

# NAVIAIR

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# Title

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*How to use sports psychology tools from elite sports to improve performance and mental health for ATCO students*

- *what, why and how?*

# Key takeaways

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- Generation Z is less resiliant
- Generation Z demands focus on mental health and work-life balance
- Sports psychology tools are useful
- Foster greater openness about mental health in general
- Example of exercise





# Speaker Profile

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## **Christina Nordentoft**

- Training Specialist at Naviair (ANSP) Denmark
- Certified Mental Strength Trainer and Coach
- High School Teacher
- Soccer Coach and Mental Strength Development Trainer (Ice Hockey Team)

# What are we doing?

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## **Mental Strength Development Training**

- Since August 2024
- For all our ATCO students
- We train them in groups (8-10 students)
- Each student attends 9-10 sessions

## **Coaching sessions**

- Individual coaching sessions
- Follow-up on the phase report meetings
- Every 3.rd. week

# Why are we doing it?

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## Who is Generation Z?

Refers to individuals born between 1995 and 2012. Members of Gen Z are less resilient to challenges than their older peers. The psychological resilience of young people decreases over the years

Takács et.al. (2021). Generation Z and stress. *Frontiers in Psychology*

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New generation –  
Gen Z



Improve our passing  
rate



Provide them with  
tools



Cultural shift

## How are we doing it?

- Training sessions are conducted by a coach with no ATCO background
- Positive feedback



*"My new set of tools for developing mental strength helps me handle my tasks better"*

*"She asks questions free from professional assumptions, prompting me to reflect deeply"*

*"Especially the "clarifying values – exercise" helped me to feel more clear-minded and calm during training"*



# Training Environment

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- Comparable to elite sports environment
- High-performance demands
- Mental pressure
- Mental strength is needed

# Definition

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## ***What is mental strength?***

*The ability to act in a way that is consistent with your values (and gameplan), even when you are under pressure and face difficult thoughts and emotions*

## ***What mental strength is not?***

*Acting based on emotions*

*Henriksen and Hansen (2016) Praester under præs*

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# Example

Mental strength development training step 1:

*Define your values and your mission...*

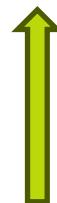
## Values



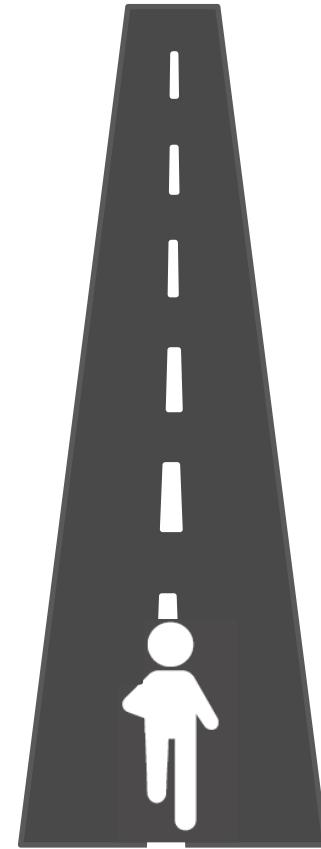
To be brave  
To be curious  
To be flexible  
To be independent  
To always give 100%  
To be helpfull

