

MOVE OR DIE

How the Sedentary Life Is
Killing Us and How Movement,
Not Exercise, Can Save Us

Tim Sitt



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Contents

Introduction: The Power of Movement	xiii
1. The Philosophy of the Freedom of Movement	xiv
2. The Problem of Sitting Is a Problem of Not Listening to the Body	xv
3. Moving from a Workplace to a Lifeplace	xviii
4. Movement Education	xxi
5. How This Book Works	xxiii
1 ThinkMOVE: An Origin Story (and How to Begin)	1
1. How Did ThinkMOVE Come to Be?	1
2. Why Is Sitting So Bad?	8
2.1 It's about movement, not exercise	10
2 The Business Case for Movement	14
1. To Be Profitable and Sustainable, You Need Health	16
2. Leaders Need to Lead with Care First and Cost Second	18
3. Practicing Movement at Work Is about Making Choices and Reacting Less	21

4.	The Four Business Drivers for Incorporating Healthy Movement in the Workplace	22
5.	The Financial Cost of Sitting	24
6.	The Benefits of Movement on Organizational Health	25
7.	The Benefits of a Healthy Work Culture	28
8.	Productivity: Movement Isn't a Break from Working, It Is a Way of Working	28
3	Transforming the Sedentary Work Culture	31
1.	Our Sedentary Ways and the Traditional Model of Exercise	33
2.	Current Solutions Actually Create Barriers to Health	34
3.	Rethinking Exercise: Who Has Time to Exercise, Anyway?	34
4.	The Culture of Ideal Body Images	37
5.	Advances in Technology and the Mind/Body Chasm	38
6.	A Vision for a New Work Culture	42
7.	Moving towards a Healthy Future	42
8.	Cultural Transformations Experienced through ThinkMOVE (or, Testimonials for Starting Your Own Program)	44
4	The Science of Healthy Movement: How Moving a Little Can Transform Your Health	45
1.	The Three Pillars of ThinkMOVE	46
1.1	Pillar 1: Frequent informal breaks from sedentary time reduce health risk	47
1.2	Pillar 2: Frequent BREAKS of formal movement improve metabolism	50
1.3	Pillar 3: A little bit of high-intensity movement will help you get fitter and stronger	52
1.4	What is the least amount of exercise I can do?	53
2.	How All of This Looks in ThinkMOVE	56
2.1	ThinkMOVE method incorporates HIIT	56
2.2	Cardio breaks	57
3.	Variety Is the Spice of Life	57

5	The Process of Change and Overcoming Resistance to Movement	60
1.	The Top Ten Resistances to Movement at the Office and How to Overcome Them	62
2.	The Satir Change Model	65
2.1	Status quo	66
2.2	The foreign element	67
2.3	Chaos	67
2.4	Transforming idea	68
2.5	Practice and integration	69
2.6	The new status quo	70
3.	Ten Powerful Choices to get you MOVE-ing!	71
3.1	Choose YOU by prioritizing yourself and your health	72
3.2	Choose to MOVE wherever, whatever, whenever (health integration)	72
3.3	Choose to create balance	73
3.4	Choose to be resilient and start again	73
3.5	Choose to be embodied	73
3.6	Choose to connect	74
3.7	Choose to MOVE in ways that work for you	74
3.8	Choose compelling goals	75
3.9	Choose to be positive	75
3.10	Choose to have fun	75
4.	MOVE-ing at Work Isn't a Break from Work: It Is a WAY of Working	75
6	An Overview of the ThinkMOVE Program	78
1.	What Is a MOVE Break?	79
2.	The Goals of the ThinkMOVE Program	79
3.	Who is ThinkMOVE for?	80
4.	The Five Elements of MOVE	81
4.1	Body awareness	81
4.2	Strength	81
4.3	Cardio	82

