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Leadership & Mindfulness

*"Your work is to discover your work and then
with all your heart to give yourself to it."*

- The Buddha



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Mindfulness & Leadership

by Alex Trisoglio

“The pursuit of mindful leadership will help you achieve clarity about what is important to you and a deeper understanding of the world around you. Mindfulness will help you clear away the trivia and needless worries about unimportant things, nurture passion for your work and compassion for others, and develop the ability to empower the people in your organization”

– Bill George, Professor of Management Practice, Harvard Business School, 2012¹

Now that Harvard Business School professors are teaching the benefits of mindfulness, it's perhaps fair to say the practice of mindful leadership has arrived in the corporate world. From Google to Genentech to the US Army, leading organisations have developed mindfulness programs and they are seeing results. We are still at the stage of experimentation and early adoption, but there are good reasons to think we'll look back on this decade as the start of a new era of more mindful leadership. This article aims to give an introduction to this rapidly evolving field and offer a sense of how things might unfold. We'll first look at how mindfulness is being introduced into organisations today to deal with stress and to develop emotional intelligence. Then we'll look at how mindfulness can also be used to develop the kind of transformational leadership needed in today's increasingly turbulent business environment.

1 Mindfulness, stress and emotional intelligence

The rationale for introducing mindfulness is straightforward enough: organisational life is stressful, and becoming more so. Stressed and disengaged employees are less healthy, less happy and less productive than their colleagues. Scientific evidence

demonstrates that mindfulness meditation is an effective way of dealing with stress and developing greater emotional intelligence. As a result, mindfulness-based programs are being introduced in companies, schools, prisons, and other organisations. Let's look at these points one at a time.

The stress of organisational life

First, organisational life is filled with pressure and stress. In the current economic climate, employees are being asked to do more with less, working long hours with increasingly heavy workloads. Globalisation and continuous technological innovation have redefined work, and blurred the boundaries between work and life. “It's an old story now: we thought our technologies – laptops, smartphones, email – would free us from being stuck to the office,” says leadership author Peter Bregman, “but it's backfired: the office is now stuck to us.”² Tony Schwartz, founder of The Energy Project, is concerned about the consequences: “The defining ethic in the modern workplace is more, bigger, faster. More information than ever is available to us, and the speed of every transaction has increased exponentially, prompting a sense of permanent urgency and endless distraction.”³

But more isn't always better. According to the Yerkes-Dodson Law, first developed by psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson in 1908⁴, increased physiological or mental arousal only leads to increased performance up to a point. Beyond that point we become stressed and our performance declines, especially with the kind of cognitively demanding work that is at the heart of today's knowledge-based economy.⁵ The McKinsey Quarterly sums things up: “Always-on, multitasking work environments are killing productivity, dampening creativity and making us unhappy.”⁶ And many people are no longer able to cope with the levels of stress in their lives. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, in a given year approximately 40 million U.S. adults – about 18% of the US population – are affected by an anxiety disorder.⁷

The costs of employee stress and disengagement

Sustained stress doesn't just reduce performance; it makes us ill. Coronary heart disease, thyroid or endocrine burnout, obesity, diabetes, immune suppression, chronic fatigue, infertility and irritable bowel syndrome may all be consequences of the ongoing experience of stress.⁸ The National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health finds that

stress-related ailments cost US companies more than \$200 billion a year in increased absenteeism, tardiness, and the loss of talented workers. 70% to 90% of employee hospital visits are linked to stress, and stressed employees are more likely to be unhealthy, unhappy and disengaged.⁹ Surveys by Gallup and Towers-Perrin show that globally only 20% to 30% of employees are engaged, with significant costs in terms of productivity, growth and shareholder value creation.¹⁰ More business leaders are realising that stress and disengagement at work aren't just 'soft' issues, and that it pays for companies to invest in tackling them. "Our people really are our greatest assets," says Kenneth Freeman, Dean of Boston University School of Management. "CEOs that lose touch with that truth spread misery unnecessarily and ultimately put their companies at risk. Talented, engaged, and aligned people hold the key to creation of long-term value."¹¹ As *Business Week* concluded, "Stress is pretty much the No. 1 health problem in the workplace."¹²

Since 40% of our working lives – some 90,000 hours – will be spent at work, the need to reduce stress and disengagement isn't just a business issue. It's a human issue, one that cuts to the core of life in the modern world. Western nations may indeed be 'advanced' and 'developed' in technological and economic terms, but it's a tragic waste of human potential and a major detriment to our overall quality of life if our time at work isn't happy and productive. We can do better than this, and leading companies believe that bringing mindfulness to the workplace is part of the solution. "Google wants to build the happiest and most engaged workforce on the planet," says Rich Fernandez, Senior People Development Lead at Google.

"What works? Wisdom, mindfulness and compassion."¹³

The growth of mindfulness meditation

Mindfulness is defined by Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn of the University of Massachusetts Medical School as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally."¹⁴ Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh offers a more poetic description of mindfulness as being "deeply in touch with the present moment."¹⁵ Mark Williams, Professor of Clinical Psychology at Oxford University explains what this means: "Mindfulness is a translation of a word that simply means awareness. It's a direct, intuitive knowing of what you are doing while you are doing it. It's knowing what's going on inside your mind and body, and what's going on in the outside world as well. Most of the time our attention is not where we intended it to be. Our attention is hijacked by our thoughts and emotions, by our concerns, by our worries for the future, and our regrets and memories of the past. Mindful awareness is about learning to pay attention, in the present moment, and without judgement. It's like training a muscle-training attention to be where you want it to be. This reduces our tendency to work on autopilot, allowing us to choose how we respond & react."¹⁶

The practice of mindfulness has been central to Buddhism since its birth in India over 2500 years ago, although its journey to the West has been long and slow. Although Buddhist philosophy was already having an important influence on Western thought by the early 20th Century, it took many decades for meditation practice to catch up. In

a 1936 review of a book describing Buddhist meditation, the editors of *Psychiatric Quarterly* noted that "the profound insight that the Orientals have into emotional life has long been acknowledged," but they felt that "considering the tempo of Western civilisation, it seems unlikely that bhavana (Buddhist meditation) could be utilized here to any great extent."¹⁷ It was only with the emergence of the 1960s counterculture that meditation hit the mainstream, and only in 2003 that meditation reached the cover of *Time* magazine, in recognition of the fact that "Ten million American adults now say they practice some form of meditation regularly, twice as many as a decade ago. Meditation classes today are being filled by mainstream Americans who don't own crystals, don't subscribe to New Age magazines and don't even reside in Los Angeles."¹⁸

As meditation has become part of popular consciousness, it has started to influence the context for organisational life. Business leaders also practice mindfulness, including the man frequently named the best CEO of his generation, Steve Jobs.¹⁹ Apple's founder was a Zen Buddhist and he spoke openly about how his time meditating in India shaped his worldview and, ultimately, Apple's product design.²⁰ "If you just sit and observe, you will see how restless your mind is," Jobs told his biographer, Walter Isaacson. "If you try to calm it, it only makes it worse, but over time it does calm, and when it does, there's room to hear more subtle things – that's when your intuition starts to blossom and you start to see things more clearly and be in the present more. Your mind just slows down, and you see a tremendous expanse in the moment. You see so much more than you could see before. It's

a discipline; you have to practise it.”²¹ Other influential CEOs who have talked about their meditation practice include Bill George, Professor of Management Practice and Henry B Arthur Fellow of Ethics at Harvard Business School and former CEO of Medtronic; Bill Gross, founder of Pacific Investment Management and manager of PIMCO’s \$270-billion Total Return Fund; and Ray Dalio, founder of the investment firm Bridgewater Associates, the largest hedge fund in the world.²² These are successful and influential leaders, and the impact of their example is sure to spread.

The health benefits of mindfulness

However, in business, inspirational leadership is not enough. Companies need to see results. Meditation masters over the centuries have talked about how their practice enables them to cultivate mental and emotional qualities such as calmness, clarity, insight, and awareness, but until recently these qualities have not been measured. This has all changed with the scientific study of mindfulness, and particularly with the revolutions in cognitive science and behavioural neuroscience over the past 30 years. There is now a solid and rapidly growing body of scientific evidence for the benefits of mindfulness, and this is perhaps the most important driver behind the rapid growth of interest in mindfulness in the business world. “Mindfulness is an idea whose time has come,” says Chade-Meng Tan, founder of Google’s *Search Inside Yourself* program. “For a long time practitioners knew, but the science wasn’t there. Now the science has caught up.”²³

Many organisations are basing their mindfulness programs on the

8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn and his colleagues at the Stress Reduction Clinic founded at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in 1979. Over the past 30 years, hundreds of peer-reviewed papers have described how MBSR has a significant positive impact on health, well-being and quality of life in general,²⁴ and the health benefits are summarised by the UK Mental Health Foundation (MHF) as follows:²⁵

- A 70 per cent reduction in anxiety
- Fewer visits to your doctor
- An ongoing reduction in anxiety three years after taking an MBSR course
- An increase in disease-fighting antibodies, suggesting improvements to the immune system
- Longer and better quality sleep, with fewer sleep disturbances
- A reduction in negative feelings like anger, tension and depression
- Improvements in physical conditions as varied as psoriasis, fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome.

The MHF concludes, “The evidence in support of MBSR is so strong that almost three-quarters of doctors think it would be beneficial for all patients to learn mindfulness meditation skills.” David Vago at the Harvard Medical School goes even further “I think we’re realizing that a lot of the ways that we conceptualize the healthcare system is going to change dramatically. Instead of thinking about meditation as an alternative method of healthcare, we’re just realizing now that meditation practice is just good medicine.”²⁶ For organisations, investments in mindfulness can be justified in terms of

the healthcare benefits alone. Stress in the workplace costs businesses an estimated \$2,800 per employee every year, and taking a mindfulness course at work reduces days off due to stress by up to 70% over three years, according to one study, in which a mindfulness course was offered to staff at Transport for London, the large company that runs the English capital’s subway network.²⁷ Convinced by this business case, 25% of large US companies have now launched ‘stress-reduction’ initiatives, according to the HR and outsourcing consultancy Aon Hewitt, and that number is growing steadily.²⁸

The broader benefits of mindfulness: emotional intelligence and personal effectiveness

In addition to its health benefits, mindfulness training enhances interpersonal relationships, develops emotional intelligence, increases resilience, enhances innovation and creativity, and improves working memory and attention.²⁹ The notion that we can improve our mental and emotional capacity is validated in a fairly new branch of science known as “neuroplasticity,” which is finding that what we think, do, and pay attention to changes the structure and function of our brains. “One very important implication of neuroplasticity,” says Chade-Meng Tan of Google, “is that we can intentionally change our brains with training.”³⁰ Many organisations are choosing to position their mindfulness programs in these broader terms of self-management, emotional intelligence and personal effectiveness, rather than solely as a means for stress reduction. We’ll look at three examples: Google’s *Search Inside Yourself* program,

Genentech's *Personal Excellence Programme*, and the *Mindfulness-Based Mind Fitness Training* (MMFT) in the US Marine Corps.

Google: Search Inside Yourself

Google's Chade-Meng Tan initially attempted to introduce mindfulness at Google with an MBSR program, but it didn't attract much attention. "Stress reduction didn't really fly here," he explains. "The hiring process at Google is designed to draw out high achievers and idealists who have done something a little different, like hiking in Patagonia or going to war-torn areas to help children. For high achievers, stress can be a badge of honour, and not many people will sign on for stress reduction, particularly those who need it the most. So I needed to go beyond stress reduction. I wanted to help people find ways to align mindfulness practice with what they want to achieve in life."³¹ So mindfulness was repositioned as a workout for the heart and mind, something as normal and obviously beneficial as exercise, and the *Search Inside Yourself* (SIY) program was born. Building on the work of Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, Annie McKee and others,³² it aims to cultivate the emotional intelligence skills that are a vital part of effective leadership.

SIY includes an introductory class, a full day of mindfulness practice, and six two-hour sessions, each a week apart. Class sizes range from twenty to fifty, and the program is offered both for open enrolment and for intact teams. The course begins with the "Neuroscience of Emotional Intelligence," which covers the growing body of scientific literature on the effects of training attention and

emotion. In addition to mindfulness training, the course includes instruction in journaling as a means of nonjudgmentally noticing mental content, mindful listening, walking meditation, mindful emailing, and a variety of other contemplative techniques. The latter stages of the course emphasize empathy using loving-kindness meditation, and social skills, including how to carry on difficult conversations.³³ The first SIY course ran from Octo-

"We are seeing the birth of many new leadership models that emphasise the importance of mindfulness"

ber to December in 2007, and it is now the highest-rated program at Google, with a 600-person waitlist. Google engineers have taken to the neuroscience-based approach, and affectionately refer to mindfulness training as "neural self-hacking" or "software development of the mind."³⁴ According to Mirabai Bush, senior fellow at the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, who helped design the program and has taught within it, "It's great when contemplative practice comes to any workplace, but it's particularly meaningful for Google, a fount of countless creative ideas. In many ways, Google is a model place to work; Fortune named it the best place to work in America two years in a row. And Google has had a big influence on all of our working lives. If it works at Google, other employers take notice."³⁵

Genentech: Personal Excellence Program

Another example of innovation comes from Genentech and its Personal Excellence Program (PEP). This mindfulness-based leadership development program won the 2012

HBR/McKinsey M-Prize for Management Innovation.³⁶ The story begins in 2002, when Todd Pierce took over as Genentech's CIO, and the employee satisfaction scores in the IT department were at rock bottom. He spent four years experimenting with the full menu of trainings, meetings, and competency models, but nothing seemed to work. He had development plans from 700 employees in the IT department, but "not one of them had an ounce of inspiration. I remember sitting there and saying, 'There's got to be another way.'"³⁷

So he worked with executive coach and meditation teacher Pamela Weiss to design an experimental program that would dispense with the traditional skills based approach to leadership development and focus instead on helping people grow from the inside out. "If you want to transform an organization it's not about changing systems and processes so much as it's about changing the hearts and minds of people," says Weiss. "Mindfulness is one of the all-time most brilliant technologies for helping to alleviate human suffering and for bringing out our extraordinary potential as human beings." PEP has three phases, with mindfulness at their core: reflection on and selection of a specific quality or capacity you want to work on (patience, decisiveness, courage); three months of cultivating the capacity for self-observation; and the hard work of turning insight into deliberate, dedicated, daily practice. The impact has been transformational for individuals and organization alike. By 2010, four years into the program, the department ranked second in the company and is now consistently ranked among the best places to work in IT in the world, even after Genentech's 2009 merger with Roche. An independent

assessment of the program's impact found a 10-20% increase in employee satisfaction; 12% increase in customer satisfaction; and 50% increase in employee collaboration, conflict management, and communication.

US Marine Corps: Mindfulness-Based Mind Fitness Training (MMFT)

Mindfulness is even entering one of the places where you might least expect to see Buddhist meditation: the US Marine Corps. The US Army has long recognised that combat is physically, mentally and emotionally draining³⁸ and that physical fitness is an essential prerequisite to handle these stresses. However, new kinds of combat stress are emerging that cannot be addressed by physical fitness alone. In February 2010, an attack by American helicopters in Afghanistan's central Uruzgan Province left 23 Afghan civilians dead. When military investigators looked into the attack, they found that the operator of a Predator drone had failed to pass along crucial information about the makeup of a gathering crowd of villagers. But Air Force and Army officials now say there was also an underlying cause for that mistake: information overload. At an Air Force base in Nevada, the drone operator and his team were trying to interpret what was going on in the village by monitoring the drone's video feeds while participating in dozens of instant-message and radio exchanges with intelligence analysts and troops on the ground. There was simply too much information, and the team determined, incorrectly, that the villagers' convoy posed an imminent threat, resulting in one of the worst losses of civilian lives in the war in Afghanistan.³⁹

According to Art Kramer, Professor of Neuroscience at the University of Illinois, "There is infor-

mation overload at every level of the military – from the general to the soldier on the ground." Michael Barnes, research psychologist at the Army Research Lab at Aberdeen, Md., acknowledges that "we're not going to improve the neurological capability" of soldiers. But he believes the military should not try to return to a less data-intensive age. "It would be like saying we shouldn't have automobiles because we have 40,000 people die on the roads each year," he says. "The pluses of technology are too great." So the military is trying novel approaches to help soldiers focus and manage the stress of information overload, including Mindfulness-Based Mind Fitness Training (MMFT, pronounced M-Fit). The program was founded by Elizabeth Stanley, a former Army intelligence officer who is now an assistant professor of security studies at Georgetown University. "The whole question we're asking is whether we can rewire the functioning of the attention system through mindfulness," she says.

M-Fit follows many features of Kabat-Zinn's MBSR protocol,⁴⁰ and it has been offered to US Marines who are undergoing stress inoculation training prior to combat deployment. Like MBSR, the course involves 24 hours of class instruction on mindfulness over 8 weeks, with weekly 2-hour meetings and a full-day silent retreat. It adds new modules on how to use mindfulness skills in a group context, integrate practices into the ongoing pre-deployment training, and apply these skills to counterinsurgency missions. M-Fit explains how mental fitness builds on the well-established importance of physical fitness for deployment readiness, and it includes a stress resilience skills section, which gives specific guidance on how to apply mindfulness to deal with physiological and psychological

symptoms following an experience of extreme stress.⁴¹ As with other MBSR applications, the 8-week program has shown good results. It was found that the Marines' working memory capacity was boosted, improving their ability to handle large volumes of information, and there were beneficial effects on their capacity for emotion regulation and their levels of cognitive control.⁴² "It's really hard to access rational thought during high-intensity stress situations," said Jared Smyser, 28, a former Marine who is training to become an M-Fit instructor. "All this stuff happens in your body because we've evolved to get away from predators. But it's not really relevant in today's warfare. You need to be calm, collected, making better decisions."⁴³ Maj. Jeff Davis, who went through the M-Fit program prior to deployment in Iraq in 2008, offers a typical reaction: "I had my doubts going in, but I'm a true believer now. The techniques were hard at first. It was like running – a few miles kills you at first, but then one day you realise you're just in better shape. It was the same with this."⁴⁴ In 2013, the Marines will incorporate M-Fit classes into an infantry school at Camp Pendleton, making the program a tentative part of its regular training cycle. "Longer term," says Elizabeth Stanley, "meditation may become as standard in the military as rifle practice, another way of making troops more effective and resilient."⁴⁵

Mindfulness in executive development

These three examples give a taste of the rapid growth of mindfulness-based training programs in organisations, and their number is growing rapidly as the benefits of mindfulness are more widely understood among leaders and HR executives. As awareness grows about the importance of

attention, mindfulness is also being incorporated into executive programs at several business schools including Harvard Business School, the Peter F. Drucker School of Management, IMD in Lausanne, and the University of Cape Town.⁴⁶ The Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University has set up the world's first executive program on Mindfulness for Enhanced Performance, which includes modules on mindful awareness, cognitive agility, mindful communications and management practices for enhancing mindfulness.⁴⁷ And the world of executive coaching is also embracing mindfulness. According to Douglas Riddle, Director of the Global Coaching Program at the Center for Creative Leadership, mindfulness offers a new paradigm for individual and organisational change, "a powerful alternative to the coercive and linear assumptions that have dominated our thinking." He believes that it could lead to radical improvements in the quality and impact of coaching, as "mindfulness practices prepare coaches to really help instead of just trying to be helpful."⁴⁸

These are still very early days in the development of mindful leadership, a time of great creativity and innovation in the development and application of ideas and approaches. We are seeing the birth of many new leadership models that emphasise the importance of mindfulness, including Boyatzis & McKee's *Resonant Leadership*,⁴⁹ Kofman's *Conscious Business*,⁵⁰ Wilber's *Integral Leadership*,⁵¹ Heifetz's *Adaptive Leadership*,⁵² Scharmer's *Theory U*,⁵³ McKinsey's *Centred Leadership*,⁵⁴ and several varieties of mindful leadership⁵⁵ and authentic leadership.⁵⁶ The benefits of mindfulness have been proven for stress management, developing emotional intelligence and cultivat-

ing awareness and focus. And the business and financial impacts of less stressed, happier and more engaged employees are becoming harder for senior executives to ignore. As innovation in the organisational application of mindfulness continues and as best practices are established, it seems likely that the momentum towards more mindful leadership will continue to grow.

2 Mindfulness, ethics and wisdom

The enthusiasm for mindfulness is well justified, as its benefits are real and important. Most of us could benefit from paying more attention, being more present and savouring life more. Our workplaces and homes would be better places if we were more skilled at emotional self-regulation, so were not as negative and reactive when feeling stressed or criticised. Many of us would like to be able to show more patience and kindness to the people who matter most to us. And, as the positive psychology movement has reminded us, we could probably all benefit from cultivating more inner peace and appreciation of life.⁵⁷ But if we limit our understanding of mindfulness to this, then we will have missed the more profound role that mindfulness plays as a transformational path, and in particular its potential contribution to leadership development.

There is growing recognition of the challenges presented by the unprecedented pace of change, complexity, and turbulence of business in the 21st century. "Leaders tell us they are operating in a bewildering new environment in which little is certain," says Dominic Barton, Global Managing Director of McKinsey. "The tempo is quicker, and the dynamics are more complex. Leaders worry that it is impossible for

chief executives to stay on top of all the things they need to know to do their job. Some admit they feel overwhelmed."⁵⁸ There is a need for new approaches to leadership. Nick Petrie of the Center for Creative Leadership argues that it is no longer enough to come up with models of best practice, but instead we need to respond to "the development challenge – the process of how to grow "bigger" minds."⁵⁹ In particular, we need more than "horizontal development" of competencies and the incorporation of new information into existing frameworks. There needs to be greater emphasis on "vertical development" that fosters progression through developmental stages and results in transformational change of the leader's ways of knowing and being,⁶⁰ and this development needs to include the cultivation of ethics and wisdom. "Leaders who do not take time for introspection and reflection may be vulnerable to being seduced by external rewards, such as power, money, and recognition," says Bill George of Harvard Business School. "Or they may feel a need to appear so perfect to others that they cannot admit vulnerabilities and acknowledge mistakes. Some of the recent difficulties of Hewlett-Packard, British Petroleum, CEOs of failed Wall Street firms, and dozens of leaders who failed in the post-Enron era are examples of this."⁶¹ The US Army has long placed an emphasis on developing leadership character in its BE, KNOW, DO approach to leadership (that is, character, competence and action),⁶² and other organisations are realising the benefits of this approach. In terms of mindful leadership, this means broadening the focus from stress reduction and emotional intelligence to include questions of character, ethics and wisdom.

Character & Ethics

The Oxford dictionary defines technology as the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes. Mindfulness is a technology of mind and emotion, both in its scientific basis and domain of application. And like any technology, mindfulness doesn't come with any built-in moral or ethical guidelines. While it is perhaps unfair to situate mindfulness alongside such self-evidently destructive technologies as assault rifles or nuclear weapons, there are nevertheless some risks. For instance, mindfulness might be used to equip people with greater calmness and focus even as they do something unethical. Elizabeth Stanley, designer of the US Army's M-Fit program, recalls, "A few people even wondered if I was trying to make, quote, 'better baby-killers.'"⁶³ Philosopher Slavoj Žižek raises a different concern, namely, that although mindfulness has been popularised as a remedy against the stress of modern life, "it actually functions as a perfect supplement to modern life."⁶⁴ Mindfulness allows people to decouple from stress, while potentially leaving the causes of the stress intact. These causes of stress include social and political issues such as injustice, inequity, and social exclusion, as well as economic issues and now, increasingly, global environmental and sustainable development issues. An unwise application of mindfulness solely to reduce stress might leave organisations and society as a whole in an undesirable situation where people only go as far as coping with unsatisfactory situations, rather than seeking to improve their outer conditions and environment. Echoing Marx's critique of religion, Žižek is concerned that mindfulness may

become the "opium of the people," ironically leaving us less mindful and less able to address the larger challenges and questions in our lives even as we become more mindful of the present moment. In a similar vein, journalist Richard Eskow warns that although "mindfulness and meditation can have a beneficial impact on individual health, that shouldn't be confused with wisdom."⁶⁵

Of course, mindfulness, ethics and wisdom need not be contradictory, and indeed in the original Buddhist eightfold path they were taught together as indispensable components of a transformational path.⁶⁶ However, we are not yet seeing this

"Mindfulness is a technology of mind and emotion, both in its scientific basis and domain of application"

integrated approach commonly reflected in the application of mindfulness to leadership, perhaps out of a misguided concern that modern secular and scientific values might be compromised. This is a missed opportunity, not just in terms of transformational possibility of mindfulness, but because these questions are already part of the contemporary dialogue on leadership, although perhaps sometimes in different language. In modern secular terms, we need not choose to live by the monastic code of Theravada Buddhism, but many business leaders have spoken of the need to think deeply about values and ensure that actions remain aligned with intentions. Bill George of Harvard Business School feels a renewed focus on ethics and values is overdue, as "today's business leaders are so poorly trusted that they rank near the bottom of every poll. Looking back at the last decade, it's not hard to see why. The 2000s began with

the Enron scandal and ended with global financial market meltdowns."⁶⁷

He has already started to bring together mindfulness and the values-orientation and integrity of authentic leadership, pointing out, "When you are mindful, you're aware of your presence and the ways you impact other people. You're able to both observe and participate in each moment, while recognizing the implications of your actions for the longer term. And that prevents you from slipping into a life that pulls you away from your values."⁶⁸

Wisdom

To do justice to the subject of wisdom would take us well beyond the scope of this article, as it has been a core concern of the great philosophical and spiritual traditions for thousands of years. However, one of most important findings of the Buddhist wisdom tradition is that there is no fixed or intrinsic identity to a person or to the phenomenal world.⁶⁹ This means that we can learn to become mindful and aware of how we see our surroundings and ourselves, and then change the way we see things, thus developing richer and more accurate maps of the world. As we develop richer and more accurate mental maps, our capacities for practical reasoning and intuition improve, opening up the possibility for us to make better – and wiser – decisions.⁷⁰

Ellen Langer, Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, has written extensively on this kind of mindfulness, specifically about how we can become more mindful and aware of our mindsets, mental maps and narratives. She uses the term "mindlessness" to refer to the idea that much of what we believe to be rational thought is in fact just our brains on autopilot. She is particularly interested in how people arrange ob-

jects and experiences of similar types into categories. “Just as mindlessness is the rigid reliance on old categories,” she says, “mindfulness means the continual creation of new ones.”⁷¹ This in turn requires openness to new information and awareness that there is always more than one possible perspective. She reaffirms the Buddhist notion that there is no intrinsic identity to phenomena, noting that “every idea, person or object is potentially simultaneously many things depending on the perspective from which it is viewed. A steer is a steak to a rancher, a sacred object to a Hindu, and a collection of genes and proteins to a molecular biologist.” Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh offers a more poetic description of the process: “For things to reveal themselves to us, we need to be ready to abandon our views about them.”⁷² Since there is no “correct” framing, the ability to choose the most appropriate and helpful framing in any situation becomes an essential leadership skill.

As leaders become more mindful and aware of the mindsets and mental models that influence their thoughts, emotions and behaviour, they gain more capacity in choosing which mindset to apply. This in turn increases their capability and choice in governing their actions and decisions. Peter Senge, Professor at MIT Sloan School of Management, has written about the importance of cultivating awareness of mental models in his groundbreaking book *The Fifth Discipline*.⁷³ Similarly, Bob Kegan, Professor of Adult Learning at Harvard University, has laid out a model of cognitive development in which individuals grow by increasing their awareness of the mindsets and narratives they hold around things like how they see themselves as individu-

als, their values, and the purpose and meaning of their lives.⁷⁴ Likewise, Bill Torbert, Professor of Management at the Carroll School of Management at Boston College, argues that what

“Many business leaders have spoken of the need to think deeply about values and ensure that actions remain aligned with intentions”

differentiates leaders is not so much their philosophy of leadership, their personality, or their style of management. Rather, “it’s their internal “action logic”—how they interpret their surroundings and react when their power or safety is challenged.”⁷⁵

Ron Heifetz, Co-founder of the Center for Public Leadership at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, has perhaps come closest to a leadership perspective that incorporates the mindfulness of mindsets. “Few practical ideas are more obvious or more critical than the need to get perspective in the midst of action,” he writes with his colleague Marty Linsky. “Buddhists call it “karma yoga,” or mindfulness. We call this skill “getting off the dancefloor and going to the balcony,” an image that captures the mental activity of stepping back in the midst of action and asking, “What’s going on here?”⁷⁶ If they are to avoid simply getting swept up in the flow of events, leaders need to be able to move back and forth between the balcony and dancefloor. They need to make interventions and observe their impact in real time, and then return to the action. Heifetz and Linsky talk about this as “reflective practice,” where the goal is to come as close as possible to being in both places simultaneously, “as if you had one eye looking from the dance floor and one eye looking down from the balcony, watching all

the action, including your own. This is a critical point: When you observe from the balcony, you must see yourself as well as the other participants. Perhaps this is the hardest task of all – to see yourself objectively.” Developing the capacity to see oneself objectively, especially in real time, is indeed

a very hard task. However, for over 2500 years the mindfulness and wisdom traditions have developed and refined ways to cultivate this capacity, and their relevance and importance for leadership has never been greater.

In summary, mindset-based approaches to leadership development are becoming increasingly influential. However, there is not yet widespread use of practices from the mindfulness and wisdom traditions to develop real-time, “on the balcony and in the dance,” awareness of these mindsets. Furthermore, work on mindsets has not yet been integrated with the mindfulness-based approach to leadership coming from Jon Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR tradition. This opens up a fertile opportunity to develop a new generation of tools and approaches for mindful leadership.

Mindfulness: an integrated approach

We have seen that there are two approaches to mindfulness in the Western scientific tradition: Jon Kabat-Zinn’s approach of paying attention to physical sensations, emotions and thoughts in the present moment; and Ellen Langer’s approach of paying attention to our mindsets, which in turn frame our relationship to our sensations, emotions and thoughts. These two forms of mindfulness are related to the two selves outlined by Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman in his book *Thinking Fast and Slow*, “the experiencing self, which does the liv-

ing, and the remembering self, which keeps score and makes the choices.”⁷⁷ Both are important to our happiness and success. By taking an integrated approach that combines both forms of mindfulness, we come full circle to the original teaching by the Buddha in the Satipatthana sutta.⁷⁸ In that text, mindfulness isn't seen as a unitary phenomenon, but rather as an awareness operating at four different levels: body, feelings, thoughts, and dhammas. The fourth level, which is based on the Pali word 'dhammas,' may be translated as 'phenomena.'⁷⁹ Just as in Ellen Langer's work, Mahayana Buddhism holds that the phenomena we see and experience are determined by our mindsets. So an integrated approach to mindful leadership would include

“As we develop richer and more accurate mental maps, our capacities for practical reasoning and intuition improve, opening up the possibility for us to make better – and wiser – decisions”

mindfulness of body, feelings, thoughts and mindsets. Many of the necessary elements are already in place, and the development of tools and approaches that incorporate the four foundations of mindfulness offers an exciting agenda for the future of mindful leadership and transformational leadership programs.

Conclusion

Mindful leadership is emerging from a hugely creative encounter between Buddhism and modern science that has been underway for more than 30 years. It offers powerful, evidence-based

methods to reduce stress, develop emotional intelligence and increase personal effectiveness. Leading organisations such as Google, Genentech and the US Army have confirmed the benefits of cultivating greater mindfulness in the workplace, and awareness is spreading to executives in other organisations.

Meanwhile, innovative work is being done at the frontiers of leadership development to integrate mindfulness into new ways of building transformational leadership.

Although much has already been accomplished, the dialogue between Buddhism, science and leadership is still in its infancy. There is every reason to look forward to a much bigger role for mindful leadership in the years ahead. ■

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A Call for Mindful Leadership

by Ellen Langer, Professor of Psychology, Harvard University

Mindlessness — not a good quality for any organization — has led to some questionable assumptions about the need for leaders; namely that 1) those who lead have privileged and reliable abilities and knowledge — what are often described as "leadership competencies"; and 2) people need to be led to achieve their goals.