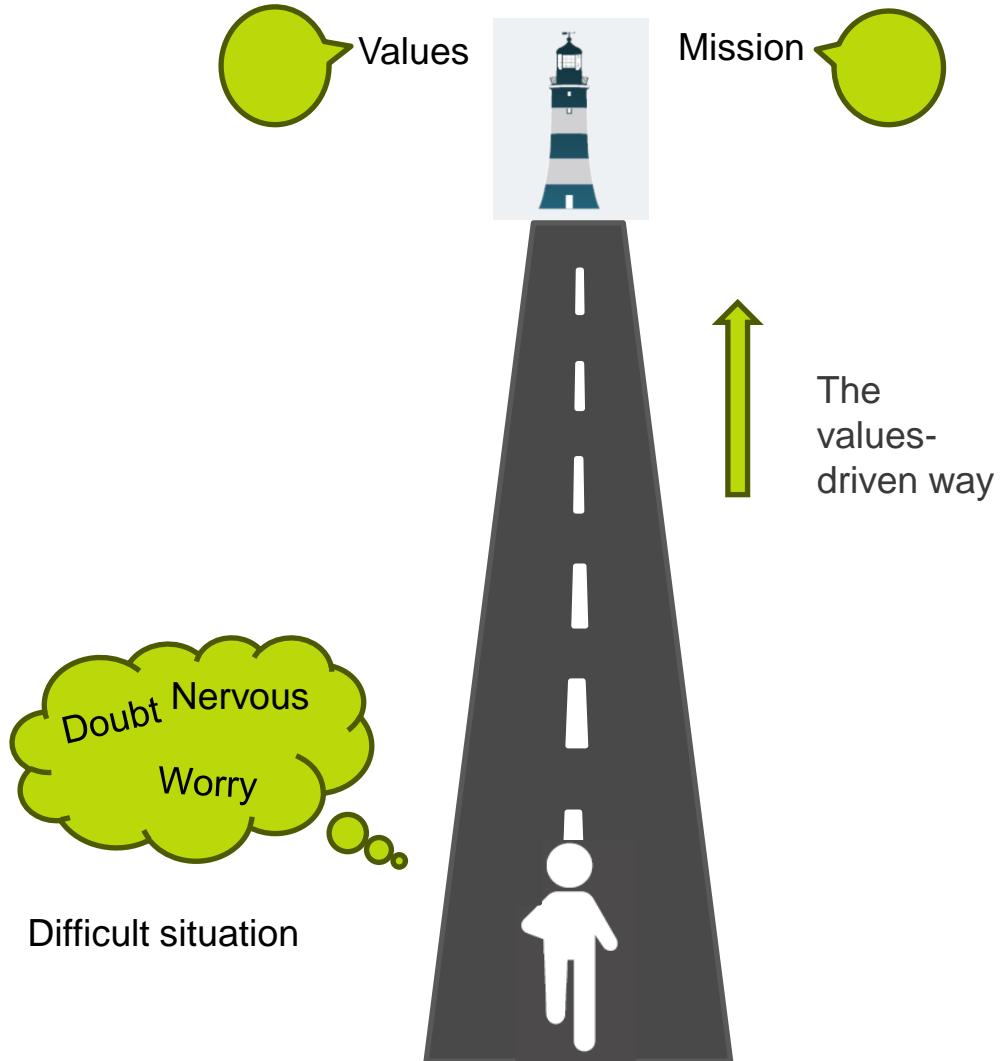
## Mission

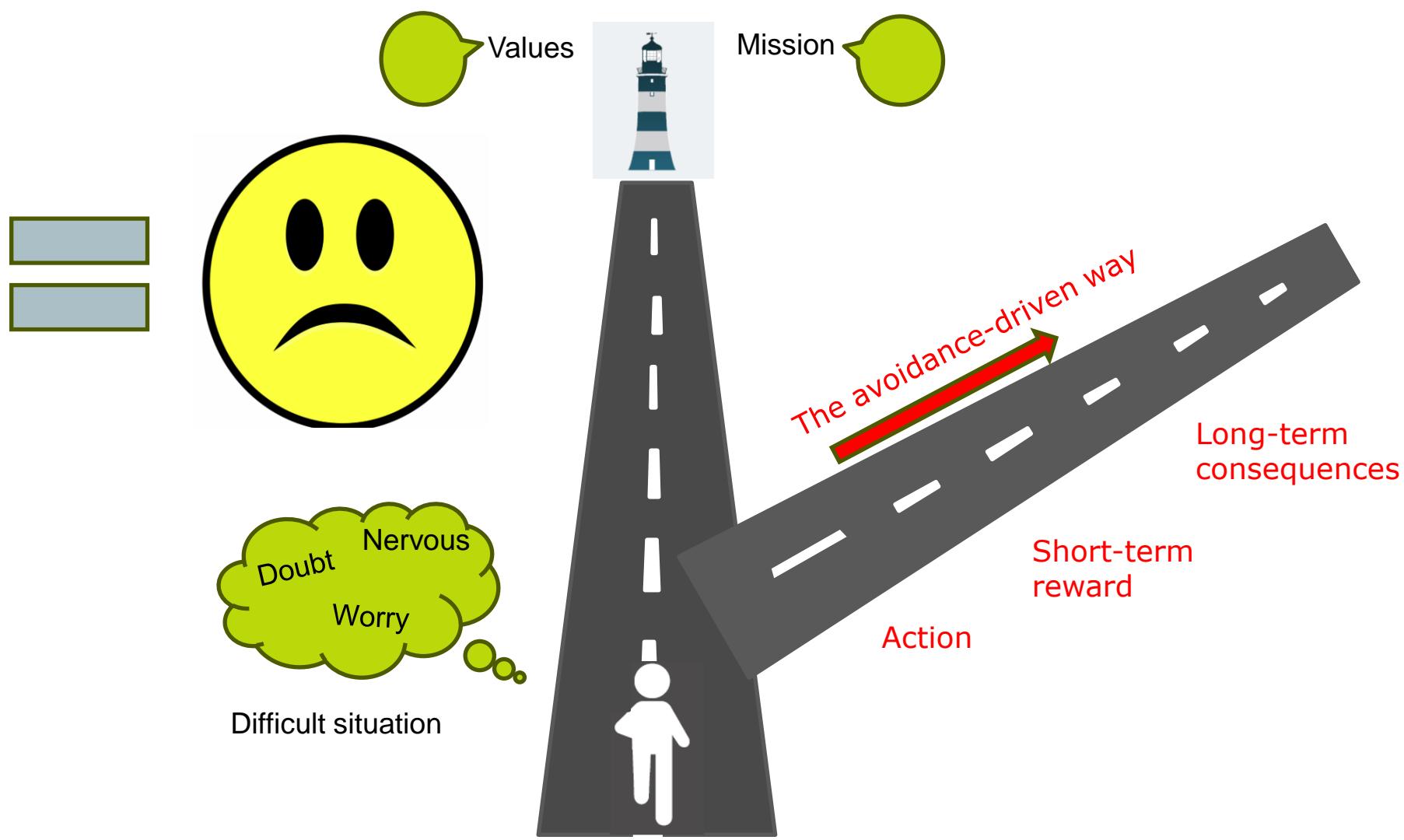
To become a professional ATCO

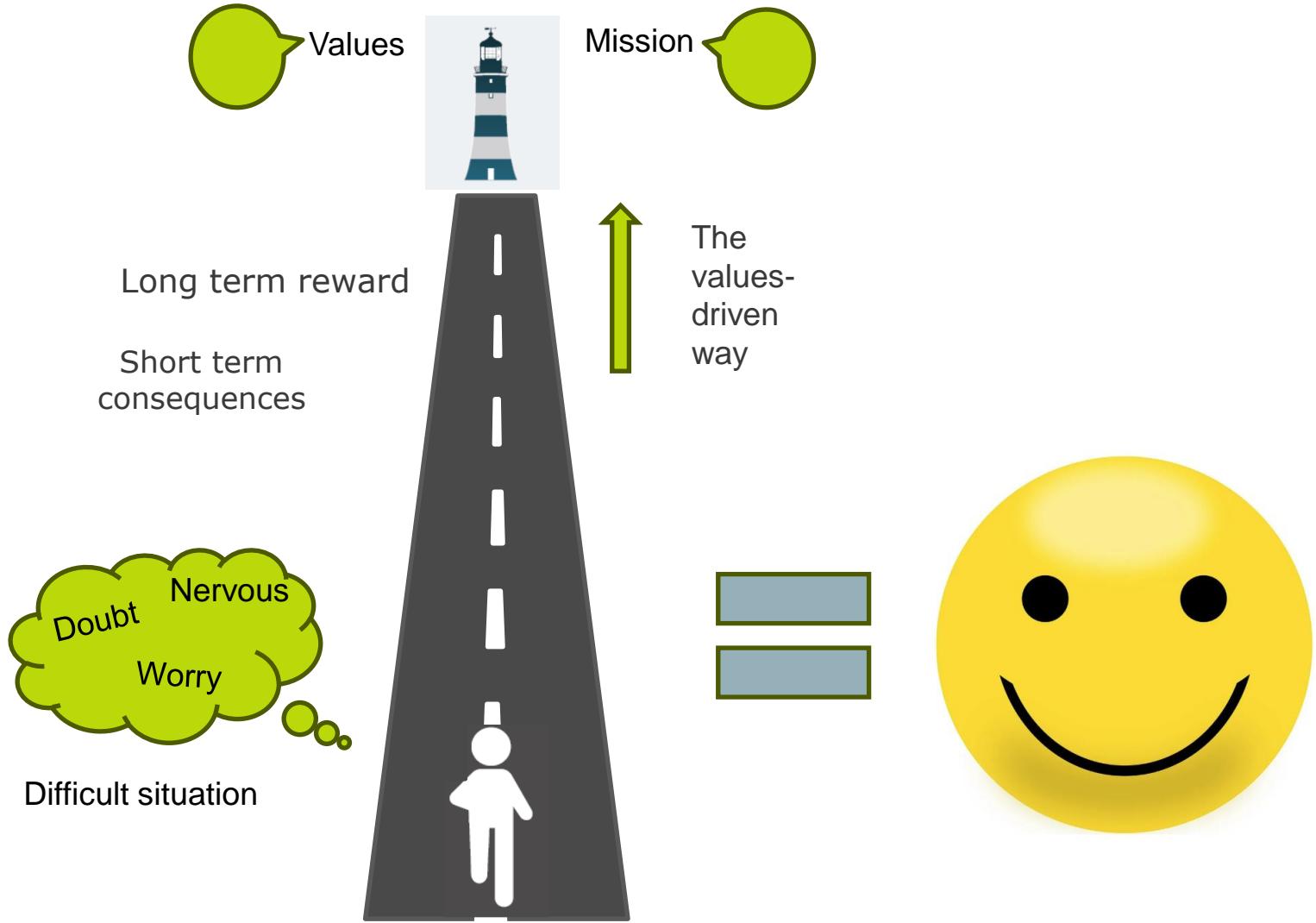