4.4	Flexibility	82
4.5	Balance/core	82
5.	Psychological Benefits of the Five Core Elements	82
5.1	Body awareness	83
5.2	Strength	83
5.3	Cardio	83
5.4	Flexibility	84
5.5	Balance	84
6.	Sustainable Engagement with MOVE, or Creating a Long-Term Relationship with Your Health	85
7.	Program Orientation	86
7.1	Triggering skills	86
7.2	Celebrating/appreciating your efforts	87
8.	Program Weekly Outline	89
8.1	Lesson	89
8.2	Exercises	89
8.3	Practice	89
9.	Keep Calm and Move On	89
10.	Week One: Body Awareness	90
10.1	Week one lesson: Steps to body awareness	92
10.2	Week one exercise: Body awareness	95
10.3	Week one practice	97
10.4	MOVE Skill: Scheduling	99
10.5	How to schedule MOVE breaks	100
10.6	Scheduling methods	101
10.7	Move: Focus on body awareness	102
11.	Week Two: Flexibility and Breathing	102
11.1	Week two lesson	102
11.2	Week two exercises: Belly breathing and flexibility	105
11.3	Week two practice	111
12.	Week Three: Balance and Healthy Positions	112
12.1	Week three lesson	112

12.2	Week three exercises	118
12.3	Week three practice	125
13.	Week Four: Strength and Stringing	128
13.1	Week four lesson	129
13.2	Week four exercise: Stringing	131
13.3	Week four practice	135
14.	Week Five: Cardio and Stringing	137
14.1	Week five lesson	137
14.2	Week five exercise: Cardio	139
14.3	Week five practice	139
15.	Week Six: Whole Body Integration	141
15.1	Week six lesson	142
15.2	Week six exercise: Combining what you've learned	144
15.3	Week six practice	145
7	Health Defined	149
1.	Health Spending	151
2.	The Healing Side of Health	154
3.	Optimizing Health: Spend Wisely, Heal Frequently	156
8	Health Resource Self-Assessment (HRSA)	158
9	Final Thoughts: The Freedom to MOVE Forward	164
1.	The Freedom of MOVEMENT Charter	164
2.	Moving towards Goals	166
3.	Now It's Up to You	167
	Appendix: Personal Health Declaration and the Freedom to MOVE	173
	Part I: Freedoms	174
	Part II: Vision	175
	Download Kit	176

Exercises

1	Take a Stand Against Sitting	13
2	How Much Do You Sit?	13
3	Move during the Day	18
4	Motivating towards Movement: Reflection Questions and Experiments	59
5	Where Are You?	77
6	Body Awareness	91
7	Benefits and Steps to Body Awareness	93
8	Questions to Ask Yourself That Will Give You Windows into Body Awareness	94
9	Triggers	98
10	Schedule	101
11	Personalized Goals for Flexibility	112
12	How Are You Using Your Body Right Now?	118
13	Top Three Triggers for MOVEMENT	143
14	Specific Goals	146
15	Two Questions	156
16	Health Resource Spending Assessment (HRSA)	159
17	Moving towards Goals Worksheet	168

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Dedication

For my wife, Le Le, who moves me every day.

*“Knowing is not enough, we must apply.
Willing is not enough, we must do.”*

— Bruce Lee

Introduction: The Power of Movement

At some point, all of us have struggled to maintain our health whether trying to stay fit, recovering from illness, avoiding illness, or taking care of our mental health. *Move or Die* focuses on time spent sitting, not as a problem to eradicate, but as an opportunity: Start moving, and you can lead a healthier and happier life.

By judo-flipping our sedentary time, we can transform sitting time into an opportunity to enhance our health in ways that were not possible before. With a healthier workforce, organizations and companies experience more productivity and by extension, profit. The most difficult part is changing your mindset. After that, all you need to do is move.

This book is your guide to rethinking popular approaches to health, then opening the door to a new world of movement, different from traditional forms of exercise. It shows you how to incorporate movement throughout your day, elevating your energy, mood, and health.

