

# 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 conflict was avoided. 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 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](#)
2. [Boundaries That Build Trust](#)
3. Resolving Emotional Reactivity, returning Fall 2026
4. The Art of Emotional Wisdom, returning Winter 2027
5. Raising the Quality of Conflict, returning Winter 2027

Learn more and contact Joan at [www.InnerSageCoach.com](http://www.InnerSageCoach.com) or [Linkedin](#)

# 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

## Exercise 1: Create the Pause

**PARTNER PRACTICE: 20 MINUTES**

**Purpose:** Notice what happens when you feel pressure to respond.

### 1. Meet Your Partner (2 minutes)

Introduce yourselves. Share your name and, briefly, a context where boundaries matter in your life or work.

### 2. Think time to choose 2-3 situations/review directions (4 minutes)

Each person chooses 1 situation where you feel pressure to respond in a particular way (not the hardest boundary in your life). Tell your partner the role to play and the request to make.

**Possible situations:** differences in opinions or values, urgency, requests that feel like demands, gossip or triangulation, repeated asking, emotional intensity, too much responsibility, limited capacity, unwanted advice, or a time conflict.

**Requesting Partner:** Make the request realistically, not theatrically, the way someone might actually ask.

### Round 1: Notice Your Automatic Response (6 minutes)

- Partner A (2 min): Hear the request and respond as you normally would.
  - Notice: What do I feel pulled to do: say yes, explain, defend, fix, appease, withdraw, push back?
- Partner B (2 min): Switch and repeat.
  - Partners share whatever feels comfortable to share in what they noticed in themselves (2 min)

### Round 2: Create the Pause (6 minutes)

**Purpose:** Experience what changes when you give yourself time to take in the request before answering.

Hear the same request again. This time, **don't answer it yet**. Use one of the pause statements below, and stop.

- “Hmm. Let me think about that.”
- “Give me a second to take in what you're asking.”
- “I need to check my calendar before I answer.”
- “I'd like to get back to you on that.”

Use the pause to notice what happens when you don't have to respond immediately, not to figure out the “right” answer.

- Partner A (2 min): Hear the request and respond with a pause statement.
- Notice: What changed when you didn't have to answer immediately? What became easier or harder to notice?
- Partner B (2 min): Switch and repeat.
- Partners share whatever feels comfortable to share in what they noticed in themselves (2 min)

## Exercise 2: Choose Your Boundary

**Purpose:** Use the space created by the pause to identify what matters to you, then respond from choice rather than pressure.

### PARTNER PRACTICE: 15 MINUTES

#### 1. Notice What You Want to Care For (2 minutes)

Return to the same situation. Look at the Needs List and ask: What matters to me here? What am I trying to take care of?

Choose one or two needs, For example: capacity, choice, rest, integrity, mutuality, reliability, respect, autonomy, connection, fairness, or clarity.

#### 2. Choose Your Response (8 minutes)

Partner B makes the same request as before.

Partner A pauses, stays connected to what matters to them, and offers a boundary.

Partner B responds with one brief sentence that the person in this situation might realistically say after hearing the boundary. Something like:

- Okay, I understand.
- I'm disappointed. I was counting on you.
- Are you sure? I really need your help.
- I didn't realize you felt that way.
- So, what am I supposed to do now?

Partner A practices staying present, listening without immediately explaining, reversing, fixing, or trying to make the response go away.

- Partner A (4 minutes)
- Partner B (4 minutes)

**Your boundary might sound like:**

- I'm not able to commit to that right now. I'll let you know if that changes.
- I'm willing to talk about this, but not while we're both this upset.
- I'd like some time to think about that before I respond.
- I'm happy to help with this part, but I can't take on the whole thing.
- I'd rather you talk with them directly about that.
- That doesn't work for me. Let's see if there's another option.

#### 3. Partner Reflection (5 minutes)

- What was different when you knew what you were caring for?
- Did knowing what mattered to you change the way your boundary sounded or felt?