

# NEWS AND TOOLS FOR HAPPINESS, LOVE, AND WISDOM

# MINDFUL LEADERSHIP: BIG MIND AND SMALL MIND

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Adapted from Seven Practices of a Mindful Leader: Lessons from Google and a Zen Monastery Kitchen.

The idea of mindful leadership is not exactly new. In an essay entitled "Instructions to the Head Cook," Dogen, the founder of Zen in Japan during the thirteenth century, advised that the head cook embrace three core practices or "three minds" while leading the kitchen. Those were:

- 1. Joyful Mind (the mind that accepts and appreciates everything)
- 2. Grandmother Mind (the mind of unconditional love), and
- 3. Wise Mind (the mind that can embrace the reality of change and be radically inclusive)

Mindfulness practice itself originated within rich spiritual traditions that have developed and transformed over thousands of years. Historically, people tend to be drawn to mindfulness practice during times of rapid change, which are accompanied by high levels of stress, volatility, and uncertainty; times much like those we live in right now. In addition, over the centuries, mindfulness has been adapted and integrated to meet the most vibrant and pressing needs of society - not only influencing spiritual traditions but seeping into many facets of daily life and culture, including the arts, food, education, work, and beyond.

While it's true that increasing self-awareness is a key aspect of mindfulness practice, the intent is more than awareness of one's individual self. The intention is to cultivate a wider and more inclusive perspective, aspiring to loosen concern about oneself and to expand our narrow

personal experience, in order to adopt a more universal and less dualistic awareness. This is referred to in Zen as a shift from **Small Mind to Big Mind.** 

Much of what we experience on a moment-to-moment basis is the world of Small Mind - of the personal self, of I, me, and mine. In fact, science now has a name for Small Mind - it's called the default mode network. This is the part of the brain that is often worrying about the future or ruminating about the past, rather than being relaxed and alert to this moment, to seeing with greater clarity. From a psychological perspective, this is a lot like ego. Mindfulness practice includes learning from and appreciating Small Mind while cultivating Big Mind - the more open, curious, and accepting perspective or way of being.



#### The Integration of Mindfulness, Work, and Leadership

You might say that mindful leadership is about applying the experience of Big Mind, which is cultivated through meditation (but can be accessed anytime), to the concerns of Small Mind, or the pressures and joys of daily life and of working with others to accomplish time-sensitive goals.

After a year as head cook, I was asked to be director of the Zen monastery, Tassajara. The monastery has many of the challenges common to a small business - for one thing, its revenue provides crucial financial support for the San Francisco Zen Center. It is also a retreat center during the summer months, with workshops and overnight guests. Working as director at Tassajara for 12 months truly deepened and broadened my experience in mindful leadership.

When I decided to leave the monastery to earn a master's degree at New York University's Graduate Business School, I was eager (as well as terrified) to enter the business world and test what I was learning about integrating mindfulness, work, and leadership. By then, I felt

#### **Greetings**

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I'd identified several noticeable benefits to this approach:

- Mindful leadership cultivates a richness of experience; ordinary, everyday work can feel heightened, meaningful, and at times extraordinary.
- It removes gaps between mindfulness practice, work practice, taking care of people, and achieving results.
- It considers learning from stress, challenges, difficulties, and problems to be an integral part of the process of growth and not something to be avoided.
- It helps us recognize and work with contradictions and competing priorities to cultivate flexibility and understanding.
- It helps us experience timelessness, effortlessness, and joy even in the midst of hard work and exceptional effort.
- It can be applied to any activity to cultivate both confidence and humility.
- It embraces individuality and unity everyone has a particular role and yet all make one team, supported by and supporting one another, practicing together.
- It considers true success to be twofold and takes into account the character and compassion
  of the people involved, in addition to the quality and results of the work.

I've since found these benefits of mindfulness practice and mindful leadership to be enduring and universal; they are accessible and available in any situation and to anyone. You don't need to spend time in a Zen monastery. You don't need a business degree. All you need is to apply

the approach of mindful leadership to whatever situation, challenge, organization, role, or work environment you are in.