By now, you may have heard that sitting is the new smoking. A large and growing body of research connects prolonged sitting and sedentary behavior with serious health problems like cancer, diabetes, obesity, and more. However, prolonged sitting doesn't only impact our physical health. The more we sit the more other aspects of us become rigid, like behavior, thinking, communication, and relationship patterns. The

problem of being sedentary is a symptom of a larger problem: a generalized stagnation resulting in the stiffening of bodies, the fixation of minds, the staleness of relationships, and the eventual disruption of growth throughout entire organizations.

This book introduces movement as a mindset. It will help you develop the skills to become aware of unhealthy patterns and help you explore choices to move towards healthier possibilities that allow for growth. Central to this work is the creation and pursuit of freedom of movement. Freedom is at the heart of many of our deepest values: freedom of choice, freedom to love whom we wish, financial freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the freedom to vote. We have yet to prioritize our bodies and movement in the same way, particularly in our working environments.

The freedom to move our bodies is central to experiences of optimal health. Movement is the key to accessing resources, creativity, and innovation that can otherwise be trapped when our bodies and our minds are locked in a sitting position for hours on end. When I am discussing movement, I am not just talking about physical movement but also psychological, relational, and organizational.

The relationship between physical health and other aspects of our lives should be obvious. We exist within bodies so it makes sense that if our bodies are stuck, other areas of our lives get stuck as well. Sitting down for long periods reduces blood flow and the production of hormones and neurochemicals. This has an impact on our mental health.

My hope is to inspire you to incorporate the power of movement into your day so you can transform your mind, body, relationships, and organizations by adding new energy, new perspectives, new strength, and an authentic experience of health. I will help you do this by teaching a philosophy of health called the Freedom of Movement. Life is a complex process that requires constant learning and growing: the freedom to move one's mind, body, and relationships is an important method for coping with challenges and facilitating growth.

1. The Philosophy of the Freedom of Movement

The power of movement is found in the freedom it can create for people who use and integrate it into their lives. I have discovered the freedom of movement in my own life. It has been a force that has given me more health, energy, and a deeper connection to myself. Here are a few of the lessons that will be elaborated upon throughout this book:

- There is no one right way to move. Be fluid and willing to experiment and explore until you find a way to incorporate movement that fits you and your life.
- There is always a choice as it relates to your health and body. People do not function in a healthy way when things are forced or when there are rigid rules of what they should or have to do. Having to sit still is one of those rigid rules that needs to be transformed and made into a choice instead of a mandate.
- Take responsibility for your health. No person, tool, gadget, or program can help move your body for you. Each individual needs to take responsibility to move. No one can be moved.
- Have no set patterns. Focus on keeping Freedom of Movement in all areas of your life. Avoid patterns which create stagnation. Create new moves every day as well as new thoughts, new relationships, and new methodologies. Keep things fresh. Keep focused on your purpose, which is your mission and vision, and update as needed.
- Your body is a part of nature so it contains a wealth of resources and wisdom. It is naturally oriented to move towards growth and healing. Simply learning to listen to its needs and responding appropriately is a large step towards health.
- Different domains of health interact dynamically so changes in one realm can lead to changes in the others, whether intended or not. For example, freeing the body can also free one's thinking.

This book helps you transform your sedentary time into an opportunity to improve your health through information, techniques, and skills that will empower you to incorporate movement throughout your day. While the practices are simple and usually only take a minute at a time, they challenge old beliefs and patterns. By learning the power of movement and the freedom it can provide, you will have more control of your mind, your choices and, most importantly, your health.

2. The Problem of Sitting Is a Problem of Not Listening to the Body

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), chronic diseases and conditions such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, obesity, and arthritis are among the most common, costly,

and preventable of all health problems. Research has shown significant connections between prolonged sitting and many chronic illnesses.

Beyond sitting, I believe that the source of these health problems begins when people disconnect themselves from their bodies. The position of sitting and the problem of being sedentary exemplifies this pattern of ignoring the body. The longer we sit hunched over keyboards facing screens without movement, the more unfamiliar we become with our bodies, their signals and needs. This internal pattern of being disconnected and not listening to our bodies can become a relationship pattern when individuals stop communicating their needs to their colleagues and managers within an organization or any system.

