EXERCISE

## Blueprinting My Autonomic Home

### OVERVIEW

Let's give you the opportunity to draw out your autonomic home and gain an in-depth understanding of its internal landscape. Cognitively, you may already understand your neural networks after reading about them. This mapping exercise will provide a visceral experience. Blueprinting My Autonomic Home allows you to don your scientist's glasses of curiosity to gain an embodied experience and more clarity about the unique features of your neural states. The mapping exercise below is adapted from Deb Dana's Personal Profile Map and enhanced to fit the workplace.[1]

Once you are able to gain a deeper felt sense of your own inner home with mapping, you will be able to answer this question in real-time: "Right now, where am I in my autonomic home?"

- To get started, download and print out the Blueprinting My Autonomic Home worksheet (2 pages) from mammalsatwork.net/exercises. If you don't have access to a printer, just draw a basic outline of a house with three levels and a roof on one side of a blank piece of paper. Do the same on the backside.
- Now, before you start the exercise, take a big stretch up, shake out your hands, and let out a long sighing breath for 7 to 8 seconds with your belly muscles. One more time. And now... time to settle in.

### TAKING STOCK OF EACH FLOOR

For each floor of your autonomic home, you can reflect on the questions and respond. First, you will focus on the middle floor (sympathetic); next on the neural basement (dorsal vagal); and then you will climb the stairs to eat *CAKE* on the top floor (ventral vagal). Write your responses on your worksheet in the space representing each floor. Let's get started.

**Sympathetic Nervous System**

On the middle floor, ponder the experience of "The one time that I felt the most stressed at work because I did not have enough time was." Record your response under the question.

- Then, while recalling and holding the "stressed" experience viscerally, respond to the 5 Questions for Each Neural State. Jot down your answers in the remaining floor space. All answers are welcomed, whatever rings true for you.

**5 QUESTIONS FOR EACH NEURAL STATE**

1. What happens in your body and face? This is the felt sense (interoception) of your tissues, organs, muscles, and insides.
2. What do you feel (remember to use emotion words) in this neural state?
3. What do you typically think and do (thoughts, actions, words) from this neural state?


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- Turn the page over and respond to the following statements about your Autonomic Stories.

4. From this neural state, "I am _____."
5. From this neural state, "The world is _____."

**Dorsal Vagal Network**

Now move down a floor to the neural basement and ponder the experience of "What is the main thing that repeatedly depletes my energy at work?" Record your response under the question.

- Once you absorb your "depleting" visceral experience, answer the 5 Questions for Each Neural State on the space of the neural basement.

Next, we are going to move up two floors to the ventral vagal network where *CAKE* is served. To get there from the basement, you need to mobilize. Take a deep breath, stand up, stretch and wiggle your arms in the air, cross your hands to rub your upper arms or give yourself a hug, and let out a big, gentle sigh. Check in and do it again if you want to gain a stronger grip on the top floor.

**Ventral Vagal Network**

Once you're safely on the top floor, reflect upon a time "In the last few weeks, what is one thing that made me feel appreciated at work?" Record your response under the question.

- Inwardly savoring the *CAKE* experience, write down your answers to the 5 Questions for Each Neural State in the ventral vagal floor space.

## REFLECTIONS OF YOUR BLUEPRINT

After mapping your autonomic home, take a minute to review your responses and tap any insights about your nervous system in the workplace. Returning to the end of Chapter 3 in the book, you will read about others' feedback and "aha!" moments after mapping their autonomic homes.

1 Dana, D. (2018). The polyvagal theory in therapy: Engaging the rhythm of regulation (Norton series on interpersonal neurobiology). WW Norton & Company.