Mindfulness is a way of being and of seeing that shifts our perspective. It is pragmatic - endlessly so, in my experience - since it helps us solve everyday problems in effective and efficient ways. It also develops our way of being, adding depth and richness to the experience of life itself. With mindfulness, every task is approached with both humility and confidence, with hope and with the letting go of hope. Ultimately, mindfulness is mysterious, plunging into questions of consciousness, birth, death, and impermanence - while providing us with direct experience that, when we let go of our fears and habits, what arises is composure, a deep sense of love, and a profound sense of meaning and connectedness to life.



#### Pain and Possibility: The Empowerment of Mindfulness

Ever since graduating from New York University, I have been part of two worlds - the contemplative world and the business world - though, of course, now I consider these one world. I currently train leaders and their employees in using mindfulness and emotional intelligence in the workplace. My consulting work at Google led to my involvement in developing the Search Inside Yourself program, which ultimately led to the foundation of the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute, which trains leaders throughout the world. The ripple effects of this work are quite evident — when individuals, teams, and companies become more conscious and aware, this in turn helps to cultivate productivity, leadership, and well-being for all concerned.

I'm often asked why we're seeing upsurge in interest in mindfulness, meditation, and emotional

intelligence among executives and business people. My two-word answer to this question is **Pain and Possibility:** 

- It can be painful to step outside of our role and to be more in touch with our vulnerability, with the tenderness of our heart. Additionally, we usually sense when our values, aspirations, and work are not in alignment or when we are not living up to our full potential. For example, it hurts to become aware that we avoid conflict and difficulty, or that we overreact in challenging situations, and thus tend to undermine our effectiveness and influence.
- On the other hand, if we can recognize that we are capable of acting in better, more effective, and more skillful ways, we see possibility and are inspired to realize that potential.



Simply recognizing a gap between how you are living, working, and leading and how you aspire to live, work, and lead can be profound and transformative. Equally inspiring is acting to narrow these gaps in effective, practical ways. Mindfulness helps us in both efforts. It helps us identify and bridge these gaps. In fact, I think just naming these gaps can be a great gift, to feel both pain and possibility: the pain of some portions of your life right now, and the possibility for greater awareness, satisfaction, ease, effectiveness, and connection. To me, recognizing, engaging with, and

learning from pain and possibility, seeing the gaps that exist, is both a core mindfulness practice and an essential leadership practice. In my trainings and workshops, this is a framework I use for understanding and practicing mindful leadership.

That said, becoming aware or more conscious of the pains and possibilities of our experience, of what is actually happening - whether that's in the world of work, community, family, relationships, or spirituality - is inconvenient and uncomfortable! It can be frightening and disruptive. This is why mindfulness, and mindful leadership, is more difficult than it may seem on the surface. Yet this is where our true power lies - our power to learn, change, and grow. This is where our ability to respond effectively, to connect deeply with others, to find solutions to problems, and to think and act creatively, originates. Signs of missed potential and opportunity are often easy to see if we dare to look. Are you avoiding facing reality or what is painful? Is your life out of alignment with your values and aspirations? Are you undermining your potential or giving away your power - that is, your ability to develop yourself, to see more clearly, and to influence others toward greater understanding, satisfaction, connection, and productivity? If so, how, or in what ways? I've posed the question - *How do you give away your power?* - to hundreds of people from many walks of life, and here are some of the answers I've received. Are any familiar to you?



- I say yes when I mean no.
- I rush from one thing to another to get to the "important" stuff and don't appreciate what I am doing in the moment.
- I overthink decisions, and then overthink my overthinking.
- I feel helpless and hopeless in light of what's happening in our world today.
- I get impatient and frustrated with myself and others over petty issues.
- I underestimate my abilities.
- I don't make clear requests or ask for help either because I feel like I need to do everything myself or I am afraid that others won't respond to my needs.
- I avoid expressing strong emotions and often ignore my gut feelings regarding what I want or what I believe is right.
- I talk to fill space, fearing an uncomfortable silence.
- I check email, social media, or find other distractions when I feel the least bit sad or anxious.
- I am critical of myself for making mistakes or for making decisions that don't turn out well.
- I don't consistently take care of myself I don't get enough exercise, enough sleep, or enough healthy food.
- I avoid having deep conversations or discussing topics that make me feel vulnerable.
- I compare myself to others when it comes to appearance, money, and status.
- I sometimes feel like a failure, stuck in the gap between where I am now in my work and life and what I know in my heart is possible.