This dynamic of not listening to one's body perpetuates poor self-care because people begin to disconnect and distrust themselves and their environment. People with this kind of closed behavior become silent not only on matters that impact them personally like their health, but also on issues that directly impact the health of any business with which they are involved.

Without the ability to listen to our bodies and the ability to communicate openly with others, problems and concerns both personal and professional remain hidden until it is too late and employees experience burnout and need to take stress leave. Some companies try to incorporate health and wellness programs, but it is not yet well understood how health practices can be incorporated into the flow of daily work. The approaches are often singular, as they focus on the body separate from the activities of work. For example, offering gym memberships, or installing a gym in the space, or bringing in a yoga instructor. The body and health are still addressed in isolation from the rest of what is happening in the workplace. A healthy body, primarily through working out and going to the gym, becomes another pressure-filled task amongst an ever growing to-do list. It often falls to the bottom of that list instead of being integrated naturally into the flow of daily activities happening in the workplace.

The ThinkMOVE approach invites people to integrate the needs of their bodies throughout their workdays. This is done by emphasizing movement, not exercise, and incorporating many short breaks of movement throughout the day to offset sedentary time. This approach enhances the individual's health and their ability to work productively by adding focus and energy to the work day. By teaching self awareness, in particular body awareness skills, the ThinkMOVE program encourages motivated and self-directed movement breaks. By listening to

what is happening in the body and periodically asking what it needs, it is a short distance to resolving those needs. For example, instead of ignoring a sore back which could eventually become a herniated disc, an individual can choose to stand up and stretch for a minute every half hour to relieve the tension.

We can also make changes to our environment that can help. One simple change is to create spaces where people have the freedom to take whatever physical position (standing, sitting, moving, etc.), they want during the workday, and give them the freedom to change positions whenever needed. Freedom of Movement will help people take care of their bodies and express their individuality. This creates an organizational culture where people feel more empowered, autonomous, and relaxed.

One can imagine a group or company that practices this will be more likely to freely express their creative ideas as well as concerns about problematic processes happening in the company, compared to a group of sedentary office workers who strain their bodies to sit for ten or more hours a day, ignoring signals and never communicating needs because they do not feel safe or welcome to do so. Participants in the ThinkMOVE program report experiencing greater engagement with colleagues and across their company hierarchy. Research also demonstrates the relationship between exercise and creative thinking.

Companies that are not investing in their employees' health don't see how healthy bodies lead to healthy minds which relate to healthy relationships, and how taken together these connections positively impact the health and growth of a business. Each of these areas consists of various skills that make employees more competent including self/body awareness, communication skills, and clarity and commitment to the larger purposes and vision of the organization. Without all of these elements functioning in a healthy way, toxic and maladaptive patterns begin to develop within individual employees and between employees that can negatively impact the organization as a whole.

Imagine that Kevin, a 32-year-old computer programmer who is sedentary, overweight, and depressed, is working long hours, and is hardly able to keep up with his work. He can't find time to go the gym, let alone eat a healthy lunch. Unhealthy work processes persist for Kevin because there are organizational rules against commenting on the situation or complaining. There are unspoken rules in this company that good employees make sacrifices, work hard, work long hours, and never complain. The hardest working employees are perceived as those sitting

at their desks continuously without needing breaks. Kevin placates to his manager by accepting new projects without hesitation. He never voices or asserts his own needs or limitations as they relate to his body or mind. This situation continues to deteriorate as the quality of Kevin's health declines along with the quality and efficiency of his work. The lack of freedom to comment or even move could be the beginning steps towards the degradation of the company as many employees share Kevin's experience and talk about it in closed quarters. Morale lowers and the company's resilience and agility is lost.

