

# mindful

taking time for what matters

Sampler

## Why **Jon Kabat-Zinn**

Thinks Mindfulness  
Has a Big Future

**Finding the  
Space to Lead**  
Strategies from  
Leadership Expert  
Janice Marturano

Get a special  
glimpse of

**mindful**

**Jon Kabat-Zinn**  
Founder of  
Mindfulness-Based  
Stress Reduction

mindful.org

from the founders

# Being Mindful

## Now is the Time

Something important is happening in our society today: people are being mindful. More often. In more ways. And in more places. In our view, the simple act of being present has the power to change everything—how we approach ourselves, our challenges, our relationships, and our communities. We believe being mindful is an idea—actually, a way of being—whose time has come. We are launching *Mindful* to celebrate and support this growing movement.

Mindfulness is not obscure or exotic. It's familiar to us because it's what we already do, how we already are. It takes many shapes and goes by many names. In his basketball days, former senator Bill Bradley called it a *sense of where you are*, and for many athletes today it's *being in the zone*. For caregivers, it's *attention* and *empathy*. For soldiers and first responders, it's *situational awareness*. For business leaders, it might be *presence* or *flow*. Artists see it as *spontaneity* and thinkers as *contemplation*.

Mindfulness is not a special added thing we do. We already have the capacity to be present, and it doesn't require us to change who we are. But we *can* cultivate these innate qualities with simple practices that are scientifically demonstrated to benefit ourselves, our loved ones, our friends and neighbors, the people we work with, and the institutions and organizations we take part in.

When an idea's time has come, it's part of the *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times.

Living mindfully is one such idea. Solutions that ask us to change who we are or become something we've not had failed us over and over again. We're ready for an approach that recognizes and cultivates the best of who we are as human beings.

Mindfulness is not only timely. It also has the potential to become a transformative social phenomenon, for these key reasons:

- **Anyone can do it.** Mindfulness practice cultivates universal human qualities and does not require anyone to change their beliefs. Everyone can benefit and it's easy to learn.
- **It's a way of living.** Mindfulness is more than just a practice. It brings awareness and caring into everything we do—and it cuts down needless stress. Even a little makes our lives better.
- **It's evidence-based.** We don't have to take mindfulness on faith. Both science and experience demonstrate its positive benefits for our health, happiness, work, and relationships.
- **It sparks innovation.** As we deal with our world's increasing complexity and uncertainty, mindfulness can lead us to effective, resilient, low-cost responses to seemingly intransigent problems.

This mindfulness movement is already emerging in many places and making a real difference. In hospitals and doctors' offices, it's improving patients' health and delivering better care. In classrooms, teachers are using it to foster healthier learning environments. First responders are becoming more resilient, and trauma sufferers are using it to heal. In business, mindfulness and awareness—and yes, kindness and compassion—are increasing job performance and satisfaction. In every sphere, leaders find that mindfulness practice helps keep their vision alive in the heat of the moment.

Our mission at *Mindful* is to support this movement and all who want to live mindfully. We'll do so through *Mindful* magazine and its digital edition; with our website and applications that deliver mindful content to mobile devices; and in conferences, collaborations, and conversations where inspiring ideas can become the building blocks of a mindful society.

*Mindful* will tell the stories and celebrate the heroic efforts of people improving our world by being mindful. We'll share advice, how-to instruction, news, and information. We'll connect mindful people, communities, and organizations with each other. We'll help the mindfulness movement deepen and broaden and introduce this way of living to wide new audiences. Like all who are committed to a mindful life, we want the mindfulness movement to have a beneficial impact on our society.

Welcome to *Mindful*. Please come as you are. As we do our best to bring you helpful information and stories and create connections, we look forward to hearing from you. We want to know your concerns and insights and learn what you're doing. Let's be mindful together. ●

# Healthy Mind, Healthy Life.

When you subscribe to *Mindful*, you will:

- Discover practical, effective tools for everyday living
- Learn about the latest brain science and the many ways mindfulness is changing our society
- Enjoy better health and relief from stress
- Improve your performance and capacity at work
- Deepen the relationships in your life
- Be inspired by stories of other mindful people like you



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mindful

# *no blueprint, just love*

In 1979, **Jon Kabat-Zinn** recruited chronically ill patients not responding well to traditional treatments to participate in his newly formed eight-week stress-reduction program. Now, 35 years later, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and its offshoots have entered the mainstream of health care, scientific study, and public policy.

We talk to the health and well-being pioneer about why mindfulness has attracted so much attention and why it will continue to do so.

**Photographs by Joshua Simpson**



In early 2005, I met Jon Kabat-Zinn at his home in Massachusetts. I came as a meditation practitioner and journalist with a bit of skepticism about MBSR. I was curious whether the attempt to bring secular mindfulness to the broader society could be effective. In a lengthy, impassioned conversation, I began to be persuaded of its validity and power, and as a result we started down on a path of further investigation that led us to *Mindful* and [mindful.org](http://mindful.org).

Since then, we've met scores of people who are bringing this approach to mindfulness into many different contexts and helping all sorts of people. And Jon and his many colleagues have just kept on going, bringing mindfulness into every corner of life. I returned to Jon's home recently, on the occasion of the publication of a revised and updated edition of his groundbreaking book *Full Catastrophe Living*, to talk about his work. Fittingly, we began with a little bit of silence and then embarked on a stimulating conversation about the present and future of the practice he has devoted his life and heart to.

—Barry Boyce  
Editor-in-Chief, *Mindful*

**“If there's an instruction manual for being human, then Western science and medicine have supplied one part of it, and the contemplative traditions have supplied another—the part that has to do with discovering and cultivating our deep interior resources.”**

**Mindful:** *Did you ever think the work that started in a modest clinic in a spare room of a hospital in Central Massachusetts would become so influential?*

**Jon Kabat-Zinn:** In a word, yes. I never thought of this work as a small thing. I don't think of myself as a big deal, but I always thought of this work as a very big deal. It wasn't just about thinking that meditation had a modest contribution to make to Western medicine. MBSR was built on the conviction that the insights, wisdom, and compassion of the meditative traditions were equal in import and magnitude to the great discoveries about human life we've made in the West. If there's an instruction manual for being human, then Western science and medicine have supplied one part of it, and the contemplative traditions have supplied another, the part that has to do with discovering and cultivating our deep interior resources.

My hope was that by starting a stress-reduction clinic based on relatively intensive training in mindfulness meditation and yoga—and their applications in everyday living—we could document how these practices might have a profound effect on the health and well-being of individuals. The larger purpose was to effect a kind of public-health intervention that would ultimately move the bell curve of the entire society.

*And it grew to the point where we now talk about mindfulness-based interventions in all sorts of areas—depression, childbirth, education, addiction, to name just a few.*

We didn't have a specific blueprint, but I am very gratified that so many developments have been happening on so many different fronts. It's really a matter of planting seeds. You never really know what will sprout from these seeds and how they will spread. That's the beauty of it. It's based on not-knowing—approaching the world inquisitively, with a fresh mind.

If we had come in with a plan, with an ideology, with all the answers, I think it would have remained small. Instead, those of us involved in this work have paid close attention to just a few essential elements. One is that mindfulness is not a special state you achieve through a trick or a technique. It is a way of being. I have a lot of faith that if people just learn how to be in the present through simple mindfulness meditation, then the practice does the work of transformation and healing. We do not need to do it for them. People are so creative and intrinsically intelligent that given a chance, they perceive the truth within their own experience. “When I get attached to something, I suffer,” they realize, “and when I don't get attached, I don't.”

*What else makes MBSR work?*

**“Mindfulness is not a special state you achieve through a trick or a technique. It is a way of being.”**



**20,000**  
meditators

More than 20,000 people have completed the MBSR program at the UMass Stress Reduction Clinic and countless more in other locations.

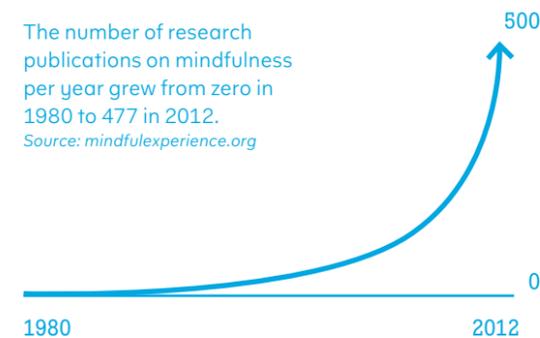
Source: Center for Mindfulness

**477**  
mindfulness  
studies in 2012



The number of research publications on mindfulness per year grew from zero in 1980 to 477 in 2012.

Source: [mindfulexperience.org](http://mindfulexperience.org)



The eight weeks of the MBSR curriculum offer a reliable protocol that is used in many studies of the effects of mindfulness meditation practice. People who have taught it a lot have seen that it has an integrity of its own. If they try to switch things around—a little more of this, a little less of that, take this out, put this in—they find it isn't as effective.

Yet it's only a framework. It's only as effective as what the teacher brings to it and how he or she “holds the space,” as we say. It simply will not work if it is scripted or formulaic. If the teacher doesn't feel competent in one of the elements, say yoga, it doesn't work if they bring in an outside expert. They have to get the training and embody it themselves. Everything that is taught has to be lived. Life is the curriculum.

As a teacher, you are trying to convey something that can't be conveyed in words. Mindfulness is also heartfulness—you need poetry as much as prose. What truly makes mindfulness training work is love. If the teacher holding the class is profoundly in love with what they are doing and with the people in the class in a fundamental way, it will work. If they are not, it will peter out.

*The benefits of mindfulness go far beyond stress reduction. Why did you call your program that, and are you still satisfied with your choice?*

I wanted it to speak to universal experience. Everybody can relate to stress. It's a common English word and a common experience. The science on stress is proving that it was a good choice. We find out more every day about the negative effects of stress on the body, on the immune system, on aging, and so on. Likewise, there is a correspondingly strong interest in how we can develop resiliency in the face of stress, which is a benefit of mindfulness practice.

*You often say that mindfulness is not about attaining benefits or fixing problems—that it's about discovering there is more right with us than wrong with us. Yet a “stress-reduction” program can seem very benefit-oriented.*

That is an unavoidable paradox. There are tremendous benefits that arise from mindfulness practice, but it works precisely because we *don't* try to attain benefit. Instead, we befriend ourselves as we are. We learn how to drop in on ourselves, visit, and hang out in awareness.