These are difficult, challenging problems for anyone, yet we sometimes feel them most acutely when we are in positions of leadership, when others depend on us and have high expectations of us. These statements often represent entrenched underlying patterns and habits. There are no quick fixes to resolve or transform them. However, just the act of naming how you give away your power can be very empowering! This is the power of awareness, the power of mindfulness practice.



#### The Power of Practice

I've always appreciated the corny joke about the out-of-town visitor to New York City who asks a stranger: "How do I get to Carnegie Hall?" Without hesitating, the stranger responds, "Practice, practice, practice."

When people ask me, "How can I bridge the gaps between where I am and where I want to be?" I'm always tempted to give the same answer: "Practice!" It's humorous but true. Practice has several meanings, depending on the context. As the joke implies, you can't succeed at anything without practice, or without learning the

skills you need by exploring them over and over. Whether playing the piano or playing tennis, preparing for a performance or writing a report, you only improve through repetition — in other words, by "doing." In this sense, practice is an intentional activity designed to increase learning, skill, and competency. In medicine or law, those who practice enough get to run their own professional practice. In this sense, your "practice" represents your business or professional role, which can involve a lifetime of study and work due to continuously evolving work environments.

During the years I spent living (and practicing) at the San Francisco Zen Center, the word practice referred to a way of life - it referred to the practice of meditation as well as to the expression of our deepest and most primary intentions. The aspiration was to integrate

meditation and mindfulness practice with our relationships, work, and day-to-day activities. In this sense, our practice was our perspective. Our practice sought to integrate all of our actions with our values and intentions.

#### The Seven Practices: Mindfulness in Action

Mindfulness can be (and has been) characterized in many different ways. However, for the purpose of training mindful leaders, I've distilled seven mindfulness practices:

- Love the work
- Do the work
- Don't be an expert
- Connect to your pain
- Connect to the pain of others
- Depend on others
- Keep making it simpler

These aren't your typical mindfulness instructions. They build skills and support integration. And they describe an approach, a way of life, and an expression of our deepest intentions. Through practice in each of these seven areas, we can transform pain into possibility.

Practices are values and intentions expressed in action. Practices are like habits, since they build a "muscle memory" over time. But they are more than good habits. Practices express our intention to transform our lives toward our highest aspirations, to realize our full potential, to help others.

To me, mindfulness is so much deeper and wider - so much more profound, messy, and mysterious - than is usually portrayed. To me, the point of mindfulness isn't to succeed at meditation, or to understand certain concepts, or to create inner peace by holding the busy world at bay. Rather, the point of mindfulness practice is to cultivate a more alive, responsive, effective, and warmhearted way of being within the world as it already exists, and within the life you already live.

What makes mindfulness somewhat challenging to explain and understand is that it involves

a certain amount of paradox.

For instance, the renowned Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki once said,

"You are perfect just as you are, and you can use a little improvement."

Thus, mindfulness practice sees and embraces two worlds at the same time: the universal and the relative, or Big Mind and Small Mind. On the one hand, the aim is radical acceptance of yourself and your experience. You are perfect as you are in the grand, universal scheme of things. Yet this is distinct from the relative world, and only

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here do you need some improvement. From the absolute perspective, you really are perfect, including your struggles, pains, desires, and aversions. Yet a core part of mindfulness practice is becoming familiar with your individual patterns and tendencies, your fears and dissatisfactions, and engaging with them to transform the everyday problems of life instead of ignoring them or pushing them away.

#### Investigate, Connect, and Integrate

The seven practices above build upon one another, and can be grouped into three categories: investigate, connect, and integrate. The first four practices focus primarily on the inner work of self-exploration and self-awareness. The second two practices focus primarily on relationships: your relationships with other people, with your work, and with the greater world. And the seventh practice focuses on integrating all of the previous practices.

