

# WELLBEING FIELD GUIDE: Crisis Conditions at Sea

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The BrainHealth Wellbeing Field Guide is a concise, action-oriented companion for high-pressure maritime conditions. Focused on crisis at sea, it delivers a clear wellbeing framework with practical exercises that can be applied in the moment. Developed alongside Halcyon Health Network, it equips seafarers to stabilize, reset, and maintain clarity when it matters most.

**HALCYON**  
HEALTH NETWORK

# The Briefing

Every vessel has a “design limit.” This is the maximum stress a hull can take before it begins to fail. Your mind is no different. In a crisis, whether it is a mechanical failure in the engine room or the high-tension transits currently occurring in the Middle East, the pressure on a seafarer is constant.

We often think of mental health as something to fix after it breaks. But in the maritime world, we don't wait for the engine to seize before we check the oil. We practice **preventative maintenance**.

The **Wellbeing Field Guide: Crisis Conditions at Sea** is built on three pillars of professional mastery. It is designed to help you recognize the early signs of structural fatigue in your mind and provide you with the tactical tools to stabilize yourself and your crew. and provide you with the tactical tools to stabilize yourself and your crew.

## The Core Objectives

- **To stabilize** or lower the internal pressure of the nervous system during high-stress alerts.
- **To secure** or create mental compartments against the noise of global conflict and news from home.
- **To support** through a transition from individual survival to collective crew resilience.

In the following pages, we move from theory to action. Whether you are an officer on the bridge or a rating in the galley, these protocols are your standard operating procedures for the most important cargo on this ship: Your Wellbeing.

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## System Status Report: Your Wellbeing Under Load

In the engine room, you don't guess if a generator is failing; you read the gauges. Let's compare you to an engine. In a crisis, like the current 2026 tensions in the Middle East, your “internal engine” is running at a constant high RPM. If you don't understand how this load affects your system, you risk a total blackout.

### 1 Hypervigilance

When you enter a high-risk zone, your brain enters combat mode. It pumps adrenaline and cortisol into your system to keep you sharp.

- At work, you are scanning every radar blip, jumping at every sudden noise on deck, and over-analyzing every email from home.

- The impact on wellbeing? You cannot shut it down. Your mind stays on the bridge even when your body is in the bunk. This leads to insomnia and irritability.
- **The Warning Sign:** If you find yourself unable to relax even after a 12-hour watch, your system has become hypervigilant.

## 2 Cognitive Fatigue

A crisis isn't just one event; it's the duration of the event. After weeks of high-tension transits, your mental energy begins to dip.

- At work, you are still going through the motions, your energy is still flowing, but there isn't enough to run the more complex workings of your brain, like multi-level decision-making or emotional control.
- The impact on wellbeing? You become robotic. You lose interest in your hobbies, you stop joking with the crew, and you feel a sense of **deep apathy**.
- **The Warning Sign:** If simple tasks feel too heavy or you find yourself staring at a bulkhead for 20 minutes, you are operating at a low level of energy.

## 3 Isolation

Every electrical system needs a "ground" to safely discharge excess energy. For a seafarer, that grounding mechanism is **connection**.

- At work, we often disconnect from our surroundings in times of crisis. We stop talking about our fears to avoid looking "weak." We stop calling home to protect our families from the truth of the situation.
- The impact on wellbeing? The negative energy of your stress has nowhere to go. It builds up inside until it causes a mental disruption. It manifests itself as a sudden emotional outburst, a panic attack, or a complete mental shutdown.
- **The Warning Sign:** If you are avoiding the mess hall to eat alone or stopped calling home, your system has begun to break down.

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# The 3-R Framework

The System Status Report you just read is not a judgment; it is a **status check**. It reveals the technical reality of working **under pressure** during a crisis.

In the engine room, you do not ignore a surge warning on your generator; you act. You apply a predetermined procedure to stabilize the system before it fails.

