

MIND MINGLE MINI

THE
ELEPHANT SEAL
PRINCIPLE

*Simple truths for living sustainably
in a world that never stops.*

REST

BOUNDARIES

ENOUGH

RENEWAL

RETURN



A LITTLE BOOK WORTH SHARING.

For yourself.

For someone you care about.

For the people you work with.



Ideas that make you stop for a
moment and think:

“Yes. That’s actually true.”

TAKE A BREATH. COME ASHORE. THEN RETURN.

A note before we begin

We live in a world that rewards constant activity. We are expected to be available, responsive, productive and busy. But I have started to question whether busy is really the same thing as valuable.

The elephant seal became a powerful metaphor for me because it does something humans often struggle to do: it follows a rhythm. It spends enormous energy in the ocean, then comes ashore. It rests. It renews. It moults. Then it returns.

The question behind this little book is simple:

How do I work, play, contribute, grow and look after myself responsibly without running myself into the ground?

The core message: we are not designed to live at maximum output all the time.

1. You don't have to be indispensable

When I stepped away from a senior role in the corporate world, I expected that my departure would create a significant gap. I suppose part of me imagined somebody would phone and say, “The business is going to fold without you.”

They didn't.

Life continued as if I had never been there.

It was uncomfortable. But it was also liberating.

Most of us are replaceable in our roles. That doesn't mean we are without value. It means our value cannot depend on being indispensable.

If my worth is not determined by my role, then what is it determined by?

I have learned to value what I bring, rather than constantly comparing myself with what somebody else does better.

Simple truth: Your worth is not determined by how difficult you are to replace.

2. Busy does not mean productive

I hear people say, "I am exhausted. I am constantly tired. I run in circles."

We are busy with work, home, social interactions and commitments. Mostly, we are busy with work.

We don't allow ourselves enough time to simply be. To talk. To think. To read. To sit in the sun.

I have even heard of people keeping waterproof boards in their showers so they can write down an idea or remember something they have forgotten.

At some point, we have to ask ourselves: is this normal?

The elephant seal doesn't seem to struggle with this. It throws sand over its body, wiggles a little and rests.

Rest needs to become part of the rhythm, not something squeezed into whatever time is left over.

Key question: When did being tired become evidence of success?

3. Rest is not something you earn

One of the worst messages we have taught ourselves is: “You can rest when you're dead.”

Dead is dead.

Why wait until life has forced you to stop?

We often treat time off as a reward for working hard enough. We feel guilty when we leave early. We work through weekends. We work from bed because we are recovering and think we may as well work.

But the elephant seal asks nobody's permission to rest.

Rest is not a prize at the end of the race. It is part of the race.

Simple truth: You do not have to earn recovery.

4. Enough keeps moving

“When I have R2 million in the bank, I will be happy.”

Then life happens.

“When I am a manager, I will be happy.”

“When I have my own house.”

“When the children are grown.”

“When the university fees are paid.”

The target keeps moving.

I used to buy a new car because it gave me a feel-good moment. Looking back, I think some of that money could have served me better later.

I have also realised that walking in nature or swimming in the ocean can give me far more emotionally than buying another outfit.

Enough is not always a number.

Enough can be enough time. Enough connection. Enough health. Enough laughter. Enough learning.

Key question: What does enough look like for you today?

5. Your body is talking

Sometimes the warning signs are surprisingly ordinary.

You don't sleep properly. You feel tired all the time. You don't want to go out. You don't want to talk to people. You are functioning, but something feels off.

I love a word my German neighbour uses when she is tired: “shlap”. I started using it too. Somehow giving tiredness a name

made it more acceptable to say, “I am tired.”

Perhaps we have created a culture where tired is simply normal.

Our bodies can tell stories that nobody else can see.

I learned this later than I wish I had.

Listen earlier.

**Key question: If your body could speak,
what would it say?**

6. No is not a swear word

For a long time, I was the person people gave things to because I was always willing to do them.

“If you want anything done, give it to the busiest person.”

That was me.

Eventually I realised I wasn't doing anyone a favour by being the pack horse for everyone and everything.

Being available is not the same as being endlessly available.

I now think of energy almost like money. We are careful about what we spend money on. Why aren't we equally careful about what we spend our energy on?

What gives you energy? What makes you happy?

I can answer those questions much more easily now: walking in nature, working in my garden, learning something new, spending time with friends, going to a wine farm on a weekday, and

sometimes simply sitting and being.