Ultimately, all seven practices work together to help you realize what is most important in any given moment so you can make the most effective decisions. Altogether, they constitute a guide or workbook for developing yourself as a mindfulness practitioner and a mindful leader.



#### Investigate

- Love the work: Start with inspiration, with what is most essential. Acknowledge and cultivate aspiration your deepest, most heartfelt intentions.
- Do the work: Have a regular meditation and mindfulness practice. Learn to respond appropriately at work and in all parts of your life.
- Don't be an expert: Let go of thinking you are right. Step in to greater wonder, openness, and vulnerability.
- Connect to your pain: Don't avoid the pain that comes with being human.
   Transform pain into learning and opportunity.

#### Connect

- Connect to the pain of others: Don't avoid the pain of others. Embody a profound connection to all humanity and life.
- Depend on others: Let go of a false sense of independence. Empower others and be empowered by others to foster healthy group dynamics.

#### Integrate

• Keep making it simpler: Let go of a mindset of scarcity. Cultivate awe and wonder. Integrate mindfulness practice and results.

My experience teaching mindfulness at Google and to companies and individuals around the world is that there is a tremendous hunger (and need) for understanding and developing greater humanness, openness, and inspiration, not only at work, but in all parts of our lives. Mindfulness practice is potent. It enables us to see more clearly and to engage with the miracle

of consciousness, the miracle of being alive.

Mindfulness practice can shift the ground of our consciousness, our presence, our being - not by adding something, such as a new belief system, or by seeking inspiration, but by presenting a more accurate view of what is, of human nature and how we construct and constrict our version of ourselves and the world. Mindfulness practice is aimed at understanding and shifting the nature of fear, dissatisfaction, and the experience of separateness. It helps us glimpse how the ordinary is quite often extraordinary, how mundane life can be miraculous at the same time.



It takes much attention and effort to be present, to wake up to our lives, to discover again and again that we are not here long, and to pay attention to what is in our heart, to what is right here, to what is most obvious and most important right now. Human beings did not evolve to see clearly — we were "designed" primarily to *survive*, to pass on our genes. Our bodies, minds, and hearts evolved based on our primary needs for safety, satisfaction, and connection. Being a mindful leader requires effort because it requires letting go of old constructed realities, the norms that no longer serve us, our organizations, or our families. Living with clarity and depth, living a mindful, integrated, warmhearted life, takes practice.

Aspiring to be a mindful leader and engaging in these seven practices helps calm fears, reduces dissatisfaction, and it helps support connection, beyond anything we can comprehend. Engaging in mindfulness practice calls forth our basic sanity in the midst of a world that often feels chaotic. Mindfulness practice knocks on the door of our inborn openness and trust in a world that can often feel cold and cynical.

Considering why mindful leadership is so difficult and necessary, I also return to the themes of pain and possibility. This pain is the pain of change, of not getting what we want and of getting what we don't want. Opening to possibility shifts our relationship with desire itself, rather than striving to satisfy our desires (though that may happen). Our freedom lies in a radical acceptance of what is, as well as in the power of awareness. Seeing inner freedom as possible is a core underlying aspect of mindfulness and mindful leadership.



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Marc Lesser is internationally recognized for pioneering work in mindful leadership, creating exceptional business cultures, and supporting profound well-being. He has led mindfulness and emotional intelligence programs at many of the world's leading businesses and organizations including Google, SAP, Genentech, and Kaiser Permanente, and has coached executives and led trainings in Fortune 500 companies, start-ups, health care, and government. He is the author of 4 books, including

Seven Practices of a Mindful Leader: Lessons From Google and a Zen Monastery Kitchen.

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## The Rhythm

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In any creative feat
(by which I mean your work, your art, your life)
there will be downtimes.

Or so it seems.

Just as the earth is busy before the harvest and a baby grows before its birth, there is no silence in you.

There is no time of nothingness.

What if.

during the quiet times, when the idea flow is hushed and hard to find you trusted (and yes I mean trusted)

that the well was filling, the waters moving?