The necessary paradigm shift is a transformation of perception; one that sees health not as a component that is separate from work but as the resource that makes work possible. The health of individuals, relationships, and the organization are all interconnected. Health as it relates to these different areas is just as, if not more, important than money. Money is an important indicator of the financial health of the organization just as blood pressure is an indicator of heart health, but health of the employees is truly the lifeblood of any company.

This book aims to guide individuals and companies towards listening and communicating honestly with themselves and each other so everyone feels respected and valued. In safety and acceptance, people become more open to communicating and sharing their needs. This requires a transformation in the way we think about the workplace.

3. Moving from a Workplace to a Lifeplace

"Work," "workplaces," "working out," being a "workaholic." All of this emphasis on work reminds me of the Greek myth of Sisyphus pushing a rock up a hill only to have it roll back down for eternity. Work without a meaningful purpose quickly turns into drudgery. I have never met anyone who works for work's sake; although I have seen many people stuck in this mindset. They have expectations about what work should be. That it should hurt or else it isn't really working. That it should be endured. That it shouldn't be fun or joyful.

When it comes to work, there is always a deeper purpose connected to life. Even working at jobs we aren't passionate about, we are providing for ourselves and our families in order to live. We are making a living. When we focus just on work and the workplace, we lose sight of a larger vision of life and how our daily activities are connected. In our devotion to work, we stop listening to our bodies. This becomes the source of many health problems. A singular focus on work squeezes out the possibility of health.

I am not a fan of work. I don't like putting the frame of "work" around all my daily activities; particularly the activities where I spend most of my time. To me, there is no life in that. Work or working hard becomes a barrier to life instead of being a part of life. For a long time, people have been trying to create work/life balance, but to balance one thing against another means they are distinct and separate.

The concept of 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. being for work and the rest of our life (family, hobbies, rest, exercise) needing to fall outside of this timeframe seems to be a recipe for disease. This artificial separation makes work so unappealing that I believe this is a major reason why a majority of people are unhappy at their jobs.

I no longer think about transitioning from work to life or from life to work. To me, there is no need for work/life balance because it is all life. I focus and do what needs to be done. Everything I do is all serving the same purpose: to live life to the fullest by helping to move the world. This way I don't spend time on things that are not supportive to my life or that are unacceptable to me. I simply do what I feel expands life as it relates to my vision and values and that is all.

Take a moment to reflect on why your company or the company you work for exists. Hopefully it is because it provides a product or service that makes life better for other people, the community or the environment. Hopefully this purpose fits with your goals and values and hopefully you are paid a living wage that enables you to take care of yourself and your family. This is all in service of life, not work.

Take a moment to reflect on the word "work." What associations does it conjure?

Some of the words that come up for me include: hard, chores, boring, painful, endless, tiring, not fun, disciplined, sweat, turmoil. I want to be clear: I'm not saying that there isn't a place for work or that these associations are inherently bad, but simply that negative experiences shouldn't be central. So what's the alternative?

What I propose is that we transform our workplaces into Lifeplaces. If we focus on how our activities create and improve life instead of just thinking about it as work, how much more of ourselves would we be willing to bring to this Lifeplace? Hard work is just one resource of many that belong in the Lifeplace. Other resources that people could bring could be creativity, commitment, intelligence, joy, and passion. How much more joy and commitment could people have for what they are doing if they could honestly tell themselves that they aren't just

going to work to work hard, but that they are moving towards and creating life?

Most employers would be happy to have employees who could bring such a rich version of themselves to serve their customers or clients. This is another way of describing employee engagement: Specifically that employees are free to show up as whole people, not just a compartmentalized workaholic version of themselves.

Personally, I am more than willing to work hard, to cry, and to bleed, if it brings something meaningful and positive into the world. I also want to bring my joy, commitment, creativity, fun, and love to that creation. This is the vision I have for healthy organizations. Making the choice to freely move our bodies and our minds makes so many more resources available to us that can be used to serve the mission, vision, and purpose of our Lifeplaces.