If organizations were mindful — referring to the simple act of noticing new things — leadership would be quite a different matter. They would not only be mindful themselves; their most important responsibility would be to enable their followers to be mindful as well. One might argue that in an increasingly complex world — where work cuts across all types of institutional boundaries — the leader's only task may be to promote and harness "distributed" mindfulness.

Noticing puts us in the present, makes us sensitive to context, and aware of change and uncertainty. When we are mindless we hold our perspective still, allowing us to confuse the stability of our mindsets with the stability of the underlying phenomena. Hold it still if you want but it's changing nonetheless.

However visionary we consider our leaders, they cannot predict the future any more than anyone else. They may be able to predict what might happen much of the time if the situation stays constant — which of course is questionable — but can never predict individual occurrences, which is where we should be most concerned. If, most of the time, when someone does "x" the result is "y" it doesn't guarantee that the next time you do "x," "y" will follow. (Do you believe Mercedes makes a great car? Would you bet all of your money that any particular Mercedes will start with one try?)

Those in positions of power often keep quiet about what they don't know. Instead of making a personal attribution for not knowing — "I don't know but it's knowable and I probably should know," which sounds defensive — leaders should make universal attributions for uncertainty — "I don't know and you don't know because it is unknowable." When we acknowledge these universal limits, we can be less distracted by the need to appear to know, which would allow us to get on to the problem at hand. Being awake in the moment allows us learn better what we need to know now.

Leaders can't know and that's fine.

What about those being led? Mindlessness can lead you to assumptions about their behavior. Once you understand the actor's perspective, you can be less judgmental. If I see you as rigid, I want to ignore you. If I see you from your perspective, as someone I can count on, I'll value you. We can turn around every judgment in this way (e.g. impulsive/spontaneous, grim/serious, conforming/eager to have everyone get along) and when we do

we'll find we have a less rigid view of people (some bad, some good). Once we free ourselves from our misplaced superiority, we may find talent and ability to provide solutions in those we prematurely cast in an unflattering light.

Regardless, the larger issue is that, if everyone is awake, you don't have to lead as if everyone else needs to be led. You may find that people will see what the situation demands, and the surprising result may be superior performance.

In a study I conducted with Timothy Russell and Noah Eisenkraft, orchestra musicians were instructed to be either mindless or mindful. In this case, being mindless meant replicating a previous performance with which they were very satisfied. The mindful instructions directed them to make the piece new in very subtle ways that only they would know. (They were playing classical music and not jazz so the novel distinctions were indeed subtle.) Their performance was taped and then played for audiences unaware of our instructions. We found that not only did the musicians much prefer playing mindfully, the mindfully played pieces were judged as superior. Everyone was in a sense mindfully doing their own thing and the result was a better coordinated outcome.

In more than 30 years of research, we've found that increasing mindfulness increases charisma and productivity, decreases burnout and accidents, and increases creativity, memory, attention, positive affect, health, and even longevity. When mindful we can take advantages of opportunities and avert the dangers that don't yet exist. This is true for the leader and the led.

In sum, there is no best way to do anything independent of context, so the leader cannot have privileged information. When leaders keep everyone in their place with the illusion of knowability and possession of this privileged knowledge the benefit to them is that we "obey" and leaders feel superior. The cost is that they create lemmings. Their mindlessness promotes our own mindlessness which costs us our well being and health. Net result, the leader, the led, and the company all lose.

It's nice to imagine a company where everyone is mindful. But it will take some time to achieve the ideal even if possible. Meanwhile, we need leaders whose major, perhaps only task is to promote mindfulness in those around them. By learning how to exploit the power of uncertainty maybe all of us will wake up.

Dr. Ellen Langer is a professor in the Psychology Department at Harvard University.

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Why Meditate ... and Why Now?

by Mark Thorton, Senior Consultant and Mobius Transformational Faculty

1 Why Meditate... and Why Now?

You may wonder whether meditation has any application in your world. Perhaps you think meditation is a practice only for people who have renounced the outside world and can afford to spend hours each day sitting silently.

But the truth of the matter is, we need meditation now more than ever. The practice of meditation can help you reduce the stress that all of us feel as a result of the hectic pace of modern life. With the techniques in this book, you can remain calm and centered no matter what challenges your workday presents, and you can practice these techniques without changing your already busy schedule.

And guess what? When you remain calm and centered, the world is a different place. When stressful situations arise, the skills learned in meditation allow you to let go of the anger, frustration, and obsessive thoughts that so often arise as a result of stress.

Yet stress is so much a part of daily life that we often don't even see its subtle and far-reaching effects. We don't see how it makes us feel disconnected from our hearts and robs our life of joy. The book you hold in your hands contains all the tools you need to transform that stress into calm.

STRESS IMPACTS THE BOTTOM LINE

Even companies are realizing the need to create calm:

- American Airlines claims that absenteeism costs the company one million dollars a day. (The Wall Street Journal)
- Industry loses approximately 550

million workdays annually due to absenteeism. (The New York Times)

- The majority of U.S. states have passed laws allowing employees to sue for having stressful conditions. (The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health)
- A recent health study found that people with prolonged work stress suffer an increase in blood pressure equivalent to aging fifteen years. (Cornell University)
- In one major financial institution, depression was responsible for nearly 11,000 lost workdays over a two-year period (more than high blood pressure and diabetes, combined). (The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health)
- 42 percent of office workers claim they work in an office where “yelling and verbal abuse happen frequently.” (Survey, The Marlin Company)
- Nearly one in three adults experiences high stress every day. (The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure)
- The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health says “stressful working conditions are ... associated with increased absenteeism, tardiness, and intention by workers to quit their jobs—all of which have a negative effect on the bottom line.”

As the pace and complexity of life expand exponentially, the need to experience the ocean of calm increases. No single technique is enough. The velocity and intensity of our lives require a range of different tools to help us remain focused and enlivened. While meditation will not solve the

cause of stress, it powerfully deals with the symptoms.

2 Journey to Your Heart

Meditation is a journey to the ocean of calm. Swimming in the ocean of calm you can deal with deadlines with ease, be less stressed on your commute, and do your job with less effort. It is a journey to your center, your core—the place that holds your essence, your deepest longings, your wildest dreams, what nourishes you most, and what you value most. Some people call it spirit, soul, true nature.

The analogy used by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of Transcendental Meditation, is that you are like the ocean. At the moment you are standing on the shore looking out onto the ocean, you see only the surface activity of the ocean—the waves, the reflection of the sun—and you can hear the sound of the waves crashing on the shore. Meditation is a journey into the ocean and away from the surface into the deepest depths of you.

The journey within can be as daunting as a first-time trip to a foreign country. As on most journeys, you will need a map, a compass, a destination, tales about the obstacles you will face, some rules about safety, signposts to show you the way, advice on some of the delights you can expect and the wisdom of others who have made the same journey before you.

- The book is a map that outlines a number of paths.
- Your heart is the compass—only your heart will know what is right.
- The destination is your heart.

- The Eleven Thieves are the obstacles you can expect to meet on the path.
- The Eight Laws of Meditation are the rules.
- The Seven Meditation Paths are the signposts.
- The Seven Sages are the wisdom of others.

>Try This Now: Perfect Calm

Close your eyes and remember a time of perfect calm in your life. Feel the sensations, hear the sounds, and see the scene. Now declare “I radiate perfect calm to all I meet.”

Let me give you an example.

The heart

Meditation is simply a way to get to your heart. We can represent this in the diagram below. This diagram is a rough approximation at best, but a helpful guide. There are many other models of how we are structured.



The circumference represents the physical body—the body you can see, feel, taste, hear, and smell. It represents the surface of your being, like the surface of the ocean. There is quite a dense, solid, and heavy quality to it.

Your heart is at the center of the circle and represents the deepest part of your being. Studying this diagram, you can begin to see how your body is similar to the surface of the ocean, and that your core lies deeper than this.

Said another way, your center remains still and calm—undisturbed

by the surface events, noises, and distractions of your life. In the same way the depths of the ocean remain calm and unaffected by surface storms.

In this way, meditation allows you to shift from chaos to calm, noise to silence, activity to stillness.

Let’s deepen this experience. As you sink deeper inside yourself, you notice two other “bodies,” other than your physical body. These are your thinking body (or mind), which is your capacity to think, and your emotional body, which is your capacity to experience emotion.

YOUR PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL BODY



In this diagram, the mind is seen as “deeper” than the physical body, indicating that it belongs to the inner world. Once you leave the surface of the ocean, you journey into your inner world. For example, a thought is still a “thing.” It is distinct. It is as an object in that you can perceive it, but it has a different quality to it than the external world. It is not something you can pick up. It’s quality is more subtle, more etheric. A thought is simply a subtle form of energy.

The same with emotions. You certainly know you have emotions, and they are “real” in that sense. However, because they belong to your inner world, they have a more subtle, less dense, less solid quality than an object in the physical world.

Meditation is your journey through the layers of mind and emotion. Your journey to the core, therefore, is a journey from dense to subtle, from solid to subtle, from the physical world where you need your five senses (sight, touch, taste, hear-

ing, and smell), to your core, which cannot be perceived by these five senses.

Imagine you are swimming in the ocean. Imagine lying on your back on the surface looking up at the sky. Imagine allowing yourself to sink—away from the surface, from the sunlight, from the gentle breeze, from the sound of the wind—and drift down. The first thing you would experience is the world of thoughts—often millions of thoughts racing inside your mind. As you continued to drift further inside, you would find what feelings and emotions were inside you—those of which you may not have been aware when you were lying on your back on the surface. This is the layer of emotions. Meditation is sinking deeper beneath both these layers into the still, silent place within you that is always calm.

Storms can rage on the surface, but your center is always calm.

The following diagram illustrates that meditation is the path to your heart.



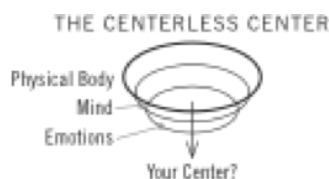
The endless journey and the centerless center

The more you journey to your center, the more you discover that your center is not a single destination. It is not one specific geographical place. The more you dive into the ocean, the more you discover that the edges of who you are, are less rigid than you thought. The deeper you go, the more you see that who you are is actually bigger than you thought. At your deepest, there is no difference between who you are and who others

are. The experience of being separate starts to disappear. The idea of “you” and “me” becomes blurred. From this space, the seeds of compassion arise. Any action that would be detrimental to another is experienced as being detrimental to the whole.

The diagram on the next page is the same diagram above seen from a different angle. The same three bodies (physical, mental, and emotional) are there, but the destination of “your center” has a question mark next to it. Like trying to find the center of the ocean, we find there is no such place. There is simply a vast and endless depth into which you dive further, a depth in which the journey becomes an end in itself. The journey becomes the destination. The true nature of your core is that it is vast and endless. No matter how many times you explore your heart, there is always more. It has no center because it’s too vast and extends into all things.

One of my teachers asked a holy Indian saint about his experience in journeying into his heart. This profound saint replied, “There is always more. Today at eighty years of age, and after journeying to my heart in every moment since I was twelve, I can honestly say that the journey is endless.” My teacher was amazed to hear such a response.



Hold on—what’s it like at the center? Why would we want to journey there in the first place?

As you journey to your center, eventually the qualities that exist there (wisdom, love, inspiration, creativity, intuition, calm) start to

flow out into the world. It’s as if the frequent journey into your heart creates pathways that allow the center to flow outward—effortlessly.

HEART QUALITY FLOWS OUTWARD



Like a river, the qualities from your heart can flow powerfully from the inner to the outer world. Imagine what it would be like if your deepest longings, strongest intuitions, fiercest loves, most passionate desires, bottomless compassion, wildest dreams, highest truths, your core values flowed out into the world. When you meet people, compassion could be the quality you exude rather than self-interest. As the idea of separation starts to melt, narrow self-centeredness becomes less of an option. You get to be heart-centered rather than self-centered. As you sit on the subway, the qualities of your heart can be available to you. When you meet people for the first time, your heart can speak rather than your judgments. Your words can have the quality of depth, love, compassion, and wisdom all because of your connection to your essence or heart. Decisions at work can come from your core values, rather than grasping self-interest. The way you are at work, from your relationship with your boss to your relationship with clients, can come from a deeper sense of teamwork, service, and emotional intelligence.

What does this mean for the Super Busy? When you talk on your cell phone, you can feel the quality and energy of your heart. When you walk down the street on your way to work, you can feel the cur-

rent of your heart, like the currents, tides, and swell of the ocean. When you meet people, you can connect with their hearts. Perhaps inspiration moves you in new ways. Maybe creativity comes alive in you in ways that you couldn’t imagine. Can your relationships be colored by the texture, fibers, and fragrance of your heart? Could your relationships with your loved ones deepen the quality of love that you’ve always known was inside you? Can love finally flow freely, no longer blocked by the surface drama of your days? The still, quiet power of your heart gets to move about in the world, creating its blessings for all you meet. Maybe people sense something’s changed in you, although they may never know what that is. The scent and fragrance of your heart, its uniqueness, its rare quality, can flow out into the world.

This is my experience of the Tao—being in the flow, following The Way. It is the way of the heart, your heart, no longer a forgotten phrase, but a daily experience.

Then you transform:

Limited ----> Unlimited

Bound ----> Boundless

Ordinary ----> Extraordinary

Finite ----> Infinite

The more you journey inside, the more you access deeper parts of who you really are—unlimited, unbound, extraordinary, and infinite. Parts of you that have always been there.

“Knock and you find you have been inside all the time.”

RUMI

Be honest. On some level, you know this already. Most people intuitively sense this is true—that at their core they are love. At their essence, they are deeper and bigger than what

they experience in daily life. Most people have an experience that life is much more vast, deep, and profound than that which they allow themselves to experience. Living from your core is the answer.

All of this is entirely optional—your heart doesn't force anything. It patiently sits waiting for your visits to whisper its secrets, speak of its love for you, inspire you with compassion. The heart's longing is palpable. You are like a prince born into the basement of a palace. The palace is your heart. The keys to the door, and every door in the palace, are the keys of meditation. You suspect that on some level the basement isn't really all there is. Maybe you can hear sounds from the banquet hall, music from the orchestra that plays, or smell the magnificent feast that is waiting for you. In whatever way, you intuitively have a sense, no matter how strong or weak that sense is, that there is more to the darkness of the basement. You are royalty born in hiding—waiting for the right call to take over the throne.

Meditation masters live in the palace of the heart.

Once in your heart, you can talk and act from that place. Maybe this will look like your core values come out into the world. Maybe it means you say what you mean more often, or that you say things with deeper conviction. Or that you say less, and the little you say resonates and has the power to move mountains.

Maybe you find your heart is where the secret of life lies—the secret of your life. Maybe your heart, rather than your head, can be an oracle that sets your direction. Maybe you can actually start to feel the desire for all of your words to be from God. Maybe you find that people respond to you differently. Maybe you

attract different people into your life, people who sense a quality in you that comes simply from your ability to access your heart. Maybe it's all actually about being more in line with your heart's longing, whatever form that may take.

Maybe you've forgotten what it's like to feel your heart, and even the phrase "find your heart" sounds familiar but is not something you can use. Maybe the last two paragraphs sound as if they were written about someone else. If that's the case then you stand to benefit most from this book. I know. That was exactly the position in which I once found myself.

An important lesson

A teacher once gave me feedback: "You do not live from your heart. Do you think I am right?"

I thought about what he said. I knew the word "heart" and I knew the word "live," but honestly I didn't really understand the question. When I told my teacher this he replied, "It's probably a good indication that what I said is true." I still didn't understand what he meant.

"You are so used to living in your head you have totally forgotten what it's like to live from your heart. I may as well have asked you what it's like living on the moon! You may have read about the moon. You may know a lot about the moon. You may have even seen the moon at night. It's not the same as having the experience of living on the moon."

I turned red with embarrassment. Imagine having no idea of the experience of living from my heart at the age of thirty! I was speechless. If I was honest with myself, I had to admit that the teacher's words were true. I went blank as if my mind had been asked a question to which it had no answer.

He gently continued. "The solution is to find the keys to your heart. If you want to, of course."

"So what are the keys to my heart?" I asked, still slightly embarrassed.

"The keys to meditation, of course!"

The more you meditate, the more the qualities of your deepest being flow outward into the world—*so that other people feel the difference*. Have you ever met someone who has a certain kind of presence? Someone whose presence in the room is palpable? In my experience, many teachers with whom I have trained have had this ability that allows the innermost to radiate outwards. I remember listening once to Sogyal Rinpoche (author of *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*) when he suddenly stopped his presentation and bowed toward the entrance to the hall. In the doorway was an eighty-year-old Buddhist nun who spoke no English. She walked into the room and smiled. I have never experienced such a force of love flowing from another person. Without any words she radiated the energy of love. I remember my body shaking with tears at the beauty of her presence.

The Eight Laws of Meditation

In this chapter you will learn eight Laws of Meditation that will help you create, deepen, and dynamically improve your ability to move from calm to Super Calm.

LAW NUMBER ONE: RELAX!

In the meditation courses I run for companies, the first thing I tell executives to do is relax! The journey to your core can only happen when you relax. Most Super Busy people approach learning new tasks like a sprinter waiting for the starter's gun in a race—the body is

tense, muscles taut; there is a goal to achieve.

Meditation is the opposite of effort. Meditation is much more like slipping into a warm luxurious bubble bath—you can feel the warmth of the water, smell the fragrance of the soaps, hear the running water. As you slip into the bath the only question is “Mmmmmm ... how long can I enjoy this?”

The journey to the ocean of calm needs to be easy—otherwise, if we had to struggle, fight, and battle to get there we wouldn't be calm when we arrived.

If you find your body becoming tense and tight, remember this law. Take a deep breath and allow the tension in your body to release. In the techniques section of this book, the practices associated with the Path of the Open Body have useful tips to build the feeling of relaxation while learning new tasks.

The Power of Relaxed Alertness

A woman who went to yoga three times a week came to a meditation master and complained, “I don't get it. I've done yoga for years, and I'm trying really hard at meditating but it's not working.”

The master replied, “You need relaxed alertness rather than tense and contracted effort. You think you need to ‘work hard to learn.’”

Can you remember the time you first learned to giggle? Or the first time your body really shook with laughter? Remember those times. Now, allow a smile to appear, and then start the practice again.

The harder you try, the less you succeed because the First Golden Law of Meditation is “Relax.”

LAW NUMBER TWO:

A SENSE OF PLAYFULNESS

To really understand the first law, it is useful to approach your meditation practice with a playful attitude, which is the second law of meditation. Often we remember the things that were a pleasure to learn. Without playfulness we risk making our bodies tense and tight, which moves us in the opposite direction of the first law: Relax! Once you understand this law, the journey to your heart is quicker and easier.

Study a kitten playing with a ball of wool; see how focused and attentive he is. Alert and watchful, yet he knows it is just a game. He is not striving to be the best ball-playing cat on the block. He is not striving to win the Cat Olympics ball playing competition. His game has the quality of delight and innocence. He can easily be distracted by some other game and then return to playing with the ball of wool, not berating himself for having forgotten to practice. Let your practice have the quality of softness, playfulness, innocence, and delight; not rigidity and hardness.

LAW NUMBER THREE: GENTLENESS

Remember a time you saw a mother holding a newborn child. Remember the exquisite gentleness and tenderness with which she caressed the child? This is the same way you need to treat yourself, with great gentleness and care. Super Busy people have enough rules at which to fail, enough hardness on themselves without creating a new set of rules at which to fail. Understanding this law powerfully moves you through times of frustration when learning how to meditate. It doesn't mean you “don't give a damn” or should be careless.

>Try This Now: The Calm Commuter

Take a breath in. Close your eyes. Count to three. Exhale for a count of three. Ensure there is no pause between your in- and out-breath. This circular breathing increases the amount of energy you feel.

LAW NUMBER FOUR: THE OPEN BODY

Imagine your physical body is a hose that carries water. If the hose is kinked and blocked, then less water gets through. In the same way, your physical body carries energy. If your body is blocked and contracted then less energy can be carried. The diagram below shows that when the physical body is tight and unrelaxed, it is difficult to journey to the ocean of calm. Your attention gets caught on the surface, and cannot drop deeper. Your body needs to be relaxed and open.



Remember, I said we could go from:

Chaos ----> Calm

Noise ----> Silence

Activity ----> Stillness

Effort ----> Effortlessness

The first four laws allow us to relax, be playful, be gentle, and have an open body. We get to be effortless. Effort works in the opposite direction from getting to your core.

But how can you build calm, deepen it, and protect it?

>Try This Now: Scanning the Body

Focus on the following muscle groups: • Small muscles around your eyes • Muscles in your forehead • Your abdominal muscles

For the next hour, check these muscles to ensure they are calm and relaxed. The more you relax your physical body, the more calm you have. Relax these muscles—you may want to gently massage around your eyes and forehead. Check these areas every ten minutes for the next hour and ensure they are relaxed. This will enable you to work with less effort.

LAW NUMBER FIVE: BUILD CALM— USE YOUR ATTENTION

To create calm—focus on calm. One of the great Laws of Meditation is that where your attention goes, energy flows.

Let me give you some examples.

- If you place your attention on positive thoughts, you get positive-thought energy.
- If you place your attention on negative thoughts, you get negative-thought energy.
- If you place your attention on a picture of a deity, you get the energy of the deity.
- If you place your attention on your heart, you magnify your heart energy.
- If you place your attention on your frenetically racing mind, you get “frenetic-mind” energy.

This is something you already know. Great athletes know to keep their attention on positive images of success prior to a match, rather than on negative ones. In your own life, if you want to complete a project you narrow your focus onto that project. This magnifies the work to be done or “energy” of the project. The same is true for calm; the more focus you put on calm, the more calm flows.

Hindu saints place their attention on a mantra to magnify the energy or quality of the sound. For example, the sound “OM” represents a certain aspect of the universe of all things manifested. Buddhist monks may

put their attention on the space between their eyebrows, or third eye, to magnify the quality of energy that is there. The Christian saint repeats the word “Jesus” to magnify the quality of his deity. Why? Because what you notice you magnify.

Don’t just take my word for it. Try the following exercises.

>Try This Now: *The Candle Flame*

At home, light a candle and place it an arm’s distance from your eyes. For five minutes gently keep your eyes focused on the candle flame.

Notice what happens to the outside world when you keep your focus on the flame. Notice the awareness of the sensations in your body. Notice what happens to your concerns about the day.

The outside world and concerns about the day are still there, but not as stressful as before, as your attention magnifies the calm energy of the candle.

>Try This Now: *The Belly Breath*

Take a deep breath from your belly.

With the next breath keep your chest and shoulders still and breathe from your belly.

Now breathe so deeply you can feel the belt of your pants.

Now breathe again and hold the breath for two seconds. Repeat three times.

LAW NUMBER SIX: BUILD CALM— THE LAW OF REPETITION

A top U.S. basketball player joined a leading NBA team, and the coach had him shoot baskets from three feet out, over and over again. The player complained that he already knew how to shoot from this distance and wanted more excitement and challenge. The coach replied, “You keep shooting from three feet out until it’s

habit, then I’ll get you to shoot four feet out until that’s habit. Eventually you’ll be able to shoot from any point on the court blindfolded.”

Meditation requires repeating basic, obvious, and simple steps over and over again.

LAW NUMBER SEVEN: MAINTAIN CALM— THE CHAIN ANALOGY

Meditation is like a chain that leads to your heart—each link in the chain represents a moment of doing the practice. For example, if the technique is placing your attention on your heart, then each link is placing your attention moment by moment on your heart.



LAW NUMBER EIGHT: FIND CALM EVERYWHERE—HIDDEN GEMS

Meditation is like digging for treasure and throwing away ordinary stones that contain priceless gems inside. Meditation is the revolution of creating the utterly profound from the utterly ordinary, obvious, and everyday. Executives often have a hard time believing that anything profound can come from altering something as simple as breath, or by repeating a certain word, or changing their focus. And yet, the height of enlightenment is experienced by harnessing the most ordinary capacities.

*“Embarrassment ...
at having overlooked
the obvious for so long”*

—THE THIRD PATRIARCH
OF ZEN, when asked what emotion
he felt upon becoming enlightened

The Serene Subway

Close your eyes. Imagine your spine is a tube of pure white light. Imagine the light glows brighter and more intense. The light represents healing and clarity.

Summary of the eight laws of meditation

The Eight Laws allow you to transform effort to effortless, to power through difficulties with ease, and to multiply the amount of calm in your life. Remember them before starting each meditation.

You Are Effortless	1 Relax
	2 Be Playful
	3 Be Gentle
	4 Open Body
You Build Calm	5 Use Attention to Focus on Calm
You Deepen Calm	6 Repetition
You Maintain Calm	7 The Chain Analogy
You Find Calm Everywhere	8 Hidden Gems

SUPER BUSY: THE UPSIDE

Here's the good news. Busy people use the same skills to create success that the Dalai Lama uses to meditate. That's why busy people are the perfect students to learn meditation. Let me give you some examples.

Successful people have the capacity to focus. One of the most important, if not the most important, skills that underpin the greatest meditation practices (vipassana, mantra, breath, concentration, and contemplation) is the ability to focus. When the Dalai Lama repeats a mantra, or places his attention on the space between his eyebrows (or third eye), or focuses on his heart, he uses the amazing power of focus.

In the same way, the Super Busy know all about narrowing their focus onto one topic; whether that person is a lawyer preparing for a case or a currency trader focusing on the Reuters screen, the outside world and all distracting issues are ignored. The currency trader blocks out all distractions and secondary priorities—the desire to phone his wife, start planning a family holiday, talk to his friends, read the paper, finish his tax return, talk to his staff. All of these worthy priorities are put aside. It's exactly the same skill the Dalai Lama uses.

The only difference is that they focus on different things—the lawyer on his case, the currency trader on the markets, the Dalai Lama on his mantra, third eye, and heart. All can keep their attention tightly focused regardless of distractions.

So powerful is the capacity to focus that if there is only one thing you learn from this book, let it be the awesome power of mastering your attention.

Successful people can do two things at once. Most of us can talk on the phone and check our email. We can “split” our attention. We can drive a car and mentally run through lists of tasks for today. Nearly all of us can walk down the street and be totally lost in stressful thoughts. We can be talking to someone, listening to that person's conversation, and be focusing on our own train of thoughts. This capacity to split our attention on two things at once can be used to profound ends.

The Dalai Lama and all great masters keep part of their attention on their center. For example, you can walk down the street and have part of your attention on the ocean of calm rather than stressful thoughts. You can talk on your cell and have part of

your attention on your heart, and so build up the quality of heart energy. You can check your PDA and have part of your attention on mastering your breathing as a way to still the mind.

Attention is lightning fast, automatic, and instant; it all depends on what you use it for.

Successful people overcome challenges. Successful people thrive and grow through challenge, making them perfect candidates for mastering meditation.

Meditation masters are masters because they overcome the obstacles and challenges in meditation in spite of distracting thoughts, or feelings of frustration. Meditation masters recognize that these obstacles will not master them. Great meditators are those who stick to the practice regardless of the challenges and hurdles they face.

“There is no enlightenment outside of daily life.”

THICH NHAT HANH

Successful people master subtlety. At peak performance, superior athletes understand the critical importance of subtlety. Let me give you an example. The Swedish Winter Olympic team returned home with zero medals from the 1998 Winter Olympics. They calculated that if they had improved their performances by 5 percent they would have won the majority of the medals. Small changes make big results.

Meditation masters are obsessed with subtle movements. They focus their attention on subtle shifts in their breath to see how present they are. They are obsessed with small shifts in body posture as an indicator of how present they are.

Zen story

After one year in a monastery, a Zen monk complained, "All I have learned about is breathing." After five years in the monastery, the monk complained, "All I have learned is breathing." When he reached enlightenment the elderly monk smiled and said, "Finally, I have learned about breathing."

Successful people know about training. In business, knowledge is power. To maintain their edge, successful people are keen to improve their skills via courses, executive coaches, and learning from role models. The Dalai Lama and all spiritual masters realize that, just like learning to play tennis, golf, or any sport, the quickest way to improve is through training. Training is a key part of all major spiritual disciplines.

You have all it takes to succeed

The most profound meditators share a similar skill set to the Super Busy.

Ability to focus. One of the crucial skills is harnessing and controlling your power of focus.

Can do two things at once. This means you can have part of your attention on your heart while doing mundane activities like walking down the street, commuting, and talking with others.

Can overcome obstacles. Great

meditators, like successful business people, have great perseverance to complete their tasks regardless of distractions.

Can master subtlety. Attention to

the small details differentiates masters from apprentices.

Know the value of training. Just as when learning a sport, finding great teachers/coaches is important. ■



Mark Thornton is the former Chief Operating Officer for JPMorgan Private Bank in London. Since 2004, Thornton has dedicated his life to creating the world's first management consultancy that does one thing: teach Leadership and ethical reflective practices to elite business schools and corporate leaders. The result is MBA, EMBA and Executive Education graduates with less stress, increased productivity, improved health and stronger ethical foundation.

Thornton's clients include elite global business schools, among them Wharton Business School and the Leadership Development Program for 1st and 2nd year MBA students, McGill International Executive Institute for Executive Education and New York University; as well as corporate organizations such as JPMorgan, Deloitte Touche, Morgan Stanley, The New York Times; and thought leaders from TIAA-CREF, Rio Tinto Alcan.

Thornton has presented keynote speeches to the Hedge Fund Traders Conference at the Time Warner center in New York, The American Bar Association, The Exchange Traded Funds 2nd Global Annual Awards, Global Capital Acquisition Annual Meeting, The Bar Association of Buenos Aries, The University de Saviour in Argentina, and many others. He has clients from the UK, Australia and Latin America.

He has appeared on national TV shows including Fox Business News, ABC TV, CNBC, MTV as well as more than 60 national and regional radio shows: ABC Radio, Air America, Sirius, XFM, The Joey Reynolds Show, Martha Stewart Living Radio, The Good Life show with Jesse Dylan, WBZ 1030 AM, The Ed Walsh Show on WOR 710AM, KOW 850 AM "After Midnight with Rick Barker," ABC affiliate KBUR 1490AM, CBS affiliate KSMA 1240AM, The Jordan Rich Show WBZ 1030AM, The Fox FM 99.7, WQCD 101.9FM and more than 50 other regional stations. His articles have appeared in CEO Magazine, The Chicago Daily Herald, The New York Times, Yoga Journal, Body & Soul Magazine, Diet & Nutrition Magazine and Perfil, Argentina's equivalent of The Economist.



While we were putting the finishing touches on the Mindfulness section of this newsletter the New York Times ran an article on a closely related topic.

Check it out as you can:

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/06/jobs/teaching-meditation-techniques-to-organizations.html?_r=1&

Managing Stress

by Daniel Goleman Host, Leadership: A Master Class

A friend told me, “My worst time at work was just after a merger when people were disappearing daily, with lying memos about what had happened.” She added, “Nobody could focus on their work.” These days what was just an episode for her has become a chronic reality in too many businesses.

Ups and downs of the economy aside, organizational life is rife with toxic moments – impossible directives from headquarters, unreasonable people in positions of power, abrasive workmates, and on and on. So, how can we manage such constant stress, or outright distress? One strategy for managing our reactions to hassles and upsets takes advantage of another dynamic between the prefrontal area and the amygdala circuitry.

Richard Davidson, who directs the Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience at the University of Wisconsin, has done seminal research on the left versus right prefrontal areas. His research group has found that when we're in the grip of a hijack or under the sway of distressing emotions, there are relatively high levels of activity in the right prefrontal cortex. But when we're feeling great – enthused, energized, like we

could take on anything – the left prefrontal area lights up.

The Davidson group found that each of us has a left-to-right ratio of prefrontal activity (measured when we're just resting, not doing anything in particular) that accurately predicts our typical mood range day to day. This left-to-right ratio gauges our emotional set point. People who have more activity on the left than right are more likely to have more positive emotions, and the more positive their emotions day to day. Those with more activity on the right are prone to having more negative emotions.