What if you trusted
that for the rest of eternity,
without prodding, without self-discipline,
without getting over being yourself,
you would be gifted every ounce of productivity you need?
What would leave you? What would open?

And what if during the quiet times you ate great meals and leaned back to smile at the stars, and saw them there, as they always are, nourishing you?

There are seasons and harvest is only a fraction of one of them. We forget this.



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<u>Create, and Lead, published by Penguin Random</u>

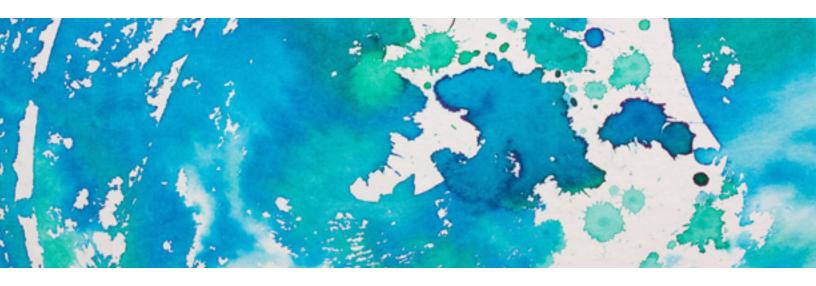
House, and named a Best Book of the Year by Apple's iBooks. She is the creator of the pioneering <u>Playing</u>

<u>Big leadership program for women, and <u>Playing</u>

<u>Big Facilitators Training for coaches, mentors and</u></u>

managers who support women in their personal and professional growth. Her work has been featured on *The Today Show* and in publications ranging from *The New York Times* to goop to *Harvard Business Review*. More than 50,000 women from around the world follow Tara's writing and wisdom. She lives in San Francisco and loves dance, art, and long walks with her family.

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### BUILDING A MINDFUL SOCIETY

Adapted from Mindful Relationships: Creating Genuine Connection with Ourselves and Others.

#### © MARGIE ULBRICK AND RICHARD CHAMBERS, DPSYCH

As more and more people become aware of the benefits of mindfulness, we are seeing it spread beyond medicine and healthcare into business, sport, and education. These emerging "mindful societies" are showing up at a time when the world certainly needs them! A collective unconsciousness has led to the rapid degradation of the environment, and our fight/flight reactivity on a large scale regularly manifests as conflict and war. Mindfulness offers us a powerful way to tackle some of these very serious issues.

Each of us is responsible for creating the change we want to see in our world. When we learn to bring mindfulness and loving presence to ourselves, we are able to extend those gifts toward others, who in turn can do the same, creating ripple effect after ripple effect, until mindfulness eventually crosses the whole "pond." We create a mindful society by creating a mindful self.

#### Being the change

Mindfulness starts with being. It is only when we learn to quieten down and become intimate with ourselves and the world around us that can we start responding appropriately in any given situation. Prior to that, we are merely reacting. But once we learn how to be, we can discover how to bring that being into the world – into our work and play, into our relationships, families and communities. Doing this effectively requires that we look deeply and see clearly. When we do this, we get to know our core values and deepest desires, and to notice the "still inner voice" of intuition. We learn to listen to, and recognise the impact of, our words and actions on everything and everyone around us.



It is easy to get disheartened by feeling like we have to carry the burden of responsibility for changing the world. We can become overwhelmed by global poverty, high rates of suicide in the young, inequality and injustice. But mindfulness is not necessarily about single-handedly trying to change everything. When we hear a calling from deep inside to make a contribution it is vital that we don't lose touch with our own heart and/or become separated from those around us. So much activism today creates further divisions rather than healing by increasing the sense of "us" and "them." To be truly effective agents of change, we need to learn to rest in a space of loving presence and to find ways of bringing that into being in the world. Which is easier said than done. In fact, nobody can tell us how to do this. We need to discover it for ourselves.

When Gandhi said: "Be the change you want to see in the world," he motivated all of India to engage in a nonviolent struggle that ultimately achieved Indian independence. On a smaller scale, we can embody mindfulness by the way we are in the workplace and in our relationships and homes. When we get in touch with our true nature through mindfulness, we discover that far from being in some apathetic state where we sit around contemplating our navels, mindfulness practice is very much alive. When we rest in awareness, we find that it is inherently joyful, compassionate, and fearless. Think of times when you have felt completely content, even just for a moment, and you will recognise these qualities.

