

Van der Krol COACHING

Full of *life*.

A short guide to feeling vibrant, present, and unmistakably yourself. About twenty minutes to read.

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A short word *from me.*

I'm Marjolein van der Krol, a NOBCO-certified coach and shiatsu therapist. I work with people through the body as much as through conversation, using Eastern medicine as an extra lens, because the patterns that keep capable people stuck rarely get solved by thinking alone.

This guide is the short version of what that actually looks like in a session. If it resonates, you'll find 1:1 coaching and a longer trajectory at vanderkrolcoaching.com, or book a free discovery call directly.

What's inside

Four short parts, with a few exercises to actually try along the way.

Part one · Mind

Recognise the patterns that quietly dim you, and learn why thinking your way out keeps you stuck.

Part two · Heart

Meet the safety system that holds you back with compassion, and start closing the gap between who you are and how you show up.

Part three · Eros

Discover what a fully alive, intimate relationship with life really means, and how to let more pleasure and play back in.

Part four · Body

Learn to read your body as a compass, and use small everyday permissions to stay alive to yourself.

Epilogue

A closing word, the key takeaways to keep, and how to take it further.

PART ONE

Mind.

The quiet signs you've dimmed, and why your head alone won't be what brings you back.

Six patterns, one *mechanism*.

You might have built real stability, a good job, healthy finances, a life that looks right from the outside, and still feel strangely absent from it. Not sad exactly. Just less yourself than you used to be: less expressive, less energised, quietly disconnected from any real sense of purpose. This guide is about finding your way back: to feeling energised, vibrant and expressive in what you do, and reconnected to purpose and fulfilment, not just to what looks good on paper.

These are the patterns I see most often, the quiet signs the spark has gone out of things. See how many you recognize.

- A weekend or a holiday barely recharges you anymore; whatever lift it brings fades within days.
- Functioning fine on the outside, while privately running on reserve and going through the motions.
- A conversation or decision that keeps replaying in your head, long after it's actually settled.
- A flatness that enough sleep doesn't fix and no doctor can explain, like the colour has quietly gone out of things.
- Saying yes when you feel a no, and only noticing the no once the moment has passed.
- Doing good work, and barely feeling it afterward, where it used to give you a real kick.

Six different signs, and in practice, almost always the same mechanism underneath: you correct yourself before you're even aware you're doing it. You adjust your reaction, swallow your opinion, push through the tiredness, and by the time you notice, the moment where you had a choice is already gone.

That single reframe changes what you need to work on. Not six separate problems, each demanding its own fix. One skill: noticing sooner. Everything in this guide builds toward getting your aliveness back, not just getting by.

● IN THE COACHING

The more energy you put into the problem, the deeper you spiral into it. That spiral, focusing on what you don't want, is underneath more of these patterns than people expect. In a session, I help you find the outcome you actually want instead, and put your energy there. That's the point where movement and real change start.

Why your head can't fix it *alone*.

The biggest block to feeling vibrant, alive, and energised in what you do is overthinking. To get there, you have to step out of your head and into your body.

Overthinking is under-feeling.

Thinking keeps your energy in your mind, and only there. It pulls energy away from the rest of your body, and it's the whole body, not the head, that actually soaks up the goodness in a moment and turns it into fulfilment and joy. Your body also tells you, earlier and more reliably than your head does, what's aligned for you and what isn't. Overthinking is the opposite of being in your body. The way back runs through your senses and your gut, not through one more round of analysis.

You feel most alive not when you're relaxed and thinking things through, but when you're so absorbed in what you're doing that self-consciousness drops away and time stops mattering.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, on flow

In practice, this is a skill you can start training right now.

🔔 EXERCISE

Stepping out of overthinking

Pause. Notice one physical sensation: your feet on the floor, your breath, the weight of your shoulders. That's the whole exercise. It proves you can drop into the body on command, in under ten seconds, which is exactly the skill this guide asks you to build.