It's essential when you're teaching mindfulness to remember this and embody it in your own way of being. People come to a mindfulness course because they're in pain or angry or depressed or afraid. The one thing they want is to get somewhere else, so the teacher needs to continually convey that mindfulness is not about getting anywhere. The teacher's own practice and way of holding him- or herself →



## Non-striving

Almost everything we do we do for a purpose, to get something or somewhere. But in meditation this attitude can be a real obstacle. That is because meditation is different from all other human activities. Although it takes a lot of work and energy of a certain kind, ultimately meditation is a non-doing. It has no goal other than for you to be yourself. The irony is that you already are. This sounds paradoxical and a little crazy. Yet this paradox and craziness may be pointing you toward a new way of seeing yourself, one in which you are trying less and being more. This comes from intentionally cultivating the attitude of non-striving.

For example, if you sit down to meditate and you think, "I am going to be relaxed, or get enlightened, or control my pain, or become a better person," then you have introduced an idea into your mind of where you should be, and along with

it comes the notion that you are not okay right now. "If only I were calmer, or more intelligent, or a harder worker, or more this or more that, if only my heart were healthier or my knee were better, then I would be okay. But right now, I am not okay."

This attitude undermines the cultivation of mindfulness, which involves simply paying attention to whatever is happening. If you are tense, then just pay attention to the tension. If you are in pain, then be with the pain as best you can. If you are criticizing yourself, then observe the activity of the judging mind. Just watch. We are simply allowing anything and everything that we experience from moment to moment to be here, because it already is.

*Excerpt from Full Catastrophe Living by Jon Kabat-Zinn, copyright © 1990 by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Used by permission of Dell Publishing, an imprint of Random House, a division of Random House LLC. All rights reserved.*

communicates that, and because people are intelligent and inherently mindful, they resonate with it. At that point, it becomes ordinary common sense. People often say, "I always figured meditation was something weird and mystical. If only I had known what it really is I would have started years ago."

*Your interest is not just working with medically defined pain, but with all of life—"the full catastrophe," in that colorful phrase you borrowed from Zorba the Greek.*

People say, "I came to this program to deal with my pain. I didn't realize it was about my whole life!" There was a professor I knew from my MIT days who needed a bone-marrow transplant, and he showed up at the clinic in Worcester. He said, "I want to learn how to be in relationship with my mind, so that when I'm in isolation in the transplant unit, I can survive it." After a few MBSR classes, he said, "I feel more comfortable with these people I've just met than I do with the colleagues in my department." When he asked himself why, he concluded, "This is the community of the afflicted, and we acknowledge the affliction. The faculty is also the community of the afflicted, but we don't acknowledge our affliction at all." Later, he was riding the subway and realized we are all "the community of the afflicted." It made him feel extraordinarily free.

*If the real benefits take place in the heart and in our very way of being, why does the scientific work matter so much?*

David Black of the *Mindfulness Research Guide* has been gathering information on the number of scientific and medical papers per year on mindfulness, and the resulting graph is pretty telling. Something that was not on the research map at all a few decades ago is a prime area of interest now. These studies provide the evidence of effectiveness you need to be respected and adopted in key institutions in health care, education, social policy, and so on.

But ultimately we do science to understand the nature of the universe—and the nature of the one who wants to understand the nature of the universe. Research that helps us understand the capabilities of the brain and how to improve them is vitally important to how we can live well, as individuals and as a society.

The brain science has become very rigorous. A lot of credit obviously goes to Richie Davidson, in his lab at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the Center for Investigating Healthy Minds. Their work is unique in that it focuses on both basic science and translational research, which takes place in real-life settings such as Madison's public schools. Research on how the brain can be trained ventures into areas we wouldn't have dreamed of years ago. For example, one of the center's really interesting

**"There are tremendous benefits that arise from mindfulness practice, but it works precisely because we don't try to attain benefit. Instead, we befriend ourselves as we are. We learn how to drop in on ourselves, visit, and hang out in awareness."**

projects, funded by the Gates Foundation, is to study the effects of computer games that train children in attention and pro-social behaviors, such as recognizing others' emotions.

Many young scientists are now taking up this field, many with the support of the Mind & Life Institute's Varela Grants and summer research institute, where contemplative practice is integrated into a scientific meeting. Young neuroscientists and behavioral scientists are building their careers in what's now called contemplative neuroscience. Ten years ago that may well have been a career-ending choice.

One of the Varela researchers whose work I admire is Paul Condon of Northeastern University. His group designed a study to determine what different results might arise from training in mindfulness meditation and training in meditation that emphasizes compassion. In the study, participants received eight weeks of either mindfulness or compassion training or no training at all. Afterward, the researchers set up a scenario in which a study participant was directed to sit in a waiting room with only three chairs, two of which were occupied. After a minute, a fourth person entered on crutches wincing and sighing, and the two people originally in the room pretended not to notice.

The study measured how many participants would, during a two-minute period, overcome the bystander effect—if others are ignoring something, so should I—and offer their seat to the person on crutches. The people trained in mindfulness and the people trained in compassion were both five times more likely to give up their seat as the people in the control group. There was no difference between training in mindfulness and training in compassion.

This raises some very interesting questions, and to my mind it underscores the fact that mindfulness is compassion and vice versa. Certainly, in MBSR, where people bring every kind of pain imaginable, compassion is naturally part of the atmosphere. →

# 12,000

health care  
professionals worldwide

The Oasis Institute has offered mindfulness teacher training to more than 12,000 health care professionals globally.

# 740+

MBSR sites

More than 740 academic medical centers, hospitals, clinics, and freestanding programs offer MBSR worldwide.

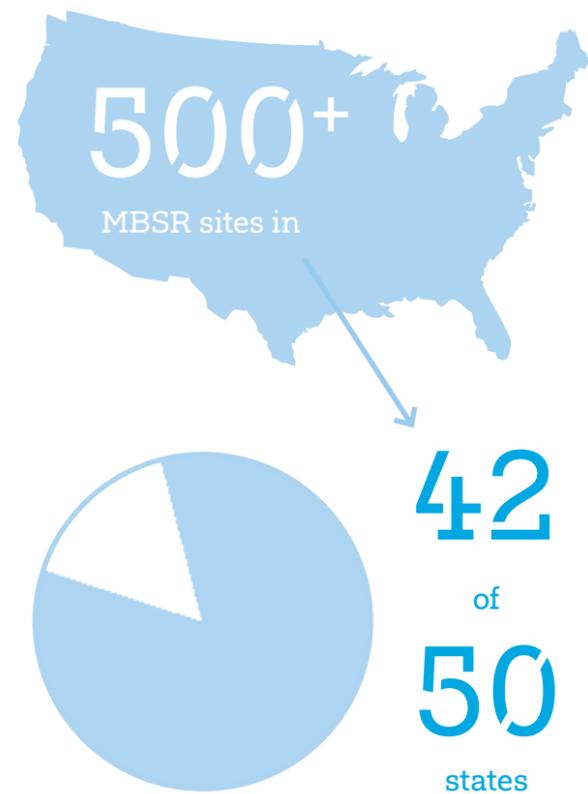
Source: Center for Mindfulness



**“Everything that is taught has to be lived. Life is the curriculum.”**

*What developments outside the laboratory are you following?*

It's exciting to see how more people in the medical world are appreciating the mind-body relationship and fostering participatory medicine, where the patient is not a passive recipient of treatment but a real partner in healing. It marks a sea change in medical education and practice. For example, Dr. Ron Epstein of the University of Rochester Medical



People can receive MBSR training in more than 500 locations in 42 of the 50 United States, with more being added monthly.  
Source: Center for Mindfulness

School, with his colleagues Mick Krasner and Tim Quill, have been training primary care physicians in mindful communication. This has resulted in decreases in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of patients, and burnout among doctors.

I can't say enough about how the role of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy is spurring interest in mindfulness among psychologists and psychotherapists, and it has led to some very intriguing research. On another front in psychology, David Creswell has been doing work with loneliness in the elderly. All sorts of conventional interventions have been tried to reduce loneliness in the elderly, and they just never work. Have them do things in groups, form friendships, roast hot dogs—they're still lonely. He trains them in MBSR, and their loneliness disappears. What's that about?

*And outside of health care?*

An area where mindfulness is spreading in a truly impressive way is education. What could be more vital for our future than teachers and students sharing a mindful classroom? There's the work of Mindful Schools and Inner Kids, to name just two of the more prominent groups. There are also federally funded test sites in several locations, where teachers are learning mindfulness along with their students.

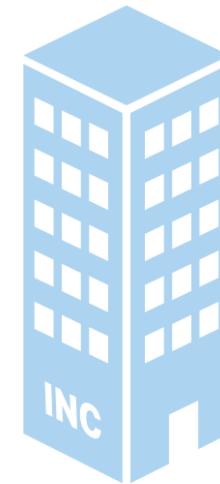
I'm really impressed by a manual called *Mindfulness in Public Schools* that just came out from the South Burlington Public School District in Vermont. It's unprecedented that a whole public school system would support mindfulness to the point of developing a teaching manual modeled on its own program for students and teachers.

Another excellent project is the pilot happening in the Madison, Wisconsin, public schools, led by Lisa Flook of the Center for Investigating Healthy Minds. I was just reading the impressive results reported in the article in *Mind, Brain, and Education*. They adapted a form of MBSR specifically for teachers, and among other results, it decreased burnout and increased self-compassion.

In higher education, something very promising is a mindfulness-based intervention to help college students deal with anxiety and a challenging environment that has caused them in many cases to go on medication. It was developed by two psychiatrists at Duke University, Holly Rogers and Margaret Maytan, who present it in a book called *Mindfulness for the Next Generation: Helping Emerging Adults Manage Stress and Lead Healthier Lives*.

*When mindfulness reaches into our institutions of higher learning, it can have broad societal effects. Where else do you see mindfulness leading to bigger changes?*

Many well-known businesses and business leaders have been bringing mindfulness into their work and



**80+**  
businesses

More than 80 corporations, small businesses, and institutions worldwide have made mindfulness-based training available within their organizations.