There is a “Bell Curve” for this ratio, like the well-known upside-down U curve for IQ. Most of us are in the middle – we have good and bad days. Some people are at the extreme right – they may be clinically depressed or chronically anxious. In contrast, those people at the extreme left on the Bell Curve bounce back from setbacks with extraordinary rapidity.

Davidson has also done research on what he calls “emotional styles” – which are really brain styles. One brain style tracks how readily we become upset: where we are on the spectrum from a hair-trigger amygdala – people

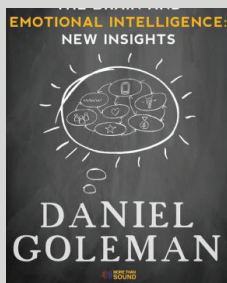
who easily become upset, frustrated or angered – versus people who are unflappable.

A second style looks at how quickly we recover from our distress. Some people recover quickly once they get upset, while others are very slow. At the extreme of slowness to recover are people who continually ruminate or worry about things – in effect, who suffer from ongoing low-grade amygdala hijacks. Chronic worry keeps the amygdala primed, so you remain in a distress state as long as you ruminate.

Given the many realistic stresses we face, those first two styles – being unflappable and capable of quick recovery – are the most effective in navigating the troubles of the world of work.

The third style assesses a person's depth of feeling. Some people experience their feelings quite intensely, some people quite shallowly. Those who have stronger feelings may be better able to authentically communicate them more powerfully – to move people.

There's another piece of suggestive data about the left-right ratio. Barbara Fredrickson at the University of North Carolina finds that people who flourish in life – who have rich rela-



Daniel Goleman lectures frequently to business audiences, professional groups and on college campuses. A psychologist who for many years reported on the brain and behavioral sciences for *The New York Times*,

Dr. Goleman previously was a visiting faculty member at Harvard. Dr. Goleman's most recent book *Leadership: The Power of Emotional Intelligence – Selected Writings* (www.MoreThanSound.net) is a collection of his key work on the topic from his books and his articles in

the Harvard Business Review. His book *Emotional Intelligence* argued that human competencies like self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy add value to cognitive abilities in many domains of life. The book was on The New York Times bestseller list for a year-and-a-half, and has since been translated into nearly 40 languages. He was a co-founder of the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning at the Yale University Child Studies Center. He's currently co-chairman of The Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, based in the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University. He is also a member of the board of directors of the Mind & Life Institute. Dr. Goleman has received many journalistic awards for his writing, including two nominations for the Pulitzer Prize for his articles in the Times.

tionships, rewarding work, who feel that their life is meaningful – have at least three positive emotional events for every negative one. A similar positive-to-negative ratio in emotions has also been documented in top teams, where it's five-to-one; the ratio for flourishing seems to operate at the collective level too.

When we're pitched into an amygdala hijack, whether intense or low level but ongoing, we're in sympathetic nervous system arousal. As a chronic condition that's not a good state. While we're hijacked, the alarm circuits trigger the fight-flight-or-freeze response that pumps stress hormones into the body with a range of negative results, such as lowering the effectiveness of our immune response. The opposite state, parasympathetic arousal, occurs when we're relaxed. Biologically and neurologically this is the mode of restoration and recovery, and it is associated with left prefrontal arousal.

If you want to cultivate greater strength of activity in the left prefrontal areas that generate positive emotions, you can try a few strategies. One is to take regular time off from a hectic, hassled routine to rest and restore. Schedule time to “do nothing”: walk your dog, take a long shower, whatever allows you to let go of leaning forward into the next thing in your on-the-go state.

Another is called mindfulness; Daniel Siegel has an elegant analysis of the brain areas this involves. In the most popular form of mindfulness you cultivate an even-hovering presence to your experience in the moment, an awareness that is non-judgmental and non-reactive to whatever thoughts or feelings arise in the mind. It's a very effective method for decompressing and getting into a relaxed and balanced state.

“Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduc-

tion,” the method Jon Kabat-Zinn developed, is widely used in medical settings to help people manage chronic symptoms, because it alleviates the emotional suffering that usually attends them, and so improves patients' quality of life.

Richard Davidson teamed up with Kabat-Zinn, then at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, to help people at work learn how to get into a relaxed mode via mindfulness. Kabat-Zinn taught mindfulness to people working in a high-stress setting, a biotech start-up where they were going all-out, 24/7. He taught them an eight-week program where they practiced mindfulness an average of 30 minutes a day.

Davidson did brain studies before and after the mindfulness program. Before, most people's emotional set point was tipped to the right, indicating they were hassled. After eight weeks of mindfulness, they had begun to tip back to the left. And their own reports made clear that with this shift toward the more positive zone of emotions their enthusiasm, energy, and joy in their work surfaced.

Mindfulness seems a good choice for strengthening the dominance of critical zones in the prefrontal cortex. Davidson tells me – this is good news – that the biggest bang for your buck from mindfulness in terms of shifting the brain's emotional set point comes at the beginning of the practice. You don't have to wait for years to feel the improvement – though you probably need to continue practicing daily to maintain the shift.

Along with this shift toward a more positive mood range comes another neural tool for managing stress: a faster recovery time. Traditionally people end their daily mindfulness session with a period of loving thoughts toward other people – the practice of

lovingkindness. This intentional generation of a positive mood enhances “vagal nerve tone,” the body's ability to mobilize to meet a challenge and then to recover quickly. The vagus nerve regulates the heartbeat and other organ functions, and plays a major role in calming down the body when we get distressed. Better vagal tone enhances our ability to arouse ourselves to meet a challenge and then to cool down rather than staying in high gear.

Having good vagal tone helps us not just recover from stress, but also sleep better and guard against the negative health impacts of chronic stress in life. The key to building better vagal tone is to find a method we enjoy, and practice it daily – like a workout for the vagus nerve. These methods include everything from simply remembering to count slowly to ten when you are starting to get ticked off at someone, to systematic muscle relaxation, to meditation.

Sometimes when I talk about meditation – a topic I've been writing about for decades – I'm asked if we might get the same effects through psychopharmacology. I prefer to use the mind to intervene in brain states; it's a natural way to manage our brain. There are many kinds of meditation, each using a different mental strategy: concentration, mindfulness, and visualization, to name a few.

Each meditation method has specific impacts on our mental states. For example, visualization activates centers in the spatial visual cortex, while concentration involves the attention circuitry in the prefrontal cortex but not the visual area. A new scientific field, “contemplative neuroscience,” has begun mapping exactly how meditation A versus meditation B engages the brain, which brain centers it activates, and what the specific benefits might be. ■

Book Excerpt from *Search Inside Yourself*

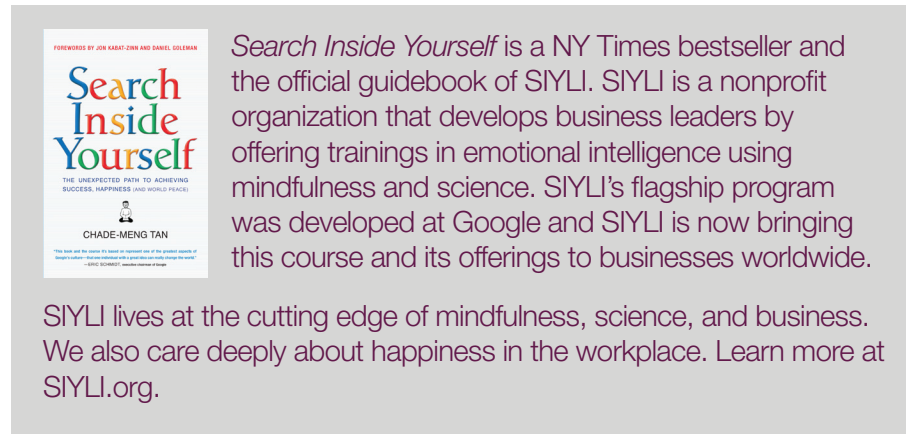
by Chade-Meng Tan, published by Harper Collins, April 2012

Optimize Thyself

The aim of developing emotional intelligence is to help you optimize yourself and function at an even higher level than what you are already capable of. Even if you are already outstanding at what you do (which everybody in our class at Google is), sharpening and deepening your emotional competencies can give you an extra edge. We hope the training in these pages can help you go from good to great. When people come to a course such as ours that advertises itself as an “emotional intelligence course,” most people expect it to be a purely behavioral course. They expect to be told how to play nice, share candy, and not bite their co-workers.

Cultivating Emotional Intelligence

We decided on an entirely different approach, focusing primarily on expanding the range and depth of people’s emotional abilities. We begin with the insight that emotional intelligence is a collection of emotional skills and, like all skills, emotional skills are trainable. We created a course to train those skills. We feel that if we develop skills, behavioral issues automatically go away. For example, if a person acquires the ability to skillfully manage his own anger, then all his behavioral issues involving anger are “automagically” solved. Emotional skillfulness frees



Search Inside Yourself is a NY Times bestseller and the official guidebook of SIYLI. SIYLI is a nonprofit organization that develops business leaders by offering trainings in emotional intelligence using mindfulness and science. SIYLI’s flagship program was developed at Google and SIYLI is now bringing this course and its offerings to businesses worldwide.

SIYLI lives at the cutting edge of mindfulness, science, and business. We also care deeply about happiness in the workplace. Learn more at SIYLI.org.

us from emotional compulsion. We create problems when we are compelled by emotions to act one way or another, but if we become so skillful with our emotions that we are no longer compelled, we can act in rational ways that are best for ourselves and everybody else. And we will play nice, share candy, and not bite our co-workers.

Emotional intelligence is trainable, even in adults. This claim is based on a fairly new branch of science known as “neuroplasticity.” The idea is that what we think, do, and pay attention to changes the structure and function of our brains. A very interesting example of this comes from drivers of traditional black cabs in London. To get a license to drive that cab, you need to navigate the twenty-five thousand streets of London and all its points of interest in your head. This is a difficult test that can take two to four years of intense training to prepare for. Research has shown

that the part of the brain associated with memory and spatial navigation, the hippocampus, is bigger and more active in London cabbies than in the average person. More interestingly, the longer someone has been driving a cab in London, the larger and more active her hippocampus.⁹

One very important implication of neuroplasticity is that we can intentionally change our brains with training. For example, research by my friend and fellow Search Inside Yourself teacher Philippe Goldin shows that after just sixteen sessions of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), people with social anxiety disorder are able to increase activity in the parts of their brains associated with self-regulation, linguistic processing, and attention when working with their own negative self-beliefs.¹⁰ Think about it, if we can train our brains to overcome even serious emotional disorders, just imagine the possibility of using it to greatly improve the qual-

*“Stability is found in freedom — not in conformity and compliance.
It is individual freedom that creates stable systems. It is differentness that enables us to thrive.”*

—Margaret Wheatley



Chade-Meng Tan

Meng is Google's Jolly Good Fellow (which nobody can deny). As one of Google's earliest engineers, Meng helped build Google's first mobile search service and headed the team that monitored Google's search quality. After a successful eight-year stint in engineering and two years as GoogleEDU's head of personal growth, he currently serves Google's talent team. Meng's job description is to "enlighten minds, open hearts and create world peace." To learn more, go to www.siybook.com.

ity of our emotional lives. That is the promise of the science and practices described in these pages.

Train Attention

How do we begin training emotional intelligence? We begin by training attention. This may seem a little counterintuitive at first. I mean, what does attention have to do with emotional skills? The answer is that a strong, stable, and perceptive attention that affords you calmness and clarity is the foundation upon which emotional intelligence is built. For example, self-awareness depends on being able to see ourselves objectively, and that requires the ability to examine our thoughts and emotions from a third-person perspective, not getting swept up in the emotion, not identifying with it, but just seeing it clearly and objectively. This requires a stable and clear, nonjudging attention. Another example shows how attention relates to self-regulation. There is an ability called "response flexibility," which is a fancy name for the ability to pause before you act. You experience a strong emotional stimulus, but instead of reacting immediately as you normally would (for example, giving the other driver the bird), you pause for a split second, and that pause gives you choice

in how you want to react in that emotional situation (for example, choosing not to give the other driver the bird, which may save you a lot of trouble because the other driver may be an angry old man with golf clubs who turns out to be the father of the woman you're dating).

That ability depends again on having a quality of attention that is clear and unwavering. To quote Viktor Frankl, "Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our happiness." What a mind of calmness and clarity does is to increase that space for us. The way to train this quality of attention is something known as "mindfulness meditation." Mindfulness is defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally."¹¹ The famous Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh defined mindfulness very poetically as "keeping one's consciousness alive to the present reality,"¹² which I really like, but I found Jon's definition easier to explain to the engineers, and I like the engineers. Mindfulness is a quality of mind that we all experience and enjoy from time to time, but it is something that can be great-

ly strengthened with practice, and once it becomes sufficiently strong, it leads directly to the attentional calmness and clarity that forms the basis of emotional intelligence. There is scientific evidence showing that improving our ability to regulate our attention can significantly impact how we respond to emotions.

An interesting study by neuroimaging researcher Julie Brefczynski-Lewis and colleagues revealed that when expert meditators (those with ten thousand or more hours of meditation training) were subjected to negative sounds (for example, a woman screaming), they showed lesser activation in the part of the emotional brain called the amygdala compared to novice meditators.¹³ Furthermore, the more hours of meditation training the expert had, the lower the activation in the amygdala. This is fascinating because the amygdala has a privileged position in the brain—it is our brain's sentinel, constantly scanning everything we see for threats to our survival. ■

Footnotes

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Leading with Authenticity and Presence

by Susan Skjei, MS, MA

When you meet a person who has inner authentic presence, you find he has an overwhelming genuineness, which might be somewhat frightening because it is so true and honest and real. You experience a sense of command radiating from the person of inner authentic presence. Although that person might be a garbage collector or a taxi driver, still he or she has an uplifted quality, which magnetizes you and commands your attention.

These words from Chogyam Trungpa, paint a powerful and intriguing picture of an essential quality of leadership that often goes unacknowledged but is desperately needed during this time of social, economic and environmental turbulence.

The primary practice Chogyam Trungpa taught for discovering basic goodness was meditation. However, he considered all of life's challenges to be opportunities to practice and incorporated the various elements of everyday life into rituals for waking up. He emphasized the importance of decorum in everyday life, including how one eats, wears one's clothes, and speaks to others. All of these practices were intended to invoke the openness, fearlessness, and tenderness that is the hallmark of the Shambhala warrior. The path of warriorship provides an inspiring and uplifting journey toward greater wholeness and authenticity.

Discovering Authenticity

The definition of authenticity within the Shambhala tradition refers to a state of awakened pres-

ence in which the individual has access to the profundity of basic goodness as well as appreciation of his or her own uniqueness. The Tibetan term for this awakened presence is wangthang, translated as "authentic presence" or "field of power." Although authentic presence is inherent, discipline and rigor are needed in order to access it. According to Trunpqa, "The cause of authentic presence is the merit you accumulate and the effect is the authentic presence itself."

Merit or virtue comes from emptying out and letting go—the ability to empathize and exchange oneself with the suffering and aspirations of others. It is a result of gradual development as well as instantaneously letting go of the habitual mind.

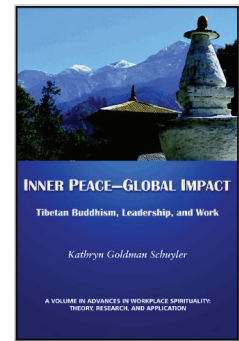
Although these qualities of authenticity are familiar to us, Trungpa said, most people only experience them in glimpses. In order to sustain the glimpse, there is a need for discipline. This can be accomplished through the practice of meditation. There are two meditation methods that can assist with the journey toward authenticity. The first is called *shamatha*, which in Sanskrit means "development of peace." First the practitioner must be able to simplify external stimuli, and thorough a simple technique, such as following the breath as it goes in and out of the body, bring his or her awareness into the present moment. The goal is not to try to think happy or pleasant thoughts or to think about peacefulness, per se, but through the process of

acknowledging that one is thinking, and letting go of specific thoughts, peace

can naturally arise. According to Trunpqa, "It doesn't really matter what thoughts you have in the practice of meditation, whether you have monstrous thoughts, or benevolent thoughts, all of them are regarded purely as thinking. They are neither virtuous nor sinful"

The second meditation discipline is called *vipassana* or clear seeing. It is not enough to have stability of mind. One must also cultivate clarity and the ability to see the interaction of cause and effect that can result in insight. The meditation technique involves opening up to the environment or "space" and noticing what happens when the practitioner attempts to rest his or her mind in this. Trungpa also emphasized the value of meditation for learning to synchronize one's body and mind.

This method of synchronizing your mind and body is training you to be very simple and to feel that you are not special, but ordinary, extra-ordinary. You sit simply, as a warrior, and out of that, a sense of individual dignity arises. You are sitting on the earth and you realize that this earth deserves you and you deserve this earth. You are there—fully, personally, genuinely. So meditation practice in the Shambhala tradition is designed to educate people to be honest and genuine, true to themselves.



ROUSING UNCONDITIONAL CONFIDENCE

There are many aspects to the Shambhala teachings, but perhaps the one that is most important for leadership development has to do with how to rouse unconditional confidence, regardless of external circumstances. This is called raising *lungta* or “wind-horse.” It involves tuning in to one’s body, emotions, and mental state, fully acknowledging and synchronizing them, and then letting go. In this way, a leader can learn to access the energy, or wind, of a situation and engage with it powerfully, as if riding a horse. By practicing this in a variety of ways, in both formal and informal settings, it is possible for the leader to develop strength and presence, or “merit” as it is known in this tradition.

LEADERSHIP PRESENCE

The importance of courage and leadership presence in the midst of difficult situations has been well documented in the leadership literature. Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas have said that good leadership is about making sound judgments when confronted with crucible moments. Bill George, former CEO of Medtronic, used the same term and emphasized the importance of moments of truth for authentic leaders. Similarly, Joseph Badaracco described moments of courage or defining moments. All of these refer to the turning points at which a leader faces a challenge and then responds with the sum total of whoever he or she is at the time with whatever level of training and experience he or she has at that moment.

Many leadership experts have sought to analyze and evaluate the actions leaders take in these critical moments in order to recommend

additional training to help them respond more appropriately in the future. This is certainly helpful, but it doesn’t address the inner experience of the leader and how awareness impacts not only what the leader sees, but how he or she responds to the situation. As Bill O’Reilly, CEO of Hannover Insurance said, “The success of an intervention is determined by the internal condition of the intervener.” When a leader faces an emerging, complex challenge that is different from anything that has happened before, he or she must innovate on the spot. These moments require the leader to access a deeper level of authenticity, coherence, resourcefulness, and presence to respond appropriately (or at all). It might be said that authentic moments are those when we are most at home with ourselves or at one with ourselves. However, leaders cannot take these moments for granted. In order to understand authentic moments more fully, a deeper exploration of leaders’ lived experience is needed. This is what Chogyam Trungpa offered the world through his teachings on authentic presence—both an understanding of authenticity and a pathway for cultivating it.

WORKING WITH FEAR

The biggest obstacle to authentic presence is fear. Leaders cannot eliminate fear, but must get to know their fear intimately in order to know how to work with it. Bravery is not the absence of fear but the ability to take wise action in spite of the fear. Pema Chodron, a Western student of Trungpa’s who became a monastic, wrote, “To the degree you face yourself and face your fear, you know what it triggers in you and all of the ways you try to run away from it, and trust the potential that you and

all other beings have to open up, be wakeful and be kind, you don’t right away discover courage, but you discover tender vulnerability.”

The antidote to fear is not a brittle confidence born of certainty, but the vulnerability of an open heart. Thus the Shambhala path emphasizes the importance of gentleness and vulnerability as well as fearlessness and confidence. The authentic leader balances these two qualities with discernment and intelligence. ■



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Life Outside the Bubble

by Susan Szpakowski, Executive Director, Authentic Leadership in Action (ALIA) Institute

It is no coincidence that when our lives are fragmented, our organizations and the larger social and natural systems of which they are a part suffer. The problem is that we stop paying attention. More to the point, we forget what to pay attention to.

—Peter Senge

As we try to manage increasing work loads, information loads, and stress loads, there is always the tantalizing thought that if we could just catch up, if conditions would just shift this way or that way, we will arrive at a breakthrough. We will harness all that complexity, all that knowledge and energy and possibility. We will ride the complexity. And so we move a little faster, stretch a little further, make more connections, cover more bases. This might seem like high performance. But when a competitor or a shift in the environment or our own overstretched capacity takes the wind out of our sails, we suddenly discover how vulnerable we have become. We have depleted our reserves.

Attention is one of our most valuable resources, and yet strangely we seldom pay attention to how we pay attention, unless we happen to be a meditator or a neuroscientist. These two perspectives are now beginning to “meet in the middle,” as Western meditators mature in their understanding, and scientists expand their knowledge of how the brain works. This new knowledge has important application in the fields of management and leadership.

For example, scientists can now explain why the brain gets overloaded at work, and how we can manage or avoid this overload by using our attention resources dif-

ferently. The part of the brain that performs complex problem-solving, the prefrontal cortex, uses large amounts of energy and literally gets tired from prolonged use. In *Your Brain at Work*, David Rock talks about some of the simple things we can do to manage our work rhythms so that we don't overload this region of our brain. Some of these we probably already do intuitively, such as prioritizing at the beginning of the day when we are still fresh, using diagrams and stories to hold complex information, getting aerobic exercise which oxygenates the brain, externalizing information on flipcharts and notepads so that we don't have to hold it all in memory, and allowing the thinking brain to return to a resting state at various points during the day.

Rock notes that the brain has other limitations, such as the capacity to perform multiple conscious tasks at once. The prefrontal cortex can only do one thing at a time. The term *continuous partial attention* refers to the common illusion of multitasking, which actually involves rapidly switching attention between tasks—an inefficient use of brain energy that leads to mental exhaustion. The only way to successfully multitask without draining energy and splitting focus is to combine automatic functions, which are taken on by other parts of the brain, with those requiring conscious engagement.

Accessing more of the brain's functions is also a key to generating insight. According recent research, people who are particularly adept at generating insight have learned how to switch to alternative modes of thinking, so that some of the background, intuitive functions can make new connections among incoming data.

These glimpses into the workings and limitations of our brain lead to the conclusion that the mind's capacity to be self-aware is key to becoming more effective in the workplace, particularly in complex environments. This capacity is called mindfulness.

According to Rock, “Originally an ancient Buddhist concept, mindfulness is used by scientists today to define the experience of paying close attention, to the present, in an open and accepting way. It's the idea of living ‘in the present,’ of being aware of experience as it occurs in real time, and accepting what you see....To neuroscientists, mindfulness has little to do with spirituality, religion, or any particular type of meditation. It's a trait that everyone has to some degree, which can be developed in many ways.... Mindfulness also turns out to be important for workplace effectiveness. When you listen to a hunch that you need to stop emailing and think about how to plan your day better, you're being mindful. When you notice

that you need to focus so you don't get lost driving to a meeting, you're being mindful."

Recent neuroscience research has further confirmed what meditators have known for millennia: that there are two fundamentally different ways of interacting with the environment. One is centered in a self-referential process ("ego" or "me" or "personality"), which neuroscience calls the "narrative circuit"—it is the brain circuitry and information storehouse that holds together a personal narrative based on past experience, which then acts as a filter and interpreter for what is happening in the present. The other is called "direct experience" by both scientists and meditators. In this case, several different brain regions become more active and you are able to experience sensory information in real time. You are not just overlaying the experiences of the past onto the situation of the present.

Mindfulness not only allows you to notice the difference between these two modes, but also gives you the choice of which circuitry to be using. Further, the more you switch over to direct experience, the "thicker" and stronger this circuitry becomes.

Now stepping outside the framework of neuroscience and into our everyday experience, we can also say that direct experience heals fragmentation. We get out of our "head" and into the mind-body system that is already connected to the larger energetic system of the environment. We reconnect with a wholeness that has been in the background. We draw from a larger energetic field, and we become more attuned to the subtle signals within and around us.

A traditional Buddhist metaphor for our usual thinking mind is that of a monkey trapped inside a house. The monkey keeps running from window to window, which represent the senses. Obviously the monkey doesn't have a very complete or integrated view of the world outside. Nor is there a lot of freedom in the monkey's world.

"Depending on the source of attention and awareness we operating from, we effect and facilitate different social dynamics and patterns. 'I attend *this way*— therefore things emerge *that way*.' "

—Otto Scharmer

MIT researcher Otto Scharmer also describes the limited, narrative mind as being enclosed in a "me" bubble, which could also be "my organization." Scharmer describes a movement of attention from the middle to the edge of the boundary, where you begin to look outward from the periphery of your boundaries; and then a movement to outside the boundary, where it is possible to see directly what is outside. Finally, he describes presence as an orientation that comes from the space, or the "field," itself. Scharmer then concludes, "De-

pending on the source of attention and awareness we operate from, we effect and facilitate different social dynamics and patterns. 'I attend *this way* — therefore things emerge *that way*.'"

In other words, the result we get depends on the type of attention, or awareness, we are employing. This is the radical thesis at the heart of

Buddhism and Theory U, and which is increasingly supported by neuroscience.

Mindfulness is a leadership practice that we can do over and over, every day. The more we do it, the more likely we will reconnect with mindfulness in

the midst of chaos, pressure, and conflict—in other words, at the times when we most need to be present and when we are most likely to have defaulted into a habitual pattern of response. Moreover, we will be cultivating the capacity to be fully present to the richness and depth of our lives. ■

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Susan Szpakowski is a founding member of the ALIA Institute and is currently its executive director. She is author of ALIA's Little Book of Practice, which chronicles key principles, stories, and practices from ALIA's first ten years. Susan has a lifelong interest in learning and education that engages all aspects of the human journey. She has been a one-room school teacher, editor for the Naropa Institute (now University), and curriculum developer for the Nova Scotia Departments of Health and Education. She has also been actively engaged in developing ALIA's model of leadership education.

Mindful Leadership: Discovering Wisdom Beyond Certainty

by Susan Szpakowski

Everywhere we hear the drum-beat of change. Organizations and communities must become more innovative, resilient, adaptive. As leaders we are increasingly called to reinvent our strategies, companies, even entire social systems, while inspiring others to do the same.

We are also called to reinvent ourselves—to let go of familiar habits, stretch in new ways, rise to meet accelerating challenges. But even the most adventurous and risk-loving among us have our limits. Too much uncertainty and our survival mechanism kicks in and we are at the mercy of fight-or-flight impulses.

Both change and resistance to change are facts of life. Any living system is constantly balancing these two imperatives. As we lead through situations of high complexity and heightened uncertainty, how do we manage the deep-seated resistance, fear, and impulse towards retrenchment that inevitably follow?

Default

It is not as if we can dismiss this resistance lightly. It seems that our brains are programmed to continually create as much certainty as possible. In his book *Your Brain at Work*, David Rock (2009) cites evidence from neuroscience that this impulse exists even at the level of perception:

You don't just hear; you hear and predict what should come next. You don't just see; you predict what you should be seeing moment to moment.... The brain likes to know what is going on by recognizing patterns in the world. It likes to feel certain. Like an ad-

diction to anything, when the craving for certainty is met, there is a sensation of reward.... When you can't predict the outcome of a situation, an alert goes to the brain to pay more attention. An overall *away* response occurs. (pp. 121-122)

Thus the tendency to move towards certainty, or to fabricate it when it isn't there, is one of the brain's primary impulses.

Anyone who has studied Buddhism will recognize parallels between these conclusions and the traditional Buddhist understanding of how the mind works. In both cases, insights into our default responses can offer much-needed guidance for today's leaders. For these leaders must learn how to linger in a state of not-knowing, facing the anxiety that arises, rather than holding on to comforting certainties that are ultimately blinding and deceptive

Ego's craft

Much of my own understanding of Buddhism comes from my years studying with the Tibetan teacher Chögyam Trungpa, who arrived in North America in 1970 as a young but already accomplished meditation master intensely committed to making a genuine link between Western culture and the wisdom tradition he had inherited. He shed his monastic robes and became immersed in the language, idiom, and questing minds of his new Western students. As a teacher he was delightful—inquisitive, magnetic, wise, playful. This was my first and most powerful encounter with a leader operating from a place beyond ego.

According to the Western Buddhist definition, ego is the process of fabricating certainty. A sophisticated, moment-to-moment process freezes, judges, anticipates, and assumes what is going on, driven by an unconscious anxiety that something is missing, something needs to be secured. But reality can't be secured; ego's mission can never be accomplished. Thus, ego's process is the source of misunderstandings from the most trivial to the most profound and is at the root of a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction.

While this process is ongoing, any indication of threat sends it into high gear, producing elaborate self-justifications, fantasies, and fears. Trying to suppress, rationalize, or override ego's process just adds to the struggle. According to Buddhism, the primary antidote is to relax the momentum by establishing a different kind of ground, one that is not ego-based, through the practice of mindfulness.

While many leaders practice formal mindfulness meditation as an ongoing support for their work, not everyone is motivated to adopt such a practice. However, anyone can apply the foundational principles of meditation to their everyday leadership.

Grounding

One of Trungpa's early teachings was on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, a traditional Buddhist instruction on how to meditate. Trungpa (1991) described the first foundation, *mindfulness of body*, as "connected with the need for a sense of being, a sense of groundedness" (p. 28). Bringing one's attention to the physical sensations of the body creates

a simple, dependable reference point that side-steps ego's tendency to create false ground by churning out reactive thoughts and emotions, which deplete focus and energy. In sitting meditation, the posture of straight back, relaxed front, shapes one's mind in a way that is stable, open, and available.

The psychosomatic body is sitting, so your thoughts have a flat bottom. Mindfulness of body is connected with the earth. It is an openness that has a base, a foundation. A quality of expansive awareness develops through mindfulness of body—a sense of being settled and of therefore being able to afford to open out. (Trungpa, 1991, p. 31)

Mindfulness of body can be practiced in any context, at any time of the day. At our desk, we can set a time to take a break, sit straight, and let the mind rest, anchored by a general sense of body awareness. When we find ourselves distracted, we simply return to the experience of body. We can also cue ourselves to come back to mindfulness with a physical gesture or activity we do regularly, such as answering the phone or walking across the office. The activity itself—the sensation of one's hand on the receiver or feet on the floor—becomes a reminder to tune in to the body.

A regular physical activity such as running, sports, dance, yoga, Aikido, or taking a lunchtime walk also helps us stay grounded and increases the likelihood that we will come back to mindfulness of body many times during the day.

All these ways of paying attention to body can help provide a base that increases our chances of being able to “open out” our attention and be expansive and accommodating without being overwhelmed or triggered by anxiety.

Recognizing and releasing

The second foundation, *mindfulness of life*, addresses the survival impulse even

more explicitly. Mindfulness of life involves recognizing and releasing the tightness, struggle, and distraction that characterize obsessive thinking. When we find ourselves preoccupied, we let go and come back to the body, the out-breath, the present moment. Trungpa describes this process as “touch and go.” Rather than dismissing, suppressing, or judging, we simply “touch” the thought, as well as the energy and impulse behind it, and then we “go,” let go, into the next moment. We don't feed the momentum with more attention and energy.

Touch that presence of life being lived, then go. You do not have to ignore it. “Go” does not mean that you have to turn your back on the experience and shut yourself off from it; it means just to be in it without further analysis and without further reinforcement.

(Trungpa, 1991, p. 36)

When touch-and-go is an ongoing practice, we become intimately familiar with the particular ways we try to manage uncertainty, because we have “touched” them with mindfulness many times. This familiarity makes recognition easier.

Other frameworks can serve the same purpose. In *Your Brain at Work*, David Rock (2009) reflects:

I noticed a surprising pattern while putting this book together. I saw that there are five domains of social experience that your brain treats the same as survival issues. These domains form a model, which I call the SCARF model, which stands for Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness. The model describes the interpersonal primary rewards or threats that are important to the brain. Getting to know these five elements strengthens your director. It's a way of developing language for experiences that may be

otherwise unconscious, so that you can catch these experiences occurring in real time. (pp. 195-196)

Rock defines the “director” as the aspect of attention that is self-aware, that notices an impulse and can choose to let it go in the moment of recognition. He explicitly links this function to mindfulness. Rock's five domains also resonate with Buddhist descriptions of ego's concerns: to be recognized, to be certain, to be in control, to gain approval, and to be reassured that one is getting a fair deal. When any of these is challenged or denied, ego goes into hyper-drive, reinforcing its defenses out of fear of losing ground.