EXERCISE

Grounding

Sit or lie down, and let your breath settle. Bring your attention to your hips and lower belly, and imagine a steady cord reaching down from there, through the floor, all the way to the centre of the earth. With every exhale, let tension drop down through it. With every inhale, feel something calm rise back up. This is the fastest way out of your head once overthinking has taken over.

PART TWO

Heart.

Meeting the safety system that holds you back with compassion, and closing the gap between who you are and how you show up.

Compassion for your safety *switch*.

We are wired for safety and survival first. Feeling more alive in what you do will sometimes trip that wiring, because aliveness often asks you to take a risk, and your safety system doesn't distinguish between a risk worth taking and an actual threat.

Knowing that is where compassion comes in. You're not failing at this. You're training something that's quite hardwired, and hardwired things change slowly, in small steps, not all at once. Choosing aliveness over what feels comfortable and stable can genuinely feel like a leap, because in a way, it is one: it takes courage, and a willingness to be seen.

Looked at on a deeper level, this is often exactly why we don't feel alive: we conform to other people's expectations, or simply go along with the culture around us, because that keeps us socially accepted and socially safe. You stay a little longer than you need to in a job that isn't you, because it's financially stable. You don't take the hour's walk you actually want during your workday, even though you know, somewhere, that it would give you inspiration and energy to do your job better, because it feels like cheating, and some part of you fears being judged for it. None of that is weakness. It's the same mechanism, working exactly as designed, choosing safety over aliveness on your behalf.

A sense of safety isn't only a feeling. It's a physiological state the body registers automatically, well before the conscious mind catches up.

Stephen Porges, on polyvagal theory

This is why willpower rarely works on its own. The safety switch is really your nervous system flipping between on-guard and at-ease, and you can't out-argue a nervous system that has already decided it isn't safe. What works is signalling safety directly to the body, with compassion, before you try to change the behaviour.

The aim isn't to override that system or fling yourself far out of your comfort zone. Going for the extreme, big step only triggers your safety system harder, and you won't be able to stay there. Instead, the aim is to expand your capacity in small steps: take what feels like a small risk, let your body learn it's survivable, and slowly grow how much aliveness, and how much tension, you can hold.

EXERCISE

From safety response to calm

The moment you notice it's hard to choose differently than your first safety response, place a hand on your chest or belly, and exhale slower than you inhale. That's not a metaphor: a longer exhale is one of the fastest ways to tell your nervous system the danger has passed, and to meet yourself with a bit of compassion while you do it.

EXERCISE

Reflect, then commit to a small step

Every now and then, write down what would make you feel more alive right now. Notice where your safety response kicks in: where it tightens, hesitates, or talks you out of it. Then choose one small way to move toward that aliveness anyway, small enough that your body can come along with you, not so big that it sets off every alarm you have.

IN THE COACHING

In a session, this often looks like working with the body first and the words second: finding what actually calms your system down, and looking at why the body resists moving toward something you genuinely want, feeling, in the body itself, which emotions and tensions are holding you back, before we even get to what you want to say or do differently.

Working with the *gaps*.

Energy doesn't only disappear through too little rest. It disappears through the gap between who you actually are and how you show up in your daily life. The bigger that gap gets, the more drained and the less alive you feel, even when nothing dramatic is going wrong.

Every choice in an ordinary day is a small chance to express who you actually are, or to quietly widen that gap instead. The point isn't to scan your life for where you got it wrong and judge yourself for it. That only adds weight. The more useful question is what you can do right now, in how you think and in what you do, with some compassion for the gap that's already there. You made choices, sometimes based on different values than the ones you actually hold, and that deserves forgiveness rather than a verdict. The empowering part is that you have a choice: you can get clear on your values right now, and decide how you want to show up in them today.

EXERCISE

Spot one gap today

Look back at today. Where was there a gap between what you actually wanted to say or do, and what you actually said or did? Don't judge it, just notice it. Then pick one small moment tomorrow where you could close that gap a little, and try it.