Source: Mindful staff

**18,000**  
schoolchildren

Mindful Schools—one of a growing number of programs presenting mindfulness for students and teachers—has presented its in-school program to more than 18,000 students in 53 schools since 2007.

Source: Mindful Schools



leadership, and I've had the opportunity to meet many of them, including at the Wisdom 2.0 conference every year. Some politicians, economists, and policymakers have started practicing mindfulness and bringing it into their work. It's not many now, but the ones who are doing it are very passionate about it. Congressman Tim Ryan, whom I met five years ago when he did a mindfulness retreat with me, has become a strong advocate for mindfulness in health care, schools, the military, and particularly for veterans. He believes that programs that develop our innate human capacity to be mindful can make a profound difference for a relatively modest investment.

When I was in England recently, I spent a whole day in Parliament and visited with Prime Minister Cameron's advisors at 10 Downing Street. Chris Ruane, a Member of Parliament from a very poor district in North Wales, has been instrumental in bringing mindfulness into public schools there, and he's encouraging his colleagues to consider other ways to bring mindfulness into public policy.

I also gave the keynote at a daylong conference in London called Mindfulness in Schools. What I saw there brought me to tears. Here were seven-year-olds addressing 900 people, and they were completely self-possessed talking about their mindfulness practice and what it was doing for them. You could tell it was unrehearsed. They just spontaneously said what mindfulness meant to them.

*With all of this interest from so many different quarters, are there enough qualified people to serve the growing need for mindfulness teachers?*

The price of success is that more and more people want something. But of course, mindfulness is not a something. As I said in the beginning, it's a way of being, and you usually discover it through someone who embodies it to some degree.

Interest in mindfulness generally, and in MBSR and other mindfulness-based programs, is spreading around the world at a lightning pace. So in addition to sowing seeds we need orchards, where we are growing things in a more structured and planned way. That has not been my emphasis, but fortunately there are people paying a lot of attention to that. At the Center for Mindfulness and in professional training programs all over the world, under Saki Santorelli's excellent direction, people are learning how to teach mindfulness in a way that allows open discovery. The program certifies that they have been well trained, but of course we can't certify that anyone is a good teacher. Each student will always have to judge that for him- or herself.

In the future, there will need to be many different kinds of mindfulness teachers and guides for many different contexts. What's needed for educators will differ from what's needed for health professionals and inner city youth. Let many flowers bloom.

The spread of mindfulness into more areas of our life is a multigenerational undertaking. One of the greatest challenges is how we will work with the digital revolution and the alternate reality it has created. Many of us are spending more time online than offline. We need to navigate this mindfully or it will eat us up. The technology itself is a source of endless possibilities but also endless distraction. We're now very good at writing code—but how good are we at knowing ourselves, loving ourselves, and making a good world together with our fellow human beings? ●

ILLUSTRATION BY BOHDAN BURMICH, FROM THE NOUN PROJECT

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALBERT ROJO (TOP) AND SAMAN BEMEL-BENRUD (BOTTOM), FROM THE NOUN PROJECT

# Rewiring Your Emotions

**Think you're destined to respond the same way emotionally to the same old triggers? Not necessarily, say scientists who study neuroplasticity. With a little mind training, you can chart new pathways.**

By Sharon Begley

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**Sharon Begley** is the senior health and science correspondent at Reuters, author of *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain*, and coauthor with Richard Davidson of *The Emotional Life of Your Brain*.

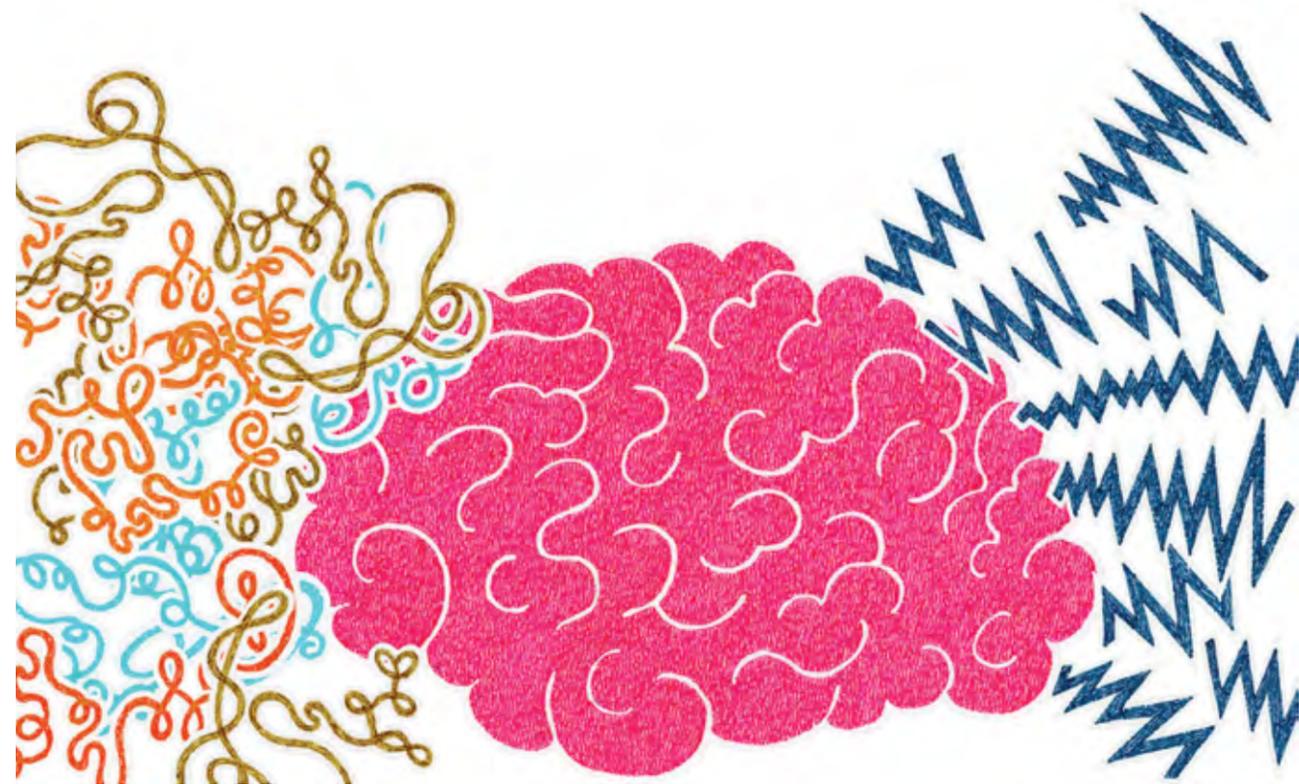
**Google changes the brain.** Playing computer games changes the brain. Conversing in a compassionate way changes the brain.

If you half expect this ever-lengthening list to eventually include, oh, making matzoh-ball soup changes the brain, you are not alone. It is true that lots of solid scientific studies show that the adult brain can change in response to what we do and the lives we lead. But they are in danger of being crowded out, at least in the public's understanding, by far less rigorous claims. (The jury is still out on Google, games, and conversation, but we're pretty sure soup-making won't make the short list.)

It's a shame to see something as scientifically significant as neuroplasticity—the ability of the adult brain to change its structure or function in an enduring way—overpopularized to the point that it could start losing its real meaning.

The promise of tapping neuroplasticity to relieve suffering is genuine. From physical therapy that changes part of the brain so it can do the job of another part of the brain that has been devastated by a stroke, to mindfulness-based therapy that quiets the circuit responsible for obsessive-compulsive disorder, techniques using the principle of neuroplasticity are already in use by physicians and therapists. But how far can neuroplasticity go?

Perhaps as far as an emotional reset—harnessing neuroplasticity to change how you respond emotionally to the ups and downs of life. Neurobiologist Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin, an expert on the emotional brain, calls it “neurally inspired behavioral therapy.” He is talking about a kind of therapy that identifies the brain activity underlying an emotional trait you wish to change, such as a tendency to dwell in →



anger, and then targets this brain activity with mental exercises designed to alter it. The result is a healthier “emotional style,” as Davidson calls it.

This mission is still in its infancy, but there are hints that it works. Much of Davidson's research has focused on determining the patterns of brain activity that characterize facets of our emotional style, such as how well we maintain positive feelings. (Full disclosure: I cowrote Davidson's 2012 book, *The Emotional Life of Your Brain*.) People who are a little familiar with brain structure might assume that these patterns occur within the brain's limbic system, an evolutionarily ancient region that includes the amygdalae, the two almond-shaped structures that are responsible for feelings of anxiety and fear.

If these patterns were lodged in this ancient brain region, where our powerful survival instincts emerge from, we would be out of luck. Think of trying to simply will yourself to be happy or sad, or any other emotion, with the brute force of a survivalist. Not so easily done. I don't know about you, but if I'm feeling miserable and someone tells me to just cheer up on the spot, I want to slug them.

Fortunately, the brain's emotional circuits are actually connected to its thinking circuits, which are much more accessible to our conscious volition. That has been one of Davidson's most important discoveries: the “cognitive brain” is also the “emotional brain.” As a result, activity in certain cognitive regions sends signals to the emotion-generating regions. So while you can't just order yourself to have a particular feeling, you can sort of sneak up on your emotions via your thoughts.

This is easier to understand with examples. Davidson discovered that people who are resilient—able to regain their emotional balance after a setback rather than wallowing in anxiety, anger, depression, or another negative emotion—have strong connections between the left prefrontal cortex (PFC) and the amygdalae. The left PFC sends inhibitory signals to the amygdalae, basically telling them to quiet down. As a result, the negative feelings generated by the amygdalae peter out, and you're not mired in unhappiness or resentment. In contrast, people with little emotional resilience (including those with

depression, who may be shattered by every disappointment) have fewer or weaker signals between the PFC and the amygdalae, due to either low activity in the PFC or poor connections between it and the amygdalae.

Neurally inspired therapy to increase emotional resilience, then, strengthens the left PFC so it sends stronger, longer-lasting inhibitory signals to the amygdalae. One way to do this, Davidson says, is mindfulness meditation, in which you observe your thoughts and feelings with the objectivity of a disinterested, nonjudgmental witness. This form of mental training gives you “the wherewithal to pause, observe how easily the mind can exaggerate the severity of a setback, note that it as an interesting mental process, and resist getting drawn into the abyss,” he told me. As a result, you create stronger connections between the PFC and the amygdalae, and thus fewer persistent feelings of anger, sadness, and the like after an emotional downer.

