhere between the rage and the reply, I thought: *Fine. Thirteen seconds. Whatever.*

Stop. I noticed Gary. Actually noticed him, instead of typing through the twitch like I usually do. Three seconds of acknowledging that my body was screaming at me.

Drop. I named it. Out loud. To my empty kitchen. "I'm at a solid 4 and climbing. The text isn't about the schedule. I'm about to respond to what it's really about, and that's going to cost me." Seven more seconds. That's all.

Roll. I put the phone face-down on the counter. Stood there like an idiot. Stared at the microwave clock. Three seconds of doing absolutely nothing.

Thirteen seconds. Total.

And then something happened that I genuinely did not expect.

The urge to fire back didn't disappear. I'm not selling magic here. But it... dimmed. Just enough. Just enough to see the gap between what I felt and what I was about to do. Just enough to type a response about the schedule. Just the schedule. Nothing underneath.

I was stunned. Not because it worked perfectly. Because it worked at all.

I get it. I was you. I might still be you on a bad Thursday.

The Emergency Brake isn't meditation. You don't have to clear your mind. You just have to notice you have one. You don't need a mat, an app, or a mountaintop. You need thirteen seconds. That's a shorter commitment than the ads you can't skip on YouTube.

Thirteen seconds won't fix your problems. I'm not going to insult you by pretending they will. But they'll give you the pause before you make them worse. And if you've ever sent the text, fired the email, said the thing, and then spent the next three days cleaning up the wreckage, you know that pause is worth everything.

"But this sounds like every other breathing exercise."

It's not. Every other breathing exercise asks you to be calm. This one just asks you to be aware. There's a difference. Calm is a destination. Awareness is noticing you're driving.

"I'm too skeptical for this."

Good. You're the target audience. This tool was built for people who've been burned by every promise that starts with "just try this one thing." I still don't love the name. I still use the tool.

You don't have to believe it works. You just have to try it once.

I didn't think this would work. I was wrong. Not because it's magic — because it's simple. The Emergency Brake is in Chapter 1 of *STOP YOUR SPIRAL*. Try it once, mockingly if you want.

That's how I started.

Here's to trying the last thing on the list. Mockingly, if you want.

Cheers, Clayton

Coffee Talk 2.0: For everyone who's ever tried a self-help tool with the enthusiasm of a hostage.

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