Shortly after reading Rock's book and contemplating his categories, I had an excellent opportunity to apply the touch-and-go practice of mindfulness of life. I was about to board a plane with my son when I received an email that literally stopped me cold. Someone I had invited into a new project had become offended. He referred to a conversation he'd had with a mutual friend but didn't provide details. He mentioned withdrawing funding support for another unrelated project. I quickly responded, expressing genuine confusion and suggesting we talk. Then I got on the plane.

During the flight the anxiety triggered by the email kept breaking through conversations with my son. The initial shock was now producing wave after wave of speculation. If this person turned against me, the repercussions would be far-reaching. The project, which I knew was ambitious and risky, would backfire. I would fail, be humiliated, shunned. Why did I always go out on a limb like this? Why didn't I know better? Why had I trusted this person in the first place? How could he do this? As each line of thinking rose to a crescendo, I would suddenly recognize

the pattern and apply the label.... Oh, right. Status. Relatedness. Fairness. And I could see the underlying fears begin to freeze into a solidified position: righteousness, self-doubt, closing the door on the other. With each recognition, I would “touch” these thoughts and emotions with mindfulness, recognize them, then “go”—return to the simplicity of sitting in the seat, in the present, on the plane, with my son.

Over the following days, efforts to reassure myself that this message was simply a mistake, soon to be cleared up, became less convincing during the notable silence that ensued. I even woke up one morning dreaming that I was telling my colleagues I had failed them. Touch-and-go was not a quick fix but something that I needed to keep applying while the impulse continued to play itself out.

Obviously the email had hit a nerve, or multiple nerves, connected to my survival imperative. Recognizing this helped prevent me from solidifying a conclusion, an emotional stance, complete with elaborate justifications, which would be difficult to undo and which would probably only exacerbate the problem. I was able to avoid feeding my deep-seated insecurities. By the time I returned from my trip I was able to have the needed conversation from a place that was grounded and sympathetic both to myself and to the perspectives of the other person. I was ready to voice my concerns while keeping the door open. I could hear the other person recognize his own sense of threatened certainty, triggered by unrelated events, which had led to the misunderstanding. The crisis was over, and we were ready to move forward.

Mindfulness of life is a very personal practice. Every time we are able to catch ourselves being triggered, we have a glimpse of our own survival

pattern as well as the possibility of responding a different way. We are able to choose. And every time we choose a more generous, considered response, that neural pathway, that mental habit, that relationship with the other, is strengthened and our leadership grows a little larger and a little stronger.

Willing to be here

The third foundation is *mindfulness of effort*. Preconceptions about meditation-in-action often conjure images of someone moving slowly, deliberately, dutifully through their day. In this case, mindfulness is much less somber and self-conscious than that. It is more like an attitude or an atmosphere. In the midst of whatever we are doing we “come back” because we have made an intention to be mindful and because mindfulness is a natural aspect of mind, always available. Trungpa (1991) describes it this way:

There is just suddenly a general sense that something is happening here and now, and we are brought back. Abruptly, immediately, without a name, without the application of any kind of concept, we have a quick glimpse of changing the tone. That is the core of the mindfulness-of-effort practice. (pp. 38-39)

There is effort involved, but it may not be the kind we are used to. It is more like tuning in. We are willing to be mindful. We understand the value of mindfulness and we have an intention to keep coming back. Like transformational leadership itself, we neither control so tightly that we squeeze the life out of ourselves and others; nor do we abandon ourselves and our projects to whatever habitual impulse comes our way. Both extremes become reminders to return to a middle path: alert and relaxed; not too tight, not too loose.

Mindfulness of effort involves intentionally creating conditions—a culture of awareness—rather than simply driving down a linear path towards a goal. It also involves courage, because even though our preoccupations and struggles are distracting and get us into trouble, at least they are familiar. Applying mindfulness of effort takes away our security blanket. We have to be willing to let go of ego’s false ground.

Simplicity

Trungpa (1991) describes the fourth foundation, *mindfulness of mind*, as “intelligent alertness,” “aroused intelligence,” and as “being with your mind.” This foundation highlights the precise simplicity of mindfulness. Fundamentally, we can only be in one place at a time. We are either present to what is happening or we miss it. This realization comes with a healthy dose of humility:

We think we are great, broadly significant, and that we cover a whole large area. We see ourselves as having a history and a future, and here we are in our big-deal present. But if we look at ourselves clearly in this very moment, we see we are just grains of sand—just little people concerned only with this little dot which is called nowness. We can only operate on one dot at a time, and mindfulness of mind approaches our experience in that way.

(Trungpa, 1991, p. 53)

Even mindfulness can be another way of fragmenting our attention. We split ourselves into watcher and doer. In reality, there is always just one thing going on, a “one-shot deal.” Multi-tasking is therefore a sleight-of-hand, an illusion:

It is easy to imagine that two things are happening at once, because our journey back and

forth between the two may be very speedy. But even then we are doing only one thing at a time. We are jumping back and forth, rather than being in two places at once, which is impossible.

(Trungpa, 1991, p. 46)

From a practical point of view, maintaining the illusion of being in more than one place at once drains mental energy and is counterproductive. Switching back to a neuroscience lens, research tells us that rapidly shifting back and forth between cognitive tasks results in plummeting capacity and rising levels of error. The only way to maintain performance is to transfer all tasks but one to parts of the brain that can function on autopilot. So, for example, we can drive a car while working on a solution to a problem. But even this can be a poor use of mental energy. We arrive at our destination slightly spaced out, because our prefrontal cortex, which is an intensive energy consumer, is already tired, and because body and mind (or different parts of our brain) are out of sync.

Our body-mind system is our personal leadership instrument, capable of sensing, attending, knowing, learning, and acting with sensitivity and accuracy. This instrument functions at its best when it is not hijacked by the impulses of ego. As leaders, we are more resilient, compassionate, and intelligent when we are grounded in mindfulness of body; when we “touch and go” in response to habitual tendencies and reactive impulses; when we maintain an alert, relaxed self-awareness; and when we tune in to the simplicity and potency of *nowness*.

Mindfulness and Transformation

Mindfulness is an age-old practice that can be used in support of a spiritual path, a leadership path, or

simply a path of becoming more fully human. Mindfulness relates directly with the ongoing, universal fear of uncertainty, which, if left unchecked, distorts perception, freezes intelligence and learning, and leads to spiraling interpretation, emotion, and reaction. As leaders, we can observe all these tendencies in ourselves, and we can readily see how these tendencies become amplified in our organizations and societies. In these times of great change, the need for alternative ways to manage uncertainty is critical.

Most, if not all, practices and methodologies of transformational leadership contain elements that we can recognize in the four foundations of mindfulness. As leaders, we intuitively know that we need to establish enough ground, enough trust and continuity, for people to be able to explore and embrace change, and to step into a shared reality that is larger and more dynamic than the territoriality and impulses of ego. We need ways of uncoupling the seemingly solid links between the momentum of the past and the possibility of the present, and between assumption and reality, so that true innovation is possible. And we need structures, traditions, and rituals that sustain and continually refresh our efforts, without becoming overly rigid and burdensome. And finally, a culture of *nowness* arises when we are present in a simple way, whether in a circle check-in or while silently holding an open question in a planning retreat. *Nowness* is the incubator of transformation—of meaning, insight, courage, commitment, and synchronicity.

Perhaps what is less evident in either the mindfulness or neuroscience literature is the great bank of wisdom and compassion that becomes available when ego’s impulses have been harnessed. This is the potential

I have experienced most vividly in my encounters with great Buddhist teachers such as Chögyam Trungpa. Simply through their presence, these teachers provide a contrast to ego’s small strugglings and a glimpse of a more enlightened way of being.

Although Trungpa died in 1987, his vision of a secular enlightened society sustained through personal and collective practices continues to inform a multitude of initiatives in the arts, business, health, and education. In every case, the premise is the same: When we harness the impulses of ego, we free up creativity and intelligence. Our institutions and communities become more alive and resilient. We are able to fully inhabit a world that is already transformational. We find ourselves present for that one-shot, straight-up reality from which there is no escape. ■

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Making the Mindful Leader: Cultivating Skills for Facing Adaptive Challenges

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*If you know others and you know yourself,
you will not be imperilled in hundred battles,*

*if you do not know others but you know yourself,
you will win one and lose one,*

*if you do not know others and do not know yourself,
you will be imperilled in every single battle.*

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

*We should base our decisions on awareness
rather than on mechanical habit. That is, we
act on a keen appreciation for the essential fac-
tors that make each situation unique instead of
from conditioned response.*

*Warfighting: The U.S. Marine Corps
Book of Strategy*

Introduction

Human civilization has always faced the challenge of adapting to change. Changes in market, shifting political alliances, financial collapses, uncertain energy sources, and natural disasters have always been part of the landscape that people have had to wrestle with. However, at this point in history, it appears that the intensity and demands of change are particularly complex and severe. Globalization creates new markets and wealth but also competition and dislocation. Natural disasters in Thailand impact tightly interwoven supply chains and debilitate manufacturing in Ohio. Information technologies speed up the tempo of nearly everything making the pace of life relentless. Nearly every aspect of modern life – ecology and economics, commerce and finance, politics and government, science and education – faces tectonic, disruptive and destabilizing change (Kelly, 2005; Toffler & Toffler, 2006; Brown, 2011). Leaders across domains express a common refrain of being in “uncharted waters” where old models, routines and assumptions are called into question with

no clear pathways on which to navigate. As a result, there are enormous stresses on individuals, institutions and organisations who are called upon to meet, and effectively adjust to, increasingly discordant, unpredictable and extreme events.

How we make sense of change influences how successful we are in responding to it and a key purpose of leadership is to facilitate responses to problems positively, ethically and in a way that strengthens society (Heifetz, 1994). It is our contention that mindfulness training is a powerful and effective means of helping leaders meet the adaptive challenges of the current age.

Adaptive Leadership

Heifetz distinguishes two classes of challenge that leaders are likely to face: technical problems and adaptive ones (Heifetz, 1994). The distinctions between these two types can help to identify potential tools for facing them. Technical problems may be complex and difficult but they can be addressed with existing ways of perceiving and understanding; they are known problems with known solutions based on past experience. For

example, a skilled surgeon understands the process of transplanting a kidney and a practiced marksman can reliably strike a target.

Adaptive challenges, on the other hand, differ from technical ones because both the problem and the solution may not be recognized and understood within current schemas. Adaptive challenges call upon leaders to grow toward more sophisticated ways of seeing and thinking, acting and relating.

Take for example an adaptive challenge of a previous era: cholera outbreaks in 19th century London were thought to be caused by “miasma in the atmosphere” according to the received wisdom of the day (Summers, 1989). However, the close observation of Dr John Snow suggested revealed the onset of disease was marked by intestinal disturbances that pointed not to poisoned fog but to a tainted water supply. His observation transformed the understanding of the problem in a way that would eventually lead to a cure and give rise to the adaptive creation of public health services.

In other examples, problems may be well understood but solving

them may require a shift in perceiving possibilities and relationships. The leaders of a large desert metropolis, for example, may understand that their city relies on an uncertain water supply. Historically, they are predisposed to building centralized large-scale engineering works to transport water from faraway sources. A significant perceptual shift is needed to recognize the millions of gallons of existing wastewater runoff as a potential resource that could be locally collected through a decentralized community effort and recycled without the expense of moving water across vast distances. That adaptation requires that they learn to relate to the public not just as passive customers but rather as partners in creating the solution.

Finally, adaptive challenges also arise where both the problem and the solution may not be well understood. The current debate on climate change typifies this sort of problem. Partisans fall into conflict over the cause of weather changes and what would constitute an effective response. In both cases, adaptive challenges cannot rely on previous solutions, frameworks or ways of understanding and relating to make sense of them and respond effectively. Leaders must learn and change if they are to engage with and resolve the challenge.

A common mistake leaders make is to misidentify adaptive problems as technical ones, thinking that yesterday's solutions can apply to today's novel problem (Kegan & Lahey, 2010). This is because of the innate human tendency to mindlessly and nonconsciously react with rote action patterns and habitual ways of sense-making (Langer, 1989). The mind's tendency toward automatic actions, while useful in stable circumstances, can become maladaptive when

the pattern no longer fits a changing condition. Many of the complex challenges leaders face exceeds their ability to perceive, understand and adapt to them with their current schemas (Kegan & Lahey, 2010). Leaders are often, to paraphrase the words of developmental psychologist Robert Kegan, "in over their heads" (Kegan, 1998). When leaders apply an old map to a new problem, they find themselves stuck, stressed, and frustrated at their lack of progress.

Adaptive challenges are especially difficult. They call into question existing roles, orders and hierarchies. As a result, they are often stressful. Stress reactions are instinctive, automatic survival mechanisms that mobilize energy to adapt to a potential threat (Greenberg, Carr, & Summers, 2002). However, if poorly managed or unmanaged altogether leaders can be expected to experience a range of negative affect and cognitive impairments that can leave them disoriented, disconnected, fearful, and frustrated (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Goleman, 1996). Yet, leaders need to demonstrate that they are calm, in control and are able to inspire, motivate, make wise decisions and take effective, thoughtful action. In other words, they need to ably manage themselves in the face of their own neurobiology. The failure to effectively self-manage impairs a leader's health, diminishes her performance and potentially damages her relationships (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

Because adaptive challenges often require complex coordination with others, quality relationships are essential. The growing importance of high quality interpersonal relationships reflects a broad trend in organizations that have shifted from hierarchical command and control models, to flatter systems where formal authority is

decreased (Pearce & Conger, 2002). In such situations, authority becomes more informal and connective – relying on a leader's skill to connect with, persuade and motivate others to act in ways that may be uncomfortable, or to give up limited resources, or to go against their own short term interests (Lipman-Blumen, 2000; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). To skilfully navigate these conditions leadership capacities and skills based in high levels of cognitive and emotional nuance are called for. Adaptive leaders need to cultivate the skills of managing themselves if they are to skilfully work with others to meet the challenge of adaptive problems (Drucker, 2011; Hunter & Scherer, 2009).

To be effective in meeting adaptive challenges a leader must be able to consciously step out of habitual reactions and engage with a shifting reality in new and more sophisticated ways (Wilson, 2004; Drucker, 2001; Kegan & Lahey, 2010). Leaders must learn to cultivate and transform themselves. This self-development results in enhanced internal capacities such as deeper intellectual understanding, perceptual capacity as well as a greater ability to innovate, self-manage, and self-direct (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993).

Leaders need new tools to support them as they grapple with increasingly testing realities. We propose that a critical skill for adaptive leaders is the capacity to be mindful—to be present and aware of themselves, others and the world around them, to recognize in real-time their own perceptions (and their potential biases), their emotional reactions and the actions they need to take to address current realities more effectively (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

Mindfulness training can provide leaders with practical methods for

enhancing attention and awareness. That in turn can significantly enhance their potential for adaptive action and greater self-management. Mindfulness adds a potent perspective for understanding human action and, as a set of transformative methodologies, it has the capacity to radically – and practically – reshape it. In what follows we describe more fully what mindfulness is, explore how it might be beneficial to leaders and examine how a seemingly simple practice can elicit potentially profound results.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a way of attending to yourself, others and the world around you that allows one to adopt more productive and positive ways of acting and being (Chaskalson, 2011). Mindful attention is rooted in the here-and-now and is not biased by the preconceptions inherent in everyday preferences (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Because attention directly informs subjective experience (James, 1890), cultivated mindful attention has the potential to radically transform how a person relates to their inner and outer worlds. The power of mindfulness arises from systematically developing a person's attention so that she can recognize in the moment how she identifies with her implicit, habitual and automated patterns of thinking, feeling and acting and the results they bring about. By recognizing these patterns, she can elect to change course. As a result mindfulness endows “an adaptability and pliancy of mind with quickness of apt response in changing situations.” (Nyanaponika 1965, p. 80). Furthermore, because attention is a necessary constituent in any human activity, mindfulness can be brought to bear in any domain of human life.

Mindfulness, as we use the term, was taught by the Buddha over 2500 years ago as a way of solving the problem of human suffering. That same approach to mindfulness is also practiced today as a specific methodology for transforming the mind in a wide variety of secular contexts such as medicine (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), clinical psychology (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002), law (Riskin 2002), the military (Jha & Stanley, 2010), corporations (Chaskalson, 2011), management schools (Hunter & Scherer, 2009), and even professional basketball (Lazenby, 2001). Crucially, the capacity for mindfulness can be trained and one highly effective way of doing that is by way of training in mindfulness meditation techniques. A growing scientific literature attests to the effectiveness of mindfulness training in areas as diverse as stress and chronic pain management, depression relapse prevention, eating disorder treatment, recidivism and substance abuse relapse prevention (Chiesa & Serretti, 2010) and a Google Scholar search on the term “mindfulness” anywhere in the title of a paper, conducted on 14 December 2011, yielded 2,480 results. Research thus far has primarily focussed on alleviating the pathological. However, there is also a growing body of evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of mindfulness in healthy populations, where it has been shown to enhance overall well-being, producing desirable outcomes across a range of measures (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Chiesa & Serretti, 2009).

How Mindfulness Can Help Leaders

To date, there is little research evidence around the application of

mindfulness to leadership (Bryant & Wildi, 2008). But drawing on what is known of its effectiveness in other fields and for human life in general, we confidently surmise that applying mindfulness in leadership contexts will be considerably beneficial.

Because mindfulness training focuses on how leaders use their attention, it is not just another construct to stand alongside the many other arms of leadership research and practice, but both a perspective and a systematic method that helps leaders better understand and transform their own minds. Such an internal shift changes both how a leader sees the world, how he potentially acts and the results those actions bring about. What marks mindfulness training out from other leadership training interventions is the fact that the shift in attentional capacity can be trained and embedded in the context of everyday action. Furthermore the effectiveness of such training is borne out by marked biological changes. To draw on just one study, neuro-imaging research by Hölzel and colleagues (2011) show that an 8-week mindfulness training course evinced changes in participant's brain areas that are associated with attention, learning and memory processes, emotion regulation, self-referential processing, and perspective taking.

Our sense of the value of mindfulness builds on Mumford's insight that outstanding leadership is rooted in a leader's ability to construct prescriptive mental models that help people and institutions make sense of and respond to crises (Mumford, 2006). Mindfulness is a tool that makes more evident how a leader perceives and processes experience to construct models of reality. Mindfulness also makes these mod-

els more amenable to conscious transformation. Increased conscious awareness, we assert, is far more likely to produce an accurate read of a changing situation than does the natural tendency to fall back on rote habits of sensemaking.

A unique quality of mindfulness practice is that it is a tool rooted in immediate experience. Leadership training has thus far tended to focus on retrospective analyses of past action or on future-oriented creations of visions and goals (Drucker, 2001). Little of leadership development has focused on understanding oneself in

the present moment. But it is the present in which all human activity occurs. The here and now is the “live feed” view into how a person experiences life. Focusing on the present affords the leader the ability to see what is actually happening beyond his own preconceptions. Focusing in the here and now affords the ability to see when a person’s stated actions and intentions mismatch the actual ones. Focusing on the present affords the ability to catch a reactive emotion before it does damage to a key relationship.

Mindfulness addresses a set of general interrelated problems that

interfere with a leader’s capacity to bring about adaptive change: the pervasiveness of mindlessness and automaticity and the instinctual survival reactions that undermine cooperative, rational action and degrade personal health as well as group and individual resilience. It can supportively speak to and build upon existing lines of leadership research and development, as well as practical application.

It may that successful leaders have always drawn on some quality akin to mindfulness to deal with change and ideas similar to mindfulness have long been discussed by prominent leadership scholars (Drucker, 2006; Heifetz, 1996). They discussion they have begun can be further developed and built upon and we aim to support these ideas with greater elaboration and empirical evidence.

What follows is a brief general discussion of the basic conditions which give rise to the need for mindfulness, namely mindlessness and the automated, non-conscious nature of human perceiving, thinking, feeling and acting. Beyond that is a more in-depth exploration of how mindfulness can help leaders in specific ways. There we will examine the role mindfulness can play in helping to manage stress and reactive emotions, make better decision, act in innovative ways and respond freshly to situations beyond the limits of their habituated actions. In other words, how to become more adaptive leaders. Finally, because mindfulness is a practice, it is important to understand the mechanisms of how mindfulness is thought to work.

Mindfulness’ Potential Promise for Leaders

The following section explores recent findings on mindfulness and

Participants on a mindfulness course learn metacognitive skills indirectly but very effectively (Teasdale et al., 2002). As we have seen, they may be instructed to meditate on their breath – simply allowing their attention to settle on the sensations of breathing. At some point during that meditation the instructor might suggest that when the mind wanders the participants should notice where it goes and then gently and kindly bring their attention back to the breath. At another point, he or she might add “And if your mind wanders off a hundred times, just bring it back a hundred times ...” The mind wanders, you notice where it went and you bring it back. It wanders, you notice where it went and you bring it back. Over and over. In this way, participants learn four key metacognitive skills:

1. The skill of seeing that their minds are not where they want them to be.

“I want to sit in this meditation, following my breath, but I keep thinking about what’s next on my to-do list.”

2. The skill of detaching the mind from where you don’t want it to be:

“Actually, I don’t need to be thinking about my to-do list right now: I can choose ...”

3. The skill of placing the mind where you want it to be:

“I’ll just come back to the breath ...”

4. The skill of keeping the mind where you want it to be:

The participant just follows the breath for a few minutes, undistractedly.

By repeatedly practicing these four skills participants become more adept at them. That starts to have benefits outside of the meditation context as well: “I don’t need to be thinking about which holiday to book online when I get home – I need to give all of my attention to the team-member who has come to see me”.

the implications they have for more effective leadership. We will explore the impact of mindfulness training on leadership stress, emotional reactivity, attention and working memory, perception and cognition, empathy, decision making and innovation. We will then conclude with an investigation of the mechanisms of mindfulness and with suggestions for the direction of further research.

Managing the Stress of Leading

The secular approach to mindfulness training that was pioneered in a clinical setting by Kabat-Zinn (1990) and his colleagues was initially intended to address the issues of stress and chronic pain. Systematic reviews of the empirical evidence (Baer et al., 2003; Grossmann et al., 2004; Chiesa & Serretti, 2010) suggest that it is an effective means of helping to manage the debilitating qualities of excessive stress.

Leaders often enjoy the challenge of their position and find their work stimulating (Lundberg & Frankenhaeuser, 1999), but leadership can also be highly stressful. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) describe the condition of “power stress” to which those in leadership positions are particularly susceptible. This is a by product of the manifold pressures they experience, the ambiguities of authority and communication that abound in large organisations, as well as the loneliness inherent in leadership positions. Boyatzis and McKee see some degree of power stress as being inevitable in leadership positions and the key to successful leadership, they suggest, is not in avoiding stress so much as in taking steps regularly to recover from the affects of it. Mindfulness practice, they say, is a key means by which such recovery can be instituted.

In an interview in the Harvard Business Review, Herbert Benson (Fryer, 2005), draws on Selye’s (1975) distinction between eustress (from the Greek, ‘eu,’ meaning ‘good’) and distress. Persistent stress that is not resolved through coping or adaptation leads to ‘distress’, which may give rise to anxiety or depression. But stress can also enhance physical or mental function, for instance through strength training or challenging work. In that case it is eustress.

Stress itself is the physiological response to any change – good or bad – that alerts the adaptive fight-or-flight response in the brain and body. When this is experienced as eustress, Benson asserts, it is accompanied by clear thinking, focus and creative insight. Distress, on the other hand, refers to the negative stressors that accompany much of a leader’s work. Benson reports frequent encounters, at the medical institute that he runs, with executives who worry incessantly about the changing world economy, the impact of uncontrollable events on their markets and sources of finance, the world oil supply, family problems, taxes, traffic jams, hurricanes, child abductions, terrorist attacks and environmental devastation. Most of these are adaptive challenges and, as we have seen, they can produce distress. For the mindful leader, however, they may equally well be a source of eustress.

The relationship between eustress and distress is illustrated by the Yerkes-Dodson curve.

First described by the psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson in 1908, this is often taken as a standard description of the relationship between stress and performance. As pressure on any organism or individual increases, so the individual or

organism’s ‘arousal’ – their capacity to respond to that pressure – increases. But beyond a certain point, if the pressure continues unabated, arousal (or performance) falls off. In the case of individuals, if that continues for too long, they become stressed and eventually begin to get ill. It is important that organizations and leaders realize the kinds of chronic stress that often comes with leadership positions have been connected to a wide range of diseases and dysfunctions such as thyroid or endocrine burn-out, obesity, diabetes, the inability to experience pleasure from normally pleasurable events, immune suppression, psoriasis, lupus, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, chronic pain, cancer, heart disease, infertility and irritable bowel syndrome or other digestive disorders (Britton, 2005). Excessive, unmanaged stress can kill. From the leadership perspective, as Boyatzis and McKee (2005) observe, it can also lead to a state of ‘dissonance’.

Dissonant leaders, Boyatzis and McKee (2005) suggest, drain the enthusiasm of teams and organizations. They lower morale and make those around them unhappy. The stressors such leaders experience drive them towards attitudes of excessive control, aversion, intolerance, irritability and fear: qualities that counteract the effectiveness of leading adaptive change. Chronic stress, therefore, is a significant leadership issue. As we will discuss later, mindfulness helps the practitioner consciously shift what and how she processes experience, including stressful experiences. Therefore we assert leaders who are better able to manage the stressors they experience and are able to recover from these more effectively, are less likely to fall into states of dissonance with their people and will therefore make better leaders. For

the mindful leader, better equipped to manage her own stressors, adaptive challenges may, as Benson (Fryer 2005) suggests, produce not distress but instead eustress.

A review and meta-analysis of the effects of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) for stress management in healthy people conducted by Chiesa and Serretti (2009) concluded that MBSR was able significantly to reduce stress in that population. How it might do that, we will see when we consider the mechanisms of mindfulness below.

Managing Reactive Emotions

Leadership is a social enterprise where relationships are key for getting things done. Quality of relationships matter. This is even truer when situations are stressful. Because leaders' emotions are prone to contagion. Sy, Côté and Saavedra (2005) undertook a study that examined the effects of leaders' mood on the mood of individual group members, the affective tone of groups, and on three group processes: coordination, effort expenditure, and task strategy. They found that when leaders were in a positive, in comparison to a negative, mood then individual group members themselves experienced more positive and less negative mood. In such cases, moreover, the groups had a more positive and a less negative affective tone. They also found that groups with leaders in a positive mood exhibited more coordination and expended less effort than did groups with leaders in a negative mood. It is often the case that considerable energy is directed towards managing a volatile leader's emotions or contriving ways to avoid their activation resulting in redirecting attention away from other critical tasks at hand.

Given the crucial importance of relationship management for adaptive leadership that we have drawn attention to above, and given the impact of the leader's mood on that relationship, the capacity to skilfully manage her own emotions is a vital leadership competency and mindfulness training can make a significant contribution here. One of the early neuroimaging studies on mindfulness conducted by Creswell and colleagues (2007) demonstrated that study participants higher in trait mindfulness displayed greater prefrontal cortical activation as well as reduced amygdala activation when exposed to difficult emotion. The same inverse correlation between the prefrontal cortex and amygdala activation was not found for those low in trait mindfulness. Furthermore, using labelling methods, where participants named the difficult emotions they were experiencing, high-mindfulness participants decreased the level of negative affect they experienced relative to those low in mindfulness. Their training in mindfulness helped them better to manage negative affect.

Jha, Stanley and colleagues (2010) suggest that there is ample evidence that mindfulness training's beneficial effects on affective experience are also commensurate with the amount of time spent engaging in formal mindfulness training exercises (there is therefore a dose-response, which suggests a causal relationship) and that the training is associated with higher levels of positive affect and well-being, and lower levels of negative affect and rumination, as well as decreased emotional reactivity. These findings, they say, are consistent with the decreases in neural activity elicited by affective distractors within the amygdala and other brain regions involved in emo-

tional processing that follow from mindfulness training. Such results converge on the view that mindfulness training may improve affective experience via improved regulatory control over affective mental content.

All of these studies suggest that mindfulness training has the potential to help leaders better self-regulate in the face of stressors.

Perceiving Reality Beyond One's Blinders

The way we make sense of the world depends on the data we draw upon. If the data is not accurate or relevant then the meanings we make will not fit the actual needs of a situation, resulting in missteps, failure and loss. A study conducted by Herndon (2008) suggests that mindfulness trained subjects may come to draw upon more objective data sources and thus make more consistently accurate inferences about the world around them. Herndon uses a distinction elucidated by Lewicki (2005) between "external" and "internal" encoders. The encoding referred to here is the way in which we make sense of the world based on available data, external encoders pay attention to facts in the environment, whereas internal encoders use rigid models based sometimes on their own past experience, sometimes on information that may bear no relation to experience whatever. Lewicki suggested that internal encoders tend more readily to sustain cognitive mismatches in the face of conflicting data because their data source tends to be self-referential and closed rather than objective and open. For example, in the case of internal encoders, the view that "people with dark eyes (A) are arrogant (B)" may generate experience that is functionally equivalent to encountering real instances of that relation between (A) and (B). Though no objective evi-

dence supports that particular A-B relation, the schema assuming it can grow in strength over time and become a habitual way of sensemaking. External encoders, by contrast, tend to be more careful in deriving meaning by using data from the environment. They require a greater amount of confirming data from the world around them before instantiating a schema. Herndon's (2008) study showed a positive correlation between mindfulness and the tendency towards external encoding. In other words, people who are more mindful tend to read the environment more accurately and are less subject to the potential distortion of internal biases.

What is crucially important for adaptive leaders in this context is the fact that mindfulness can be trained. By undertaking a course in mindfulness training, Herndon's study implies, leaders may become better able to make accurate assessments of the environment in which they are operating and less prone to misleading, subjective, perceptual blinders.

That view is supported by neuroscience data. An fMRI study conducted by Farb and colleagues (2007) noted that with just eight weeks of MBSR training, individuals were more readily able to switch their focus of attention from the default network, involved in 'narrative focus' activities – such as planning, daydreaming and ruminating – to modes of direct 'experiential focus' somatosensory awareness, involving the activation of the insula and the anterior cingulate cortex. In other words, the mediators were more readily able to experience information coming into their senses in real time. What is more, compared to the control group, those who practiced mindfulness – regularly noticing the difference between narrative and di-

rect experience modes of processing – showed a stronger differentiation between the two neural paths. They were able to know which path they were on at any time, and could switch between them more easily. Subjects with no experience of mindfulness practice, on the other hand, were more likely to automatically adopt a narrative mode of processing.

On this basis it seems, all other things being equal, one might reasonably expect leaders trained in mindfulness to exhibit lower levels of automaticity, higher levels of situational awareness and consequently higher levels of objectivity than those who are not so trained.

Cultivating Empathy

Besides drawing attention to mindfulness training's ability to help leaders develop greater situation awareness in the moment through an enhanced capacity to attend to what is present, Farb and colleagues' (2007) study points to another important potential outcome of mindfulness training in the context of leadership development: increased empathy. They showed that mindfulness trained subjects had higher levels of insula activation after just eight weeks of training. That insula activation is central to our sense of human connectedness, helping to mediate empathy in a visceral way (Singer, 2004). Mindfulness training allows participants more readily to know that they're thinking when they're thinking, to know what they're feeling when they're feel-

ing it and to be aware of what they are sensing at the time of sensing it. It enhances their capacity for situational awareness in the moment and it builds their capacity for empathy.