The values-driven way







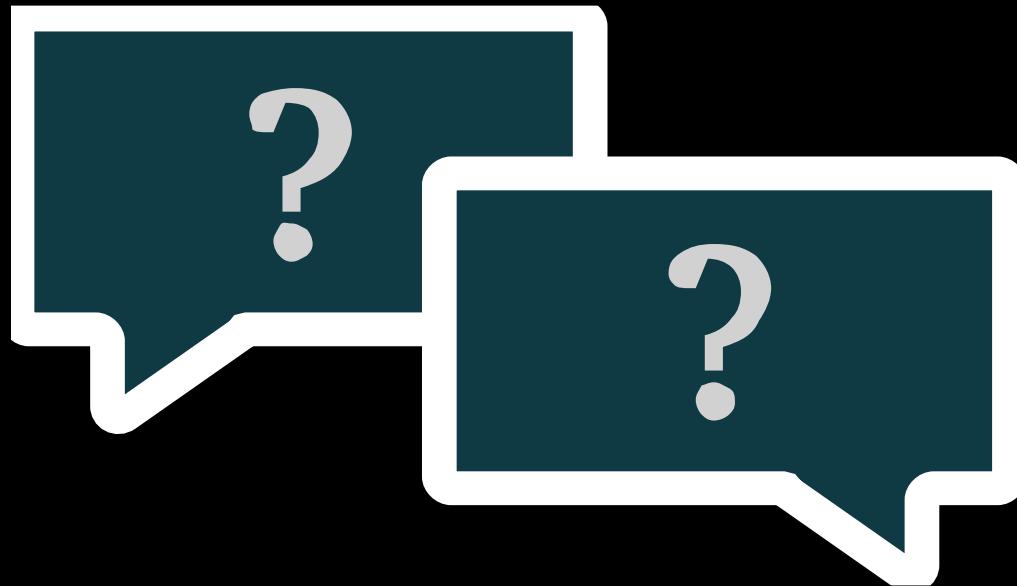




## Next steps – more tools...

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