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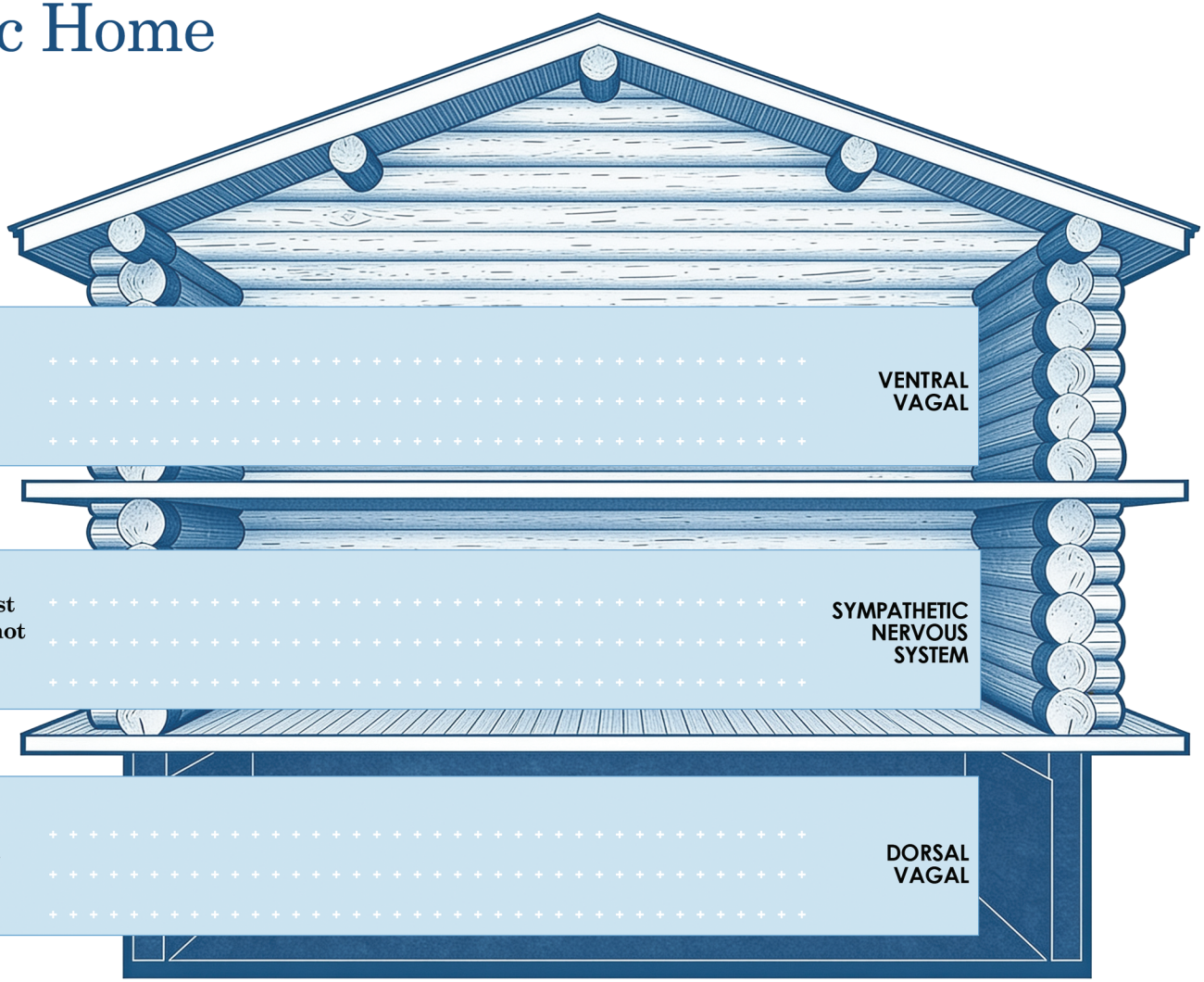
# Blueprinting My Autonomic Home

- Physical Sensations
- Feelings (Emotions)
- Inner Thoughts + Words

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Excerpted from ***Mammals at Work***