Another way to strengthen the circuitry that supports emotional resilience is through cognitive reappraisal training, in which you challenge the accuracy of catastrophizing thoughts (“I am days behind in my work; I'm going to get fired”). This “directly engages the prefrontal cortex,” Davidson says, “resulting in increased prefrontal inhibition of the amygdalae.”

Davidson has also discovered that in people whose default mode is a positive frame of mind and a sense of well-being, there is high activity in the left PFC as well as in the nucleus accumbens. This is a structure deep within the brain that is associated with pleasure and a sense of reward and motivation. In contrast, in people with a consistently negative outlook, the nucleus accumbens is quiet and is found to have few connections to the PFC.

As with much of the brain's emotional apparatus, the nucleus accumbens is not reachable through conscious thought directly; you can't will it into greater activity. However, Davidson believes you can exploit its connections to the PFC, which is accessible to conscious targeting. The great strength of the PFC is planning, imagining the future, and exercising self-control. By putting yourself in situations that demand forethought, he says, you can strengthen the PFC and thus its ability to goose activity

*“Meditation gives you the wherewithal to pause, observe how easily the mind can exaggerate the severity of a setback, and resist getting drawn into the abyss.”*

Richard Davidson

in the nucleus accumbens. You might, for instance, put yourself in a situation where an immediate reward beckons— forbidden food usually works, though anything fun when you're supposed to be working would also be effective—and resist its siren call.

What are the limits of neuroplasticity? The honest answer is, we don't know. But when neuroscientists in the past scoffed at the power of the brain to change in meaningful ways, such as to remap the cortex in order to restore mobility after a stroke, they were often proved wrong. One new study even shows that the brain is plastic enough to change in response to cognitive demands that are as new to evolution as the industrial soot that caused moths to evolve gray wing scales. Earlier this year, scientists at Stanford pinpointed the anatomical coordinates of a brain region, a mere one-fifth of an inch across, that handles the sight of numerals. Yes, the brain has specialized real estate to process the likes of 5 and 24. Since “no one is born with the innate ability to recognize numerals,” says Stanford neuroscientist Josef Parvizi, “it's a dramatic demonstration of our brain circuitry's capacity to change” in response to education and culture.

If regular exposure to the 2+2s on flash cards, signs for 99¢ specials in store windows, and the other digits in our world is sufficient to cause the brain to develop specialized circuitry, surely we are only in Act 1, Scene 1, of understanding the power of neuroplasticity and how to exploit it. ●

leadership

# LIFE, LIBERTY & THE PURSUIT *of* Mindfulness

*Congressman Tim Ryan of Ohio  
believes it's time for Americans to find  
quiet—for their own well-being and  
for the good of the country.*

By Christina Bellantoni  
Photographs by Mark Mahaney



**It's 95 degrees, I have sweat in my eyes, and I'm squinting at four women in brightly colored Spandex tops and cropped pants.**

That's when I spot the guy who suggested I try this yoga class.

The congressman has flipped his dog.

He's turned his downward dog almost inside out—back bent, belly up.

The moment offers one answer to the central question of this story: How does Representative Tim Ryan truly live his mindfulness practice?

As I stick with downward dog, he looks like he could hang out upside down all day, and the more I get to know him, it's clear his steadiness is not limited to the yoga mat.

Ryan, 39, is not one of those bomb-throwing members of Congress, the type who generates sensational headlines on *Hardball*. No, he's not *that* Ryan, the one who was on the Republican presidential ticket. He's the Democrat. The one who has quietly continued winning races in his Ohio district. The one with "that mindfulness thing," as one of his fellow members put it.

Ryan's book, *A Mindful Nation: How a Simple Practice Can Help Us Reduce Stress, Improve Performance, and Recapture the American Spirit*, reads a bit like what presidential candidates publish two years before they start to show up at the Iowa State Fair, full of broad statements like this one from the close: "It's helping us all recapture the spirit of what it means to be an American. Join us."

But it's also pretty simple—taking a mindfulness approach to your life can make it better. And it can make America better. Children can be smarter and better prepared for the world. Soldiers and firefighters can become more resilient. The book hasn't generated the same buzz as the typical Washington political tell-all, but it's done what Ryan wanted: it's garnered him dozens of appearances across the country to talk about mindfulness; it's inspired

teachers, doctors, nurses, and veterans to contact him about how they're applying mindfulness practice in their lives; and the policy ideas in the book may well be catching on in the halls of the Capitol.

And that's what Ryan is counting on this year, as he steps up his efforts to translate mindfulness into legislation.

During the time I spent with Ryan, in his home state of Ohio and in Washington, I witnessed a politician who—unlike many others I've interviewed—hasn't adopted a cause because it does well with focus groups. He's adopted it because he believes it will help our country. And from what I've seen, this guy isn't faking it.

**Our journey began on a drizzly Friday, as I**

drove with Ryan 319 miles from his Capitol Hill office to Niles, Ohio. He sat in the front seat in shorts and flip-flops with his shirt sleeves rolled up; looking like he could have been on his way to a football game, not coming from a congressional office. His aide, Merv Jones, son of the late Representative Stephanie Tubbs Jones of Ohio, was behind the wheel of the SUV.

Ryan describes his almost-daily meditation practice as "classical": he sits on a cushion and follows his breath, usually giving himself 40 to 45 minutes before a church-bell timer sounds on his phone. He meditates at home in front of the fireplace or in the House gym.

He says mindfulness practice gives him a feeling of calm that allows him to manage his day, especially necessary in an increasingly bitter Washington. "If something arouses some anger, I try to see it, and then let it go. As the days get hectic, I make myself stop, take a breath, and pay attention to that breath," Ryan says.

Among the practices Ryan highlights in his book are waiting in the morning until you're fully out of bed and stirring before looking at your email, instead of reading it the moment you wake. And no television before bed: "I sleep better."

Back to that question if he's for real. I decide to tally how often he looks at his device. 1:10 p.m. is the first glance, and he pops off a quick text message. He turns his eyes to the screen about once an hour, and at more frequent intervals as we get closer to home, perhaps because we're arranging to meet his family at a festival.

In all, Ryan looked at his iPhone only 13 times during our more than 7 hours together. Meanwhile, I was going through BlackBerry withdrawal, and Merv didn't look like he was doing much better.

As we pulled into Youngstown, Ohio, Ryan sat in the front seat of the SUV, animated. He pointed out new developments along the main drag, boasting about the city's 80% commercial-occupancy rate. There's his great uncle's house, the golf club where he used to caddy, parts of his district added through redistricting, and the Youngstown State University

**Ryan says mindfulness practice gives him a feeling of calm that allows him to manage his day, especially necessary in an increasingly bitter Washington.**



***A Mindful Nation* hasn't generated the same buzz as the typical Washington political tell-all, but it's done what Ryan wanted: it's inspired teachers, doctors, nurses, and veterans to contact him about how they're applying mindfulness practice in their lives.**

stadium where he played one football game "before I cashed it in."

As a teenager Ryan dreamed of being a pro quarterback, but a blown knee forced him to, as he puts it, "reconstruct my life." He'd already been exposed to politics, working in then Representative James Traficant's district office and in his office on the Hill. He got a law degree but never practiced, and he was, as he describes it now, "just floating around thinking about what I ought to be doing."

Ryan considered coaching but kept coming back to politics and a desire to offer leadership. He ran for the state senate at age 26, and when Traficant landed in jail, he ran for his old boss's seat in Congress. His surprise victory in the primary made him the youngest Democrat in Congress the following year.

Pat Lowry, Ryan's district press secretary and longtime friend, isn't surprised at how his political career has played out. Lowry tells me that in 1991 Ryan was named player of the year, and the next day "the coaches in the paper didn't talk about his abilities, they talked about his leadership."

Now, he's a hometown hero.

We drove up bucolic Fifth Avenue, then off to his neighborhood in Niles. His house is just down the way from his mom's. A little farther is the home where his grandparents took care of him. Family is everything.

His father left his mother when Ryan was eight, and the family became even more close-knit. As a boy, Ryan found their Catholic church to be a calming place. He smiles when he talks about his grandparents' peaceful home where he could always find them saying the rosary. They were early role models for mindfulness. "I always think about my grandparents. They worked hard, but it wasn't everything," he says. "They spent time in the garden, they celebrated birthdays, they went out dancing to big bands, they hosted parties and dinners."

We stopped at the church's souped-up Italian festival, which seemed more like a county fair. We walked only a few feet before someone called out for "Timmy." Everywhere we go he has roots. He ushered me into the beer tent his grandfather used to run. I didn't get to meet his mom; her shift at the dried-baloney stand wasn't until the following day.

We all ordered the Italian sausage Ryan says is the festival tradition. Eating like this matters politically—northeastern Ohio's Italian and Portuguese roots are a distinctive part of the local culture. Ryan taps into that easily; his family embodies his district's working-class demographic.

As I ate one of those giant sausages, Ryan's sister-in-law was gabbing about how he'd gotten them all into yoga. A discussion among his friends and →

family about a new hot yoga studio with Tuesday and Thursday classes provoked high fives. Every member of the family, and loosely defined extended family, seemed attentive, in the moment, enjoying each other.

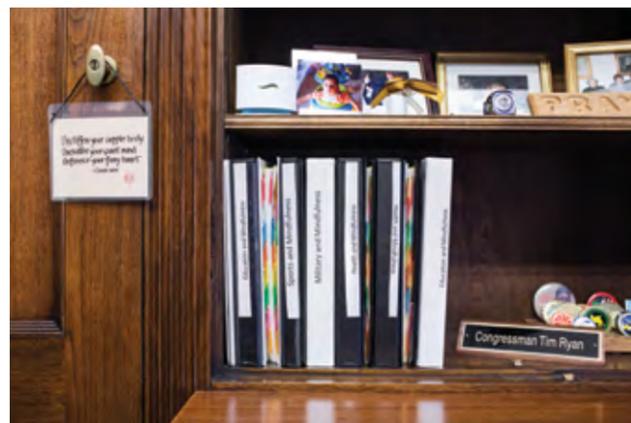
As Ryan's three nieces and two nephews ran around, he would scoop one of them up and play the role of doting uncle. It was obvious they adored him. As Nicky and Dommy mounted the trapeze swings, Ryan appeared laser-focused on their performances. "Go for it, Dom!" he cheered.