- Attention to the present moment – Mindfulness
- Diffusion strategies
- Visualization exercises
- Relaxation and breathing exercises
- Circle of concentration



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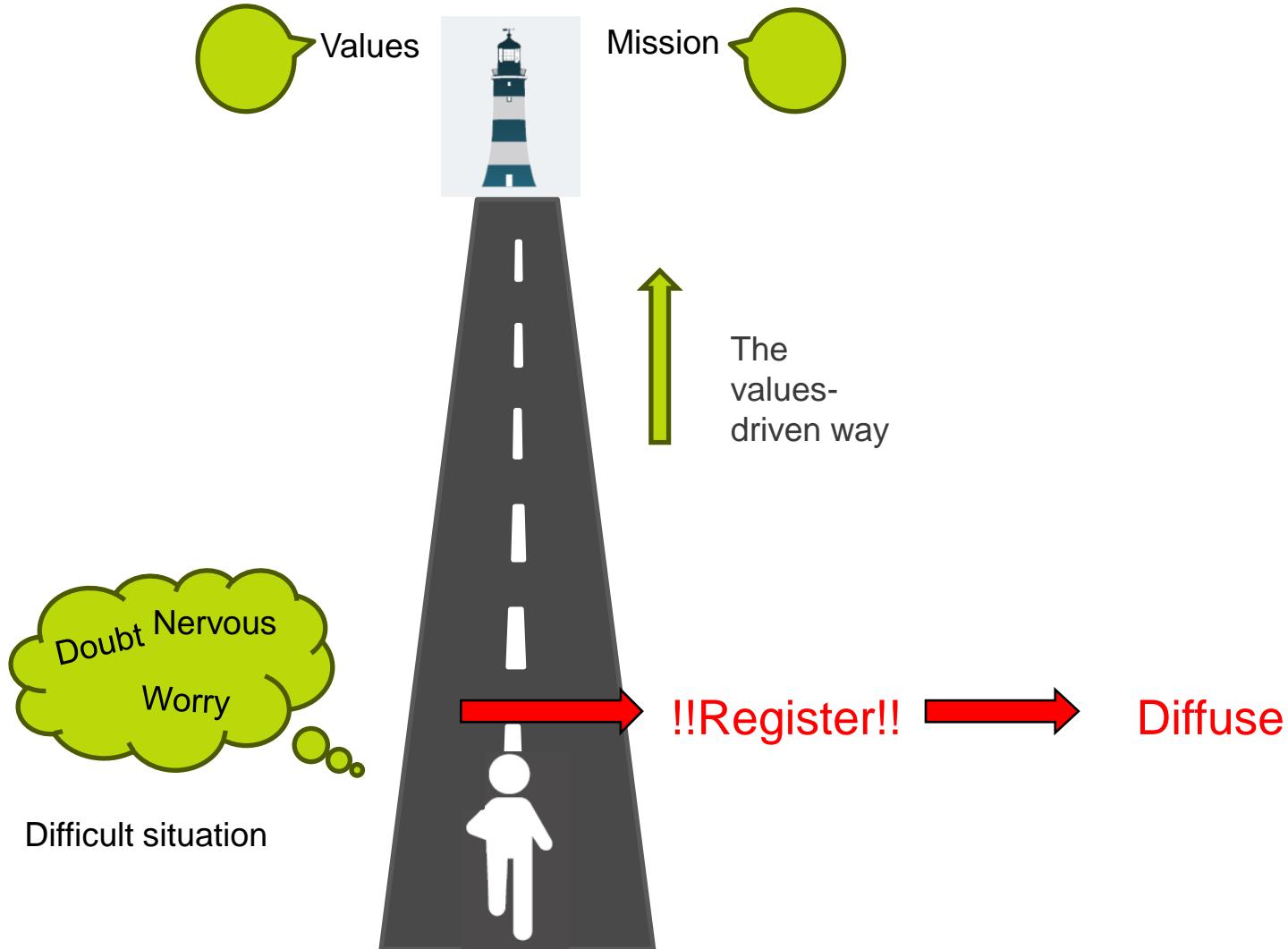
# Contact information