The human system requires the same proactive, disciplined approach. To move from a state of failure to a state of operational readiness, you cannot use guesswork. You need a reliable, trusted, and repeatable protocol.

We call this **The 3-R Framework**.

This is not a philosophy; it is a three-step maintenance procedure designed to reset and restore full cognitive and emotional control.

- **R1: RECOGNIZE**
- **R2: RESET**
- **R3: REACH**

By mastering these three steps, you are not just managing stress; you are ensuring the integrity of your most critical operational system: **You**.

## R1: RECOGNIZE

Before you can fix a fault, you have to acknowledge it exists. In a high-stress environment like the Middle East transits of 2026, the internal noise of a crisis can mask the symptoms of a failing system. **RECOGNIZE** is your initial diagnostic sweep.

It is the discipline of looking at yourself without ego. It asks: *Is my system currently sustaining a surge of pressure, suffering a cognitive fatigue, or heading toward a breakdown?*

### The Internal Inspection List

To master the first R, **Recognize**, you must take a look at three specific internal indicators:

- 1 Physical**  
Is your heart racing while you're off-watch? Are your muscles constantly braced for an impact that hasn't happened?
- 2 Mental**  
Do you find yourself circling around the same worry? Is your decision-making slowing down, or are you skipping steps in your standard operating procedures?
- 3 Emotional**  
Are you snapping at your crew for minor errors? Have you stopped finding humor in the mess hall?

## R2: RESET

When you are operating under highly stressful situations, especially during a crisis, your body's stress response can take over, clouding your judgment and narrowing your focus. This isn't a sign of weakness; it is a biological reaction to a high-pressure environment. To regain control, you must override the system.

The following exercises are designed to intervene at different physical, mental, and emotional levels to stabilize your system. You don't need to do all of them at once. Think of these as a toolkit: pick the one that fits your current situation to clear the fog and restore your ability to think clearly.

## Box Breathing (4-4-4-4)

The fastest way to reset your system is through controlled breathing. **This isn't simply relaxation; it is a manual override of your body's stress response.** Techniques like Box Breathing use your breath to stabilize your heart rate and internal chemistry. Think of it as clearing the mental fog. By manually calming your physical state, you stop the high-pressure "tunnel vision" that leads to mistakes. This simple act restores balance to the parts of your brain responsible for logic, allowing you to **think clearly, assess your surroundings with precision, and make high-stakes decisions** without the interference of sudden internal pressure.

### What zone am I in?



SICK



TIRED



SAD



BORED

- Talk to someone you trust
- Take deep breaths
- Mindful activity
- Take a break



CALM

READY TO  
LEARN

HAPPY



OKAY

- Learn
- Listen
- Work hard
- Try your best



SILLY



UPSET

ANXIOUS/  
WORRIEDGROUCHY/  
CRABBY

- Take deep breaths
- Get a drink
- Mindful activity
- Take a break



MAD



AGGRESSIVE



YELLING



MEAN

- Take a break
- Talk to someone you trust
- Go for a walk
- Mindful activity

- **Inhale (4 Seconds):** Force oxygen into the system.
- **Hold (4 Seconds):** Stabilize the pressure.
- **Exhale (4 Seconds):** Flush the carbon dioxide.
- **Pause (4 Seconds):** Allow yourself to recalibrate.

**Note:** You only need to do this for three to four cycles to see results. Once your focus returns, simply return to your normal breathing.

## Transform Your Struggle

While breathing stabilizes your body, this exercise is designed to stabilize your mind. Sometimes, a problem feels overwhelming because we are too close to it. We can't see the full picture because we are stuck in the middle of it.

This process is a **visual reset**. It is not about being an artist or making a "good" drawing. It is a technical tool used to move a struggle from the back of your mind, where it can create mental noise, and put it in front of you where you can observe it. By breaking a problem down and reshaping it on paper, you bypass the mental loop and allow your brain to find a different perspective.