Carrie Ryan beamed when I told her that during our drive, her brother-in-law had sung her praises as a mindful person. The congressman had called her "super present," noting that she doesn't use email outside of work. He told me "she's a great mom."

Before hitting the dance floor with the kids, Al Ryan shared his impression of his younger brother. "He's always seeing the good in people, and he's able to stay centered with an understanding of what you can control and what you can't. It's just how he's built."

**The central tenet of Ryan's philosophy may be** gaining some traction these days, but in Washington, a city many Americans think of as toxic, and with partisan rancor and discord at historic highs, it's a surprising message to hear from a politician. In January, Ryan sent out a "Dear Colleague" message announcing weekly all-are-welcome meditation meetings from 9:30 to 10 a.m. each Wednesday the House is in session. About 30 staffers attended the inaugural session in the Rayburn House Office Building. "It's a nice little technique for people in a high-stress environment to learn. There's no belief structure you need to sign on to," and everyone can benefit from "having a quiet space for 10 to 15 minutes during a hectic week," Ryan told the Capitol Hill newspaper and website, *Roll Call*. Ryan has

A shelf in Ryan's office offers a snapshot of what inspires him.



also invited his colleagues to join him for a half-hour "quiet time" before the first vote each week, in a room near the House chamber in the Capitol. "Members can use that time in whatever way they like—a specific religious contemplation, mindfulness, or just silent reflection," he says.

I ask Ryan if he worries that his push for mindfulness could make his colleagues take him less seriously. "I probably should worry," he admits, but adds that he has the backing of "the Marines, science, Google, and Phil Jackson—the coach who won the most NBA championships." The congressman senses an "openness now that wasn't there five years ago, because everybody feels overwhelming stress in their lives and they don't know what to do about it."

Now that his colleagues know what he's up to, Ryan can move beyond the occasional mention of mindfulness in committee hearings. He plans to take advantage of open floor time available to members and enjoyed by C-SPAN viewers to get into the science of mindfulness and explain in detail the legislation he's crafting. That could be a bill supporting mindfulness teacher training or carving out space for stress reduction in health care, military, and veterans' programs. The legislation will be written in consultation with experts in each field.

Ryan is deeply concerned that he sees so many veterans "ending up in the obit sections of the newspapers in my state, having committed suicide." He thinks it's a supreme tragedy when people so highly trained, whom so many people look up to, take their own lives. He's conceptualizing a sort of veterans corps that would help returning service members by teaching them yoga and meditation. It would be led by veterans in individual communities, allowing those who want to participate to avoid having to work through the department of Veterans Affairs. Many veterans won't go to the VA for fear of being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress. They don't want the stigma.

Of course, in Washington these days it is hard to pass any piece of legislation, no matter how badly it is needed, and Ryan admits he's frustrated. But he notes that the president or first lady could accomplish a lot even without legislation.

"The mindfulness agenda cuts through a lot of the current political divides. Because it is based on self-care, preventing illness, and increasing your overall well-being, it saves health-care dollars and promotes individual responsibility," Ryan says. He also believes it can be a key element in job retraining. "Mindfulness increases a worker's resiliency and creativity in the face of challenges, her ability to change what she's doing if she has to respond to economic realities. We need that in today's economy."

Ryan doesn't want to out other members of Congress who have been joining him for meditation in the House gym or his colleagues—Democrats and



Ryan regroup in his office on Capitol Hill, checking C-SPAN to see how much time is left before he needs to go to the House floor to vote.

Republicans—who tell him they've read his book and agree with its ideas. So I won't name names. But let's just say the politicians starting to see his point of view, and even engaging in deep breathing, are plentiful. They know stress when they see it, and they've had enough.

Ryan sees his own role as cultivating interest in mindfulness practice over time. When Republicans tell him they do yoga, he listens and invites them to join him. Or he suggests they drop by the weekly meditation session in Rayburn.

With the support of his congressional colleague Jared Polis (D-CO), the Mediator's Foundation, which encourages leaders to work for a "peaceful, just, and sustainable world," sent every member on Capitol Hill a copy of *A Mindful Nation*. Ryan wishes he could have convinced the Republicans who have read it to write a blurb for the paperback edition that's just come out.

I ask if he tries to pitch his mindfulness agenda when he senses a lawmaker who is open to the idea. Not right away, Ryan says. "I want them to understand mindfulness on a very personal level and experience it themselves, then they will understand why I am pushing legislation and why it's important."

**Months later, we're talking about guns in the** wake of a new tragedy—the mass shooting in Newtown, Connecticut. Ryan believes the nation has an opportunity to take a fresh look at mental health. "The experts tell us we need to prevent mental illness by intervening as early as possible," he says. "Part of the prevention we could maybe agree on is social and emotional learning programs and a little bit of mindfulness practice in the schools."

Ryan's Appropriations Subcommittee on Education has directed nearly \$1 million to schools in his district for a study to evaluate the effectiveness of mindfulness and social and emotional learning, known to educators as SEL.

He has been told that when mindfulness is taught in an educational setting, behaviors such as pushing on the playground are less frequent and fewer kids are sent to the principal's office. Instead, they sit in the "peace corner" when they act up. His aim? Standardizing the practice so it's part of the fundamentals of being a teacher. He argues, too, that schools can use meditation as a recruiting tool because the statistics prove its effectiveness.

This brings us to a discussion of how Ryan ended up practicing mindfulness. "I was always interested in trying to figure out how to discipline my mind, calm my mind down, and be in a peaceful →

Ryan and the children in Erica Sampson's kindergarten class at Jefferson Elementary School in Warren, Ohio, try a little meditation.



# Teaching the Whole Child

An excerpt from Congressman  
Tim Ryan's *A Mindful Nation*

Children in America deserve every opportunity to fully develop their talents—and I know that's what their parents want, because they talk to me about it all the time. For the future of our country, it's essential that we teach the whole child. A young child who can regulate his emotions is a child who will do better in school. Why not teach all of our children simple, tremendously powerful techniques to help increase their capacity to learn and regulate their own emotions. We don't need more gadgets or fly-by-night programs in our school systems. If we teach children to follow their breath—and return to it when they get distracted—we are teaching them how to concentrate. Over time they will increase their ability to mobilize their attention.

For a very small investment, we can prevent incredible future costs and heartaches in our communities. How much will we save in preventing substance abuse? How much depression will be prevented because these kids will be able to discuss their problems with each other?

How many teen suicides will be prevented because fewer children will feel isolated and alone? We are a compassionate country. We are a smart country. Methods to cultivate mindfulness need to be reflected in our curriculum.

Mindfulness can have great benefits for our children, but it can also help us be better parents. If you bring a touch of mindfulness to parenting, you may notice you're less inclined to immediately react negatively to something your child has done. If your stress level is decreased a bit, you may be less likely to cause an emotionally charged situation to spin out of control. If you can slow down a bit, you may find yourself appreciating the free-spiritedness and curious nature of your child more often. If you're paying closer attention and listening more deeply, you may notice your kids being more willing to open up to you. You may find yourself being more affectionate to them, and this may make them more affectionate toward you. Practicing mindfulness for a few weeks won't turn someone into a perfect parent. But if we slow down and reduce

our own stress, it may make home life noticeably calmer and more harmonious.

Growing up, I remember two phrases being drilled into my head from my mom, the nuns, and the other teachers: Pay Attention! and Be Nice! Well, the most frustrating part of hearing that was that no one ever showed us how to pay attention! It's not something you do automatically. It needs to be taught and practiced. It reminds me of watching young children try to play baseball for the first time. Even if they can hit the ball, they immediately run for third base. Until someone shows them how to get to first base, they can't play the game. So it is with paying attention. We have an obligation to do all we can for our children. Let's make our kids aware of the deep inner resources and resilience they possess. Let's develop their capacity to think and to care about each other and to know themselves better.

*Adapted from A Mindful Nation: How a Simple Practice Can Help Us Reduce Stress, Increase Performance, and Recapture the American Spirit. © 2012 by Tim Ryan. Published by Hay House. Available at hayhouse.com*



"Stop Bullying" artwork made by students at Jefferson Elementary School in Warren, Ohio.



Children from the kindergarten class gather round. Ryan's Appropriations Subcommittee on Education has directed nearly \$1 million to schools in his district to evaluate the effectiveness of a program that combines mindfulness and social and emotional learning.

place," he says, referring to his earlier days as an athlete. "My mind was very active and it was hard for me to focus. I would stay out and shoot baskets in the driveway. I'd shoot a million times, just me and a ball and a hoop." Sometimes it was a football through a tire in the front yard.

In spite of his commitment to discipline and reputation for leadership, "I still felt a nagging inability to really be present," says Ryan. It wasn't until a five-day silent retreat after the 2008 presidential election, with Jon Kabat-Zinn, the founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, that he found a way to decrease stress and stay in the moment more often. "After that intense election campaign, I was burned out, so I signed up for this retreat, turned in my two BlackBerrys at the door, and sat quietly and walked attentively. It's when I discovered how effective this method could be. If it worked for me, I thought, it ought to work for others. I also began to realize that it's another version of the same old thing I had always been drawn to: discipline. But now it was discipline not just of the body but also of the mind."

Ryan mentions running the Cleveland marathon, where he raised \$5,000 to help returning troops learn mindfulness to aid their transition to everyday life. Under sunny skies, the temperature hit the mid-80s in 80% humidity. "Talk about mindfulness,"

he says, laughing. "The bombardment of negative thoughts toward the end was almost overwhelming: 'I'm stupid, I hurt, look at that big hill, why did I do this?' But you have to keep going back to your breath. You can think about how hot it is or you can hydrate and keep going."

Ryan staffers say he's encouraged them to be more mindful, too. One says the congressman convinced him to stop using his iPhone as an alarm. And three or four often come to the weekly mindfulness sessions in Rayburn. Former Representative John Sullivan of Oklahoma, a Republican, isn't shy about how Ryan has influenced him for the better. They were co-chairmen of the Addiction Caucus (Ryan took over the helm at former Rep. Patrick Kennedy's request, with the agreement he could push mindfulness) and frequently met in the House gym to meditate.