The idea of creating a mindful society implies effort and *doing* however mindfulness does not separate thoughts and actions but rather comes from a profound sense of wholeness, which is enhanced by a deeper connection to our true nature. Mindfulness practice is not about achieving - it is about listening to what is most meaningful for us. This expresses itself in each person individually and then through society collectively. Every individual has a contribution to make in the world and simple acts like joining a cause-based group can support our own mindfulness practice while also contributing toward a more mindful community.

It is important to do this without getting caught up in a sense of self importance or being motivated by wanting to prove we are right so we can strengthen our ego. This is not what mindfulness is about. If we seek to dominate with the importance of our beliefs we make mindfulness just another dogma. Mindfulness continues to come back to the expression of our inner truth as it arises moment-by-moment, day-byday. Whether you are a dentist or a social worker, a factory worker, an insurance broker, or a stay-at-home parent, the ripples that you create by relating mindfully to the people and things around you will reverberate and keep on reverberating. If the world is going to genuinely heal and experience less violence and separation, and more love, unity and sanity, the change must start with us: each one of us.



We must be able to sense into the depths of our being, know ourselves fully, and hold all of this in a loving, healing space. Only then will we be able to relate to each other as unique, whole beings, and overcome the conflict that results from rejecting parts of ourselves and those around us. Deep inside each of us is a yearning for this wholeness and loving relationship. All we need to do is listen deeply enough to hear its call, and then follow that.

#### Exercise: What Does Your Deepest Being Want To Express In The World?

Take a moment to pause and sense inside. Notice and let go of any tension. Use the breath as an anchor so you can become calm and centred.

Once you start to quieten down, ask yourself "What do I want to contribute to this world?" or "What is the next step for me?"



Resist the temptation to try to "work out" an answer Instead, allow the question to rest in the stillness as an inquiry. Allow the answer to arise in its own time. Breathe deeply into your belly and let the breath flow throughout your whole body. Cultivate a place of inner stillness and wait. See what arises.

Perhaps for a time nothing will come. Don't judge it if this is the case. Just notice what sensations you are experiencing. Let this question form the basis of an ongoing inquiry.

When answers do arise, simply notice them and check whether they feel true to you. Keep returning to the inquiry.

You may also wish to revisit this inquiry in your daily meditation. When you seek earnestly to know "your place" in this process of building a more mindful society your heartfelt question will connect you with what is most real in you. You will start to be led by intuition and impulses, big and small. Allow these to guide you, always checking back in with yourself as to whether what is arising — and the ways you are bringing it into action — is an expression of mindfulness and loving presence.

#### Starting where we are

Mindfulness is inseparable heartfulness. We need to start where we are and be curious about what our commitment to relating respectfully and lovingly to all parts of ourself and our world brings. It may calm and focus us. Or it may shake us out of our lethargy and inaction. Little by little, mindfulness takes us on a journey of discovery that expands possibilities beyond what we might previously have considered. Mindfulness is not a quick fix but it necessitates whole-hearted engagement. To quote Eisenstein:

"Addiction, self-sabotage, procrastination, laziness, rage, chronic fatigue, and depression are all ways that we withhold our full participation in the program of life we are offered. When the conscious mind cannot find a reason to say no, the unconscious says no in its own way."

Mindfulness offers us the capacity to wake up. We begin to see the patterns that may have held us back; we identify the ways in which we have been stuck or saying "no" to life. Mindfulness al-

lows us to have fresh eyes and to be engaged with life in a fuller way. This requires connecting deeply with an experience of being, and then finding ways to bring that into our doing. It eventually involves changing behaviours, structures and systems where injustice flourishes. Consider what you could do and how you could lend your voice to your community, in prisons, schools, hospitals, or with

#### **Perspectives on Self-Care**

Be careful with all self-help methods (including those presented in this *Bulletin*), which are no substitute for working with a licensed healthcare practitioner. People vary, and what works for someone else may not be a good fit for you. When you try something, start slowly and carefully, and stop immediately if it feels bad or makes things worse.

the young or the elderly? You may very well need to sit with that question as an inquiry, allowing the answer to emerge in its own time from deep inside.

