

# Theory, Research & Application

## Exploring One-Up and One-Down Roles through Body Awareness

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**This title was used for a two day workshop at the SCT conference in San Francisco last year. In this article, I present key elements from the workshop – focusing on how awareness of low energy and tension in the body can be an element in getting to know one-up and one-down roles – and in shifting from a stuck role to taking up our member role.**

An example of getting to know and negotiate a one-up role: right at this moment when starting to write this article I notice tension in my neck and upper back. When I pay attention to the tense parts, I discover that I am on the edge of going into a one-up role of “I know better”, “I am going to teach you how to do role-work”.

I slow myself down and I get curious about other reactions in my body.

The tension in my neck and upper back locks my capacity to orient – my vision gets narrow, I lose awareness of the context I am in. I discover tension in my arms too – I am tapping the letters on the computer with extra firmness. I am putting a punch into my writing.

I then ask myself: where am I distant in my body? Which parts of my body have gone into low energy? I track low energy on the inside of my thighs, the surface of my lower back and to some extent around my center.

**T**his is a body-based way of getting to know my one-up role, which can be added to the ways described in the SCT role-protocol, where the emphasis lies most on naming the role, getting to know the behavior and the assumptions present in the role.

What do I gain from getting to know my one-up role through tracking tension and low energy?

As soon as I track the low energy areas under the dominant tensions, I am already on my way out of the role. I experience the loss of presence in the one-up role directly in my body. I feel the reality of losing parts of myself when I am in the role. Said in a different language: tracking low energy within the one-up role loosens my identification with the role – my perception of the role gets grounded through body sensation.

When I notice the low energy state in my inner thighs, the support muscles in my lower back and around my core, I feel empathy with myself. And emotions emerge – I notice that I am sad and shaky. Did I make negative predictions when starting to write this article?

Yes, I did. I am writing under time pressure. I want to do it and I don't really have time for it. I made an unconscious negative prediction of not being able to finish this, not being able to do it in a way that will be accepted by the editors.

I slow down, settle into the here and now. I feel a lot of energy on the edge of the unknown now. Tracking my low energy areas within the one-up role took me straight to what I wasn't aware of, when I pushed myself to start writing: sadness, anxiety, negative predictions.

I can take a step more in tracking what was held in both the tense and the low energy areas: Which impulses emerge when the pattern starts opening up? My arms feel like relaxing and also playing – they are okay with writing right now, feels like playing an instrument. Sadness emerges from my lower back, I have an impulse to lean into support. I remember that I will get contact in this writing process when sending it to the editors. I am not alone. When my core gets more energy I feel an impulse to move forward and stay oriented to time and space. I have 20 minutes left for writing right now. My neck muscles relax with this orientation – and I also feel the frustration and anger with real life limitations.

The above example points to a hypothesis that I find support for in my work: *One-up roles are held bodily by a combination of tension and low energy. Tension is typically dominant, meaning that quite a lot of tension in muscles is needed to keep us in a one-up position. In the same time other parts of the body go into low energy, diffusing emotions and impulses, keeping parts of us out of consciousness while we push through in one-up styles.*

**S**taying a little longer with the above example, I notice that tracking my low energy areas brings me to the realization that under my one-up role lies a one-down role that becomes visible when I name my negative predictions, and also when I feel the lack of presence in my core and in my support muscles. The message from these parts of my body when they are in low energy is: I feel weak, not capable enough, dependent on the good will of somebody else. I

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don't expect any support – I feel alone.

One-up and one-down roles come in pairs – both inside of us and amongst us.

*Summary.* The following steps can be added to the process of getting to know a role. When you have become aware of being in a one-up or a one-down role and you have decided to explore it, you can ask yourself: where in my body do I notice tension? In which muscle groups? And where in my body do I notice low energy? In which muscle groups?

Start with tension if you are exploring a one-up role – and with low energy if you are exploring a one-down role. What happens emotionally, when you sense and see that your stuck role is maintained bodily by a combination of tension and low energy? Do any emotions emerge? How do you feel for yourself when seeing this inner system dynamic?

Modifying both tension and low energy can support the process of stepping out of a stuck role – (look into the protocols for undoing tension and low energy to get ideas for how to do that). Notice if emotions or impulses become available. What emotions emerge from the parts of your body that were tense, and what do those parts want to do? And do emotions emerge from the parts that were in low energy, and what do those parts want to do?

**A**nother example from my here and now context. This is the last day of a long summer break with both time off and time for writing and administrative work. My husband and I are packing today to go home to Copenhagen and my busy schedule starts in 2 days. I notice a sinking feeling in my body, like falling backwards. I am going one-down to the amount of work I am facing and to all the people who want something from me.

What is going on in my muscle system with that??

When I start paying concrete attention to my body, the sinking and falling feelings slow down, like they are put on hold. Concrete awareness of my body prevents me from identifying with the one-down role. I notice low energy in the front of my trunk and in my arms, especially on the back side – leaving me with diffuse boundaries to what I am facing. “I can't do it” or “Too weak” could be the name of the role.

The hypothesis named above points to stuck roles being held by a combination of tension and low energy. In one-down roles, low energy is typically dominant and tension is hidden. Based on this hypothesis, I get curious about tense areas in my body. I notice that I am biting my front teeth a little bit, which means that I am tensing up on the front side of my throat. I notice a stiffness in my calves – I am holding on to the ground. What is held in the tense parts – and what is held in the low energy parts in this one-down role?

First of all – tracking that both are there impacts me. I no longer feel identified with the role – I am exploring it and discovering that a polarity is held in it. I am getting aware of my

inner system dynamic. When I focus on biting my front teeth, a light sense of anger or resentment emerges. I don't like the situation I am in right now. I start acknowledging that part of me is protesting against it.

I am inviting energy into the front side of my body by gently pushing my fingertips into each other. My front side feels more gathered and protected. I am here. My arousal goes down.

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When I focus on biting my front teeth, a light sense of anger emerges

An impulse emerges in my arms – I want to push, slowly outwards, establishing my space. I still feel weak in my arms, but I also feel that I am able to push. I am here and I can do one thing at a time. My calves start relaxing. I can ground in reality, though it is frustrating right now.

So what benefit can we get from including awareness of low energy and tension in the exploration of a one-down role?

As mentioned above, low energy is typically dominant in a one-down role – and tension is hidden. To track and name low energy areas supports exploration in a concrete way. We can observe the body instead of just being it. I think in SCT language, this would be called that we take up our member role in our person system. Tracking the polarity of tension and low energy in the role further supports the member role. I start seeing a pattern, I start seeing the inner system dynamic that is active in keeping me in the role.

Knowing that I can bring energy into low energized areas, and through that modify the defense, is a key component in the process.

**L**ow energy very easily takes us into one-down roles – and if I don't know how to modify this defense, I easily go helpless to it, which risks to deepen the one-down position.

In the above example – pushing my fingertips lightly into each other modified the low energy state on the front side of my body – and I regained access to my body-based sense of boundaries. In my experience – knowing this possibility makes it easier to explore and get out of one-down roles.

Time has passed – I have had fun writing this article – and now it is time to attend to the larger context of packing and cleaning the house.

I have submitted a proposal for doing the same workshop at the 2015 SCT Conference in Philadelphia.