"Tim convinced me to try it and it was nothing like I thought it would be. I really liked it," says Sullivan. It even helped him cope with the surprise of losing his seat to a Tea Party activist in a 2012 primary.

Sullivan predicts Ryan will use *A Mindful Nation* to demonstrate the benefits across government. "He's the person who can bring new light to this," he says. "A guy like him who is charismatic, he's going to be able to take this book to a level that can show so many benefits." →



Ryan talks with Congressman Tony Cárdenas (D-CA) before the half-hour session of “quiet time” prior to the week’s first vote.

Ryan, naturally, agrees. “Republicans will see a lot of people in the suburban districts who do yoga and meditate, and not all of these are Democrats,” he says. “Republican parents are likely to be just as pleased if their kids learn to have better attention spans. If it’s only a bunch of liberals talking about meditation in schools, it’s not going to work. It’s got to be mainstream and bipartisan.”

**As he steps up his national profile, Ryan has been** wrestling with a career choice based in part on how he can make the most difference putting mindfulness into practice. Does he run statewide in Ohio or stay in Congress and exert influence through spending bills as an Appropriations Committee member?

“The ability to transform the way we run our government and implement programs at the state level is appealing,” Ryan tells me in January, just after former Ohio Governor Ted Strickland announced he would not seek a rematch with the Republican who unseated him in 2014. Ryan has made no secret of the fact that he’s interested in a gubernatorial bid, but is the timing right?

As governor, you’re “basically the superintendent of all the schools,” Ryan says. Not to mention overseeing the prison system, state Medicaid programs, and the colleges and universities. It’s a chance to make big changes quickly. He doesn’t say this, but state executives also tend to run for president.

Another option is to inch slowly ahead in the House, where power lies in seniority. That could mean moving up on Defense Appropriations and getting the Pentagon to do the research that will “build a body of evidence” for how mindfulness training programs can increase health, well-being, and resiliency.

As he faces these decisions, Ryan says he wants to make the best choice for advancing mindfulness. “Mindfulness training makes a valuable investment in the most important asset we have—well-functioning human beings. My goal is to be the person who gets

it implemented in current programming,” he tells me. But, he admits, “the congressional track is a lot more long-term.”

Either strategy carries risks: he could lose at home running for governor and find himself in the political wilderness or his party could remain in the minority in the House and he could find himself bordering on irrelevance. On March 15, Ryan announced that he had decided to forgo a run for governor. For now.

**All of the people I talked to describe Ryan**

as someone who doesn’t appear to have extremes. “He’s the one guy who never gets stressed in our office. He absorbs it all and tells us what he wants to do,” says Wiley Runnestrand, his campaign manager.

When I began this profile, Ryan was spending his weekends back home campaigning for his pals in Congress who needed more help than he did for re-election. He helped boost turnout in northern Ohio for President Obama and was sent back to Washington for a sixth term by a nearly 150,000-vote margin.

The day after the Italian festival in Niles, we picked Ryan up at his girlfriend’s house so he could headline the opening of the president’s local campaign office. As Ryan stepped in front of a few hundred Obama supporters, he apologized for his flip-flops and shorts: “I’m a little underdressed, but I’m going to my niece’s birthday party, which we all know is a little more important.”

Suddenly it was as if he had flipped a switch. He spoke the first overtly political words I’d heard since we met in the car 24 hours prior, and he knew what he was doing. He urged the volunteers to get out and “draw this distinction between what Romney stands for and what President Obama has already done.” That included the auto industry bailout, a central issue in Ohio, and the fact that “Osama bin Laden is no longer around.” Ryan told the group: “This guy has done a lot of what he’s promised.”

When we parted ways outside the Obama campaign office, Ryan recommended I try hot yoga. He started it to strengthen his back and goes a few times a week. He said he’d be there on Monday night, and when I show up for the 7:45 class, there’s Ryan in the front corner. Merv is there, too.

I take the opportunity afterward to ask the class instructor, Derek Waddy, some questions about the congressman. His alignment? “Perfect, he’s doing a great job.” Does Ryan do headstands? “Jury’s still out.” Does anyone in the class know they are trying to hold eagle pose next to someone who belongs to a club so exclusive it has just 535 members?

“You know,” Waddy says, “when you’re in there all sweaty, you’re all the same.” ●

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Christina Bellantoni is politics editor at PBS NewsHour.



*“My goal is to get us to invest more in the most important asset we have in America—well-functioning human beings.”*

# finding the space to lead

It's easy to get caught up in a swirl of thoughts and worries. But what we really need as leaders is continual attention to detail and to the needs of others while still appreciating the big picture. **Janice Marturano**, former vice president at General Mills, shows us how it's possible to find the space to lead.

Illustrations by Andrew Bannecker



**Leading people is one of the most challenging** roles we can take on in life. It requires a dizzying array of skills, a strong education, and passion. Most often, when we take on a leadership role, we do so because we want to make a difference. As leaders, we take for granted that we will work long hours, make great sacrifices, and ride the roller coaster of success and failure. However, the busyness that accompanies being a leader in today's 24/7/365 interconnected world often distracts us from what's important and limits our ability to lead with excellence. When we are really honest with ourselves, we may have to admit that there are far too many times when we feel as though we're spending the day putting out fires and wasting time rather than doing our best work.

Does it need to be this way? Happily, the answer is no.

You can learn to lead with excellence by cultivating your innate capabilities to focus on what is important, to see more clearly what is presenting itself, to foster greater creativity, and to embody compassion. When you are able to do so, you are much more likely to make the conscious choices we need our leaders to make. These choices often lead to a win-win-win scenario: good for the organization, good for the employees, and good for the community.

.....  
**Janice Marturano** is the founder of the Institute for Mindful Leadership and a certified mindfulness teacher.

**You can learn to lead with excellence by cultivating your innate capabilities to focus on what is important.**

## Why Do We Need Mindful Leadership?

To answer that question, let's begin with a look at what it means to be mindful.

When you are mindful of this moment, you are present for your life and your experience just as it is...

not as you hoped it would be  
 not as you expected it to be  
 not seeing more or less than what is here  
 not with judgments that can lead you to a conditioned reaction  
 ...but for exactly what is here, as it unfolds, meeting each moment with equanimity.

As we consider the challenges leaders face today, it's relatively easy to see how much we need to cultivate mindful leadership. The environment we live and work in is constantly evolving. Time is now often measured in internet microseconds. There are new and complex economic and resource constraints on our organizations. We are attached 24/7 to an array of technological devices that regularly generate anxiety-producing information overload and a sense of disconnection that can overwhelm and isolate us. The world is changing so rapidly that people training for a career today may find their career path radically altered by the time they are ready to enter it. One paradigm after another is shifting. The volume of information at our disposal is, in fact, leading to less rather than more certainty. The number of voices and opinions we can hear on any given issue is so dauntingly large that we often don't know who or what to believe or follow.

It is also true, though, that these tumultuous times can offer great opportunity and ample possibilities for innovation, as the world becomes smaller and we begin to see the potential to meet the complexities of the day in ways that are truly creative, productive, and compassionate. It's a time to take leadership, and to redefine what it means to lead with excellence.

In my own experiences, first as a Wall Street associate, a community volunteer, an employee in three large organizations, and an officer of a Fortune 200 company for fifteen years, and then in the work I have done in offering mindful leadership training to leaders from around the world, I've consistently found that the best leaders' qualities go far beyond "getting the job done." The best leaders are women and men who have first-class training, bright minds, warm hearts, a passionate embrace of their mission, a strong connection to their colleagues and communities, and the courage to be open to what is here. They're driven to excellence, innovation, and making a difference. →

## Reflecting on Excellence

Taking note of the qualities exhibited by leaders we admire can help all of us pinpoint how to become better leaders ourselves.

### PRACTICE

**Begin by sitting comfortably and closing your eyes. Notice the sensations of your breath. Allow your mind to let go of distractions.**

**When you're ready, bring to mind a person you believe embodies leadership excellence. This could be someone you know personally or a leader you have read about. Allowing yourself some time to let the answers arise, ask yourself the following questions:**

**Why did this person come to mind?**

**What is it about this person's leadership that made you think of him or her when asked about leadership excellence?**

**Be patient; hold the question in your mind with a sense of openness and curiosity. You don't need to overthink the question. Set aside the first answer or two to see if more qualities emerge. As you open your eyes, you may find it helpful to write your answers on a piece of paper before reading further.**

1

**When you listened for** your responses to the reflection questions, you might have noticed that they did not include too many of the typical measures of organizational leadership. For example, you probably did not put *consistently makes his quarterly numbers* as the reason you admire the person as someone who leads with excellence. Rather, your list might have included some of the qualities named by other leaders who have explored this reflection with me:

- Respectful
- Open thinker
- Compassionate
- Clear vision
- Able to inspire
- Great listener
- Creative
- Patient
- Collaborative
- Kind
- Teacher

