



## Shift Pressure to Precision With Recalibration

Can a simple shift in breathing help the mind stay sharp under pressure?

**A** breathing tool called recalibration offers a way to stay composed and in control during high-stress situations. This article defines recalibration, explains the breathing technique, explores the physiological mechanisms behind it, and demonstrates how recalibration supports Warrior Toughness.



An individual inhaling for 5 seconds and exhaling for 7 seconds

## Freeze or Flee

Whether on deck, during a drill, or at a podium, stress can overwhelm a person and trigger a freeze-or-flee state. LCDR Mike Greenburg, a Warrior Toughness Training Master and Clinical Psychologist (Psy.D., ABPP), details the effects he experienced from the pressure of public speaking.

“My brain shuts down. I am like an animal in the headlights. My brain has just completely dumped everything that I was hoping to talk about. And I’m watching as the crowd’s faces start to contort into horror. They start having this second-hand shame, ‘Oh my gosh, this guy’s going to bomb this whole presentation.’ I needed to keep myself calm, cool, and collected so I could retain my

cognitive function and my brain could still think.”

Many people experience moments like this when the pressure hits and stress begins to override the brain’s ability to function. Using recalibration makes a difference in these moments.

## Recalibration

The word recalibration often brings to mind images of fixing a misaligned sensor, adjusting a telescope lens, or resetting a digital compass. Typically, recalibration refers to tuning a piece of precision equipment to run in an optimal state.

In the context of Warrior Toughness, recalibration takes on a deeper, more personal meaning. Think of the human body as precision

equipment, capable, yet sometimes in need of refinement to perform at its best. Recalibration serves as the tool for Sailors to make real-time adjustments by controlling their breath. This breathing technique regulates the body’s stress response and promotes optimal performance in high-stakes environments.

## Performing Recalibration

Recalibration uses a breathing rhythm of inhaling for 5 seconds and exhaling for 7. The process begins with a slow inhale through the nose for 5 seconds. The nostrils open, air flows inward, the chest rises, and the lungs expand. The breath fills the lungs deeply and steadily. Nothing is rushed. The count begins. One... two... three... four... five. The body takes in as much air as possible.

Next comes the exhale, through the mouth for 7 seconds. The release is calm, even, and deliberate. Air escapes in a controlled stream, not all at once. The shoulders drop, the chest falls, and tension begins to leave the body. By the end of the 7 seconds, a noticeable shift occurs. The muscles loosen, the heart rate slows, and the breath feels smoother.

This cycle repeats three to five times. Attention remains fixed on the breath. In for five. Out for seven. Again. And once again. This is recalibration. Simple, effective, and grounding.

## Recalibration Requires Practice

Recalibration does not activate automatically after just one practice session. Like clearing a weapon malfunction under fire or completing a long-distance run, it requires deliberate, repeated training to build familiarity and instinct. The body and mind must be conditioned for the skill to become a muscle memory.

To be effective under pressure, recalibration requires consistent, intentional practice. Integrating it into daily activities, such as while driving, on watch, or during daily tasks, reinforces the muscle memory needed to make the technique instinctive.

With enough repetition, recalibration takes over in the moment, steadying the breath before panic can take hold. Instead of freezing or spiraling, the system responds: In for five. Out for seven. Calm. Focused. Ready.

## Counteracting Stress

Stress responses can manifest physically: tightened throat, dry mouth, shaking hands, and elevated heart rate. In these moments, effective performance depends on the body's ability to regulate itself and recalibration enables control.

The 5-7 breathing pattern activates the parasympathetic nervous system, a branch of the autonomic nervous system responsible for involuntary functions, such as heart rate and respiration. This system counteracts the physiological effects of stress and adrenaline, shifting the body out of a freeze-or-flee state and into one that remains calm, focused, and alert.



A Sailor on a ship looking out over the railing



You're engaging the parasympathetic part of your nervous system, and it's stimulating your brain to be down-regulating, relaxing, and getting into a comfortable space.

LCDR Mike Greenburg, Warrior Toughness Training Master  
Clinical Psychologist (Psy.D., ABPP)

Once activated, the parasympathetic system initiates a series of responses: slower heart rate, reduced blood pressure, deeper breathing, muscle relaxation, and decreased adrenaline production. These changes restore cognitive clarity and support focused performance, even under extreme pressure.

Through controlled breathing, recalibration stabilizes both body and mind, preventing freeze responses or overstimulation during high-stress moments.

## Recalibration in Action

If stress causes sensory overload and triggers cognitive shutdown, performance suffers, and mission readiness is compromised.

Fortunately, with consistent training, recalibration activates automatically the moment stress begins to rise, before it hijacks focus and decision-making.