Taking a step back to reframe the language around work and focusing on life opens up new possibilities and invites new conversations. Instead of asking “What do you do for work?” we might begin to ask (ourselves first, then each other), “What do you do to create life or to connect to life?” or “What do you do to make life better for others?” or “What do you do that gives you the feeling of life or of being alive?” Calling it a Lifeplace creates space to include our physical, mental, and relationship health, alongside creating products and services that help make life better for others.

The master in the art of living makes little distinction between his work and his play, his labor and his leisure, his mind and his body, his education and his recreation, his love and his religion. He hardly knows which is which. He simply pursues his vision of excellence at whatever he does, leaving others to decide whether he is working or playing. To him he is always doing both.

— James A. Michener

As we have been discussing, there are several broad categories of health which we might further describe as psychological, physical, social, and organizational. Trying to address each of these areas separately is analogous to the story of the four blind men and the elephant. The story goes that there are four blind men trying to determine what the elephant is by feeling different parts of the animal. One of the blind men feels a leg and says the elephant is like a pillar. The one who feels the tail says the elephant is like a rope. The one who feels the tusks

says the elephant is a solid pipe. The one feels the belly says the elephant is a like a wall. Each man is correct in his own way; however, they are each merely describing features of a greater whole.

Compartmentalization and alienation between the domains of health creates conflict and misses the whole picture. Often trainings, interventions, and programs focus on one domain to the exclusion of others. Some examples include mental health services offered by an employer to see a psychotherapist off-site; teambuilding workshops to improve relationships and communication within a team; gym memberships or onsite Yoga classes for physical health; and retreats or conferences for leadership training with visioning exercises for organizational health. Trying to improve health in these four domains separately from each other is like trying to drive a car with the wheels, engine, seats, and frame all disconnected.

4. Movement Education

In order to move, education is the key; not just in terms of physical aspects of health, but health in all domains.

The lines we create that separate areas of health are useful. They give us a focus and concrete plans and practices for each domain. By exploring the spaces between these different categories of health we can learn about their interactions and the positive impacts of improving all domains simultaneously. This focus on the relationship between categories can invite new questions: “How does my mindset impact my relationships and the organization?” “How will paying attention to my body’s needs improve my health?” “How can greater individual health improve the quality of work the organization produces?”

By learning to apply the Freedom of Movement philosophy, the approach is not to try to address each category separately, but to integrate them by applying general principles and mindsets that are health- and growth-oriented. Certain principles flow from a state of health, whether you are talking about physical, mental, relationship, or organizational health. Some of these are awareness, nurturance, integration, fluidity, openness, honesty, balance, attunement, listening, and congruence.

To make significant and sustainable change, we need to explore the interplay of the four domains of health. This will result in healthier people, relationships, and organizations which, from business perspective, create a foundation for financial growth for companies as well.

The artificial separation of the four domains of health is a large part of the problem we face when it comes to health and also job dissatisfaction. This separation represents a way of living (or *not* living) that creates and perpetuates rigid patterns of being. Being sedentary epitomizes this separation. During long periods of sitting, the body's needs and sensations are removed from conscious awareness for the sake of work. To fit into the workplace one learns to restrict oneself to a specific series of movements which consist of sitting, with only a few trips perhaps to the photocopier or washroom.

Being sedentary is a pattern we develop that impacts the body, the mind, relationships, and organizations as a whole. All of these domains overlap and create a cascade effect that can either accumulate health or disease. Organizational health is particularly significant because it doesn't just overlap with the other domains, it encapsulates them. The other elements exist within that context.

Consider an example of integrating the skills of body awareness, movement and communication and its impact at the organizational level.

Sally is feeling tired, disconnected, and stuck on a project. She takes a moment to become aware of her body and asks herself how her body is feeling right then. She realizes she feels stiff from sitting for several hours. She also recognizes her accumulating stress from feeling stuck in her work. She decides to get up and connect with her colleague, Maria, through a MOVE break. They connect through movement doing some light stretches. Sally talks about something she's stuck on, and asks directly for help. She first asks if Maria would be willing to help and puts out an invitation without demanding it. Sally practices communication and healthy boundaries, which means she is direct and open with her needs and also open to Maria's needs and limits. Maria has the option and opportunity to practice saying a real yes or no to being helpful. By tuning in and listening to her whole body, Maria can be aware of whether she is able to take on another project or not. Fortunately, she is. Sally walks away from the interaction feeling supported by her colleague, confident that she is not alone and is moving in a good direction, as well as refreshed and energized by the movement.

