



EFL “Brieflet”: Engaging with Mindfulness

Sometimes, we spend so much time trying to capture a great photo that we don't fully appreciate the experience itself. Or we get so caught up in achieving an objective that we don't pay enough attention to the nuances of process that achieved it. Other times, we try so hard to escape from discomfort or pain that we fail to understand it fully, and so it recurs. And, sometimes, we use alcohol, other drugs or unhelpful behaviours to enhance or avoid our experience.

Mindfulness is an approach to life - rather than a skill - where we *choose* to focus specifically and objectively upon our experience. As a result, we provide ourselves with the opportunity to gain the most from our lives. Mindfulness is the:

*“... awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally to things as they are”
(Williams, M. et al. 2007)*

Business leaders and magazines, mental health researchers and esteemed academic journals, those experiencing mental and/ or physical pain, soldiers, sports people and civilians - all report the benefits of mindfulness in everyday work and life. They recognise that choosing to approach life mindfully enables people to focus attention, gain clarity and enhance perspective.

Whilst understanding how to live a mindful life is simple - focus on the present, purposefully and without judgement - it is a challenge in reality. Regular practice makes it easier. It also enhances our empathy for others as we develop the need to be more self-compassionate with ourselves when we notice that we are not always as present and focused as we would like.

An easy Mindfulness Mnemonic is provided by Jack Kornfield:

- **R - Recognise** the thoughts or emotions that you are currently experiencing
- **A - Accept** your experience with courage, rather than try to justify, avoid (e.g. through denial, alcohol/ other drugs), or even prolong it.
- **I - Investigate** the manifestations of your experience in your body and mind. Be curious to discover and spend time with where they are located and how they are experienced, without judgement (what is the story and where does it come from? Where is the sensation and what does it feel like?)
- **N - Non-identification** - because all things are in constant change, they come and go. You are not your thoughts or feelings. Your awareness, itself, is your only constant.

Simple Mindful Exercises

- Brush your teeth: Observe and notice the taste, smell, sight, sound and sensations in your mouth. What's happening with other parts of your body?
- Meetings: Upon what thoughts, emotions, feelings and other people are you focusing? What is your body doing? How are you breathing? Notice then choose how you want to respond, rather than reacting.
- Driving: What are your hands and feet doing? How are you sitting? What are you choosing to look at and listen to? What can you smell?

Formal Mindful Activities

- Sit down for a few seconds, minutes or hours. Focus on your breathing. Notice its sound, where you feel it in your body. Allow your thoughts and emotions to come and go, without getting hooked, as if they were leaves being carried past you by the current of a stream.
- Draw a picture. As you draw, what do you notice about your thoughts, emotions, sensations; what colours do you choose; what actions, thoughts, emotions do you tend to notice?
- Take a walk. Focus on what you see, hear, smell, touch, taste - inside and outside your body. What/who do you notice? Are you reacting and judging, or simply responding to, what you observe?

The STOP Exercise (Russ Harris)

- **S** - Slow your breathing, notice your feet on the floor (and other parts of your body that might be touching something, even the clothes you are wearing)
- **T** - Take note, be curious about what you see, hear, touch, taste and smell. Notice what is happening both inside and outside your skin. Stay present with each moment, without getting caught up in thoughts or emotions.
- **O** - Open up and make room for your thoughts and feelings. Allow and give them space to flow through you freely.
- **P** - Pursue your values - let what is really important to you guide you to do what you do next, so that you are energized by what you *choose* to do next.

My sources for your further interest

- Harris, R. http://www.thehappinesstrap.com/free_resources
- Helpguide.org (with Harvard Medical School) <http://www.helpguide.org/harvard/mindfulness.htm>
- Kornfield, J. <http://www.jackkornfield.org/articles/dharmaandpolitics.php>
- Williams, M. et al The Mindful Way Through Depression: freeing yourself from chronic unhappiness

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