EXERCISE

Notice your resistance

Through the day, simply register where you hold back from acting the way you actually want to. Where does it get difficult, where does the gap open up, and what's underneath it. You don't have to change anything yet. Noticing sounds like it does nothing, but the awareness itself is already the start of change: as long as you want something different and can see where it's blocked, you can begin to move toward it. A smaller everyday version: count how often you say yes while feeling a no. Most people are surprised by the number alone.

● IN THE COACHING

Almost everyone I work with already knows what they'd want to say, what they'd want to do, how they'd want to show up. They know the gap. What actually sits in the way is the judgment about it, and a second layer underneath that: dissatisfaction, bitterness, sometimes shame or guilt about the distance between who they are and how they've been living. In a session, we don't relitigate the past. We work in the present, with small, empowering steps.

PART THREE

Eros.

What it means to be in an intimate relationship with life itself.

An intimate relationship with life *itself.*

This whole guide is about one thing: feeling alive and energised again. And at the core of that is something simple, and easy to lose, a real, intimate relationship with life itself. There's an old word for exactly that quality, worth reclaiming: Eros. It's the lens for everything in this chapter.

A few months ago I was cycling back from a workout in Spain, and halfway there it hit me: the salt in the air, palm trees going past, a cathedral at the end of the boulevard, people laughing somewhere behind me. Nothing dramatic was happening. I was simply, completely there for it: fully in my senses, in the present, open to whatever goodness the moment had to offer. That's the whole thing in one image. So much of the time our heart is half-closed, or we're up in our head instead of in our senses, focused on what's missing rather than open to what life is actually handing us. Coming back to life is the opposite: being present enough to receive it.

Eros is one of the oldest words we have for that feeling. At its root it names the life-force itself: vivid, vibrating, fully in the body, energy moving through you without apology. Over the centuries the word slowly turned into "erotic" and shrank to mean something purely sexual. What I'm pointing at here isn't sexual at all. It's that relationship with life, and eros is simply the most precise word we have for the quality of aliveness this whole guide is about.

It is about our capacity for spontaneity, for creative energy, for the courage to feel rather than merely think, believe, or know.

Audre Lorde

Therapist Esther Perel also talks about this. She adds that eros is about deliberately bringing pleasure, play, curiosity, adventure and spontaneity into your days, for the sheer enjoyment of them, not to get anywhere. All of it is about being fully, willingly alive to your own life. And it starts with you, long before anyone else is involved.

Being fully yourself means letting yourself have pleasure, play, adventure and creativity, woven through ordinary days. That asks for the same safety and compassion as the last two chapters: you don't need to clear every shadow out first. You only need to be present enough to let it in.

💡 EXERCISE · ONE

Switched-on reflection

Grab a pen and paper, sit down, and make two columns. Name them "I turn myself off when..." and "I turn myself on when...", and fill each one in. Keep it about your life and especially your work, not your relationship: what genuinely switches you on, and what quietly switches you off. Most people find the second column is almost entirely about being embodied and present: a walk, real focus, a good conversation, moving your body, making something.

💡 EXERCISE · TWO

Play at work

We tend to look for pleasure, play and fun on weekends and birthdays, and rarely connect any of it to work. This is about what happens when you do. Look at your work and find real places where you could bring in more pleasure, play or spontaneity, on purpose. What would you do differently, notice differently, choose differently? Try it for a week, then look back. Most people find it doesn't make them less effective. Usually it's the opposite.

PART FOUR

Body.

Your body's responses and feelings are a compass. Following it comes down to small, everyday permissions to be more yourself.

Presence is the *vessel*.

To feel alive, you need to get into your senses: into your body, into what's actually happening right now. You can't feel alive in your head, the same head that was busy overthinking and under-feeling back in chapter two. You can only feel alive in your body, and only now. The goodness of life is happening at this exact moment, and your senses are the only doorway in.