Because leadership is a social activity, the quality of relationship between the leader and especially his/her proximate followers is important because helps to understand others' points of view, build an effective team and rally a group to work collectively (Hogan & Hogan, 2002). A small but growing body of research offers evidence that mindfulness improves the quality of interpersonal relationships. Though focused primarily on romantic relationships, Carson and colleagues found that mindfulness training improved both partners well-being and their ability effectively to cope with their own and each other's daily stresses (Carson et al., 2004). Another study exploring mindfulness and relationships found higher levels of mindfulness were associated with greater relationship satisfaction. Additionally, mindfulness was related to reduced negative emotions and increased positive assessments of one's partner after discussing a relationship conflict. People with higher levels of mindfulness experienced less anxiety and anger-hostility and that produced more positive outcomes when facing conflict. The authors suggested that mindfulness plays an inoculating role in reducing basic levels of distress and that allows a more positive and productive engagement with one's partner (Barnes et al., 2007).

*Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful,
and endures through every circumstance.”*

—I Corinthians 13:7

Although the studies referred to above come from the field of romantic relationships, there is no de facto reason to imagine that their findings would not translate into the relations between leaders and their teams. In particular, the relationship found by Barnes and colleagues (2007) that showed lower levels anxiety and anger-hostility in mindfulness trained subjects at times of conflict must imply the strong possibility of significant benefits from mindfulness training when it comes to leader-follower relations.

Innovative Action

Finally, although we are not aware of any studies yet carried out that show a direct correlation between mindfulness training and creativity, the work of Friedman and Forster (2001) suggests that such a correlation is highly likely. Before we discuss the study on creativity they undertook, we need briefly to outline one carried out by Davidson and Kabat-Zinn et al. (2003). They carried out a study with volunteers at a biotech company to investigate the effects of mindfulness training on prefrontal activation. They measured brain electrical activity in the left and right prefrontal cortex (LPFC and RPFC) before, immediately after and then at four-month follow-up after an eight-week training program in mindfulness meditation. Twenty-five subjects were tested in the meditation group and a wait-list control group was tested at the same points in time as the meditators. At the end of the eight-week period, subjects in both groups were vaccinated with influenza vaccine to assess their immune response.

Davidson (1998) has drawn attention to the relationship between RPFC activation and diminished immune response. The 2003 study showed significant increases in LPFC activation in the meditators compared with the non-

meditators. They also found significant increases in antibody titers to the influenza vaccine among subjects in the meditation compared with those in the wait-list control group. The magnitude of increase in left-sided activation predicted the magnitude of antibody titer rise to the vaccine. These results persisted at four-month follow-up.

What is significant here are the changes evidenced in the mindfulness trained subjects' ratios of LPFC and RPFC activation. Gray (1970, 1994) distinguished two important behaviour modification systems. These he called the Behaviour Inhibition Systems (BIS) to an 'avoidant' mode of mind, indicating the presence of fear, disgust, anxiety, aversion and so on; and the Behaviour Activation Systems (BAS) which is an 'approach' system, indicating the presence of emotions such as enthusiasm, pride, interest and curiosity. As Davidson (1998) has shown, these two systems correlate to the asymmetric activation of the prefrontal cortex. Left prefrontal cortex (LPFC) activation corresponds to BAS, or 'approach' modes of mind and right prefrontal cortex (RPFC) activation corresponds to BIS or 'avoidance' modes of mind.

Returning now to the work of Friedman and Forster (2001), they set two groups of college students the task of helping the mouse find its way out of the maze drawn on paper. There was one slight difference in the pictures the groups received. The 'approach' version of the picture showed a piece of cheese lying outside the maze in front of a mouse hole. The 'avoidance' version showed an identical maze except that, instead an owl hovered over the maze – ready to swoop and catch the mouse at any moment.

The maze takes about two minutes to complete and all the students who took part solved it in about that

time, irrespective of the picture they were working on. But the difference in the after-effects of working on the puzzle was striking. When the participants took a test of creativity soon afterwards, those who had helped the mouse avoid the owl came out with scores 50% lower than those who had helped the mouse find the cheese.

The enhanced capacity for 'approach' modes of mind following a course of mindfulness training, evidenced by Davidson and Kabat-Zinn (2003) and shown also by Barnhofer and colleagues (2007) suggest that leaders who train in mindfulness are likely to experience an increased capacity for creativity and innovation. ■



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Calming a restless mind – training leaders in mindfulness

by Matthias Birk, Mobius Senior Consultant and Executive Coach

Around 25 managers, all engineers by background, sit silently in a workshop room, eyes closed. The only sound you hear is the sound of their breath. Sitting upright, they are observing their breathing. Used to constant multitasking and maximizing their time and output, what makes them spend even just 10 minutes sitting and breathing?

Let's look at one example: Ray Dalio, CEO and founder of investment management firm Bridgewater Associates, and widely acclaimed one of the most successful investment managers of all time is an avid meditator. Why does he meditate? "Its 20 minutes in the morning and 20 minutes in the evening", he says. "And that's a challenging thing. But people who invest in it and experience it and do that for more than six months never stop doing it. And the reasons are, not only does it feel terrific at the time but they carry it through the day and it's really such an unbelievable investment. So when you think about the 20 minutes in the evening and the 20 minutes in the morning and then you think how much does this change the effectiveness and the enjoyment of my whole day it's such a radical payback that you want to do it." Ray Dalio is not alone. A growing number of CEOs are practicing regular meditation today.

At the same time our scientific understanding of the benefits of meditation is growing rapidly. Scientific publications on the topic of mindfulness have grown exponentially over the last decade. Still modern science has only just begun to identify the benefits of meditation. What we do know today is that medi-

tation actually changes the brain. We can observe for example increased activity in the left pre-frontal cortex leading to increased alertness and focused attention.

Robert Stiller, founder and former chairman of Green Mountain Coffee and a regular meditator claims for himself that "meditation helps develop your abilities to focus better and to accomplish your tasks." And that "If you have a meditation practice, you can be much more effective in a meeting". Subsequently he has brought in meditation instructors for his employees at their headquarters in Waterbury, Vermont.

Maybe most well researched is the impact of meditation on stress, and general well-being. We know that regular meditation decreases the activity in the amygdala, a region connected to anxiety, anger and stress. Marc Benioff, founder and CEO of Salesforce.com reflects that "I enjoy meditation, which I've been doing for over a decade — probably to help relieve the stress I was going through when I was working at Oracle," and Ramani Ayer, former CEO of The Hartford Financial Services Group says about meditation that "it has demonstrably reduced my stress and helped to maintain my good health".

Some evidence also seems to suggest that meditation can make us better, more creative problem solvers. Legal Sea Foods CEO Roger Berkowitz says "I meditate twice a day for 20 minutes, closing my eyes, clearing my mind, and repeating my mantra until I'm in a semiconscious state. Sometimes, I'm wrestling with an issue before meditation, and afterward the answer is suddenly clear."

And Ray Dalio says, meditation gives him an open-mindedness: "There is no thoughts just clarity. And that opened mindedness is where I find that creativity comes from." Scientific evidence however still has to grow to let us make a clear claim on this.

So it is hardly surprising that companies are wanting to systematically reap such benefits. Apple, with its founder Steve Jobs never making a secret of his affinity for Zen meditation, allows employees to meditate at work, providing classes on meditation and yoga on-site, and offering the use of a meditation room. Google has believed for a while that meditation can help improve not only employees' mental health and well-being but the company's bottom line as well. In 2007 it started the program "Search Inside Yourself", that teaches employees mindfulness. Indeed, Silicon Valley is a hotbed for mindfulness at work. An annual conference called Wisdom 2.0 draws together thousands of spiritually minded technologists from companies like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

But by far not only tech-firms are bringing meditation to their employees. The publishing Company Prentice Hall for example is said to have a meditation space in their corporate headquarters, which they call the "Quiet Room." Employees can take a break and slip into the space for meditation, prayer, or just a moment of quiet reflection when they're feeling particularly stressed out. And just recently a manager from the UN headquarters told me that they were offering regular meditation sessions to their employees.

In the programs I co-facilitate at Columbia Business School and with executives at a number of corporations, executives are often quickly convinced by the benefits of meditation. They want to try it out. Guiding them through 10 minutes of meditation many realize how challenging it can be to bring the mind to a still point. “Oh, it does not work for me” is something I hear every time. “I have tried it a few times and I simply cannot focus”. To use an analogy here: Few of us would give up going to the gym after three times, just because we cannot yet see tangible results. The analogy is not far fetched. We know from recent findings in neuroscience that the mind is as plastic as the body - and it needs practice. Richard Davidson, Professor of Psychology at University of Wisconsin puts it this way: “In our country people are very involved in the physical fitness craze, working out several times a week. But we don’t pay that kind of attention to our minds. Modern neuroscience is showing that our minds are as plastic as our bodies. Meditation can train the mind in the same way exercise can train our body”.

It is how Steve Jobs said: “If you just sit and observe, you will see how restless your mind is. If you try to calm it, it only makes it worse, but over time it does calm, and when it does, there’s room to hear more subtle things – that’s when your intuition starts to blossom and you start to see things more clearly and be in the present more. Your mind just slows down, and you see a tremendous expanse in the moment. You see so much more than you could see before. It’s a discipline; you have to practice it.” Researchers find changes in the brains of participants engaging in meditation already after two months of regular daily discipline.

Ultimately, meditation helps us experience what we are beyond our thoughts and emotions.

“When I go into my meditation I go into a subconscious state. It opens my mind. It relaxes me. When I carry that outside the meditation it gives me an ability to look at things without the emotional hijacking in a way that gives me certain clarity”, says Ray Dalio. And Andrew Newberg, Research Director at Myrna

Brind Center for Integrative Medicine claims: “Meditation trains the mind to become less attached to its own desires, attachments and beliefs. When this happens, the way we see ourselves and the world will change.” Or as Albert Einstein put it long ago: “A human being is part of a whole, called by us the Universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.” ■

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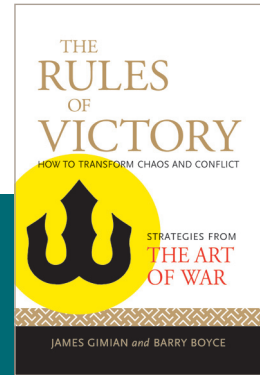
Mobius is proud to have this chance to introduce you to some of the emerging bodies of thinking and practice introducing meditation and mindfulness practice into the business world. In both the private and public sector our transformational programs often include a variety of methodologies designed to cultivate mindfulness and awareness. We also offer a bespoke one day program in this domain anchored by Mark Thornton entitled Stress Free High Performance. For more on this please go to our website at www.mobiusleadership.com.

We enjoy as well an alliance partnership with Authentic Leadership in Action (ALIA) Institute, a leading organizations focused on the intersection of mindfulness and leadership. We are also glad to introduce you to the work of a new mindfulness and leadership firm called Search Inside Yourself or SYLI. Finally, our media partners, More Than Sound, produce wonderful resources on this topic that can be found at their website at www.morethansound.com.

Forming and Transforming Energy: Strategies from the Art of War

By James Gimian, Mobius Transformational Faculty, and Barry Boyce

When life leads us into disagreements and conflicts, as it inevitably does, we need a way to reach our goals without creating unnecessary harm. Sun Tzu's Art of War offers lessons in how to work skillfully with the underlying energies that give rise to effective action.



The Art of War teaches us how to work more deftly with the underlying energies in the campaigns we find ourselves in—at home, at work, and in our communities. The central teaching of the Art of War is shih (pronounced “shir,” with almost no vowel sound), which concerns how to act dynamically and effectively within the interconnected world we’re part of. Shih describes how energy flows within certain patterns—how it moves, gathers, focuses, and releases in any system or situation. Shih is not a mystical force. To use a natural-world analogy, the buildup of energy is like a system of mountain rivulets, creeks, streams, and waterfalls that come together to form a large and powerful river.

The text teaches us how to work with shih in order to see, capitalize on, and even affect the buildup and release of energy in order to bring about a favorable result. Working with shih can be as simple as sensing when to break an awkward silence with a humorous comment, or as complex as observing when the entire direction of one’s marketplace or community is about to shift and knowing how to exploit that shifting energy. When we fixate on obstacles as impediments to getting what we want, our severely limited perspective prevents us from using the energy available in the situation. Working with shih teaches us to let energy function by itself rather

than trying to manufacture a solution to deal with perceived obstacles. If someone is angry, for example, we could rely on reactive approaches—perhaps trying to vanquish or ignore their rage—or we could notice how its inherent power might be redirected.

The Art of War gives us rich images and analogies to teach us about the power of shih, such as “the rush of water, to the point of tossing rocks about” or “rolling round rocks from a mile-high mountain.” In this way, the Art of War encourages us to observe closely how power and energy collects, builds momentum, and is released in a moment. It asks us to pay fine attention to the terrain we find ourselves in. It asks us to transcend a limited vantage point and operate from the largest perspective we can find.

Within this profound teaching on how to work with reality at such a deep level, the text presents forming and transforming as a vital pair of strategic practices. Forming is the shape we give to ourselves and our world. Transforming is the way that shape changes in relation to the conditions in the world, and most particularly in relation to our objective and the obstacles that might lie in our path. Simply put, when we remember that everything is interconnected, we realize that how we are and how we act affects everything around us.

Presence

We start the process of forming and transforming by creating victorious conditions in ourselves. We recognize that how we conduct ourselves and interact with others communicates an enormous amount to the world around us. Just by walking around, we change the world.

The text presents knowing oneself as the first step, which leads us to emphasize the importance of character, or one’s way of being. The could also be called presence, as it is the quality of being fully present and connected to the world in a way that brings effectiveness and confidence. Presence can have a significant impact in ordinary times, but it brings even greater benefit in more extreme conditions. Like a military commander in battle or a teacher in a chaotic classroom, anyone able to hold her composure and perspective in the middle of chaos—to absorb the energy, integrate it into her own perspective, and hold it while others might be freaking out—communicates confidence and strength to others.

Forming

Forming is any gesture of extending into space, starting with the simple arrangement of things in your world. How you set up your workspace, what chair you sit in when leading a meeting, what food and drinks

you serve, the air and the lighting, how you initiate a conversation or communicate news, the moment you choose to shift the course of a discussion—all these have impact. On a slightly larger level, the position you take on a critical issue will shape the decision-making options for your colleagues and coworkers. These kinds of strategic actions can contribute to creating victorious environments. The text says

*One skilled at moving the enemy
Forms and the enemy must follow,
Offers and the enemy must take.*

Forming is most effective when it includes the perspective of the whole, paying attention to all the factors likely to affect a situation. If you are growing a garden, the right mix of air, heat, water, and earth allows the seeds to take root and flourish. If those elements aren't balanced properly, it may not matter what else you do.

An excellent example of forming came to us in a story about a city councillor whose neighborhood became a battleground involving students, landlords, the university, and local homeowners.

University policies had increased the number of students seeking housing in family neighborhoods. Landlords used zoning loopholes to create subpar rooming houses that nevertheless carried high rents. So, the houses became packed with students, who made noise and littered garbage around the neighborhood. Police patrols and punishing the students did not affect the landlords, and thus they couldn't be drawn in to discussions to address the problems. The councillor took the unusual and politically dangerous step of pushing through a bylaw that assessed fines on the landlords for infractions committed by their tenants. This im-

mediately brought the wrath of the landlords and jeopardized her reelection. However, it also got their attention, and brought them to the table. They saw that responsible behavior would strengthen rather than threaten their rental business; as a result, subsequent fall move-in seasons have been successively quieter. The councillor formed the ground by an action outside of the habitual self-interested approach of protecting her political future, and achieved a result no one would have imagined possible at the outset.

Container Principle

We can apply the skill of forming in a variety of ways. Our action might take the form of a very broad gesture with no specific goal associated with it, or it could take the form of a detailed and intensified campaign that involves managing the whole experience of those we encounter. This more comprehensive application is what we and our colleagues have come to call “the container principle.” When you want to go beyond merely forming to shaping the options and intensifying the result, applying the container principle is a natural next step.

A container serves to hold something, either something of value we want to protect or something we want to limit the spread of. The container, as we define it, forms the environment for that thing by establishing boundaries and points of entry and exit, which we call gateways. The boundary—most often the walls or the sides of the container—provides the obstacle, the resistance, the hard part, the “no.” And the gateways have the quality of openness and vulnerability, the soft part, the “yes.” An effective container has a good relationship between boundary and

gateway. The boundary or barrier is definite, but the gateway makes the container permeable.

Our lives are filled with examples of the container principle. Our houses or apartments are containers, not only for people and goods but also for the energy and activity that go on there. Temples, cathedrals, legislative chambers, museums, and myriad other public spaces are all intended to inspire a particular frame of mind and sense of reverence—and egress and ingress are carefully guarded. Offices, cubicles, and workspaces generally heavily influence the activity that occurs within. The container principle can also be seen at work in societal norms, government laws, treaties, and rules of engagement, which shape our behavior in the same way that mountain slopes shape the flow of water.

In experiences that are all too common—such as facing a critical presentation at work or having to deliver a difficult message to a teenage child—we are so focused on the impending conflict that we don't think about how the container or environment can aid us in our task. Yet we can feel the difference between a formal meeting across the boss's desk and coffee at the local café. We're familiar with the limits of screaming about homework over the chaos and noise called family mealtime. Events and their environment—the container and its contents—are intimately interconnected, and missing how the environment affects the outcome loses the advantage that comes from relying on the power of shih.

Transforming

To be able to transform with the enemy is what is meant by “spiritlike.”

We can't allow ourselves to get stuck in the ground we've shaped or

how we've shaped it, but rather we continue to transform—in relation to the goal we seek and the obstacles to achieving it. There is no lasting form: whatever worked in the past, another form may be called for now.

Regardless of how brilliant the plan that got you where you are, holding on to it can become a liability if it doesn't continue to reflect reality as the ground changes. Loosening the grip on a specific, known solution allows space for transforming. Then, multiple options or solutions can arise, for both ourselves and others. The text tells us that transforming renders us “spiritlike”—untouchable, not graspable or solid, and thus not able to be attacked. By holding firmly yet loosely to the aim, we give chaos and uncertainty the space to sort themselves out. Insights beyond what we might expect can arise more readily.

A simple, everyday example of transforming comes from the world of the grade-school classroom. To make the chaos of a third-grade classroom workable, a good teacher has to consistently create and maintain a container for learning, in order to form the maelstrom of energies flying around the room into a learning environment. Naturally, this involves a relatively high degree of control, but as educator Richard Brown points out, this control can also become an obstacle in class discussion. “As teachers, we can hold on too tightly to our idea of having a successful classroom, and in asking students to share their thoughts, we can subtly try to control them.” Brown, among others, teaches a technique that asks teachers to wait three seconds before calling on someone. Inevitably, more hands go up. After calling on someone and hearing his or her response, the teacher waits

an additional three seconds before commenting. In that short period of time, Brown says, teachers can give up control and step out of the role of conveying information and transform into listeners. When students see their teachers learning in front of them it has a powerful effect.

Forming the ground starts with the intention to succeed and the strong exertion required to do so. But when we push something, it moves and changes, so we've got to adjust our exertion to respond to the changed ground. First we form, but then we must transform. We cannot remain fixed, nor can we expect to permanently fix others or the environment. Continuing to push in the same direction that got us where we are can be counterproductive.

Beyond Form

The key to the practice of forming and transforming, as the text clearly tells us, is being without form:

And so the skilled general forms others yet is without form.

As a “skilled general,” we must not get stuck in any form we employ. Transforming requires a leap, yet there is a still larger leap of not solidifying or fixating on form itself. Being “without form” means not regarding the form of any situation as the ultimate reality but rather as an ever-changing manifestation. This has simple yet profound advantages:

The ultimate in giving form to the military is to arrive at formlessness.

Formlessness means shaping the ground, taking a firm and definite position, yet not fixating on it as the only solution. This doesn't mean we don't care or believe in the position we've taken. It means maintaining an allegiance to a bigger solution, one that serves the larger whole more than it serves one particular plan. Being

formless isn't abstaining from engagement; indeed, it is engaging deeply and entering the play of forming and transforming. It simply means not grasping onto any particular form, which allows the forming and transforming to be powerful and effective.

Aikido offers a fine example. The founder of aikido, O'Sensei Morihei Ueshiba, mastered many martial arts. Yet it dawned on him that no matter how strong he might become, there could always be someone stronger. So he based his new martial art not on solidity and strength but rather on offering no fixed form to be attacked. Aikido is a practice of forming and transforming, using the opponent's own energy of attack to bring about a victorious resolution by becoming formless. His counterintuitive insight was that not taking a fortified position—not being “there” in a solid and fixed way—was the strongest position. Combining forming and formlessness gives aikido its power and effectiveness.

The ability to respond to form is not about how many clever plans we devise, nor is it about holding steadfastly to our role or position. It's about being in touch with whatever arises, and capitalizing on emerging solutions:

Do not repeat the means of victory, But respond to form from the inexhaustible.

Strategy in Practice

Nancy stared out her office window into the cold twilight. Everyone had already gone home from the progressive day care center she founded almost two decades before. Another restless sleep loomed.

The center was in crisis. The administrator she hired five years ago had started out strong and made many improvements. The workers

and parents liked him, but of late they had turned against many of his decisions. His recent moves were met with vehement resistance. A “tone” had crept into his messages to parents and staff. The atmosphere was toxic.

Earlier that day, Nancy had watched from her window as parents handed out fliers for an upcoming meeting organized to make a formal complaint and propose withholding tuition payments. She was at a loss about what to do. Bob had become a close friend, but was now an obstacle. Firing him would mean caving into a vocal minority of parents and staff, and there were also employment law issues to consider. But she was unhappy with the job he was doing and so frustrated that she was ready to just leave behind all that she had built.

Nancy was open to any suggestion for help, and her friends gave many, from coaches to mediation experts to group-process consultants. One friend suggested the *Art of War*, saying it was very helpful in embattled situations.

Through the lens of shih, Nancy could see the upcoming parents’ meeting as a defining moment, when the configuration of energy would reach a high point. She needed to work with that ground. Acting quickly, she invited Bob to share an agenda-free lunch at her house on Saturday. She created an accommodating container—her home rather than the office, and a lovely meal—when Bob was braced for trouble. At the end of lunch, after they had relaxed with talk of their own children, she pointed out to him that events had clearly reached a point where things would change—no matter how much he or she may want them to stay the same. They would need to be there for the parents’ meeting, to face the gathering storm. Through her gentle shaping of the situation, Bob faced the dis-

comfort and unease that he had been feeling about this meeting, and realized it was important.

Nancy wanted the airing of the problems and grievances to take place in an environment of openness, so she invited the organizers to use one of the day care’s rooms. In her mind, the playful child’s environment would not only be neutral ground, but it would also make the children participants in the discussion. She and Bob would attend, but the organizers would run the meeting. She only asked for the opportunity for them to make some statements toward the end of the meeting. The organizers agreed.

On the night of the event, Nancy and Bob prepared the room, making sure that there were tasty refreshments and setting up chairs in a circle to accommodate open discussion. The meeting was very high energy but as time went on, the most aggressive energy depleted and some humor even emerged. Nancy was letting the energy function by itself, trusting that the anger would be balanced out by the parents’ appreciation of the loving care that their children were getting at the center. By observing quietly rather than trying to dominate the meeting as “the leader,” she surprised many of the parents and even unnerved the more extreme ones.

When it came time for Nancy to speak, she simply asked everyone, including her and Bob, to take a few minutes to say why they were involved with this center as opposed to any other. When the sessions had finished, she said good night and mingled with people afterward. She dropped her effort to win everyone over to her side, becoming “spirit-like” as she hung out with the parents without an agenda. It took hard work

to keep dropping her habitual way of acting, but it also seemed fresh and even exhilarating.

In a follow-up letter, Nancy asked for a moratorium on major changes and suggested that they reconvene the parents’ meeting monthly. Bob concluded that he had done all he could do at the center and started looking for new employment, with his self-confidence and positive feelings about the school intact. A search committee was struck to find Bob’s successor. Life was not perfect, but things moved on, with much less pain and anguish.

Had Nancy not applied what she had learned from the *Art of War*, she might well have taken some of these same actions. The main influence of the *Art of War*, however, was to inspire her to stop working so hard to hold on to her fixed positions and defend her ground. She was therefore free to form situations, then be formed and transformed by them. She worked directly with the conflict, but she didn’t have to counterattack. By stepping outside the role of commanding and controlling, she let solutions emerge rather than having to cook them up all the time. Nancy started to get some sleep and could get up in the morning with enthusiasm about her life’s work once again. ■

Adapted from *The Rules of Victory: How to Transform Chaos and Conflict—Strategies from the Art of War* (Shambhala Publications, 2008, by James Gimian and Barry Boyce). Gimian and Boyce are also authors of *The Art of War: The Denma Translation*, (Shambhala Publications, 2001), and have been studying and teaching the Sun Tzu text for more than 30 years. Gimian is Publisher and Boyce is Editor-in-Chief of the magazine *Mindful: Taking Time for What Matters*.



Angela Wagner

Mobius lost a cherished member of its community last month. Angela Wagner, one of the original members of our coaching cadre, passed away on December 3rd, 2012 after a long illness.

It is difficult to write about Angela without lapsing into clichés: She was a smart, warm and articulate coach and colleague – with a love of learning and an absolute commitment to the growth and development of others.

We knew Angela already possessed all of these qualities when she first joined Mobius. But it was in witnessing her ongoing response to having cancer that we were more fully able to experience the depth of who she was as a human being.

For those of us who read her regular posts on CaringBridge, the health social network, Angela became an inspirational teacher and mentor. Her strength, faith, and continuous gratitude for things big and small were a reminder of how to live consciously, purposefully, and joyfully.

Angela's unflagging spirit, sense of humor, and sheer zest for life came through everything she wrote. Just when she was at her most luminous, she would bring us back to earth and make us laugh with a particularly juicy pun.

Angela, we will miss you dearly!

*Devra Fradin
Director, Mobius Coaching Practice*

Mindfulness at work: What are the benefits?

With Mirabai Bush, Mobius Transformational Faculty

Mindfulness. Everybody's doing it. From Google to the NHS and Transport for London. Even Harvard Business School includes mindfulness principles in its leadership programmes.

So what is mindfulness? In its simplest form, mindfulness means awareness. Practising mindfulness offers a way to pay attention to the present moment, without judgement. The origins of mindfulness sit firmly in Buddhism but it's increasingly taught in a secular form.

Mindfulness can help to reduce stress and anxiety and conflict, and increase resilience and emotional intelligence, while improving communication in the workplace.

When trying to decide whether you are mindful, consider the following points. In the last week have you found yourself:

- Unable to remember what others have said during conversations?
- With no recollection of your daily commute?
- Eating at your desk without tasting your food?
- Paying more attention to your iPhone than to your nearest and dearest?
- Dwelling on past events or dreading what the future holds?
- Are you skim reading this article?

If you answered yes, the chances are that you're zoning out on a regular basis, spending at least some time on autopilot.

In the current economic climate, employees are being asked to do more with less, working long hours with increasingly heavy workloads. Leading mindfulness academic, Mark Williams, professor of clinical psychology at the University of Oxford, says working in a culture where stress is a badge

of honour is counterproductive. "We can spend so much time rushing from one task to another. We may think we're working more efficiently, but as far as the brain is concerned, we are working against the grain. No wonder we get exhausted."

The neurological benefits of mindfulness have been linked to an increase in emotional intelligence, specifically empathy and self regulation. It's the development of these areas that contributes to our ability to manage conflict and communicate more effectively. Mindfulness also enables us to take a step back and consider alternative perspectives rather than simply reacting to events and using the least intelligent area of our brains to make decisions. Mindfulness helps us to flick the switch back to the smart parts of our brain to put us back in control of our emotions, enabling us to choose a more appropriate response.

Mindfulness expert Mirabai Bush, famous for introducing it to Google, says: "Introducing mindfulness into the workplace does not prevent conflict from arising or difficult issues from coming up. But when difficult issues do arise... they are more likely to be skillfully acknowledged, held, and responded to by the group. Over

time with mindfulness, we learn to develop the inner resources that will help us navigate through difficult, trying, and stressful situations with more ease, comfort, and grace.

"Becoming more aware of your own emotions as they arise gives you more choice in how to deal with them. Mindfulness helps you become more aware of an arising emotion by noticing the sensation in the body. Then you can follow these guidelines: stop what you are doing. Breathe deeply. Notice how you are experiencing the emotion in your body. Reflect on where the emotion is coming from in your mind (personal history, insecurity, etc). Respond in the most compassionate way."

Regular practice of mindfulness increases the brain's ability to repair itself and grow new neural connections. But the use it or lose it approach to physical exercise also applies to our brains so it's important to practise.

A simple mindfulness practice is the one minute meditation. Find a quiet place and focus your attention on your breath. If your mind wanders (as it probably will), bring your concentration back to your breath. Then relax as the calm unfolds. ■

Excerpted from theguardian.co.uk; posted by Gill Crossland-Thackray.

Mirabai Bush is Senior Fellow and the founding Director of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, a nonprofit organization that encourages contemplative awareness in American life in order to create a more just, compassionate, and reflective society. She has designed and led contemplative trainings for corporations from Monsanto to Google, led a national survey of contemplative practice, and directed a Contemplative Practice Fellowship awards program with the American Council of Learned Societies to explore such practices in academic courses in more than 100 colleges and universities. She is co-author, with Ram Dass, of *Compassion in Action: Setting Out on the Path of Service*, and editor of *Contemplation Nation: How Ancient Practices Are Changing the Way We Live*. She co-founded and directed Illuminations, Inc., in Cambridge, MA. Her innovative business approaches, based on mindfulness practice, were reported in *Newsweek*, *Inc.*, *Fortune*, and the *Boston Business Journal*. Mirabai's new CD on practices for a contemplative workplace, *Working with Mindfulness*, is available at morethansound.net.

Developing Agile Leaders through mindfulness awareness meditation

By Michael Carroll

We all know what human agility looks like. Attend any performance of “Cirque du Soleil” or the NYC Ballet and we can witness remarkable performers executing flawlessly: muscular, refined, and utterly disciplined. Such agile artistry is a marvel to behold!

And, as an executive coach, I am equally inspired when business leaders bring their special breed of agility onto today’s global stage: mentally quick, emotionally confident, socially intelligent and commercially astute. Such agile leadership is equally a marvel to behold.

Needless to say, such agile leadership is vital for today’s enterprises. The old models of “command and control” leadership do not readily scale with the mobile “Facebook” generation of self-organizing networks and distributed technologies. Traditional “top-down” leadership is giving way to a new generation of leaders who influence through networks, galvanize diversified teams and accelerate creative change - negotiating, problem-solving, collaborating and jointly executing. Today, work is about resilient coalitions and leaders who are agile enough to lead them.

But how are our emerging business leaders learning to master such agility? Dancers attend ballet academies and acrobats have gymnasiums where they relentlessly practice and perfect their art. And, not surprising, it’s in the halls of our corporate and educational institutions where we find our leaders engaging an emerging

field of agility training: *young leaders learning to sit still for extended periods of time on meditation cushions.*

Mindfulness-awareness meditation in business

Let’s consider a few examples:

- The Drucker School of Management and Wharton Business School both offer courses for applying mindfulness meditation to the challenges of leading enterprises.
- Virginia Tech is sponsoring a conference entitled “Contemplative practices for a technological society” designed for engineers who want to integrate contemplative disciplines into their work.
- Google offers courses in meditation providing facilities for employees to practice meditation and yoga.

Aetna, Merck, General Mills – the list goes on – all are exploring how meditation can help their leaders and employees agilely thrive in today’s fast paced business environment. And the benefits are widely publicized: sustained attention span, improved multi-tasking abilities, strengthened immune system, increased emotional intelligence, improved listening skills....And there is

science behind such claims. Research is fast concluding that sitting still for defined periods of time is a very healthy thing to do.

But what really happens when we meditate? How can such a simple act of sitting still actually cultivate agile, talented leaders?

What is mindfulness-awareness meditation?

For those not familiar with the practice of mindfulness awareness meditation, let’s take a moment to describe what the act entails.