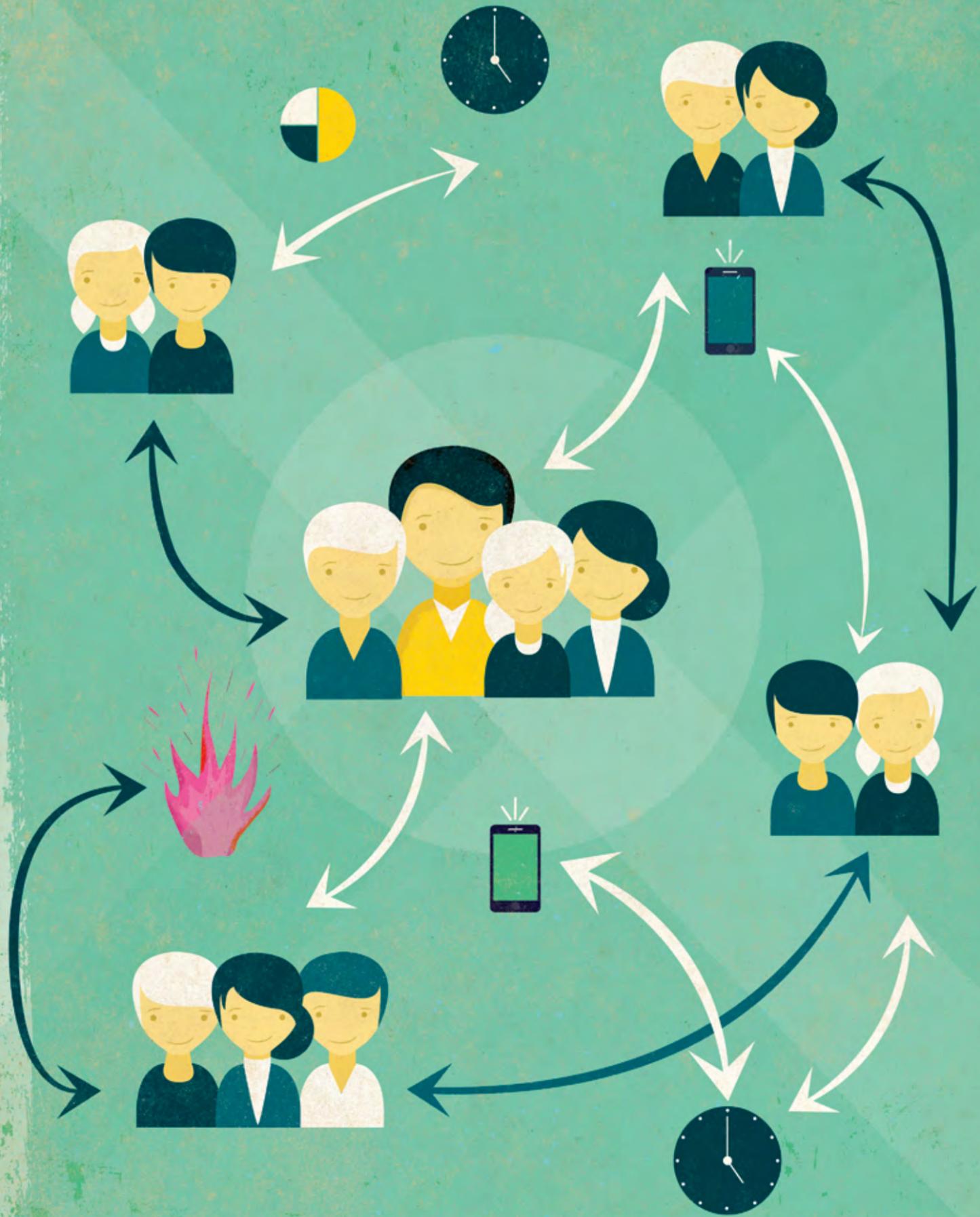
**Ability of a leader to connect**—to self, to others, and to the larger community. Connecting to *self* is how we stay connected to our values and our ethics. It's the rudder we steer with in the midst of the chaos. How deeply we are able to connect authentically with *others* is the difference between an organizational environment that values inclusion and one that is insular and divided into silos that rarely communicate with each other. Connecting to the *community* comes from being able to see the bigger picture and not get caught up in the minutiae of a single objective. That wider connection is how great organizations give meaning to their existence and inspire their employees.

2

It's not that hitting the quarterly numbers isn't important; it is. What sets people apart as leaders, however, is something much bigger than quantitative metrics. The people we call to mind in this reflection have touched us, inspired us, and made us feel their leadership. The qualities can be rolled up into just two capacities of leadership excellence, and these two capacities are embodied by those we identify as leading with excellence.

**Ability of a leader to skillfully initiate or guide change.** The important word is *skillfully*—leading not by command and control but by collaborating and listening with open curiosity and a willingness, at times, to live within ambiguity until a decision becomes clear. It's also this capacity that fuels a leader's willingness to take a courageous stand, lead the organization or industry into new arenas, and accept failures as experiments from which to learn.

*From Finding the Space to Lead*



**Leadership presence is not only critical for us as individuals but also has a ripple effect on those around us: the community we live in, and potentially the world.**

Yet time and again, they feel as though their capabilities and their leadership training are inadequate. They tell me that even as they execute well and meet the quarterly goals, they simply do not feel they are living their best lives—at work or at home. They feel something is missing. But what? The most frequent answer is:

**Space**

We often simply do not have the space, the breathing room, necessary to be clear and focused, and to listen deeply to ourselves and to others. How can we expect to generate the connections with our colleagues and communities that we need when we are so busy that all we can really do is check off boxes, squeeze in a perfunctory hello to our coworkers, and get through the day's meetings and calls? Can we realistically expect leadership excellence when we spend whole days on autopilot—looking at our watches and wondering where the day went, looking at the calendar and wondering how it could be spring when just yesterday it was Thanksgiving?

Whether our leadership affects millions, hundreds, or a handful, we can no longer afford to be on autopilot in our lives, with our families, or in our organizations. We can no longer afford to miss the connections with those we work with, those we love, and those we serve. We can no longer make decisions with distracted minds, reacting instead of responding or initiating. We can no longer lose touch with what motivated us to lead in the first place. We need mindful leadership to lead with excellence.

So far we have been exploring the need to be present for leadership roles in the workplace. There is an equally, or perhaps more, important need to be present for your leadership roles in your personal life. Excellence involves making conscious choices about not just how you work but how you live your life and how you connect with your family, friends, and community. We need mindful leadership to live with excellence.

**What Exactly Is a Mindful Leader?**

*A mindful leader embodies leadership presence by cultivating focus, clarity, creativity, and compassion in the service of others.*

Leadership presence is a tangible quality. It requires full and complete nonjudgmental attention in the present moment. Those around a mindful leader see and feel that presence.

A friend of mine decided to attend a local rally to see if he could get an important healthcare question answered by presidential candidate Bill Clinton. Of course, when he arrived, he faced a teeming, screaming crowd, but he maneuvered his way to the police barricade and waited. Clinton soon arrived and began walking along the barricade shaking hands. As my friend stretched out his hand and Clinton took it, he yelled out his question. In that moment, the candidate stopped, faced him, and responded to the question. Later my friend told me, "In those few moments when we spoke together, it seemed as though Clinton had nothing else on his mind. It was as if there was no other person there." He felt heard and respected. That's leadership presence: you give your full attention to what you're doing, and others know it.

Leadership presence is powerful. In your own life, you can probably recall times when you experienced leadership presence, either in yourself or someone else. It might have been in a one-on-one conversation, or it might have been in an audience filled with people. Presence can be felt even from far away.

You can undoubtedly recall the much more common experiences when you feel only partially in the room, or you feel the person you're speaking with is not really there. Like all of us, even when you have every intention to be focused, your mind becomes easily distracted—thinking about the past or the future, and only partially in the present if at all. In those moments, you are not embodying the innate capacity everyone possesses to be present.

Why is that? What do we know about *being present*?

As a beginning, you might recall a moment when you experienced full awareness in a situation. When there seemed to be nothing else but whatever you were noticing. This might have been a momentous moment like the birth of your child. In that moment, time seemed to stand still, and nothing else existed but the warmth of that miraculous being softly sleeping in your arms. You were not distracted by the to-do list or the noises in the hall. Your full attention—mind, body, and heart—was completely absorbed in that moment.

Or it might have been an ordinary moment, the kind often overlooked and not particularly celebrated. You may have lingered to notice a sunset. →

## Meditate Right Where You Are

Most of us spend a great deal of time sitting behind our desks, or in conference rooms or colleagues' offices, so having a short practice that helps you relax while at work can be beneficial. What I call the desk chair meditation gives you a way to incorporate a short mindfulness practice into your day.

You may need to be creative to find the quiet place. Many people have told me that they're best able to do this practice by first leaving their office and finding an empty conference room, or even leaving the building to sit in their car during part of their lunch break. The desk chair part need not be taken literally. This meditation can be done anywhere you are able to sit quietly and practice, even an airplane seat.

The main part of this practice involves what's called a "body scan," which is very simple to do.

Begin by bringing your attention to the sensations of your breath. When you're ready, direct your attention to the soles of your feet, opening your mind to whatever sensations are there to be noticed.

Perhaps you are noticing the pressure on the soles of your feet as the weight of your legs rests on them. Perhaps the soles of your feet feel warm or cool. Just notice. No need to judge or engage in discursive thinking. If your mind is pulled away or wanders, redirect your attention, firmly and gently.

Move your attention next to the tops of your feet, ankles, lower legs, knees, and so forth. Gradually scan through your body, noticing sensations, noticing discomfort, and noticing areas of your body where you detect an absence of sensations. You simply don't notice any sensations in your shoulders right now, for example. No need to search for sensations; just keep scanning through your body, taking your time and being open to what is here.

*From Finding the Space to Lead*



From the February 2014 issue of *Mindful* • [mindful.org](http://mindful.org)

Perhaps you recall that it stopped you dead in your tracks and held you in its beauty, all of you, for what seemed like forever but in clock time might have been just a couple of seconds. In those seconds, you became aware of the shades of pink and orange, the intricate play of light and shadow, your body's absorption of the waning energy of nature, and the feeling of belonging to something bigger than yourself.

Maybe you were at the coffee shop in the morning, your mind racing through the details of the upcoming day, and you looked up from your coffee and actually noticed a piece of art on the wall or the warm, comforting aroma of the shop. Whatever it was, it interrupted the busy mind, and you were living that moment of your life more fully.

Such moments—when we fully inhabit our bodies and our senses are at work on more than an internal storyline, checklist, or rehearsed conversation—are what give life true meaning. Beyond that, for those of us who hold positions of influence, the ability to be present, to embody leadership presence, is not only critical for us as individuals, but it also has a ripple effect on those around us: our families and friends, the organization we work within, the community we live in, and potentially the world at large. Just as a pebble thrown into a still pond can create ripples spreading throughout the whole of the pond, so too can the cultivation of leadership presence go far beyond the effect it has on us alone.

### When the Institute for Mindful Leadership

works with an organization to bring mindful leadership training to its employees, we witness an example of the ripple effect. We often start with retreats or courses for the more senior leaders, and as the training begins to change how they lead, those around them notice the change and soon ask to enroll in the training as well. It's not unusual to hear people tell stories of the transformation they noticed in their manager. As leaders we know that we often underestimate the impact, for better or worse, that we have on those around us. When we are present and engaged, the effect is very different from when we are distracted and on autopilot. But it isn't enough to want to be more present, to want to

We can no longer make decisions with distracted minds, reacting instead of responding or initiating.