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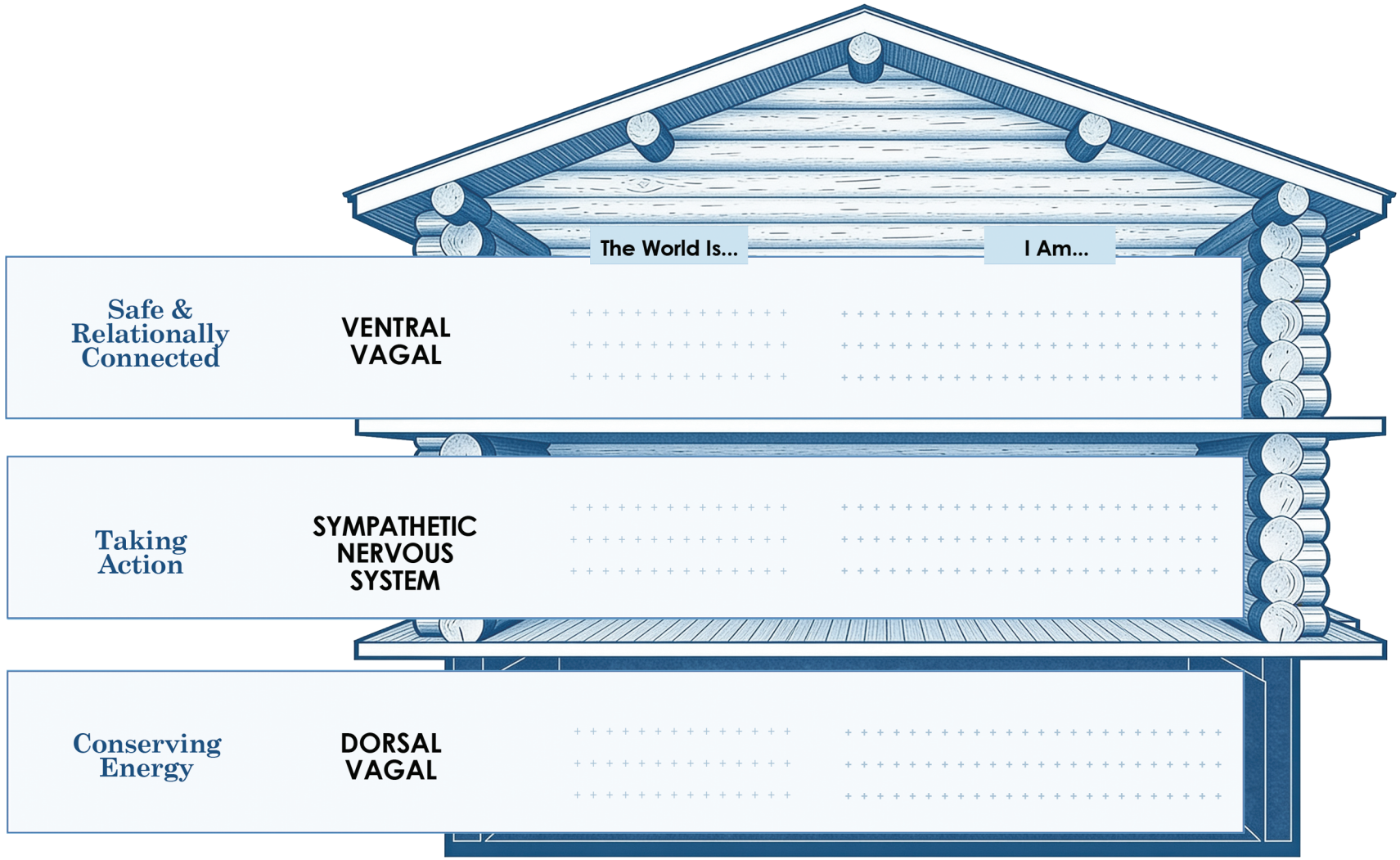
# Autonomic Stories

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