When we practice mindfulness awareness meditation, we take a posture sitting upright, relaxed and alert. Our eyes are open, with a soft gaze; our hands are placed palms down, gently resting on our thighs. Our chin is tucked in, neck straight and our gaze is slightly downward. Our face and jaw are relaxed and our mouth is slightly open. We breathe normally and sit still. If we are sitting on the floor, we sit on a cushion with our legs loosely crossed. If we are sitting in a chair, our feet are firmly on the ground.

When we sit still like this, we have two distinct experiences. First, we notice the simple vividness of our immediate circumstances: sounds, sights, smells and sensations. And secondly, we also notice that we are thinking: talking to ourselves, commenting on this and that, thinking about any number of things. Particularly, if we are new to meditation, we may find ourselves unusually restless with our thoughts. But, such restlessness is not a problem; it is what we work with in meditation.





Attending to these two experiences - being alert in the immediate moment and thinking - is central to mindfulness awareness and requires a simple yet exquisitely demanding gesture: while sitting still in the meditation posture when we notice ourselves thinking, we deliberately recognize that we are thinking by silently saying “*thinking*” and then bring our attention gently to our breath. We, in effect, *label* the thought “thinking” and bring our attention back to now.

As we become familiar with resting our attention on our breathing - like gently running our hand over a piece of silk, slowly, precisely again and again - we eventually find balance where we are both mindful of our breath *and* mindful in the immediate moment.

Attending to our breathing in such a way, especially for extended periods

of time, is a tremendously boring thing to do and this is where cultivating our agility and natural leadership talents come in.

“Letting go”

When we examine this simple and often monotonous act of sitting still, at first glance there appears to be little going on other than the sheer boredom of sitting still. But by doing the practice consistently, we begin to notice that we are expressing some subtle yet powerful “spiritual muscles” that had gone overlooked - leadership muscles that had gone flabby, so to speak.

For example, during meditation we label thoughts as “thinking”. Whenever we notice that we are thinking, we simply recognize that we are doing so by saying to ourselves “thinking”. But a careful examination of such a simple

gesture reveals that our very next gesture after “labeling” is to “let go” - to release our grip on our internal dialogue and gently bring our attention to our breath. We “let go” of our inner dramas and story lines and guide our attention to the simple yet vivid experience of just breathing.

This gesture of “letting go” of our internal gossip while simple, is also a highly concentrated gesture of leadership agility. Like ballet dancers rehearsing a *demi-plie* or an acrobat practicing a handstand *pirouette* over and over again, here in mindfulness awareness meditation we, too, are exercising core muscles of basic human wisdom and agility.

Too often at work we tend to “hold on”, “hold in” and “hold back”. Whether it’s “holding onto” our jobs, our prestige, our paychecks, “holding back” our views, concerns and suggestions or “holding in” our frustrations, inspirations and ideas - at work our bias toward “holding” can have a singularly blinding effect on how we skillfully engage challenges. “Letting go”, on the other hand, of our fixed mindsets, discursiveness, opinions, emotional habits and much more, can provide vital perspective in effectively leading a team, an enterprise or a life.

And what happens when we exercise this muscle of “letting go” in conducting daily business? We become agile, as Professor Leonard Riskin, JD observes in his seminal study of practicing attorneys:

“To perform well as a counselor or negotiator - to make and help the client make wise decisions - the lawyer must be able simultaneously to consider inconsistent perspectives (such as those considered associated with adversarial and problem-solving approaches). Mindfulness can play a role in helping the lawyer do this. First, it can free a lawyer from habitual reliance on either

mind set, by helping her observe – without attachment – the thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations that typically make up and support these mindsets.... Consequently, the lawyer can adopt an attitude of curiosity, consider other options and make a discerning decision.... Second, mindfulness can help the lawyer uncover and gain distance from a preoccupation with self....help the negotiator better understand and deal with emotions that affect all participants...and when a negotiation situation threatens a lawyer's sense of identity and competence; mindfulness can help the lawyer simply notice the manifestations of the feelings of being threatened.....and decide to let them go and maybe learn from them.”

This lawyerly agility that Professor Riskin is observing here – an agility that comes from being free from fixed mindsets - is the very same agileness that thousands of business leaders are discovering through mindfulness awareness meditation. Such agility, not surprisingly, is all about a leader's poise and confidence in the face of novel problems, dissonant voices and unforeseen opportunities - an “emotional

flexibility” that is ready to learn, reassess and adapt.

Of course, there is more to being an agile leader than simply “letting go”, and mindfulness awareness meditation exercises many other subtle yet highly concentrated “spiritual muscles” such as “opening”, “loosening”, “connecting”, “recognizing” and much more.**

A new generation of leaders for the 21st century enterprise

Leaders alone can't do all the work, however. “Cirque du Soleil” and the NYC Ballet understand how to create the stage for elegance – the atmosphere, the tradition and the brand. And business enterprises – global, local, large and small – must also embrace new, agile ways of doing business. Besides optimizing for efficiency and profits, enterprises must also cultivate self-organizing networks – as in “Google's Bazaar” where engineers self-select projects to work on; promote cultures that revere retail excellence – as in ING Direct on line banking where IT analysts are the celebrated heroes; and enlist consumers in the joy of doing business – as in “Apple Stores” where

customers linger and linger and linger.

But core to the success of these emerging adaptive enterprises are agile leaders who can build and inspire high impact coalitions among employees, with vendors, and alongside consumers. Such leaders are artists of a sort who can confidently sip a glass of water or launch a global brand - flawless, spacious and firm. Arrange fresh flowers on a table or design a cutting edge technology – gracious, distinctive and uplifting. Such leaders are confident and poised in this diverse and ever changing climate and there is no better way to train for the challenge than with the practice of mindfulness awareness meditation. ■

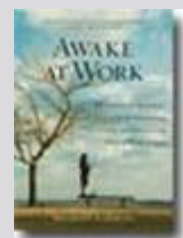
**The Contemplative Lawyer: On the Potential Contributions of Mindfulness Meditation to Law Students, Lawyers and their Clients, by Professor Leonard Riskin JD, Harvard Negotiation Law Review, Volume 7:1*

*** See The Mindful Leader: Ten Principles for bringing out the best in ourselves and others by Michael Carroll (Shambhala Publishing, 2007)*



Michael Carroll is the author of *Awake at Work* (Shambhala 2004), *The Mindful Leader* (Shambhala 2007) and *Fearless at Work* (Shambhala 2012) and over his 30 year business career has held executive positions with such companies as Shearson Lehman/American Express, Simon & Schuster and The Walt Disney Company. Michael is presently the COO of Global Coaching Alliance www.globalcoachingalliance.com and has worked with client firms such as Procter & Gamble, Google, AstraZeneca, Viropharma, Starbucks, RED, National Geographic Expeditions, Merck, Gilbane, Inc. and others.

Michael has been studying Tibetan Buddhism since 1976, graduated from Buddhist seminary in 1980 and is an authorized teacher in Kagyu-Nyingma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Michael received his bachelor's degree in theology and philosophy from the University of Dayton and his master's degree in adult education from Hunter College. He has lectured and taught at Wharton Business School, Columbia University, Swarthmore College, Carleton College, Yale University, Virginia Tech, Drexel University, University of Sydney, St. Mary's University, University of Toronto, Kripalu, Cape Cod Institute, Zen Mountain Monastery, Shambhala Mountain Center, Karma Choling, Evam Institute, Omega Institute (*assisting Pema Chodron*) and many other practice centers throughout the US, Canada, Europe and Australia.



Mindful Leadership

By Scott Rogers, Mobius Transformational Faculty

We are living at a time of great change and uncertainty where effective leadership is needed more than ever. While change and uncertainty are inherent in the lives we live, it has, for a long time, been easier for those living in highly developed countries to forget these underlying truths and replace them with an illusory sense of stability and predictability. But with globalization's reverberations sending tremors into local communities, the larger realities of life's complexities and challenges are imposing themselves in a more formidable manner. While people tend to react to this scenario by experiencing discomfort, even angst, the ripeness of the reality offers the opportunity to see more clearly what is happening. It helps us sustain attention for greater lengths of time, and make decisions that are more directly related to making a meaningful difference in the lives of a great many—in business, education, medicine, and law.

Mindfulness is an area of growing interest for many as society grapples with the implications of a rapidly changing world. Leaders are looking to mindfulness as a way of cultivating a set of skills to help them operate at the top of their game in the increasingly stressful and distracting environments in which they work. For many, mindfulness is a new concept that offers a stimulating and exciting change from more staid approaches to professional development. For those with a background in meditation, mindfulness meditation (one form of mindfulness practice) offers a simple, yet elegant method for finding balance amid the hustle and bustle of a hectic work-

day. And with neuroscience research finding that practicing mindfulness is associated with changes to the structure and function of the brain—which can translate into long term benefits—even the skeptics are taking note and participating in mindfulness workshops and retreats. The following offers a glimpse into what mindfulness is and some of the different ways it is being explored in the context of leadership.

Mindfulness and Attention

Paying attention resides at the core of a mindfulness practice. And so too, paying attention resides at the core of effective leadership. The difference that emerges at times is what it is to which we should be paying attention. To the leader, the answer is found “out there”—to the reports and its underlying data, to the people and their productivity, to the competition and its threat. To the mindful leader, the answer is found “out there” too, but great interest is also found “in here” attending to thoughts, feelings, and sensations that are continuously arising and passing away. Most of the time, these phenomena pass unnoticed. And yet, their subtle and not so subtle presence influences our decision making. Without awareness of this influence, decision making is a reactive process, with little actual choice involved. But with awareness, the leader has greater mastery over the options available, the timetable for making a decision, and the decision reached. The great paradox, however, is that until one comes to glimpse the presence of these inner experiences, one cannot know the measure of their influence or how

much greater their mastery could be. Mindfulness practices open the doorway to this insight.

Mindfulness, Self-Awareness and Empathy

At Harvard Business School, Professor Bill George, the former CEO of Medtronic, has long been interested in the ways that leaders can be more effective by becoming more “authentic.” His books include the bestseller “Authentic Leadership” and, more recently, “Finding True North.” To this highly successful business leader turned researcher and educator, great knowledge and experience of all things business are of limited benefit if there is not a corresponding degree of self-awareness. Self-awareness offers a leader the capacity to notice how external factors are influencing changes to thought patterns, feelings, and body sensations, which in turn allow the leader to assess how these changes are influencing the decision making process. Momentary impulses are noticed and, rather than leading to a rash decision—or ignored—are factored into a decision that appreciates the many moving parts at play. Factor into this neuroscience research that finds mindfulness practices to be associated not only with increased self-awareness, but with greater attention and working memory capacity, and it is no surprise leaders, like George, are taking note.

The role of emotional intelligence—of which self-awareness is central—in the acquisition and development of leadership skills was introduced early on in Daniel Goleman's classic “Emotional Intelligence” and more formally expressed in his recently

released “Leadership: The Power of Emotional Intelligence.” Both George and Goleman are keen on “empathy,” a hot topic in neuroscience circles and an often misunderstood aspect of emotional intelligence, as an attribute that is fundamental to effective and sustaining leadership. With businesses realizing not only the benefits to flow from cultivating a more emotionally intelligent workforce, but the ways in which each employee serves as a leader in their own right, emotional intelligence programs are being offered to employees at corporations like Google, General Mills, and Target. Books like Chade Meng Tan’s “Search Inside Yourself” and the program of the same name that it promotes, are providing information on mindfulness, a pillar of emotional intelligence, and practical approaches to cultivating mindfulness in daily life.

Mindfulness Practice: Noticing the Mind

We often find ourselves sitting—in our office, at a business meeting or lunch—and these moments invite mindfulness practice, whether for a few breaths or 30 minutes. In contrast to the ways we sometimes approach these situations (lost in thought, sizing up an adversary, preparing for the worst), and experience these situations (feeling tense, judgmental, and worried) mindfulness practice asks that we shift our attention inward and notice the thoughts, feelings, and sensations arising in the moment. You can experience this shift right now by assuming a posture in your chair that is upright and stable and following these instructions:

1. Bringing awareness to your breathing, noticing the movement of your body with each breath you take.

2. Following the in-breath, paying attention to the air that flows into your nose or mouth, or to your belly as it lifts with the breath.
3. Following the out-breath, sensing the body as you exhale.
4. Resting your awareness on the breath with the intention to maintain your attention on the breath.
5. When you notice your mind moving off onto a distraction or getting lost in thought, gently bringing your attention back to the breath.

This simple instruction forms the basis for a mindfulness sitting practice. If you are alone you may wish to close or lower your eyes while you practice as this can be helpful for toning down distraction and cultivating an inward focus. One of the first things you’ll notice is how challenging it is to keep your attention in one place when your mind is moving about. It is all too easy to get lost in the thoughts that arise (as we often do) and operate reactively out of habit. By bringing your attention back to the breath, again and again, and again, you become more adept at noticing when your mind has wandered, doing something about it, and not getting pulled further and further afield. This practice is often regarded as a powerful experience and an effective exercising of the muscle of attention. Its regular practice pays dividends when interacting with another person or in a group setting.

Mindfulness, Attitude and Possibility

Another important approach to mindful leadership is found in the work of psychology professor, Ellen Langer, and her 30 years of

research and writing on the subject of mindfulness. Langer, who penned *Mindfulness and Mindful Learning* and speaks on the crucial role of mindfulness in decision making and leadership, offers an approach that focuses more on the ways we attend to momentary experience, than on meditation, as the term is commonly understood. While the importance of mindfulness meditation cannot be overstated, many find a sitting meditation practice to be challenging to implement. This often limits the role mindfulness plays in their lives. Langer’s approach, which does not espouse meditation as a central route to the cultivation of mindful awareness, is a powerful vehicle to mindful living and offers a complementary approach that works well alongside mindfulness meditation. To leaders who, like most of us, often operate on automatic pilot, Langer makes the case that an attitude of interest and curiosity opens the mind and body to opportunities that continually present themselves but are often overlooked. Not surprisingly, the fruits of a mindfulness meditation practice include the cultivation of a mind that is open to the mystery of the unknown and to the limitless possibilities that reside in each moment. In some ways, Langer’s approach operates in reverse as she recognizes the ability we have to choose to pay attention and offers guideposts on the ways of doing so that enrich momentary experience and decision making.

Mindfulness Practice: Noticing the New

Langer invites leaders to snap out of automatic pilot by choosing to do so. Noting that it is next to impossible to know that one is in a state of automatic pilot—hence its common-

place presence—Langer suggests that leaders make the deliberate decision to pay attention to what's taking place with a curious and interested mind. Even more, she urges leaders to awaken mindfulness in those they lead. The key is noticing what is new—and it's all new. Notwithstanding that we tend to attribute a predictability to that which we have already encountered, realizing that everything is always changing and therefore new, readies us for the moments to come, unhindered by the past.

Walking into a business meeting, whether easygoing or stressful, is often attended to in a habitual way. Langer encourages taking a fresh look at the people and surroundings; noticing that which we tend not to notice and in doing so, open the mind to a host of insights and opportunities that may otherwise have never arisen or taken longer to do so. Langer asserts that the intentional

act of “noticing” positions one in the present moment where there is a natural sensitivity to context, and an awareness of change and uncertainty. And because leaders are looked to as guides for future action, a leader who sees clearly the inherent uncertainty and instability of situations and circumstances, is more likely to appreciate that their own “not knowing” is less a character flaw that needs to be concealed at all costs and more a natural expression of reality. Relieved of the burden of needing to know that which is unknowable, leaders are better prepared to learn what they need to learn to lead with courage and vision.

Bridging Experience and Attitude

Though the application of mindfulness in the leadership context is relatively new (though some would suggest that traditional mindfulness practices have long been a

basis for the development of strong leadership skills and insights), there are a growing number of websites, books, and events that explore this exciting area. Different approaches will draw off the different perspectives and backgrounds of their proponents, and it is likely that the coming years will offer a diverse collection of methods. Some will be borne out of traditional mindfulness practices while others will be based on more modern approaches. For now, you can bridge the two approaches discussed above by establishing an attitude of openness and

interest in persons, places and things (i.e., the newness of nouns), while paying attention to the thoughts, feelings, and body sensations arising in the body and mind (i.e., the newness of me). In your next meeting, notice what's new about the person and periodically check in with the thoughts, feelings, and sensations arising during your interaction. But rather than comment on your inner experience or doing something about it, just notice it. The breath can be a powerful anchor allowing you to remain present for the conversation without reacting to these momentary influences. This same practice is available to you when, upon quiet reflection you strategize next steps to take with an important opportunity. There too thoughts, feelings, and sensations will arise and pass away. Noticing them, and allowing them to be as they are, will offer you interesting insights and a renewed sense of well-being.

Through mindfulness practice—and it is a practice—we notice the richness of our inner experiences without them flooding us. We see and sense them with greater clarity, and, doing so, have greater mastery over them. We have greater mastery over ourselves, of the decisions we make, and choose not to make, and over the actions we take, and refrain from taking. We also come to see those around us and the events continuously taking place, the pleasant and unpleasant, as multi-faceted and exciting. Intrigued by the mystery, we are freed from having to know the answers to everything. Uncertainty becomes not only bearable, but fascinating. And through that fascination, we find in ourselves a leader interested in facing the unknown and finding out what happens next. ■



Scott L. Rogers, MS, JD, is founder and director of the University of Miami School of Law's Mindfulness in Law Program where he integrates mindfulness into the core curriculum. At Miami Law, Scott

teaches “Mindfulness in Law,” “Mindful Ethics” and “Mindful Leadership.” A nationally recognized expert on mindfulness in law, Scott is author of “Mindful Parenting” “Mindfulness for Law Students,” “The Six-Minute Solution,” and “Mindfulness and Professional Responsibility.” He has appeared on television, National Public Radio, and been interviewed for magazines and newspapers for his creative approaches to teaching mindfulness. Scott lives in Miami Beach, Florida with his wife and two daughters. Scott is also a member of the Mobius Transformational Faculty.

Finding the Space to Lead

By Janice Marturano, Founder, Institute for Mindful Leadership

"Opportunities for leadership are all around us, the capacity for leadership is deep within us"

—Former Secretary of State
Madeline Albright

I love this quote from Secretary Albright. It is a powerful reminder of the need for leadership in all sectors of our society—business, non-profit, government and military. And it is an important reminder that the capacity to embody leadership begins from within, 'deep within.' And yet too often, leaders are not offered the very training that is foundational to all other leadership training. The training that begins to teach us about the wealth of information and wisdom that is at the core of who we are, and the training that begins to teach us about the filters, conditioning and distractibility of the mind that may be limiting our ability to lead with excellence.

In the Institute's Mindful Leadership retreats and courses, we experience mindful leadership training as a way to strengthen and cultivate four hallmarks of leadership excellence—**focus, clarity, creativity and compassion**—hallmarks that originate from within. The first hallmark is '**focus**'. More and more often, I hear about the struggles people have with maintaining focus. It is difficult to stay focused on an article or a project, or even a conversation. Too often, even when we intend to stay fully attentive, we notice our thoughts wandering away, distracted by virtually anything that pops up. In fact, today we almost never fully attend to anything. What are the ramifications of this?

When we are distracted, we lose productivity. Every time we need to redirect our attention to a project or a

report, we need to spend time getting our mind back to the place we left off and back to the relevant thoughts. This reset takes time, and it also interrupts the stream of steady focus necessary to delve deeply into the most complex strategic issues and opportunities.

And when our focus wanes in a conversation or meeting, we lose not only productivity, but we lose connectivity. The connections we form when we are fully present and therefore fully listening can mean the difference between the person who is speaking leaving an encounter feeling heard or leaving an encounter feeling disrespected. We might wonder if someone can tell if our mind is wandering when they are speaking to us. Can they notice when my mind wanders to the next meeting even if I maintain eye contact and nod my head from time to time? Of course they know. The kind of focus that brings our attention fully to what is being said is a connection that can be felt by the speaker. And when our mind wanders, the connection is lost.

When we begin the practices in mindful leadership designed to strengthen our focus, we learn how to redirect our attention so that we not only notice when the mind is pulled away from the present, but we know how to work with it. Over time, we begin to notice it more and more quickly. We build the mind's capacity to aim and sustain focus.

Next, we use mindful leadership training to develop the ability to see what is here with greater '**clarity**'. In the constant busy-ness of business, we can find ourselves going on auto-pilot to make it through the day. We reach 6pm and wonder where the day went, or whether we actually did anything important. In this auto-pilot mode, we

The Institute for Mindful Leadership is a non-profit organization dedicated to unlocking a leader's potential to be fully present in the fast-paced complexities of today's environment by embodying the practices of mindful leadership. The application of mindfulness to daily leadership challenges is an emerging practice that cultivates greater clarity of thought, communication excellence and mental resiliency by teaching leaders to 'train the mind' just as an athlete leverages specialized training to 'train the body'. Through the training of mindful leadership, participants develop the mind's innate capacity to be more focused, to see with greater clarity what is here, to generate greater spaciousness for creativity and to embody true compassion.

Our mission is to deliver exceptional mindful leadership training and ongoing support to officers, directors, managers, professionals, future leaders, and to other significant community influencers in all sectors of our society. We offer retreats, workshops and courses that use curricula designed to reflect the challenges and opportunities of leading in today's global communities. Leaders from organizations from around the world have participated in these unique programs taught by experienced business leaders and have gained a more developed appreciation for the innate ability to be focused, clear, creative, and compassionate.

www.instituteformindfulleadership.org

can get so caught up in reactivity that we fail to see something we should have noticed. We see what we expect to see, what we hope to see or what we want to see...but not what is actually here. Learning to step out of the auto-pilot mode and stop long enough to notice when you are in reactivity mode is a training of Mindful Leadership that develops our ability to see clearly what is here, the issues and the opportunities, and to choose how to respond.

As the world continues to shrink, the markets become more global, resources become more scarce and the old playbook no longer applies. We need leaders with the ability to see clearly what is happening. They need to be aware of their own filters and conditioning so they can be open to the

many changing variables that need to be evaluated with accuracy and speed.

And as the evaluation is completed, we need our leaders to have access to all of their internal capacities for **creativity**, the third hallmark of leadership excellence. When we have a calendar that is fully packed with meetings, and a Task list that fills several pages, the availability of the spaciousness needed for creativity is minimal. Creative solutions and ideas have a better chance of arising when the mind is not constantly busy with our 'to do' lists. Have you ever noticed that setting aside time to think of a creative solution is not nearly as fruitful as an approach that identifies the problem, and then allows the mind to simply work at its own pace? How many times have you awakened with an answer, or perhaps it popped into your head while you were in the shower. Why? A constant stream of

thinking actually gets in the way of that wisdom that is deep within. We can train our mind to stand in a different relationship to those thoughts and cultivate more spaciousness for creativity through Mindful Leadership training.

Finally, we need to cultivate our innate capacity for **compassion**. And it needs to begin with us. This was not an easy lesson for me to learn, and it is not an easy lesson for most leaders. In the 25 years that I have held leadership positions, I have had the great privilege of working with wonderful people in all sectors of our society. They were leaders with warm hearts and bright minds, and they generally put themselves at the bottom of the list of those who needed compassion. Compassion is a powerful force and can be defined as 'understanding'. So when we fully realize our capacity for leadership by going 'deep within', we are including our willingness to understand ourselves and to be willing to make choices that are nourishing and supportive of who we are. Only when we honestly embody self-compassion can we then offer it to those around us, and to the larger community in which we live and work.

Just as we know that we can develop our body's innate capacities to increase our strength, flexibility and resiliency, we now know from the field of neuroscience that we can develop the mind's innate capacities, including its capacity to focus, see clearly, be creative and act with compassion. We can no longer afford to have those in positions of influence lead without training the mind's full capabilities. In the Institute for Mindful Leadership retreats and workshops that my colleagues and I teach to employees and leaders from around the world, we repeatedly hear people say that this experience and practice has allowed them to see a fuller and more meaningful way to live their lives, and to lead with more of

who they really are, rather than trying to lead like someone else. They come to appreciate their capacity to offer inspiration, not just set expectations, and they notice the potential richness that comes from the choice to hold ambiguity for a time rather than making a quick, 'check the box' decision. These, and many other discoveries, come from a practice that is consistent and practical. An investment of 15 minutes a day will do to get you started, and there are an infinite number of ways to practice informally once you have experience the basic Mindful Leadership training (see the Meditation Hallway practice below).

As leaders, our best hope for influencing in a productive and authentic way is to learn to use all of our mind's abilities, including our ability to practice Mindful Leadership, to embody leadership presence.

Meditation Hallway

If you care to explore a 'taste of Mindful Leadership training', try the following Meditation Hallway practice:

Choose a hallway or stairway that you frequently walk through during the day. Each time you pass through this space, bring your attention to the sensations of walking. With each step, notice the touch of the floor, the movement of the ankle and toes, the swing of the foot, the touch of the air, the weightiness of the legs, etc. Feel the sensations, do not think about them! When you notice that your mind has drifted away, simply redirect it to the sensation of walking. Do you notice any differences in how you arrive at your next meeting?

This simple practice can begin to break holes in the auto-pilot, reactivity by bringing us back to this moment. Our body sensations can only be felt in the present so practicing by bringing our attention to body sensations immediately takes us to the present. ■



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and leadership excellence. She founded the Institute for Mindful Leadership in January, 2011, after ending her tenure as Vice President, Public Responsibility and Deputy General Counsel for General Mills, Inc.

Janice was a strategic leader within General Mills for nearly 15 years before leaving to dedicate herself full time to the Institute. While at General Mills, she co-developed the very first mindful leadership curricula at the University of Massachusetts Medical School's Center for Mindfulness where she served as a member of the Advisory Board. As a certified teacher of mindfulness and an experienced former officer of a Fortune 200 company, she has brought the intensive training of mindful leadership to leaders from all forms of organizations-corporate, non-profit, academic and government, military.

Awakefulness is the heart-essence of buddhist meditation

By Lama Surya Das

During my initial private meeting with the elderly Tibetan Master Kalu Rinpoche, my heart guru, in Darjeeling, West Bengal in 1973, I asked him about the main points of meditation. He asked what kind of meditation I was doing, and I told him mindfulness of breathing. “What will you concentrate on when you stop breathing?” he asked.

That was a real eye-opener! Suddenly I realized that I might have to broaden the scope of my understanding of Buddhist practice. In time, I came to discover that it included a great deal more than any one meditation technique and also that the many forms of Buddhist meditation shared fundamental elements. Primary among them all is, an awake, alert and nonjudgemental openness and friendly appreciation of or interest in what appears in the field of consciousness, in the present moment. Mindfulness is the active ingredient in the basic recipe for the path of enlightenment and awakening.

The philosopher Simone Weil characterized prayer as pure undivided attention. Here is where all contemplative practices have a common root, a vital heart that can be developed in an almost infinite variety of skillful directions, depending on purpose and perspective. Different techniques of meditation can be classified according to their focus. Some focus on the field of perception itself, and we call those methods mindfulness; others focus on a specific object, and we call those concentrative practices. There are also techniques that shift back and forth between the field and the object. Attentiveness is the gently, prayerful song of the soul.

Thomas Merton said that prayer is like talking to God, and meditation is like listening. This intimate conversation begins to pervade one's entire life.

Meditation, simply defined, is a way of being aware. It is the happy marriage of doing and being. This lucid, intentional presence of mind lifts the fog of our ordinary lives to reveal what is hidden; it loosens the knot of self-centeredness and opens the heart; it moves us beyond mere concepts to allow for a direct experience of reality. Meditative awareness embodies the entire Way of Awakening, being both the path and its fruition. From one point of view, it is the means to awakening; from another, it is awakening itself. I call it “being there while getting there, every single step of the way,” by being completely and utterly here right now.

Meditation masters teach us how to be precisely present and focused on this one delicious, present breath, the only breath; this vivid moment, the only moment, whatever we may be doing—at work or at home, or behind the wheel of a car. Meditation is simply a way of remembering what you're doing while you're doing it. “Sleepwalkers of the world, awaken! Throw off your chains, your obscurations,” says Buddha Marx.

Different Buddhist schools recommend a variety of meditative postures, but mindfulness can and eventually must be cultivated in every posture, every waking moment. This may seem arduous in the beginning, as one has to carry the practice wherever one goes and be mindful about it, amidst all the pushes and pulls distracting us throughout

the day; and yet, as mindful living becomes more habitual, the practice begins to carry us, and we catch the updraft and buoyancy that is the spontaneous joy of meditation. Years seem to drop away, while spacious lightness and joy pervade our being.

Some teachers emphasize a still, formal posture, while others are less strict and more focused on internal movements of consciousness. An apt Zen Buddhist saying instructs us to sit with formal body and informal mind. Tibetan traditions emphasize the lotus posture (crosslegged and an upright spine, part of the “seven points of Vairochana Buddha”). The popular Vipassana Master U Goenka of India sits slightly hunched over. The common essential point is to remain balanced and alert, so as to stay present, focused, alert and attentive, and pierce the veil of samsaric (worldly) illusion.

Although most Westerners tend to conceive of Eastern forms of meditation as something done crosslegged with eyes closed, in a quiet, unlit place, the Buddha points with equal emphasis to four postures in which to meditate: sitting, standing, walking, and lying down. Buddha's sermon called “The Mindfulness Scripture” (Satipatthana Sutra) says: “When you sit, know that you are sitting; when standing, know you are standing. . . In all four activities, cultivate mindful awareness.” This pretty much covers all our various postures activities, allowing us to integrate meditative practice into daily life. Learn to sit like a Buddha, stand like a Buddha, walk like a Buddha. Be a Buddha; this is the main point of Buddhist practice. For we are all

(Part of this article appeared in Tricycle Magazine, Winter, 2001)

Buddhas by nature; we only have to recognize that fact, to awaken to and know who and what we truly are.

While many people today practice meditation for physical and mental health, a deeper approach to contemplative practice energizes our inner life, nurtures heart and soul-- as well as body and mind-- and opens the door to spiritual realization. In Tibetan, the word for meditation is gom, which literally means “familiarization” or “getting used to,” and in this sense meditation is a means by which we familiarize ourselves with our inner heart-mind and its most intimate workings. The common Pali term for meditation is bhavana, meaning “to cultivate, to develop, to bring into being.” So we might then think of meditation as the active cultivation of mind leading to clear awareness, tranquility, self-knowledge and wisdom. This requires conscious effort.

But from another—and at first glance contradictory—perspective, there is nothing to do in meditation but enjoy the View: clear vision, seeing things as they are and not as they ain’t; appreciating the magical, mysterious, and lawful unfolding of all that is. In other words, we’re perfect as we are, and yet we can still use just a little tweaking; and as for the world, there’s plenty of work to be done. In this we find the union of being and doing: we swoop down with the bigger picture in mind—the view of absolute reality—and at the same time we climb the spiritual mountain in keeping with our specific aspirations and inclinations, living out relative truth. “While my view is as high as the sky, my actions regarding cause and effect [karma] are as meticulous as finely ground barley flour,” sang the eighth century Lotus Master Padma Sambhava of Tibet. By alternating between

active cultivation and effortless awareness, we engage in a delicate dance that balances disciplined intention with simply being. By being both directive and allowing, we gradually learn to fearlessly explore the frontiers and depths of doing and being, and come to realize that whatever is taking place, whatever we may feel and experience, is intimately connected with and inseparable from intrinsic awareness. “Not doing, not constructing, not fabricating, not altering or manipulating your mind, while remaining undistracted: this is my vital pithy instruction, the heart-essence of meditation,” taught my own Dzogchen master Nyoshul Khenpo Rinpoche. “Beyond action and inaction, the sublime dharma is accomplished.”

As it happens, I love the water element. When I sit, stand or walk by the ocean, for instance, the waves and wind simply meditate me into peace, clarity and harmony. Whenever I see bodies of water, or flowing water, I naturally and instinctively pray and meditate, in a centering-prayer kind of wordless way. Every breath becomes a sort of prayer, like a mantra, effortlessly repeating itself in the form of subtle energy circulation as well as physical sounds and vibrations-- as the gentle, embracing spirit of the moving (or still) waters mirrors my own inner awareness and subtlest, luminous consciousness, and everything flows, while nothing remains. And yet, and yet: this nuttin’s really sumptin’, aint it?!