The goal is to shift from *feeling* the struggle to *analyzing* it, giving you the distance needed to see a way through.

*Please use a separate sheet of paper to complete this activity.*



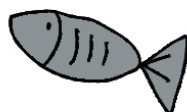
1. Think of a struggle you are currently facing.



2. On a separate piece of paper, draw images to symbolize this struggle.



3. After you draw, pause for a bit and look at your picture.
4. After looking at your drawing, identify a part of the drawing you like, or that calls your attention.



5. Redraw the portion of the drawing that gets your attention on any part of the paper. It can be as small or as big as you want it to be.



6. Now, create a new and possibly different drawing starting with that part. Give your hand the freedom to create images without the burden of making the image look good, or make sense.



7. Pause again to look at your drawing. Give it a title.
8. Pause again to listen. What does your artwork want to say or ask you about your struggle? What do you want to say or ask in return?

## Self-Compassion Break

Operating in a conflict zone like the Middle East is an immense burden. The constant vigilance, combined with being away from your family during uncertain times, creates a massive amount of internal pressure. Ignoring this pressure won't make it go away; it only increases the risk of mental strain.

The **Self-Compassion Break** helps release built-up stress. It is a private, disciplined moment to acknowledge that this is hard. Acknowledging the weight of your homesickness or fear isn't a sign of weakness. It is a sign of situational awareness. By validating the reality of your struggle, you work through the emotional tension, preventing it from interfering with your professional judgment.

### 1 Locate the Tension

Pause for a moment and sense where the weight of being away from home, especially during this crisis, is sitting in your body. It might be a tightness in your chest, a knot in your stomach, or a heaviness in your shoulders. If you are in a private space, you can place your hand over that area.

### 2 Acknowledge the Reality

Tell yourself clearly:

***"This is a moment of high pressure."***

Don't try to downplay it. You can also say:

*"This is hard."*

*"This hurts."*

*"This is a heavy load to carry."*



By doing this, you are practicing **mindfulness**. You are recognizing the truth of your situation instead of fighting it.

### 3 Recognize the Connection

Remind yourself: "I am not the only one carrying this."

There are others feeling exactly this way. You can say:

*"My fellow crew members feel this, too."*

*"I am not alone in this struggle."*

*"This is part of the sacrifice we make."*

#### 4 Stabilize and Reassure

Place your hand over your chest. If it helps, tap gently and feel the vibration or the warmth of your hand. This is a physical signal to your system that you are safe at this moment.

Say to yourself: **"May I be steady and kind to myself."**

Ask yourself: "What do I need to hear right now to stay strong?"

It might be:

*"May I be resilient."*

*"May I accept that it's okay to feel this way."*

*"May I be patient with myself."*

#### 5 Secure the System

To finish, take one deep inhale through your nose, followed by a long, slow exhale through your mouth.

Use this quick reset whenever the internal pressure of the crisis feels like it's becoming too much to manage.

**Note:** Practice compassion for yourself to help you gather the strength that you need to endure difficult experiences. You can endure more when you are kind to yourself, instead of being critical, or ignoring what you are feeling.

## R3: REACH | Reconnecting the System

Once you have **Reset** yourself and cleared the mental fog, you have a critical window of clarity. However, a ship cannot sail in isolation, and neither can a seafarer. **REACH** is the final stage where you take that internal stability and reconnect it to the world around you.

In a conflict zone, the greatest risks often come from isolation, when we stop communicating or stop looking out for one another. To *reach* means to bridge the gap between your more stable internal state and your external responsibilities.

## This stage focuses on two vital connections:

- 1 Reaching Inward to the Mission:** Returning to your duties with full situational awareness, ready to make the precise, high-stakes decisions required.
- 2 Reaching Outward to the Community:** Building a stronger, more capable crew. By checking on a fellow crew member or connecting clearly with your family, you ensure that the entire support system stays intact.