The scientific term for humans is *Homo Sapiens*, meaning "the ones that have the capacity to know, and to know that they know." This knowing gives each of us immense power, if we are willing and able to use it. As Hugh Mackay says,

"You don't have to be rich to leave a positive legacy; you don't have to be intelligent, famous, powerful or even particularly well organised, let alone happy. You need only to treat people with kindness, compassion and respect, knowing they will have been enriched by their encounters with you."

Picture a society where an understanding and practice of mindfulness is as commonplace as going to the gym to maintain a level of physical fitness. Health is not merely the absence of illness. Some health insurers have even started funding mindfulness classes just as they do for Pilates, Yoga and other stress-reduction modalities. Perhaps we will eventually see a juncture between religion, contemplative practice, and mindfulness. If we are faithful to our own hearts we can live from a place of mindful presence and do our bit to bring about a more mindful society. And if it feels like what you can offer is merely a drop in the ocean of need, remember that oceans are just a lot of drops of water.

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# SKILLFUL MEANS

Your Skillful Means, sponsored by the Wellspring Institute, is designed to be a comprehensive resource for people interested in personal growth, overcoming inner obstacles, being helpful to others, and expanding consciousness. It includes instructions in everything from common psychological tools for dealing with negative self talk, to physical exercises for opening the body and clearing the mind, to meditation techniques for clarifying inner experience and connecting to deeper aspects of awareness, and much more.

### **Identifying Personal Values**

#### Purpose/Effects

Amidst the constant stress and activities in our daily lives it is easy to lose track of what we truly care about and value. Identifying and working to further incorporate personal values into our lives can not only be fulfilling but also deepen our sense of purpose and meaning.

#### Method

#### Summary

Make a list of the personal qualities and values you most resonate with and specific ways that you can incorporate them into your life.

#### Long Version

The word "values" has many definitions, but in this case it means personal qualities and ways of living that you believe in and resonate with. Psychologist Steven Hayes describes values as "chosen life directions" that are "vitalizing, uplifting, and empowering". A value is not merely a goal, but can be thought of as a continuous process, direction, and way of living that helps direct us toward various goals and live a meaningful life.

#### Identifying your values:

There are various ways to identify your personal values including choosing which domains or areas in your life are most important to you, and specifically what you value within each domain. Which areas of your life and how many you choose can vary. They can include relationships, work/career achievement, parenting, self-care (health, leisure, etc.), spirituality, community involvement, and education/learning.

- Begin by taking some time to reflect deeply on what areas of your life and ways of living give you the most meaning, interest, and sense of fulfillment.
- Feel free to use any of the areas listed above or think of your own.
- After you have chosen a few areas, evaluate how important each one is to you and rank them accordingly.
- Next, closely and honestly examine how present this value is expressed in your current life, including daily activities, lifestyle, and relationships.
- Make note of any values that are highly ranked but not highly present in your life.
- Begin to brainstorm and list any concrete ways that you can make this value more prevalent in your life. These do not need to be major life changes but can be small actions or activities. For example, if you value spending time with your family, perhaps making an effort to have family dinner together four times a week, or read a bed time story to your children every other night.
- Continue to think of different ways to further incorporate your values into your life and test them out, noting what works and most importantly, enjoy the exploration!

#### History

Identifying and incorporating personal values into one's life is a long-standing tradition emphasized in many cultures and religions. The practice specifically described here was adapted from the work of leading clinical psychologists Steven Hayes, Susan Orsillo, and Lizabeth Roemer.

#### **Cautions**

Realizing that we are not truly living the life we want to live or embodying what we value can be difficult and even painful. Please remember that above all, maintaining a compassionate and gentle approach to yourself and discoveries is critical to the process and for creating real change.

#### **SEE ALSO**

Realizing Intention

Fare Well

May you and all beings be happy, loving, and wise.