Meditation is not about getting away from it all, numbing out, or stopping thoughts. Mindfulness is also entirely relational; it’s mastery of how we relate to things, being master rather than victim of causes and conditions. It’s as if we carry our own atmosphere wherever we go.

For example, without trying to be rid of pesky thoughts and feelings, we learn how to practice being aware of them in the fleeting immediacy of the very moment in which they present themselves. We can cultivate awareness of any object: sounds, smells, physical sensations, perceptions, and so forth. Everything is grist for the mill—even those things we find terribly unpleasant. As the Tibetan Dragon Master Gyalwang Drukpa says, “Everything must be meditated!” Like the archer straightening his arrow and perfecting his aim, the practitioner of meditation straightens out the mind while aiming his or her attentional energy at its object.

This calls to mind the haiku master Basho’s saying that in order to write about a tree, he would watch the tree until he became the tree. We watch the breath until we become the breath. In this way, as it is said in Zen, we come to know the breath, ourselves, and all things intimately. In the beginning, concentration is key. Concentrative meditations (Sanskrit shamatha) are said to be the useful means but not the end. The stability of mind established by shamatha becomes the foundation for insight meditation, or vipassana. What we call “mindfulness meditation” can be broadly defined as any conscious activity that keeps the cling-free attention anchored in the present moment, allowing us to see clearly what is happening, to distinguish what is wholesome from what is unwholesome, and to perceive the contingency and interdependent working of things.

As the pioneering Zen master Shunryu Suzuki said, “We pay attention with respect and interest, not in order to manipulate but to understand what is true. And seeing what

is true, the heart becomes free.” This is not just Buddhist double-talk.

There are various Buddhist schools with different approaches and practices, but committed meditation practice is, in short, the way we apply the Buddha’s final words: “Work out your own salvation with diligence.” In Tibetan Buddhism it is said that detachment is the root of meditation and devotion is its head. Bodhichitta (the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the welfare of others) is its soul. Mindfulness is its breath, vigilance its skin, and non-distraction its essence. Balance and harmony are the seat of meditation, and penetrating wisdom is its eye. Nowness is the time, and this place is the place. Self-discipline is the very bones of Buddha, and present-moment awareness is the heart of it all. Milarepa said, “The ultimate view is to observe one’s mind, steadfastly and with determination.” When the Buddha stated, over twenty-five hundred years ago, that anyone could become enlightened through applying his teachings, he meant it. And many have reaped those blessed results. This is the promise of Buddha-dharma, of the wisdom of meditation.

On a more personal note: I wake up each morning, look out the window at my little pond and woods, and wonder: Who made all this? It wasn’t me, that much I know. Therefore wordless gratitude and wonder fills my heart and mind, body and soul when I look out the window each morning and I sense the sacred Presence, transcendent over all of us yet immanent in each and every one of us, by whatever name or image-ing.

Where’d it all come from, and where’s it heading? The unspeakable, vital potency of this ancient, timeless mystery instantly makes me feel grateful and awe-struck, standing

New Millennium Prayer

May all beings everywhere,
with whom we are inseparably interconnected
and who want and need the same as we do;

May all be awakened from the sleep of ignorance,
liberated, healed, fulfilled and free.

May there be peace and harmony in this world
and throughout all possible universes,
an end to war, violence, poverty and inequality, injustice and oppression,
and may we all together complete the spiritual journey.

~Surya Das, Boston 2001

right amidst the miracle and amazing grace of it all. Immediately I feel enveloped in what a Christian mystic once called the cloud of unknowing, and know I don’t really need to know. In this state of I sit naturally to meditate, in the very heart of the matter, completely at home and unalone, wherever I may happen to be at the moment. This is what I term co-meditation, implying meditating with, never alone. The very vividness of everything that appears and is acts as aid and abettor to this kind of Natural Meditation. This co-meditation embodies sublime solitude and sacred silence. You too are invited and welcome to join, any time, any place spirit happens to find you.

“Only that day dawns to which we are truly awake,” says Ralph Waldo Emerson, our poetic first American philosopher. Simply sitting down, dropping everything for the moment, and making the firm resolve to awaken in the Presence invokes all That for me. It’s not very complicated. Of course this is quite personal and may not work well for everyone. I’m one man alone before the Ultimate, and that’s my true existential situation. I offer these thoughts on prayer and

meditation by an American lama, with love, prayerful blessings and healing thoughts.

I have visited, bowed, prayed, chanted, bowed and meditated in many if not most of this evanescent world’s great houses of worship—churches and cathedrals, temples, mosques, holy mountaintops and river confluences, grottos and pilgrimage places. I assure you that nothing is missing right here. A sacred space is one which feels larger inside than outside, for it makes us feel that way, too. In that moment, that experience, is ones inherited acre of heaven, our backyard nirvana and inner citadel; just like ones own home is greater than all the mansions and architectural wonders of the world, or at least should feel so. ■



Lama Surya Das is one of the foremost Western Buddhist meditation teachers and scholars, one of the main interpreters

of Tibetan Buddhism in the West, and a leading spokesperson for the emerging American Buddhism.

A practitioner reflects on the role of awareness training in leadership development

By Marc Roudebush, Mobius Consultant and Executive Coach

“There is nothing so practical as a good theory” –Kurt Lewin, 1951

This is a time of great ferment for practitioners of leadership development, organizational learning and the like. At such times, we see potential connections between multiple approaches—for example Voice Dialogue, Difficult Conversations, Mindfulness, Immunity to Change, and Conscious Business—but don’t necessarily see how they fit together, or know which end to present to clients.

I imagine a number of readers of this newsletter are engaged in integration efforts, making sense of different theories, experimenting with different practices, and finding ways to talk about their discoveries that make sense to clients and colleagues. I offer this essay as a contribution to the effort to integrate Eastern wisdom traditions and Western approaches to leadership development.

The question I’d like to take up with you is “what is the role of awareness training in the development of leaders, and why does it matter?”

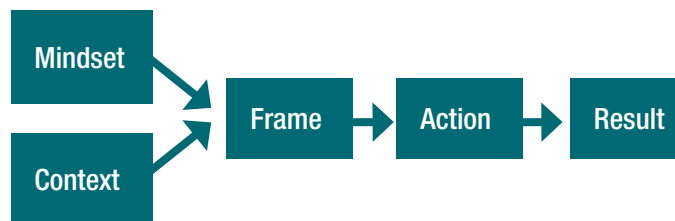
Like many of you, my fascination with this question was a big part of the bond I instantly felt with Amy Elizabeth Fox, the publisher of this newsletter, when I first met her in 2006. Thank you, Amy, for holding the space for such inquiries. You host a magnificent virtual Salon!

Back then, as now, spiritual practice was of central importance in my life (I had been a Tai Chi practitioner since 1989 and meditating since 1993), and such practice seemed to make me more effective as a coach and trainer. I would go further now: the result of spiritual practice (let’s call it greater awareness

and compassion) seems to be the source of the best value I bring to clients.

Yet I don’t teach meditation or mindfulness to clients... yet.

Now you may say there’s a simple fix for this. “Train in MBSR or MBCT and apply it in your coaching. Become a Search Inside Yourself facilitator!” Or



you may say “you should meet person X who is doing “Big Mind” in a corporate context.” My reply is “Terrific! In fact I *am* training to be an SIY facilitator. But that doesn’t change the fact that we’re still in the early stages of this integration.”

There is a lot of excitement about Mindfulness. Pioneers like Richard Davidson have brought it “out of the closet” and into the limelight of scientific inquiry. But in pulling the blanket hard over to the side of Mindfulness, we are at risk of forgetting the benefits of our western, action-oriented models of learning. We are leaving Organizational Learning exposed and grumpy on the other side of the bed.

To make our Eastern and Western bedfellows happier with each other, it may be helpful to reflect on their shared interests and ability to support each other. One could take Eastern and Western approaches to this task. In this essay I focus on a Western one.

Let us consider the natural link between awareness training and the “learning pathways” that are at the heart of so much organizational learning and leadership development. I

learned the “learning pathways” model from our Mobius colleagues Bob Putnam, Phil MacArthur and Diana Smith—all three students of Chris Argyris. It posits that results are always a function of our actions, which in turn are shaped by how we “frame” a situation, which, in turn, is shaped by our underlying mental models and the external context. (See figure to left.)

It is in this framework that many of us learned to reflect on our “Left Hand Columns” (what we thought and felt but did not say). Thus we gathered data to illuminate the frame of reference and operating assumptions governing our actions. Informed in this way, we were able to make changes not only to our behaviors, but also—more powerfully—to the mindsets driving those behaviors. Not only might I give my erstwhile opponent greater air time in the negotiation; I might shift my intention from “winning over” him to “winning with” him. Chris Argyris famously called this higher leverage approach “double-loop learning.”

Already in this approach to learning we can discern a role for awareness. The better our skill at reflecting on our “operating assumptions”—especially in the moment—the greater our chances of successfully learning, adapting and leading. The “reflective practitioner” is by definition self-aware.

Many readers of this newsletter will be familiar with one or several children (or cousins) of the learning pathways framework, for example Bill Torbert’s *Action Inquiry*, the “iceberg” model (in which behaviors are shaped by underlying thoughts,



An Inspiring Workplace is the creation of individuals and yet shapes the choices that individuals make. We offer custom-designed interventions designed to support individuals, teams or your entire organization. What follows is a sample of programs we have successfully implemented with clients:

The Inspiring Workplace Culture Diagnostic

A “quick and clean” way to generate multiple, independent perspectives on how things get done in your workplace.

Design and Facilitation of your “Best Offsite Ever”

A proven process for achieving alignment, engagement, and commitment in your company (or team).

Integrating Creativity into the rhythm of your business

A four-step process that supports a regular discipline of collaborative value-creation in key areas of the organization.

Initiating Culture Change from the “Bottom Up”

Complete with a low-impact survey instrument and a flexible, self-serve support model, this program boosts employee engagement, and people’s willingness to take appropriate risks in an environment of trust.

Using Conflict as an opportunity to build engagement & trust, and achieve breakthrough solutions

Our Productive Conflict Facilitation, for 1 on 1 or group situations, will help you successfully navigate “promising” conflicts and develop your ability to handle them gracefully and productively in the future.

Keeping your leaders on their growth edge with 1 on 1 coaching

Nothing motivates a high potential or influential leader more than the opportunity to fulfill their potential. Most leaders are honored to receive the challenge and support of 1 on 1 coaching; and the ripple effects on employee engagement and productivity create a strong ROI for the company.

feelings and beliefs), the “observer-action-result” triad in the Newfield ontological coaching model, or the “Be-Do-Have” sequence in Conscious Business.

When talking about the importance of awareness in one of these frameworks, I have often presented it as a means to greater effectiveness. Like the lumber jack’s proverbial saw sharpener, the ability to reflect on one’s mindsets and actions is presented as an investment required to optimize effectiveness—to get the leader to be, or get back to being, at her best.”

This line of reasoning has a weakness, however. It defines the value of double-loop learning as a means to an end and does not provide a way of questioning one’s definition of success. The question of ethics goes begging. We might try to answer “why ethics” in terms of intrinsic motivation (as in Daniel Pink’s *Drive*), in terms of the binding power shared purpose, or in terms of building a more sustainable “whole system” approach to solving problems. But such answers easily fall prey to a false dilemma—the dilemma of the long-term and short-term.

Coach: “... and so you can see the superior effectiveness of long-term, multi-stakeholder thinking...”

Client: “I like that idea, but just now I have to make my numbers. I’ll call you in a few quarters.”

Fortunately, this dilemma is resolved when we clearly distinguish between two distinct dimensions of action: effectiveness on the one hand, and integrity on the other. I’m not aware of the full lineage of this concept, but I was first exposed to it in Fred Kofman’s, *Conscious Business*.

In this elaboration of the learning pathways, effectiveness is defined as the accomplishment of one’s goals, and is recognized as being conditional (i.e. only partially in our control). Our

attempts to generate buy-in, like a marriage proposal, only succeed if our counterparts agree! We may be 100% committed to success, but we can’t command the outcome.

Integrity, on the other hand, is defined in relation to our values, and is therefore unconditional. How I ask is entirely within my control. In the case of the marriage proposal, I can choose to lie and manipulate—exaggerating my assets, getting my girlfriend drunk, asking a mutual friend to disparage the “other guy”—or I can choose to be authentic, vulnerable and respectful of my beloved’s choices.

The choice to be authentic or not (or respectful or humble or compassionate, or any of their opposites) rests *unconditionally* with me. It does not depend on any one else’s choices. This is why Kofman offers another name for integrity: “success beyond success.” Integrity represents the “how” that you would not want to lose sight of in order to accomplish any given “what.”

What would be the point of securing a “yes” to your marriage proposal at the expense of having deceived and manipulated your fiancé? Conversely, how much better is a relationship—whether personal or business—when we have had the courage to be authentic and respect the other person’s choices?

OK, so far we have a theory that says our actions can be evaluated both in terms of their effectiveness and their integrity. If we want to improve in either of these dimensions, we can look “upstream” along the learning pathways, for a better understanding our goals, values, interpretations and choices. Thus double (even triple) loop learning can enhance not only our effectiveness but also our integrity.

So what’s awareness got to do with it? At the simplest level, awareness is in play for anyone who may be wondering “what are my values anyway, and what does it mean to express them

through my actions?” To be honest, this was my initial reaction when I was first exposed to the concept of “success beyond success.” I was intrigued by the “admirable characters” exercise in which we listed people we admired and why (e.g. Nelson Mandela for his forgiveness)... and by the suggestion

that I would be more engaged and engaging if I could count myself on that list. “Live courageously, with integrity,” sounded like a good battle cry, but at first it was a lot easier to regard this earnest entreaty with irony than to see what it might point to in my life.

I could readily see what it meant in the extreme example of the marriage proposal, but then I started to see it in more and more ordinary situations. What it meant to propose a process improvement, to check an assumption, to invite participation, to share a story that had moved me: In all these cases there was a conditional outcome that defined success (such as getting a “yes”), but there was also an opportunity to “exercise” a way of being that I could be proud of regardless of the outcome: to engage productively rather than just criticize the process, to be curious, to respect other’s choices, to be generous in sharing what moves me.

I could see the value of being aware of these choices and their consequences. In my coaching practice, it seemed that many of my client’s big “ahas” occurred when they saw new choices that appeared meaningful to them—like discovering an opportunity to be more true to oneself.

This is how I came to think of awareness as a third dimension of action. Awareness gives our actions depth. Moreover, our ability to make choices with effectiveness and integrity is in part a function of awareness.

As a meditation practitioner, I was intrigued by fact that effectiveness is always demonstrated over time—the time it takes to complete a project, to play a baseball game, to get an answer to a proposal—while integrity does not take time. Being honest... or curious or respectful or generous, etc. is not something that evolves over time. It just is or it isn’t.

Integrity, as the expression of such values, is a quality of being, not of doing. It does not vary with time, but it does vary with our awareness. If we are not even aware that our buttons are being pushed, or that we are being influenced by a conflicting interest or commitment, how can we be expected to resist the temptation or make the wiser choice? If we don’t even see the opportunity, how can we make a meaningful sacrifice or take a “heroic” stand?

Thus by making the role of awareness and integrity more explicit in the learning pathways framework, we can demonstrate that awareness is a critical factor not only for success but also for “success beyond success.”

My hope is that this framework may be helpful to those of us who are seeking to integrate mindfulness or awareness training into our leadership development work with clients. In what ways have you attempted this synthesis? How can we integrate mindfulness with listening exercises? How does it apply to working with the Left Hand Column, or Immunity to Change? Can we link pausing and reflecting directly to the quality of our advocacy and inquiry? How can we offer meditation training in a broad and explicit context of creating an inspiring workplace and building culture leadership capability?

I would be very curious and grateful to hear your experiences in this domain. Please join the discussion on Linked in I have just launched.

Finally, I would like to add that I am excited about the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute. Please check out the book excerpt in this issue by Chade-Meng Tan. Search Inside Yourself represents an ambitious and thoughtful synthesis, providing an evidence-based approach that links mindfulness, emotional intelligence, difficult conversations, and leadership. Go SIY! Let’s keep on learning!

Epilogue

There would be a whole other article to write from the “eastern side of the river.” The task here would be to build a bridge in the opposite direction; from awareness training toward the more action- and dialogue-oriented western approach to leadership development. The stereotype of Eastern spiritual traditions as being about retreat and renunciation can seem to suggest that actions are of no consequence in comparison to contemplation. Yet action—in body, speech and mind—plays a central role in Buddhist theory and practice. At the subtlest levels action and awareness, compassion and wisdom, are inseparable, and one of best questions we can ask as spiritual practitioners is “what can we do to allow our actions to express and amplify our awareness, rather than obscure it.”

Awareness plays an important role in helping us learn to be skillful in our conduct, but conduct as well, plays a role in developing and sustaining our deepest realizations. ■



Marc Roudebush is an executive coach and culture change consultant whose empathic listening, “tough love,” and deep understanding of the human dimension of business have helped senior leaders achieve breakthrough results in high-tech, big pharma, financial services, consumer goods, as well as government and non-profits. Along with his 15 years, hands-on experience in coaching and consulting, Marc brings direct experience as a business executive (CEO and Managing Director roles) and the analytical rigor of a social science Ph.D. He is also a dedicated meditator, and President of Pointing Out the Great Way Foundation.

Mindfulness in our working world

By Chris Tamjidi, Mobius Senior Consultant

The picture is no doubt familiar to all. In front of us sits a successful leader, in the prime of her abilities. She exudes expertise and competence, albeit a bit distracted. The BlackBerry blinks several times in the course of the conversation. The first impression: everything under control, business is good. But if we look closer, we see that the leg under the table moves continuously in a nervous fashion. The conversation is interrupted several times by text messages - and shortly thereafter a phone call. As we talk, her eyes drift to her laptop. A short glance at an e-Mail. Then, the mood is different - even tenser. The thread is lost - the moment has changed.

Stress, constant pressure, no time to think, endless e-mails, between 80 and 150 per day and at least 30 phone calls. The To-Do List of a typical executive at the end of a day is longer than it was at the beginning of the day. No time for reflection, no room for creativity or the ability to think through an issue until the end. The longing for focus and deceleration is palpable. The working day starts at 6 am, the mind thinking through the e-Mail we read yesterday at 23:20. We go from one meeting to the next seamlessly, interrupted only to check messages. The day ends in exhaustion. We saw the children at some point, but we did not really notice them or take time for them.

The experience is common. The statistics confirm the degree of stress and burnout experienced in working life. We are always "on", and more often distracted and more exposed than ever to multitasking situations. Many people have been saying it for a long time, it has become almost boring: We have to change - and find a new way of thinking and acting. This will require

new solutions. And one solution is mindfulness.

For many people, mindfulness meditation is something somewhat esoteric. Or, at second glance, a kind of cognitive training. Mindfulness meditation is much more than that. The esoteric touch around meditation is thoroughly misplaced. There is hardly a topic that relates to the business world, which is currently being researched more intensely. Annually about 550 scientific studies and publications about mindfulness meditation are published. And the results are becoming increasingly clear: meditation does help - and in many surprising ways!

- **Health:** Body and mind are deeply connected, and especially through our nervous system. Mindfulness meditation helps us to relax and let go of stress. It has very positive effects on our physical health and strengthening the immune system. Hundreds of studies have demonstrated the effect of mindfulness on various diseases and conditions, including headaches, pain syndrome, high blood pressure etc.
- **Cognitive:** Mindfulness is the basis for all higher-order cognitive skills. Brain researchers have found that mindfulness has a positive impact on concentration, perception, creativity, working memory and so on
- **Behavior and mental health:** mindfulness strengthens our mental resilience especially and helps overcome chronic anxiety, burnout, depression and sleep disorders.

At first glance this may seem surprising, but if we look more deeply, it is understandable: We all know that exercise has a positive effect on body, mind and spirit. If we had discovered sports

only in the last 5 years, we would have been similarly amazed how wonderful sport is. Let's take a short look at some of the well-known, and also more surprising ways in which mindfulness can affect our working life.

Mindfulness, stress and slowing down

The prevailing opinion is: Because we do not have time, we are all so stressed. But actually it is the other way around - because we are stressed, we do not have time! Our daily workload is not statistically significantly greater than was the case 20 years ago. What is undisputed, however, that we have to deal with hundreds of instant requests and tasks. Our mind has to deal with these daily myriad things- and we cannot just simply switch off when we get home or even have time off.

What happens then? Our minds still circle around, jumping from one topic to another, we cannot slow down. Because of this we have no sense of being able to come to rest, relax or have inner peace. But this is exactly what is so crucial. Stress per se is not a problem, but rather the absence of significant time to rest, relax and let go.

Mindfulness training can help us slow down, let go of the constant clutter in our minds, and simply be. Scientific studies have even shown that we can change the structure of our brain and our instinctive responses to things. So rather than responding in a stressed manner, and furthering the cycle of stress and tension, we can become mindful of our own behavior and respond in a more nuanced way. And we can also learn to not further our own stress and burnout by amplifying the negative emotions in our brain. For this reason, mindfulness training has

already taken firm root in many clinics treating burnout patients.

Mindfulness and concentration

Daily life in many companies is dominated by one thing above all - constant sensory overload. We do many things at once, and cannot always bring something to an end. This feeds a cycle of multi-tasking, which has been shown to undermine our concentration, productivity and quality of our work.

What we need however are concentration, focus and perseverance. Because of the permanent stress, many executives cannot lead a quiet conversation or pursue any thought to the end. Many suffer from a neurological phenomenon - the "attention deficit disorder" - and are in a state of sustained silent panic and restlessness. They are erratic, intense, imperious and unfocused.

Regular meditation has been proven to train quiet attention and to significantly strengthen concentration. Researchers have found that even brief meditation can help. Some results - just four days of 20-minute mindfulness training can improve cognitive skills such as attention and concentration significantly.

Emotional Intelligence and Empathy

A number of management researchers see emotional intelligence or empathy as more important indicators for the success of a manager than technical knowledge. In parallel, brain researchers have discovered that we all have mirror neurons in our brains - we can perceive not only the emotions of others, but their experience is also mirrored naturally in our brains. Empathy is natural. Thus we do not learn empathy, but ONLY notice it. Mindfulness cultivates self awareness of our own emotional states, and also that of others.

This essential knowledge is also part

of the "Search Inside Yourself" project by Google, a mindfulness-based training program, developed with mindfulness researchers. It has been available since 2007 for Google employees and is an important part of the development of the management culture at Google.

Sustainability

Researchers at INSEAD were commissioned by the EU to evaluate measures to improve CSR in the business community. They found with surprising results. The full quote is worth reading:

"The standard executive education approach based on engaged discussion and case analyses fails to facilitate managers to shift towards higher probabilities to make socially responsible decisions."

"On the other hand, coaching programs based on introspection and meditation techniques, without any discussion about CSR topics, exhibit a significant impact on both the probability to act in a socially responsible way and on the factors that influence the probability to behave that way."

At first glance, surprising. At second glance, maybe not. Actually, every person, every manager in their hearts would like to do good for others - for employees and for our environment. They just often do not have a clear head or are so caught up in their mill that they have no time to think or act sustainably.

You only need to have the space for it, a mental space to reflect the consequences of our own actions. So many people, not least those in charge of the training program at Google believe that mindfulness meditation can make a substantial contribution for a successful company and also a better world.

Slowing down, less stress, better cognition, attention and empathy and more natural interest in sustainability: these are natural results of mindfulness

meditation. Therefore, mindfulness is actually a very pragmatic approach to cultivating good and sustainable leadership. We even believe that mindfulness is one of the essential answers to the question of "how" is. Many talk of sustainable management but when asked how to do that, especially when we are in a stressed, exhausted state, there have been few answers.

Mindfulness training is to acquire more than a tool. It encompasses self-awareness, embracing perception and intelligent social interactions. One study in 2007 analyzed over five hundred leaders and divided into different levels of performance. Many were functionally good leaders - but only 5 to 10% were truly outstanding "leaders". And the interesting thing - more than 50% of the outstanding leaders had a regular practice of mindfulness or a similar contemplative practice.

Now to the disappointment: Mindfulness meditation is not a magic pill. Although it is scientifically proven in hundreds of studies, it's like a sport - we need to do it regularly, otherwise nothing will happen. And we need to try and experiment to see how it fits into the working world.

So this is an interesting time. A time of much experimentation and learning - to see in what forms mindfulness will take root in the working world. A number of different approaches have been tried - based on stress reduction, employee satisfaction, emotional intelligence, learning and growth. And all have shown very promising results and are being rolled out further. We invite you to experiment too. ■

Chris Tamdjidi lives in Germany where we works as a consultant and also runs a mindfulness hotel. At the hotel and in his consulting, he works with companies who are trying to balance the fast paced demands of the modern workplace with human wellbeing and wisdom - a delightful and challenging dance.

Excerpt from *The Lotus: A Personal Practice Guide for Authentic Leadership towards Sustainability*

By Christopher Baan, Phil Long and Dana Pearlman

From complexity to collaboration

The growing global complex sustainability challenge that society is facing today calls for facilitators and leaders that are adept at engaging groups in a collaborative manner to see the larger picture beyond individual perspectives, and to support complex planning and decision-making.

These collaborative engagement processes include people learning from each other, with each other, and is a cornerstone in organisational learning theory. It relates to the notion of 'team learning' and the process of unearthing a group's 'collective intelligence', the idea that in collective learning or collaboration, the intelligence of a group is greater than that of any individual. Through these group engagements, complex problems are seen holistically through a wider stakeholder perspective.

The sustainability challenge is complex; we cannot foresee how social, environmental and economic modifications will affect the system. Therefore, the wider stakeholder perspective obtained in a system, the more holistically a system can be perceived. In order to engage groups, facilitators who are adaptive and create an environment conducive for collaboration will be more effective dealing with complexity and in helping move society toward sustainability. Facilitators cultivating their personal leadership

capacities will increase their depth at engaging group processes with a more holistic understanding of self, others and society. Therefore, as a facilitator or leader, cultivating your leadership capacity that helps make sense of the world in a deeper and more holistic way, is paramount.

Useful resources:

Cynefin Framework/Complexity theory/Systems thinking

Cultivating your Authentic Self

In order to address the complex sustainability challenge facing society today, leaders must cultivate their own authenticity and presence. We understand authenticity as being true, open and honest with who you are. The more adaptable and developed a leader becomes, the greater they are able to steer through complex, participatory planning processes. Through their personal development, facilitators and leaders are more able to utilise hindsight, hold multiple worldviews and perspectives, and sit with current reality while simultaneously aiming toward a desired future. The adaptability achieved by facilitators and leaders honing these capacities lends itself to enhancing collaborative group processes and outcomes in Strategic Sustainable Development. This is a continuous path towards using more and more of your authentic self in facilitation processes. This path helps facilitators and leaders improve the quality of relationships in a team while engaging people cognitively, mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Facilitators and leaders bringing their authentic selves into the facilita-

tion process are more likely to guide a team towards successful, lasting and sustainable results that have ownership among the stakeholders. Authentic leaders and facilitators that hold the 'container' for collaborative processes more personally, are better able to engage people in multi-dimensional ways, resulting in more embodied and empowered outcomes. The developed sense of awareness inherent in personal leadership capacities can be critically valuable in enabling facilitators and leaders to know when and what to do during a group process by 'sensing' what is happening with the group in the present moment. In this practice guide we present 9 personal capacities that leaders find essential in their work to facilitate complex and transformational change towards sustainability. These personal capacities by their very nature cannot be learnt only on a cognitive level; they must be embodied.

Our research has shown that one important path to the embodiment of these capacities is through personal and collective practice. The implication of this is clear; as one expert put it, "no real transformation can take place without personal and collective practice". The simplest dictionary definition of practice is "to do repeatedly to acquire or polish a skill" (Szpakowski 2010). We distinguish here between personal (individual) and collective practices. An example of a collective practice is dialogue or Aikido, something you do in a group of people where interaction is key. In addition to the personal capacities identified in our research we found conditions for success for developing your capacities through practice:

The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener.

- William O'Brien

The Lotus: A Personal Practice Guide for Authentic Leadership towards Sustainability

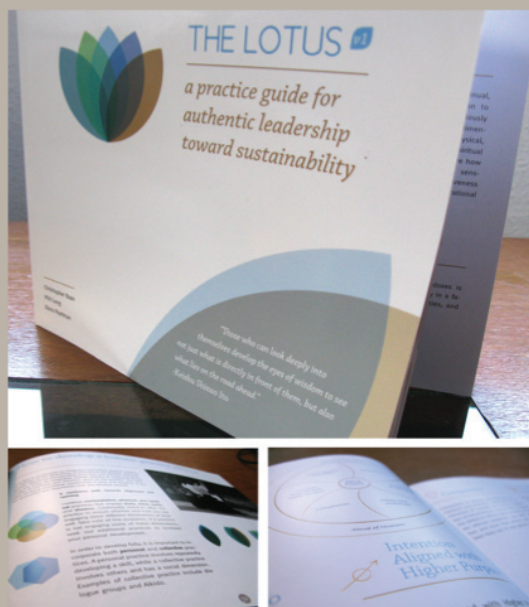
By Christopher Baan, Phil Long and Dana Pearlman

With the ever-increasing complexity and speed of change in society and in the world today, how can we tap into the wisdom, clarity, and commitment needed as sustainability practitioners, to engage people in participatory ways, to facilitate the transformation towards sustainability in our organisation or community? A guidebook was written by three 2011 graduates of this Swedish Sustainability Leadership Master's programme, that attempts to answer this question. Relevant to leaders, facilitators and change agents working on the intersection of leadership development, process facilitation, and sustainability, the guidebook documents personal leadership capacities that authentic leaders find essential in their work when facilitating complex, transformational change in organisations and communities. Furthermore, it suggests practices (ranging from contemplative and spiritual to physical, engaging both head, heart and hands) that help in developing your leadership capacities.

The guidebook, which is freely available to download or to order as hardcopy, has been informed through interviews with practitioners in the *Art of Hosting Strategic Conversations*, and in the ALIA institute (Authentic Leadership in Action), among others. From a community initiative in Halifax (Canada) to strategy development for an energy company in Bolivia - practitioners around the world are already applying the models and ideas presented in this guidebook and showing its real-life value.

You are welcome to download, read and share the practice guide. Feedback and suggestions for continuous improvement are welcome.

www.thelotus.info



Conditions of success for developing your personal leadership capacities

- A combination of personal and collective practice is a pathway to the development of your leadership capacities;
- A combination of contemplative, physical and spiritual practice helps you align body, mind, spirit and shadow, in order to maximise personal development;
- The integration of practices both in your personal and professional life helps you take the learning from the practice back into the facilitation process.

Conditions of success for choosing a practice

- The practice must have a mirroring quality, to help the participants observe themselves and enhance self-awareness;
- The practice has to provide 'a container you can't manipulate' with structures that are adhered to;
- The quality of your attention in the practice is more important than the type of practice performed;
- The practice must be something you are willing to do repetitively and consistently.

The continuous mastery of personal capacities not only improves your leadership performance; it also helps you get in touch with your own authenticity. When you are more in touch with your authentic self, your actions are easier to embed in your life and thus lead to stronger follow-through in a facilitated engagement process. The literature on leadership development highlights the importance of self-mastery in leaders and through "increased self-awareness, self-regulation and positive modelling, authentic leaders foster the development of authenticity in follow-

ers" (Avolio et al. 2005). Authenticity is about "owning one's personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to 'know oneself' and further implies that one acts in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings" (Harter 2002, 382; in Avolio et al. 2005). Leaders modelling awareness and authenticity invite participants to do likewise, and if one is engaged on an authentic level, engagement processes are likely to result in more desirable outcomes.