## Key Principles of REACH

- **Presence:** Being fully on the bridge, in the engine room, or wherever your work needs you to be, and not trapped in your head.
- **Solidarity:** Recognizing that the safety of the ship depends on the mental strength of every person on board.
- **Communication:** Sending a clear signal to those who rely on you, both on deck and back home.

### TIPS:

- 1** The Middle East crisis is a tense time for everyone. Don't wait for a crew member to ask for help.
  - Identify one fellow crew member who seems particularly quiet or stressed.
  - During a break or a shift change, ask a direct but low-pressure question: *"We're on tight watch today. How are you feeling about our situation?"*
  - You aren't just making small talk; you are checking for signs of operational fatigue in your teammate. Your listening helps them feel heard and less overwhelmed.
- 2** Your family is watching the same news you are. They are scared. Your job is to provide a sense of stability.
  - Before you call or message your family, perform one **Box Breathing** cycle.
  - Be honest but steady. Instead of *"It's dangerous,"* say: *"We feel the situation, but we are all alert and ready. The ship is safe and our spirits are high. Take care there, too."*

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## The Final Watch: A Note on Your Resilience

Resilience is not the absence of fear, especially in the waters you are navigating today; it is the disciplined choice to remain steady when the pressure rises.

## The Resilience Promise

- 1 You Are the Anchor**  
Your ability to stay calm and focused is what keeps the rest of the crew and your family at home steady.
- 2 You Are Strong**  
Just as a ship is built to withstand heavy seas, you are equipped with the capacity to recover, adapt, and lead through this crisis.
- 3 The Mission is Home**  
Every breath you take to reset, every check-in you make with a fellow seafarer, and every tactical decision you make is a step closer to the ultimate goal: a safe return to the ones you love.

## Navigating Your Growth in the Hot Zone

Take a minute to reflect on the version of yourself that first boarded this ship. **What has changed in you?** Navigating a global crisis in these waters has likely forced you to grow in ways you never imagined.

True resilience isn't just being able to bounce back to who you were before. It is the ability to **evolve.**

- **The Growth Mindset:** In a crisis, this is your most valuable gear. It is the belief that you can learn new ways to regulate your emotions, communicate under pressure, and adapt to the threat.
- **The Fixed Mindset:** This is a dangerous mental lock. It tells you that a mistake is a failure or that your stress is permanent.

Which mindset will help you navigate this transit? The sailor who adapts is the sailor who survives. Choosing to learn, even when it feels scary or uncomfortable, is how you turn a crisis into a source of strength.

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### FINAL NOTE:

The crisis in these waters may be unpredictable, but your response to it doesn't have to be. Stay alert. Stay connected. Stay resilient.

**You were built for this journey, you are equipped for this situation, and you are destined for a safe return. By guarding your mind and protecting your inner peace, you are proving that a seafarer's wellbeing is his greatest armor, and that the heart of a sailor is a force that no storm or conflict can ever diminish.**

### SHARE YOUR VOICE

This field guide was created to support you as you navigate these challenging waters. Resilience is a shared journey, and your experience, your questions, your insights, and your stories matter to us.

Whether this guide helped you find a moment of calm during a high-pressure watch, or if you have questions about the exercises, we want to hear from you. Your feedback helps us strengthen the support we provide to every seafarer at sea.

# SCALE YOUR WELLBEING STRATEGY

The Wellbeing Atlas: Seafarer's Edition 2026 is an interactive workbook created to support the mental health and wellbeing of seafarers throughout their journey at sea. Developed alongside Halcyon Health Network, Inc., with insights drawn from over 20 years of experience in the maritime sector, this edition acknowledges the unique emotional, psychological, and social challenges faced by those who work far from home for extended periods.

- Wellbeing Exercises
- Reflective Activities
- Easy-to-Follow Art Style
- 9 Comprehensive Chapters

## Additional BrainHealth Services

- BrainHealth Talks
- BrainHealth Workshops
- Safe Space Sessions
- Tailored Solutions

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