Simple truth: Protect your energy as carefully as your money.

7. What makes you come alive?

The things that make you happy deserve space in your life.

I love making clothes. I love being creative and turning ideas into action. I have an inquisitive mind and naturally ask, “What can be done better?”

Walking in nature makes me feel alive too. I recently hiked through a hilltop area near where I live. I hadn't done anything like that for about forty years.

I made it.

I felt proud. I saw the world from a different and beautiful view. I met new people and found a group of hikers I want to join again.

Renewal doesn't need to be expensive.

Read a book. Start a book club. Walk with friends. Learn a language. Volunteer. Try something you have never tried.

Make space for wonder.

**Key questions: What gives you energy?
What makes you happy? What have you
stopped doing that once made you feel
alive?**

8. Strategic withdrawal

The elephant seal draws the line when nature tells it to. It has a rhythm it cannot ignore.

We often wait until our bodies force the issue.

Strategic withdrawal means choosing to pause before life chooses for us.

Schedule recovery like you schedule the dentist, school meetings or a haircut. Start saying no. Let the people you live with carry some of the responsibility. Step back intentionally.

Lying in bed reading a book while everyone else is watching a game is not necessarily bad manners. Sometimes it is self-care.

I have learned that I need to disengage temporarily, switch off social media and allow myself to stop carrying everything.

I wish I had understood that thirty years ago.

Key question: What are you refusing to stop that desperately needs a pause?

9. Come back stronger

When the elephant seal hauls out, its focus changes. It is no longer focused on eating, swimming and surviving. It is resting, rebuilding and preparing to return.

What could happen if we used our own haul-outs that way?

Maybe we would focus more clearly. Maybe our contribution would improve. Maybe our relationships would become stronger. Maybe we would have more ideas.

The fact that I took time out, opened myself to new ideas and interacted with people I didn't know is part of why I am writing this book.

Sometimes you don't know what becomes possible until you give yourself enough space to discover it.

Key question: What could you contribute if exhaustion was no longer driving your life?

Your personal haul-out

Before you close this little book, take a few minutes.

What currently keeps you permanently at sea?

What drains you most?

What boundary have you stopped enforcing?

What kind of haul-out do you need?

Then choose one small thing.

One boundary to protect.

One recovery ritual to start.

One habit to stop.

One person to tell.

You don't need to redesign your entire life tomorrow.

Start by coming ashore.

**Your phone has a battery-saving mode.
Why don't you?**

Want to share a Simple Truth?

This little book isn't just for work. The ideas in it are about being human — so why not share one with someone who might need it?

□ **Share it with your team**

Use one of the truths to start a conversation about how you work, rest and support each other.

□ **Share it with your family**

Talk about what keeps each of you “at sea” and what helps you come ashore.

□ **Share it with a friend**

Sometimes someone we care about needs permission to pause more than they need another piece of advice.

□□□ **Share it with your children**

Help them learn early that being busy isn't the same as being valuable — and that rest is part of life.

□ **Use it for yourself**

Pick one Simple Truth and sit with it for a week.

**You don't have to use the whole book.
Sometimes one simple truth is enough
to start a different conversation.**

If you'd like to explore these ideas more deeply in a workplace or team setting, the Power of Strategic Retreat learning experience takes the conversation further.

**The Mini starts the conversation. The
keynote takes it deeper.**

The Elephant Seal Principle

You do not have to prove your worth through constant activity. You do not have to earn rest. You do not have to wait for retirement, your graduation, getting married, the next promotion or some imaginary “tomorrow” before you start living. Don't wait for tomorrow. The goal is not to do less. The goal is to live sustainably so that you can continue contributing meaningfully for the long haul. Nature already understands rhythm. Perhaps we can learn to follow it too.

Know when to swim. Know when to come ashore.

One last seal note

Elephant seals are not the only seals that haul out. Hauling out is a normal behaviour across many seal species, used for things such as resting, regulating body temperature, moulting, breeding and caring for pups. The elephant seal simply gives us a particularly memorable way to think about our own need for rhythm and recovery.

Source: NOAA Fisheries



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ABOUT THIS LITTLE BOOK

The Elephant Seal Principle is a Mind Mingle Mini
— a small collection of Simple Truths about
rhythm, rest, boundaries, renewal and
sustainable living.

Written by Daleen van Rensburg
Mind Mingle • Different Minds. Better Together.

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