Authentic leadership development offers facilitators and leaders a foundation from which to engage groups beyond the cognitive level. It includes the emotional, physical and spiritual dimensions to increase congruence between outcomes created collaboratively with participants' authentic selves, resulting in stronger and more successful outcomes. Facilitators and leaders bringing their authentic selves into an engagement process benefit outcomes. However, it is not enough in order to successfully address the sustainability challenge. One must have the ability to plan in a strategic manner within the confines of the Earth's carrying capacity. The sustainability principles introduced previously define such boundary conditions. Combining an authentic and holistic leadership approach along with knowledge and skills in Strategic Sustainable Development, we contend, will benefit collaborative engagement processes and outcomes that help move organisations and society toward sustainability.

Personal Leadership Capacities and Practices

The following section describes the personal capacities authentic lead-

ers find essential in their work and some of the various practices that help them develop these capacities. They are accompanied by principles as well as self-reflection questions and reflection questions to use during a facilitation process. Bare in mind that a more holistic approach to practice is most beneficial and many of the practices are useful for developing multiple capacities. It is recommended to do practices that regularly engage the body, mind, spirit and heart, which may mean using multiple practices to cover all bases.

Being Present

- Being Present means being fully aware and awake in the present moment – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. This includes connecting to others, the environment around you and current reality.

Suspension and Letting Go

- Suspension and Letting Go is the ability to actively experience and observe a thought, assumption, judgment, habitual pattern, emotion or sensation like fear, confusion, conflict or desire, and then refraining from immediately reacting or responding to the situation.

Intention Aligned with Higher Purpose

- Intention Aligned with Higher Purpose is the alignment of one's authentic nature with one's internal resonance with manifested actions in the world. This alignment trickles down to all facets of life including one's personal, professional and spiritual dimensions. "Where your deepest personal passion and the world's greatest needs align, there is opportunity" (Peter Senge).

Compassion

Compassion is having unconditional acceptance and kindness toward all

the dimensions of oneself and others, regardless of circumstance. Compassion involves the ability to reflect upon oneself and others without judgment, but with recognition and trust that others are doing the best they can in any given situation

Whole System Awareness

Whole System Awareness is the capacity to quickly switch between different perspectives, scales and worldviews to see the big picture, interconnections within the system, and being able to scale down to small details. Whole System Awareness is not just cognitive – you 'sense' the system. It is the understanding that everything is interconnected within a system.

Whole Self-Awareness

Whole Self-Awareness is the continual, lifelong process of paying attention to knowing one's self; it involves consciously and intentionally observing various dimensions of the self (including the physical, mental, shadow, emotional and spiritual realms). It is the capacity to observe how one is thinking, relating, feeling, sensing, and judging. Whole Self-Awareness includes perceptions beyond the rational mind, such as intuition.

Personal Power

Personal Power is the ability to use energy and drive to manifest wise actions in the world for the greater good, while being aware of one's influences on a situation.

Sense of Humor

A Sense of Humor, or 'light-heartedness', is the universal experience of simultaneous amusement, laughter and joy culminating from an experience, thought or sensation.

Dealing with Dualities and Paradoxes

Dealing with Dualities and Paradoxes

is the capacity to sit with ambiguity in a facilitation session, manage polarities, and hold multiple perspectives.

Being Present

What is it? Being Present means being fully aware and awake in the present moment – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. This includes connecting to others, the environment around you and current reality.

Principles: Show up, choose to be present. Pay attention to what has heart and meaning. (*adapted from 'Four-Fold Way: Principles To Guide A Learning Community' www.equalvoice.com*)

Self-reflection questions

- Sit still for a moment in silence. What do you notice happening around you? When you observe yourself in the environment or space you are in, what are you sensing, hearing, smelling, feeling and noticing? How is your body, mind, spirit and heart in this moment?

Reflection questions during facilitation

- What questions about the system you're operating in help you understand their current reality more fully? For example, how does the social system function (do people share viewpoints, listen to one another, have solidarity or use critical thinking?).
- What does the group need right now in order to proceed with the agenda? You could ask questions about the organisational structure, and any other part of the system you are working with.
- How are you feeling right now with this system or group - mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically? What do you need to acknowledge, and then put aside

for later, or focus on right now to be present with this group and help them become present?

Practices to develop your capacity to Be Present

Mindfulness meditation practice. This is useful for discerning the reality of things rather than believing in false impressions or misinterpreting information. By sitting in mindfulness meditation, this practice helps you train your mind to be calm and stable. An inexperienced practitioner may find the practice overwhelming at first. If this is the case, use concentration meditations (see Whole Self-Awareness) before beginning Mindfulness meditation. For a guided mindfulness meditation by John Kabatt-Zinn go to: <http://bit.ly/BZYU> and for a description of mindfulness, go to <http://bit.ly/swZo2>.

Breath exercises. When you wake up first thing in the morning lie flat on your back and use a deep breath to scan the body. Find any existing tension in the body and breathe deeply into that area for 8 rounds of breath. If no tension exists, breathe through the chakras starting with the crown to the third eye to the throat to the heart to the solar plexus to the lower abdomen and to the root chakra on the inhale and on the exhale reverse the attention on the chakras beginning with the root chakra. Bring this breath work with you out in the world during the work-day,

in your car, when listening to others. Try using the breath throughout the day to connect to the present moment.

Suspension and Letting Go

What is it? Suspension and Letting Go is the ability to actively experience and observe a thought, assumption, judgment, habitual pattern, emotion or sensation like fear, confusion, conflict or desire, and then refraining from immediately reacting or responding to the situation.

Principles: Notice your judgments, assumptions and habitual patterns of being in the world coming up with yourself or other people. Either share them or park them and explore them later.

Self-reflection questions

- Notice when you are judging yourself or others. What is your judgment? What is the source of this judgment? What do the judgments tell you about your values? If you did not have this judgment what else is possible?
- If you stop and listen deeply to yourself or others, what is being said beyond your comprehension? If you let go of habitual beliefs and assumptions, what is happening?
- Do you remember ever assuming something and letting it go to see what would happen? What were your assumptions? Were your assumptions wrong? What did you learn?

Reflection questions during facilitation

- What are you holding onto from the past that is hindering your ability to work with this group right now to be effective? What do you have to let go of in order to meet this group's highest potential?
- What is possible if you give space for others to voice their ideas and opinions?
- If you let go of judgments or assumptions, what is possible that you cannot see yet?

Practices to develop your capacity to Suspend and Let Go

Meditation is very useful for developing the capacity to Suspend and Let Go. Vipassana meditation helps you witness consciousness; it is a practice of observing your emotional and mental states. Vipassana trains you to have a thought, and let it go or experience an emotion and witness it move through you. During this mediation, you aim to be detached to thoughts and sensations while observing them. For an explanation on Vipassana Meditation visit <http://bit.ly/kFuQjt>

Bohmian Dialogue is a structured technique that helps you witness judgments, assumptions, cultural beliefs and personal values objectively within the context of a group. Dialogue provides a mirror to individual and collective consciousness. The Greek word for dialogue originally means 'meaning flowing through,' as opposed to discussion meaning 'breaking things apart.' It is a conversation with a centre, not with sides (Isaacs 1999). A group of people form a circle with no agenda, just a dialogue revolving around thinking collectively. The group gathers with the intention to observe what is being said in a non-judgmental way. Bohmian Dialogue Principles include:

*Our true home is in the present moment
To live in the present moment is a miracle.
The miracle is not to walk on water.
The miracle is to walk on the green Earth
... to appreciate the peace and beauty available now
... in our bodies and our spirits.
Once we learn to touch this peace,
we will be healed and transformed.
It is not a matter of faith; it is a matter of practice.
- Thich Nhat Hanh*

Intention is not a powerful force, it is the only force.

- W. Brian Arthur

- The group agrees that no group-level decisions will be made in the conversation.
- Each individual agrees to suspend judgment in the conversation.
- As these individuals “suspend judgement” they also simultaneously are as honest and transparent as possible.
- The conversation builds upon each individual’s ideas in the conversation, and individuals do not argue, counter or break apart what is being said.

Suspension & Letting Go: Resources for further exploring, practice, and reading

- Bohm, D. 1996. *On Dialogue*. New York: Routledge.
- Isaacs, William. 1999. *Dialogue and the Art Of Thinking Together*. New York: Crown Business.

Intention Aligned with Higher Purpose

What is it? Intention Aligned with Higher Purpose is the alignment of one’s authentic nature with one’s internal resonance with manifested actions in the world. This alignment trickles down to all facets of life including one’s personal, professional and spiritual dimensions. “Where your deepest personal passion and the world’s greatest needs align, there is opportunity” (Peter Senge). Articulating one’s higher purpose helps one embrace the unknown with profound trust.

Principles: Seek out what moves you at your core with how you can assist others and the world.

Self-reflection questions

Reflect upon these questions as though they are a ‘tuning fork’ for your purpose in life:

- When you imagine your highest self in the future, accomplishing your goals, what do you see? What are you accomplishing personally and professionally?
- How would you like people to remember you? What did you accomplish in your life that is worth remembering? What kinds of relationships did you have with other people?
- What do you care about most in the world? What is/are your greatest passion(s)? How does this align with the world’s greatest needs?
- What moves you at your core? What is your calling?
- Why are you here on Earth *at this time*? If you look at the biography of your life what always comes back for alignment, and calls you to act for something beyond your own self gain?

Reflection questions during facilitation

- If you look at the history of this community or organisation what always comes back for alignment or is at the core of these people coming together?
- What calls this group to act beyond their own individual selfinterest?
- What is this group’s core purpose and greatest passion?

Practices for developing Intention Aligned with Higher Purpose

Andrew Cohen’s Five Tenets of Psychology Liberation (<http://bit.ly/kGi1Oe>). This can be used as a tool for affirmations during concentration meditations. Take one tenet and repeat it to yourself as an affirmation during a meditation practice.

- Clarity of Intention: is foundational to spiritual life. Liberation

is achieved by refraining from self-deception and seeking freedom.

- The Law of Volitionality: rather than assuming you are an unconscious victim, you know exactly what you are doing.
- Face Everything and Avoid Nothing: an ultimate form of spiritual practice asking, “how awake are you to what is motivating you to make the choices that you make? Because only if you’re paying close attention are you going to be able to bring the light of awareness into the darkest corners of your own psyche.”
- The Truth of Impersonality: All we do as humans is an impersonal affair. The “illusion of uniqueness the narcissistic selfsense that is ego, is created moment by moment through the compulsive and mechanical personalisation of almost every thought, feeling and experience we have.”
- For the Sake of the Whole: “The pursuit of enlightenment is for the transformation of the whole world, the enlightenment of the whole universe. It’s ultimately for the evolution of consciousness itself.

Intention Aligned with Higher Purpose: Resources for further exploring, practice, and reading

- U-journaling: use these guided journaling questions based upon Theory U to articulate your higher purpose: <http://bit.ly/iOHFaa>.
- Lynne McTaggart. 2007. *The Intention Experiment: Using Your Thoughts to Change Your Life and the World*. Free Press.
- Joseph Campbell. 2008. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces (The Collected Works of Joseph Campbell)*. New World Library.

Compassion

What is it? Compassion is having unconditional acceptance and kindness toward all the dimensions of oneself and others, regardless of circumstance. Compassion involves the ability to reflect upon oneself and others without judgment, but with recognition and trust that others are doing the best they can in any given situation.

Principles: Have compassion and kindness, for yourself and for others in even the most challenging circumstances. Share in another person's humanity.

Self-reflection questions

- When you are sad or emotional, what do you do? Are you judging yourself or allowing feelings to move through you?
- Are you okay asking others for help?
- When someone else is sad, how do you respond? When you hear of a stranger suffering, how do you feel?
- Describe a time you felt pain or joy when listening to another's story. Describe a time you enjoyed helping others; when you accepted or felt compassion for others different from yourself or doing things you thought were 'wrong'.

Reflection questions during facilitation

- What worldviews and perspectives exist in this group? How can you understand other people's viewpoints and enable them to see others' viewpoints, as well? How can you hold all these viewpoints simultaneously as a facilitator?
- What are others feeling that you need to try to understand? Are you ignoring or overlooking feelings within the system? What feelings are not being talked about?

- What is the level of compassion in this group you are working with? How could you help increase the level of compassion within this group?

Practices for developing Compassion

Tonglen. Lojong mind training consists of various practices you may find easily online. Tonglen is a concentration meditation practice on compassion. The practitioner breathes in another person or animal's suffering on the in-breath, and on the out-breath sends them relief. You can focus on an individual or a group of people, animals or environmental suffering. On the in-breath imagine taking away suffering (breathe in as much as you can), and on the out-breathe (breathe out as wide as you can) imagine sending relief, comfort and happiness to the people or animals you are focusing on.

Loving-kindness meditation. There are many visualisations, reflections, and guided meditations for developing loving kindness. The traditional pattern is to move outward from oneself, to a good friend, to a neutral person to a difficult person or enemy and then gradually to the entire universe. A typical mantra would begin:

'May I be safe and protected. May I be peaceful and happy. May I be healthy and strong. May I have ease of well being (and accept all the conditions of the world)' - then replace "I" with a good friend... then a neutral person... then a difficult person or enemy... then the entire universe with the same mantra above. For an audio-guided loving-kindness meditation, go to <http://bit.ly/lkQqgl>.

Compassion: Resources for further exploring, practice, and reading

- Communicating Sustainability to people with Different Worldviews (research by Barrett Brown). <http://bit.ly/frxasL> and <http://bit.ly/k0cnB>. (Also see practices under Whole System Awareness).
- Trungpa Rinpoche: Genuine Heart of Sadness (pdf). <http://bit.ly/mc2t16>.
- Chade-Meng Tan: Everyday compassion at Google. <http://bit.ly/hsrGDz>.
- Charter of Compassion: www.charterforcompassion.org.

Whole System Awareness

What is it? Whole System Awareness is the capacity to quickly switch between different perspectives, scales and worldviews to see the big picture, interconnections within the system, and being able to scale down to small details. Whole System Awareness is not just cognitive – you 'sense' the system. It is the understanding that everything is interconnected.

Principles: Sense the system, don't try to understand it. Pay attention to patterns. Invite essential stakeholder input to gain a wider perspective. Harvest collective intelligence surfacing from the group.

Self-reflection questions

- What can you see, sense, feel, and intuit, about the system in which you are living and working?
- How far have you set the system boundaries? What are the system boundaries in which you are living and working? Are they determined by family, friends, neighbourhood, tribe, city, region, country, language, the world, all of humanity,

Your work is to discover your work and then with all your heart to give yourself to it.

- The Buddha

all sentient beings, or the whole universe?

- How big are your spheres of control, influence, and concern respectively?
- To what extent do you see yourself as part of a larger whole, as dependent upon a larger, interconnected system?

Reflection questions during facilitation

- What stakeholders could you talk to within the system to get a wider perspective of the system or for stronger collaboration and ownership among stakeholders?
- What patterns exist within the system that you can recognise?
- What is not being talked about within the system?
- What questions need to be asked to help those within the system sense and see the system more completely?
- What experience does the system need to sense, in order to see itself? (See co-sensing, Theory U).

Practices for developing Whole System Awareness

Body Whole System-Awareness. Notice yourself being aware of your own body as a whole system: all of your organs, your digestive system, and circulatory system are interconnected. Your body cannot function optimally if the one part of the system is not operating optimally. Now connect this concept to everything else (relationships, your home, the environment etc.). Ask yourself reflective questions: what is not whole in my physical body, my relationships, my workplace? If I work to improve that area, how will it affect the whole system?

A thought exercise. “What happens to one breath of air?” by astronomer Harlow Shapley: (<http://bit.ly/j9ve8N>) demonstrating the gas argon in the air we all breathe is the same breath of argon used by Jesus Christ, Joan of Arc

and Mahatma Gandhi, for example. We literally all breathe the same air, and it cycles through us from all past generations to all future generations. This demonstrates the interconnections existing between everyone, as well as the laws of thermodynamics stating that matter within our biosphere does not disappear and all matter spreads.

Whole System Awareness: Resources for further exploring, practice, and reading

- Booth Sweeney, L. & D. Meadows. 2008. *The Systems Thinking Playbook*.
- Capra, F. 1997. *The Web of Life. A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems*.
- Meadows, D. 2008. *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*.
- Senge, P. 1990. *The Fifth Discipline. The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*.
- Scharmer, O. Theory U, material on co-sensing: <http://bit.ly/o60g41>.
- Wheatley, Margaret, J. 2006. *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*.

Whole Self-Awareness

What is it? Whole Self-Awareness is the continual, lifelong process of paying attention to knowing one's self; it involves consciously and intentionally observing various dimensions of the self (including the physical, mental, shadow, emotional and spiritual realms). It is the capacity to observe how one is thinking, relating, feeling, sensing, and judging. Whole Self-Awareness includes perceptions beyond the rational mind, such as intuition.

Principles: Pay attention to all the dimensions of yourself (physical, emotional, spiritual, shadow and mental dimensions). Your body is not a transporter for your head, you are a whole system.

Self-reflection questions

- How would others describe you?

What do you tell yourself about yourself?

- Think of someone you admire, what do you admire about them? What does this tell you about your values? What can you learn about yourself from this admiration?
- Think of someone that irritates you, why do they irritate you? What does this tell you about your values? What can you learn about yourself from this irritation?
- When something is physically challenging to you, how do you respond?
- Are you aware of how you are feeling throughout the day?
- What emotions are acceptable, what emotions are not acceptable?
- How do you feel physically, emotional, spiritually, energetically and mentally right now?

Reflection questions during facilitation

- What reactions are you having with this group that need to be explored or shared now or later?
- What do you perceive to be occurring within this group beyond your cognition?
- How can you invite the group to be engaged beyond cognition? How are you inviting the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of this group to participate?
- Is your whole self (body, mind, spirit, emotion, and shadow) in alignment? Is your head agreeing to do something and another dimension of yourself not in agreement?

Practices for developing your Whole Self-Awareness

Concentration meditation practice. These practices focus your thoughts on a particular object (such as the chakra system or visualising white light moving through the body) to shut out the outside world and prevent the mind from wandering. For

example, focus upon the inhale and the exhale breath. On the inhale breath your posture elevates and on the exhale breath your posture settles. Repeat for a few minutes and extend this time with practice. This helps calm the parasympathetic nervous system to help you relax. Once calm from the concentration breathing, an awareness meditation practice like Mindfulness (See Being Present Practices) helps you see the nature of your mind. With compassion move toward embracing all of yourself and seeing the patterns of thinking including judging, planning, yearning and fearing that show up. This enables you to begin to discern between unconscious material surfacing in your thoughts from the past and accurately receiving information in the present moment.

'Core Qualities' practice (by Frank Heckman). Tell a story to a peer or mentor about a time when you were doing something challenging in which you persevered by stepping up and being courageous. Have the other person listen to your story and take note of the qualities you displayed in that situation to feedback to you. These qualities are your core qualities of personal strength you embody in your life. Repeat with another story. This practice also helps you become aware of your Personal Power.

Giving and receiving feedback. Intentionally ask others (peers, co-workers, mentors, family members) for feedback on your behaviour to see areas for your growth in order to increase the quality of your work, relationships and self-understanding. Being open to feedback and listening is key. Start this process with someone you trust most. Notice if and when you feel defensive, refrain from responding, and explore how receiving feedback impacts you. Use specific examples and reflect back to the person what you think you heard them say for accuracy and clarity. Use an actual experience.

Ask the person giving feedback to focus upon:

- What behaviours they observed you doing?
- What was the outcome of the situation and how did it impact them?
- What feelings did they feel?
- Now ask yourself, what future opportunities for new actions are available to you now given the feedback? And remember to have compassion with yourself.

A physical practice such as yoga, Thai Chi, martial arts to integrate a holistic approach and address more dimensions of yourself.

Shadow work. Facilitators work with all kinds of people and situations and are bound to be irritated or triggered sometimes. If you focus your energy on the 'outer' trigger, you are missing the

gem in the lesson from self-reflection; by being angry at the person triggering you, you are really just shooting the messenger. When in process, try to notice when an irritant or trigger or dislike arises and write it down, suspend it temporarily and return to it for exploration when appropriate. Describe the event, how you felt, what reaction you normally would have had if you had not suspended your reaction, and how that situation may represent a repressed part of yourself from long ago. Seeing irritations as shadows that need to be explored helps you gain acceptance, compassion and awareness of yourself and others, it teaches you to suspend when an irritation occurs.

Whole Self-Awareness: Resources for further exploring, practice, and reading

- The Johari Window: mapping personality awareness: <http://kevan.org/johari>.
- Goleman, Daniel. 1996. Emotional Intelligence.
- Goleman, Daniel; Richard E Boyatzis; Anne McKee. 2004. Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence.
- Self assessment tools such as Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Enneagram Test, Temperament Assessments, Emotional Intelligence Tests, Action-Logic Assessment, or Spiral Dynamics Value Meme. ■



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Mindfulness at Work: An Interview with Mirabai Bush

By Elisha Goldstein, Ph.D.; Excerpted from *PsychCentral.com*

Most of us spend the majority of our day at work. It follows that an essential place to bring mindfulness to is at work. Mirabai Bush

is the author of *Working with Mindfulness* (MP3), a key contributor to Google's Search Inside Yourself Program, Cofounder of The Center for Contemplative Mind and Society and so much more. Today is a joy to bring her to you to explore how bringing mindfulness to work can help us reduce stress, increase productivity, use more creative problem solving techniques, and improve relationships.

Today, Mirabai talks to us about what it means to bring mindfulness into the workplace, how it can bring deeper meaning, the benefits of mindful listening, the why and how of informal walking practice, and a simple practice to enhance relationships at work.

Elisha: When it comes to the workplace, you have found a fundamental flaw in our minds when we think of work like “Love is for home and discipline is for work.” One of the foundations to bringing mindfulness into the workplace is through an approach called Right Livelihood, can you tell us more about that and the benefits?

Mirabai: I first heard the words “right livelihood” while learning to meditate in a Buddhist monastery. Meditation teacher S.N. Goenka said, “If the intention is to play a useful role in society in order to support oneself and to help others, then the work one does is right livelihood.” Other teachers expanded on that: Do work that is ethical and helpful to your personal development. Do no harm through your work. Cause no suffering to yourself or others. Use work to nourish understanding and compassion. Remember that all life is interconnected. Be honest, be mindful of what you are doing.

When I asked my root teacher, Neemkaroli Baba, what work I should do, he said, “Love everyone and

serve everyone.” That has kept me busy. Livelihood can be a path of inquiry and awakening, of coming closer to truth. All work that we do—from shipping Buddhas from a monastery store to guarding inmates in prison—has embedded in it questions that help us to transform our work from busyness to awakening. In retreats I led for the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, a biotech scientist asked, “How can I develop products that sustain life, not destroy it?” An architect asked, “How can I create a contemplative building—a space in which the inside is larger than the outside?” A lawyer asked, “Can I be a zealous advocate and still have compassion for my adversary?” An anti-globalization activist asked, “If I give up my anger, where will my motivation come from?”

Approaching work as right livelihood encourages us to explore these questions in the context of our full lives. How can we live a meaningful and authentic life and still support our families and ourselves? What is the connection between ethical work and capitalist democracy? How can we contribute to social change that moves us to a more sustainable world?

These retreats were open forums to delve into practical challenges and barriers we encounter at work, and to investigate how our work can and does impact the whole world. Organizations don't change suddenly, but as employees become committed to principles of right livelihood through mindfulness and compassion practice, they will change a company in important ways. They will—

- Apply standards of conduct that are aligned with their personal values
- Recognize that business is not an isolated entity—it is interconnected with all other life and its actions affect all other life
- Encourage generosity
- Use right speech
- Listen carefully to others, both within and outside the company

- Work better in teams and communicate more effectively
- Tolerate ambiguity, not knowing, paradox
- Recover more quickly from negative information and difficult situations
- Encourage responsibility to those who work for and depend on the company—fare wage, health care, maternity/paternity leave, etc.
- Exercise humility
- Be compassionate and loving
- Create products that support life.

Committing to right livelihood leads some of us to look for new work that we identify as meaningful and others of us to look for more meaning in the work we are already doing. A mindful workplace supports and nourishes the workers who are already sane and mature and encourages kindness, sincerity, and basic decency for all employees.

Elisha: You mention some important facts that come out of the International Listening Association that 45% of our time is spent listening and 75% of the time we're apparently listening we're actually distracted. That the average attention span is 20 seconds and from what we hear we only recall about half of it and a few hours later maybe we have 20% retention. How do you explain Mindful Listening and what are its benefits? One of the most important activities in workplace is listening.

Mirabai: Deep or mindful listening is a way of hearing in which we are fully present with what is happening in the moment without trying to control it or judge it. We let go of our inner clamoring and our usual assumptions and listen with respect for precisely what is being said. Very few of us have fully developed this capacity for listening. The practice of listening has many dimensions. We listen to our own minds and hearts and, as the Quakers say, to the “still, small voice within.” We listen to sounds, to music, to lectures, to conversations, and, in a sense, we listen to the written word, the text. There is a well-known image of the Tibetan poet and mystic Milarepa, sitting in his familiar listening posture, with his right hand cupped over his right ear. He is listening for the Dharma, or the truth.

Deep or mindful listening requires that we witness our thoughts and emotions while maintaining focused attention on what we are hearing. It trains us to pay full attention to the sound of the words, while abandoning such habits as planning our next statement or interrupting the speaker. It is attentive rather than reactive listening. Such listening not only increases retention of information, but encourages insight and the making of meaning. It can reveal the role of not knowing and not judging and help us to maintain an open receptivity to new ideas, important for growth in any workplace.

Elisha: I consider Thich Nhat Hanh to be a great teacher, someone who has influenced my life. You note a wonderful walking practice of his in your program where you instruct us to combine phrases with steps. “Stepping with your right foot, I have arrived, Stepping with your left foot, I am home.” Can you tell us how this applies to the workplace?

Mirabai: Walking meditation is the practice of paying close attention to the ordinary action of walking, a helpful practice for people at work, who usually walk at least sometimes during the day. It is a way of using a natural part of life to increase mindfulness as we become aware of the movement of each step; the exercise engages the person in life directly. It is not thinking or contemplating life while walking (which is also delightful), but being mindful of the verse (as in Thich Nhat Hanh's verse) or of the muscles of the body, the movement and placement of the feet, balance, and motion. Once you learn the practice, you can do it almost anywhere. It frees the mind and helps you feel fully present on the ground. So when a person walks in the workplace to another office or a meeting or a lunch date, he or she is more open and mindful when arriving at the destination, ready to be present for the next agenda.

Elisha: Relationships are fundamental to our lives and can be trying in the workplace. Can you give us a practice that we can use immediately to enhance relationships in the workplace and act more positively to others?

Mirabai: One powerful practice that we call “Just Like Me” is usually learned in pairs, so that each person is looking in the eyes of their partner and silently repeating phrases spoken by a meditation

leader about the person across from them: “Just like me, this person has known physical pain. Just like me, this person has done things she regrets. Just like me, this person wants to be happy....” and so on. This compassion practice is designed to shift perspectives and deepen the understanding that we human beings are similar in important ways, no matter how vast our differences. We all need food, and shelter, and love.

We crave attention, recognition, affection, and, above all, happiness. Resentments, disagreements, and estrangements hurt all parties because they reinforce feelings of separation. And that separation is true only at one level—this activity helps us remember how we are connected by our humanity. And one person can do it alone by bringing to mind a difficult person and repeating the same phrases

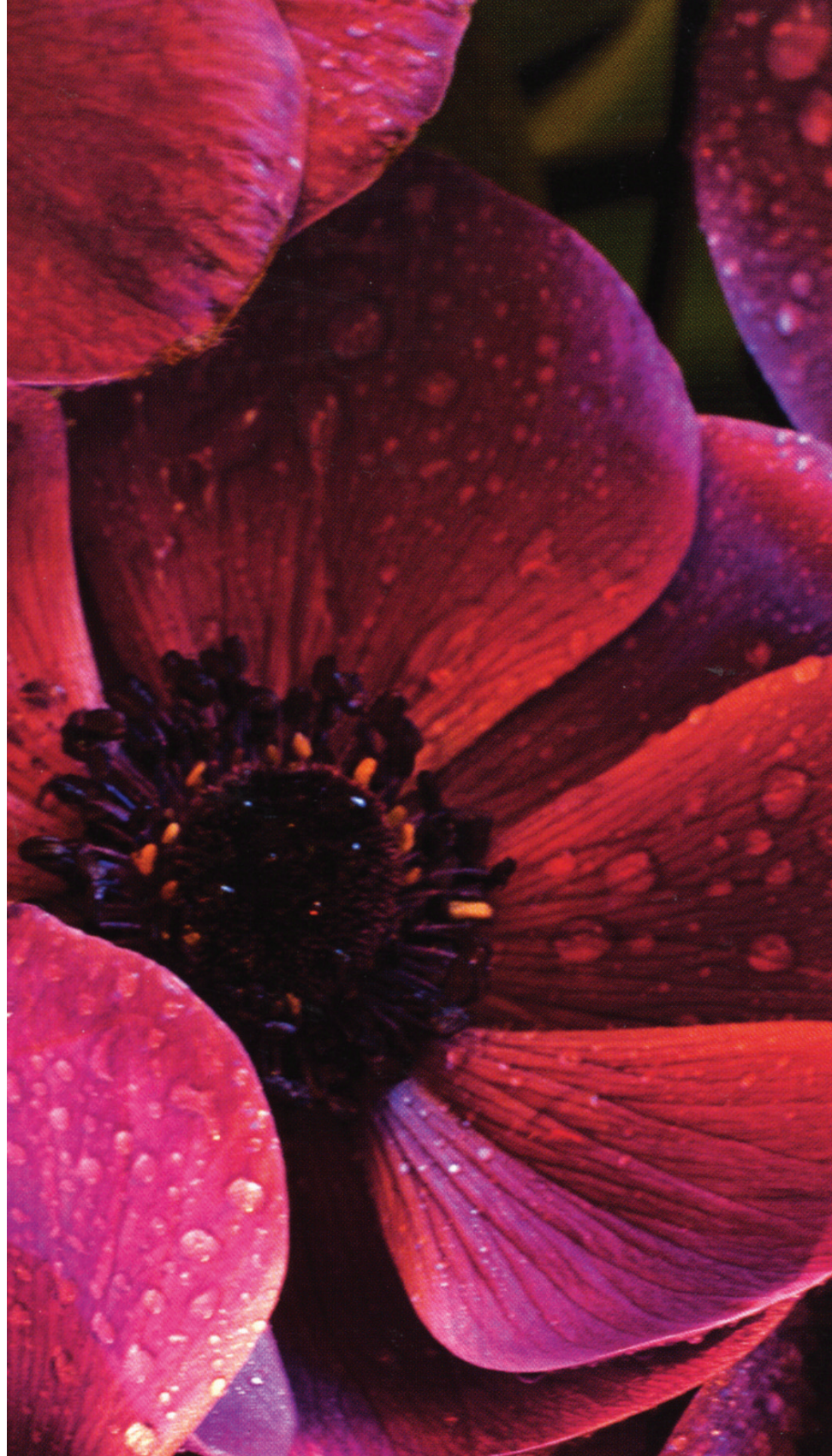
silently. It softens the negative feelings we have for another, and working together often becomes much easier.

Elisha: Do you have any final thoughts about what really matters in bringing mindfulness into the workplace?

Mirabai: What matters in the workplace is what matters in our lives—using every moment to learn from experience so that we grow in insight, wisdom, and compassion. ■

To hear a clip of a practice that Mirabai to help people with change at work you can find it here: www.morethansound.net/blog/2012/07/working-with-mindfulness-coping-with-change/





*“If hope is the thing with feathers,
to quote Dickenson, then I want
mine peacock-bright. I want
wings strong as a hawk — fierce
enough to face the truth of the
day and yet far-flying enough
to see the broadest view. I want
feathers of the softest down - a
hope that cushions the rockfall
of reality with the gentleness
of yellow canaries who sing no
matter where they've been taken
and I want my hope phoenix-
light. A hope that falls apart. And
comes together. And rises. Again.
If hope is a thing with feathers
that perches in the soul then let
the winds of change come for my
soul is safe and ready for air and
rise I shall.”*

—Maria Sirois

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