Coming back to life, in that view, has to happen through the body, not only around it in conversation.

EXERCISE

Coming to your senses

When you notice you've drifted up into your head, breathe slowly and count down through your senses: five things you can see, four you can touch, three you can hear, two you can smell, one you can taste. It pulls your attention out of the thinking and back into your body, in about a minute. The grounding exercise from chapter two does the same job from another direction; either one grows your presence.

EXERCISE

Aliveness in the body

Bring to mind a moment you didn't feel very alive. Nothing dramatic, just flat, going through the motions. Notice where that lands in your body: heaviness, tightness, numbness, distance. Stay with it for a few breaths, then let it fade. Now bring to mind a moment you did feel genuinely alive, simple and real. Notice where that lands too: warmth, openness, a bit of movement wanting to happen. Stay there a little longer than feels necessary.

● IN THE COACHING

This is why I trained for four years in shiatsu and Eastern medicine alongside coaching. Talking things through has its place, but a lot of what keeps people dimmed sits below the level of language. The body usually knows first.

Your gut-feel, and small *permissions*.

It is your body, not your mind, that truly knows what lights you up and what drains you. That flicker of excitement, that quiet contraction: it isn't vague. It's information, and it's often the first system to know, if you check in with it before overriding it with logic.

Micro-mischief is what happens when you actually act on that information. It's the small, playful act of putting your own aliveness first: a tiny, private yes to what lights you up, even when nobody's watching, even when it quietly breaks from what's expected of you. Do nothing, simply go with the flow, and you end up living out whatever the norm around you expects. Choosing your own aliveness instead takes real, proactive work: figuring out who you actually are, and choosing that, even when there's a gap between that and what's considered normal. It's a small act of resistance, and it tends to inspire the people around you more than almost anything else you could do.

It helps to be honest about why this can feel uncomfortable: feeling more alive, and showing up as who you actually are, nearly always means stepping a little outside the norm. Once you see that clearly, the discomfort is worth it, because that discomfort is the feeling of turning into more of yourself. We tend to overestimate the social risk. In practice it usually inspires people rather than costing you their approval. And the real risk runs the other way: quietly going along with the norm is how you slowly lose touch with yourself. Being who you are turns out to feel far safer than it looks from the outside.

A life without enough play carries real costs: more stress, less resilience, a flatter mood over time. Adults need it every bit as much as children do, just in smaller, more private doses.

Stuart Brown, play researcher

None of this needs to be a big leap. Aliveness is built in exactly these small, repeated permissions, not in one dramatic overhaul, because a dramatic overhaul is exactly what sets off the safety system from chapter three, and you won't be able to sustain it anyway.

A closing *word*.

I hope something in here was useful, and that at least one line stays with you. If you keep just one thing from each chapter, keep these:

- Catch yourself correcting, swallowing an opinion or pushing through tiredness, a beat sooner.
- When you're stuck in your head, drop into one physical sensation, or ground yourself.
- A hand on your chest or belly and a longer exhale, whenever choosing differently feels hard. Small steps only.
- Notice the gap between what you wanted and what you did, without judging it.
- Bring a little more pleasure or play into your work this week, on purpose.
- Come back to your senses: five things you see, four you touch, three you hear, two you smell, one you taste.
- Take one small, private yes to what lights you up, even when nobody's watching.

Everything in this guide comes together in how I actually work with people: through the conversation, and through the body, so change starts where you can feel it, not only where you can explain it. If any of it resonated, and you're ready to take a real step, I'd love to talk.

Curious how this works for you?

The discovery call is free and takes up to 40 minutes, in Utrecht, Hilversum or online. You talk, I listen and feel along. At the end, you'll know if you want to go further. No sales pitch, no commitment.

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Wherever you are, I hope something in here helps you come back to yourself.

Marjolein van der Krol

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