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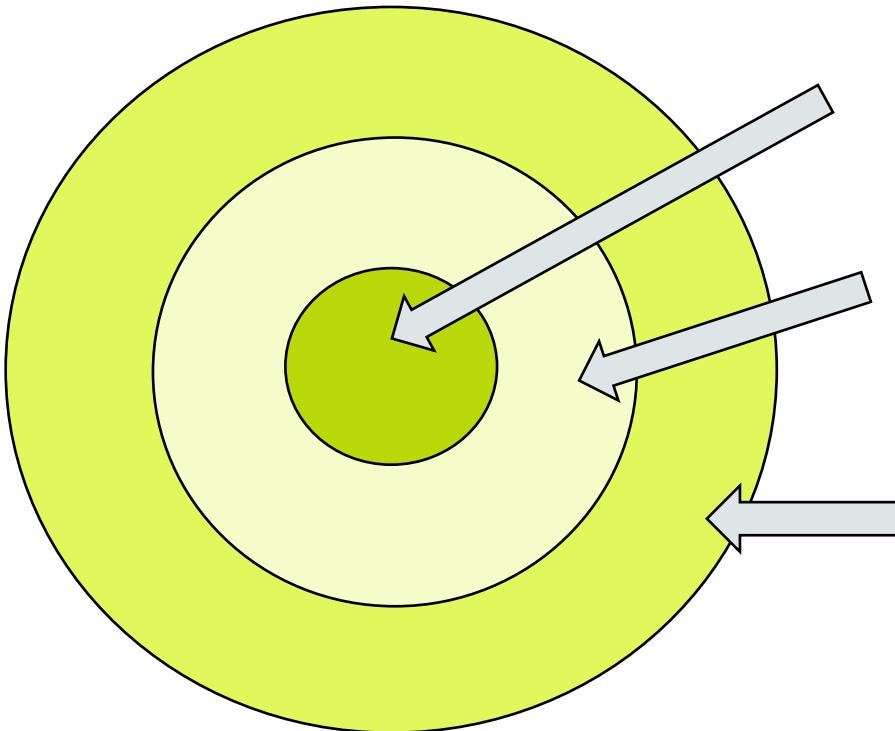
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# Circle of concentration



**Things I can control** How I am handling my traffic, my competences, my values, my attitude etc.

**Things I can influence** My relation to my instructor, my relation to the people around me: Colleagues, supervisor etc.

**Things that are outside my control** How the simulator is working, how the pilots are working etc.

## The Foundation: ATC

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- Our mental strength development training is based on the ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) Model
- The fundamental idea is that discomfort, nervousness, and other unpleasant feelings are unavoidable parts of the training to become an air traffic controller—and life in general
- We cannot eliminate those unpleasant feelings but we can learn to accept their presence while still performing our best during training or on the job
- The key takeaway in this model is that developing psychological flexibility should be your goal