Movement occurred in terms of physical movement but also in Sally's willingness to move her mind as she decided to listen to her body. She also moved her relationship with Maria by her willingness to communicate her needs and ask for help. These movements of minds, bodies, and relationships help create a healthy flow within the organization.

If you don't understand and appreciate human movement, you won't really understand yourself or play. Learning about self-movement creates a structure for an individual's knowledge of the world; it is a way of knowing. Through movement play, we think in motion. Movement structures our knowledge of the world, space, and time so completely that we need to take a step back (a movement metaphor) to realize how much we think in these terms. Our knowledge of the physical world, based in movement, explains why we describe emotions with terms like "close," "distant," "open," "closed."

We say we "grasp" an idea or "wrestle" with them, or "stumble" upon them. Movement play lights up the brain and fosters learning, innovation, flexibility, adaptability and resilience. These central aspects of human nature require movement to be fully realized.

— Dr. Stuart Brown, Psychiatrist and Researcher of Play and author of the book *Playing*

5. How This Book Works

In this book, you will find everything you need to start your own MOVE program in your life or at your office including the specific techniques needed to incorporate movement breaks as well as specific exercises that will help improve your body awareness, cardio, strength, core/balance, and flexibility. By incorporating movement throughout your day you will be addressing many of the health issues caused by a sedentary lifestyle, but more importantly you will develop an awareness of yourself that is inherently rewarding and healthy. With the information and tools in this book, you will create a deeper connection to yourself by acting in ways that are caring and loving towards your body.

In the first chapter, we focus on making the mindset shift necessary to begin to incorporate movement at the workplace. I will share the story of how the ThinkMOVE program was created. Hopefully some of my struggles and insights will resonate with you and save you some of the pain I had to experience before I created the ThinkMOVE approach.

In Chapter 2, we explore how a focus on movement and health makes business sense. Movement will not only prevent healthcare costs from rising, it will also increase productivity and connections within the office. This chapter on the business case for movement will be valuable to anyone in need of a coherent and cogent presentation of facts and logic to convince an organization to invest in health and wellness.

In Chapter 3, we look at the importance of shifting our culture and mindset to adapt new ways of working; specifically, ways that account for our health. Chapter 4 reviews the research that informs the program and gives you the key principles that help you incorporate movement into your day. Chapter 5 shows a model of change which is relevant to health, relationships, or organizational changes. This section will prepare you for what you and your company will experience along your moving journey. In Chapter 6, we offer an overview of the program.

In Chapter 7, I offer a specific definition of health as a renewable resource that enables us to achieve meaningful goals. This will help you prioritize your health by seeing how it is connected to everything you do. I have also included a Health Resource Self-Assessment (HRSA) in Chapter 8 that will help you become aware of your health resources and how you currently use them. Finally, in Chapter 9, we conclude with reflections on the benefits of incorporating these principles and values of movement in our everyday lives.

On the download kit, you will find all the exercises from this book as well as my sources and places to look for further reading.

Here are suggestions to help you get the most out of this book.

1. **Do:** Do the exercises throughout the book. You will not only move more and feel healthier, you'll also learn the underlying principles for incorporating any healthy behavior you wish.
2. **Share:** Sharing is caring for yourself and your friends. Find at least one other person who will take this movement journey with you. By helping others, you will help transform the culture of your workplace so that it is happier and healthier.
3. **Feel:** The program is an embodied practice so it will only work if you do the practices and let yourself move and feel what you feel. You will learn to listen to your whole body and develop a deeper connection with yourself through this awareness.