This often occurs just before high-pressure situations such as delivering a brief, responding to an emergency, or stepping into a critical evolution. It also kicks in mid-event, when tension peaks and clarity begins to slip. As the heart rate climbs and breathing shortens, the trained response engages, steady breath in for five, controlled breath out for seven, stabilizing the system without conscious thought.

Recalibration continues to serve after the stress passes. Even when the threat has ended, the nervous system can remain elevated.



You can utilize recalibration in the most stressful kind of environments. As corny as it sounds, your breath alone has so much power to not only down-regulate but also increase your energy levels.

LCDR Mike Greenburg,  
Warrior Toughness Training Master  
Clinical Psychologist (Psy.D., ABPP)



Sailors on a ship firing at targets

Here too, the trained breathing rhythm re-engages, gradually restoring composure and operational readiness.

Whether before, during, or after a high-stress moment, recalibration, once embedded through repetition, regulates the response, preserves clarity, and sustains performance under pressure.

### What Recalibration Is Not

Recalibration does not mean a person steps away, pauses, or takes a break when stress hits. It is not a Training Time Out (TTO), intentional recovery, or a quiet moment to reset. Recalibration is the opposite, staying in the moment and staying in the fight.

It is not a relaxation technique; it is a focus technique. Recalibration is not meditation; it is controlled reaction,

the trained ability to regulate the internal response without ever stepping away from the external demands. The person maintains clarity, control, and readiness.

The process is deliberate, not random. It works because the skill has been trained, repeated, and built into muscle memory. The breathing cycle activates automatically, without hesitation and without distraction from the task. Focus holds. Momentum continues.

### Precision Under Pressure

Despite its simplicity, recalibration ranks among the most important Warrior Toughness skills. When pressure spikes, technical skills and tactical training lose value without mental clarity and control. Recalibration ensures readiness regardless of conditions.



Firefighting, combat training, and surgery in action

When Sailors remain locked in, mentally and physically, they are better equipped to support those around them. A calm, focused teammate becomes a stabilizing force. Practicing recalibration is not just about individual performance; it is a commitment to the team's performance. One person's control can anchor many.

Recalibration down-regulates the stress response, stabilizes focus in the present moment, and builds long-term resilience. Frequent practice strengthens the Warrior Mindset by reinforcing the capacity to stay composed, decisive, and effective under pressure.

### **Fire, Focus, and Recalibration**

As FORCM Larry Lynch explains, recalibration helps Sailors stay calm and focused under pressure in high-stress situations like firefighting training.

"A lot of Sailors, me included, spend a lot of time in firefighting trainers, and that training environment is as close to real as it gets.

You're wearing your firefighting ensemble. You have your oxygen tank on, your mask on. The boots are normally too big and too heavy. Everything feels like it's 75 pounds. You step into the firefighting scene and then that heat just overwhelms you, sucks your breath away. But you activate that hose and you're charging down onto the fire.

You're doing the best that you can and then suddenly, everything just hits you at once. You become nervous, your breathing becomes heavy, and all you can do is your best to control your breath, to kind of slow yourself down in the moment. You can't just drop the hose and leave because the fire will grow and cause further damage.

You do what you can in the moment to apply your breathing to slow things down. Recalibrate there, on the spot. It's an effective method and can be difficult at times, but it'll get you back into the fight. Recalibration gets you focused on what you need to do, which is putting the fire out and saving the day like every good Sailor does.

## Wrap-Up

Recalibration ensures peak performance in high-pressure environments. Training the body to control breath creates the ability to control response and that keeps performance optimal when it matters most. Whether operating on the flight deck, conducting an underway replenishment, or fighting a fire, recalibration maintains mental clarity, steadies the system, and enhances operational precision.

But success does not come without practice.

Five in. Seven out. Breathe. Repeat. Succeed.

The infographic is titled "WARRIOR TOUGHNESS" in large yellow letters at the top. Below the title, the word "Recalibration" is written in white. The central image shows a firefighter in a dark suit and helmet, with glowing blue lines representing breath entering and leaving their lungs. The lungs are highlighted in orange and yellow. Text on the left side reads: "Don't Stop to Recalibrate" and "Performed in the Moment". Text on the right side reads: "Inhale Slowly Through the Nose for 5 Seconds", "Exhale for 7 Seconds", and "Repeat". At the bottom of the infographic, it says "Control your breath; command your mind." There are logos for "TOTAL NAVY SAILOR FIT TO FIGHT" and "CULTURE AND FORCE RESILIENCE". A QR code is present with the text: "Scan this QR code to learn more about Warrior Toughness, or visit [www.mynavyhr.navy.mil](http://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil) for more information."

Warrior Toughness Recalibration infographic

For more information, check out the videos and podcast about Recalibration.



SCAN THE QR CODE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT  
**WARRIOR TOUGHNESS**