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON LEE

The work of developing leadership presence through mindfulness begins by recognizing how much time we spend in a mental state that has come to be called continuous partial attention.

have a positive ripple effect. We need to train the mind.

The work of developing leadership presence through mindfulness begins by recognizing how much time we spend in a mental state that has come to be called continuous partial attention. If you're like most of us, you probably take pride in your ability to multitask, to be incredibly efficient by simultaneously listening to a conference call, writing a few emails, and eating your salad at your desk.

Sound familiar to you? And yet, when you were listening in on the call, did you actually hear anything? Did you share your best thinking in the emails? Did you enjoy your lunch, or even notice you ate it?

Perhaps one of my most memorable lessons about the cost of multitasking came early one morning as I sat at my desk, getting things ready for a day filled with meetings and reviewing the latest emails. One of the messages that morning came from my husband, who was forwarding a message from my daughter's teacher. It was asking us to choose one of the available parent-teacher conference slots on her calendar, and my husband wanted to know which one I wanted before he replied. I wrote to my husband, "Thursday at 10 would be great. Love you forever, thanks for last night." Fine. Except that in my haste and partial attention, I wrote those words to my daughter's teacher. Needless to say, when I finally realized what happened, it became a moment to remember.

A few moments of people-watching in the hallways at work or on the sidewalk in front of your building can also give you a taste of the disconnection that results from multitasking. You'll notice people texting and checking email as they walk, barely avoiding walking into walls and each other. It has even become acceptable to do this while walking—and supposedly having a conversation—with someone else. Once upon a time, this would have been considered rude. Putting manners aside,

though, continuous partial attention can also be exhausting and inefficient. Neuroscience is now showing us that the mind's capacity for multitasking is extremely limited. We're really built for doing one thing at a time.

The hallways of offices used to be places for informal greetings and impromptu conversations. Valuable connections could be made in the hallways. Physiologically, a walk down the hallway used to allow a few moments of space when you could leave behind the thoughts of the last meeting and arrive at the next with a bit of openness. Today, few if any connections are made, as everyone rushes down the hall with thumbs blazing on smartphones. As a result, everyone arrives at the next meeting still attached to the last one.

We lead hurried, fractured, complex lives, and we seem to be more easily losing the richness and engagement that come from being in the present moment. With all the many ways we are enticed to get distracted, to drown out our intuition, and to fragment our attention, we can easily go through our entire lives without ever bringing all of our capabilities and attention to any given moment.

What do we do about that? Is leadership presence a natural gift possessed by a special few, or can it be cultivated? Can we train our minds to support our intention to live life with focus, clarity, creativity, and compassion even when our lives are hurried, fractured, and complex?

Thankfully, we can.

Leading with excellence, being fully present for what we do, and connecting with others—these are innate abilities we all possess. In my experience, those who are good leaders, and those who aspire to be good leaders, are eager to cultivate these abilities.

Mindful leadership training can do just that. By following simple practices that hone your attention and your ability to be aware of what's going on in your body and mind at any given moment, you can utilize all of your capabilities—clear minds and warm hearts and wise choices—and begin to see the results of leading from an authentic place. ●



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## It's Not All in Your Head

TIME: 3 to 5 minutes

When we think about meditating (with a capital M), we can get hung up on thinking about our thoughts: we're going to do something about what's happening in our heads. It's as if these bodies we have are just inconvenient sacks for our brains to lug around.

Having it all remain in your head, though, lacks a feeling of good old gravity. That approach can make it seem like floating—as though we don't have to walk. We can just waft.

But meditation begins and ends in the body. It involves taking the time to pay attention to where we are and what's going on, and that starts with being aware of our body. That very act can be calming, since our body has internal rhythms that help it relax if we give it a chance.

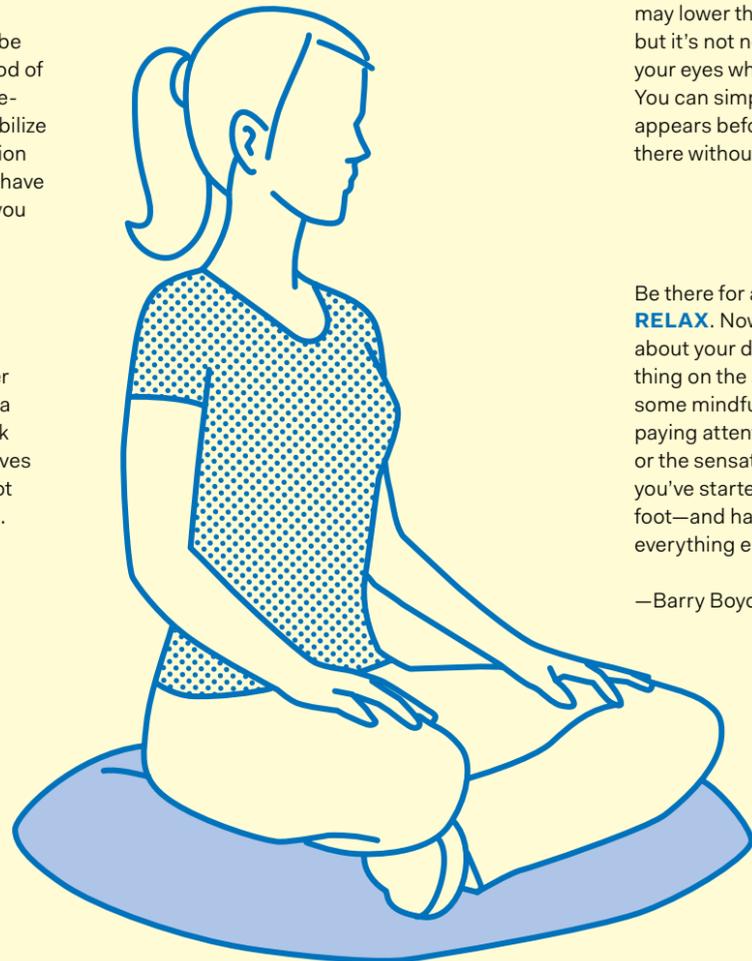
Here's a posture practice that can be used as the beginning stage of a period of meditation practice or simply as something to do for a minute, maybe to stabilize yourself and find a moment of relaxation before going back into the fray. If you have injuries or other physical difficulties, you can modify this to suit your situation.

1

Take your **SEAT**. Whatever you're sitting on—a chair, a meditation cushion, a park bench—find a spot that gives you a stable, solid seat, not perching or hanging back.



For more on mindfulness practice go to [mindful.org/inpractice](http://mindful.org/inpractice). To submit questions about techniques, the workplace, or relationships and homelife, email [inpractice@mindful.org](mailto:inpractice@mindful.org)



2

If on a cushion on the floor, cross your **LEGS** comfortably in front of you. (If you already do some kind of seated yoga posture, go ahead.) If on a chair, it's good if the bottoms of your feet are touching the floor.

3

Straighten—but don't stiffen—your **UPPER BODY**. The spine has natural curvature. Let it be there. Your head and shoulders can comfortably rest on top of your vertebrae.

4

Situate your upper arms parallel to your upper body. Then let your **HANDS** drop onto the tops of your legs. With your upper arms at your sides, your hands will land in the right spot. Too far forward will make you hunch. Too far back will make you stiff. You're tuning the strings of your body—not too tight and not too loose.

5

Drop your chin a little and let your **GAZE** fall gently downward. You may let your eyelids lower. If you feel the need, you may lower them completely, but it's not necessary to close your eyes when meditating. You can simply let what appears before your eyes be there without focusing on it.

6

Be there for a few moments. **RELAX**. Now get up and go about your day. And if the next thing on the agenda is doing some mindfulness practice by paying attention to your breath or the sensations in your body, you've started off on the right foot—and hands and arms and everything else. ●

—Barry Boyce

Illustrations by Jason Lee

## Stressing Out? S.T.O.P.



Time: 1 to 3 minutes

Two-thirds of Americans say they need help for stress. But stress itself is not the problem. It's how we relate to stress.

The stress response is critical to our survival. It can save our lives or enable a firefighter to carry a 300-pound man down 20 flights of stairs. Of course, most of us don't encounter a life-or-death threat all that often. We usually experience stress reactions in response to thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations. If we're actively worried about whether we can put food on the table or get the perfect exam score, presto: the stress reaction activates. And if the bodily systems involved in stress don't slow down and normalize, the effects can be severe. Over time, we can succumb to, among other things, high blood pressure, muscle tension, anxiety, insomnia, gastro-digestive complaints, and a suppressed immune system.

Creating space in the day to stop, come down from the worried mind, and get back into the present moment has been shown to be enormously helpful in mitigating the negative effects of our stress response. When we drop into the present, we're more likely to gain perspective and see that we have the power to regulate our response to pressure.

Here's a short practice you can weave into your day to step into that space between stimulus and response.

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Elisha Goldstein, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist and the author of *The Now Effect* and coauthor of *A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook*.

S

**Stop** what you're doing; put things down for a minute.

T

**Take a few deep breaths.** If you'd like to extend this, you can take a minute to breathe normally and naturally and follow your breath coming in and out of your nose. You can even say to yourself "in" as you're breathing in and "out" as you're breathing out if that helps with concentration.

O

**Observe** your experience just as it is—including thoughts, feelings, and emotions. You can reflect about what is on your mind and also notice that **thoughts** are not facts, and they are not permanent. Notice any **emotions** present and how they're being expressed in the body. Research shows that just naming your emotions can turn the volume down on the fear circuit in the brain and have a calming effect. Then notice your **body**. Are you standing or sitting? How is your posture? Any aches or pains?

P

**Proceed** with something that will support you in the moment: talk to a friend, rub your shoulders, have a cup of tea.

Treat this whole exercise as an experiment: Get curious about where there are opportunities in the day for you to just STOP—waking up in the morning, taking a shower, before eating a meal, at a stop light, before sitting down at work and checking email.

You can even use your smartphone's message indicator as a reminder to STOP, cultivating more mindfulness with technology.

What would it be like in the days, weeks, and months ahead if you started stopping more often?

—Elisha Goldstein



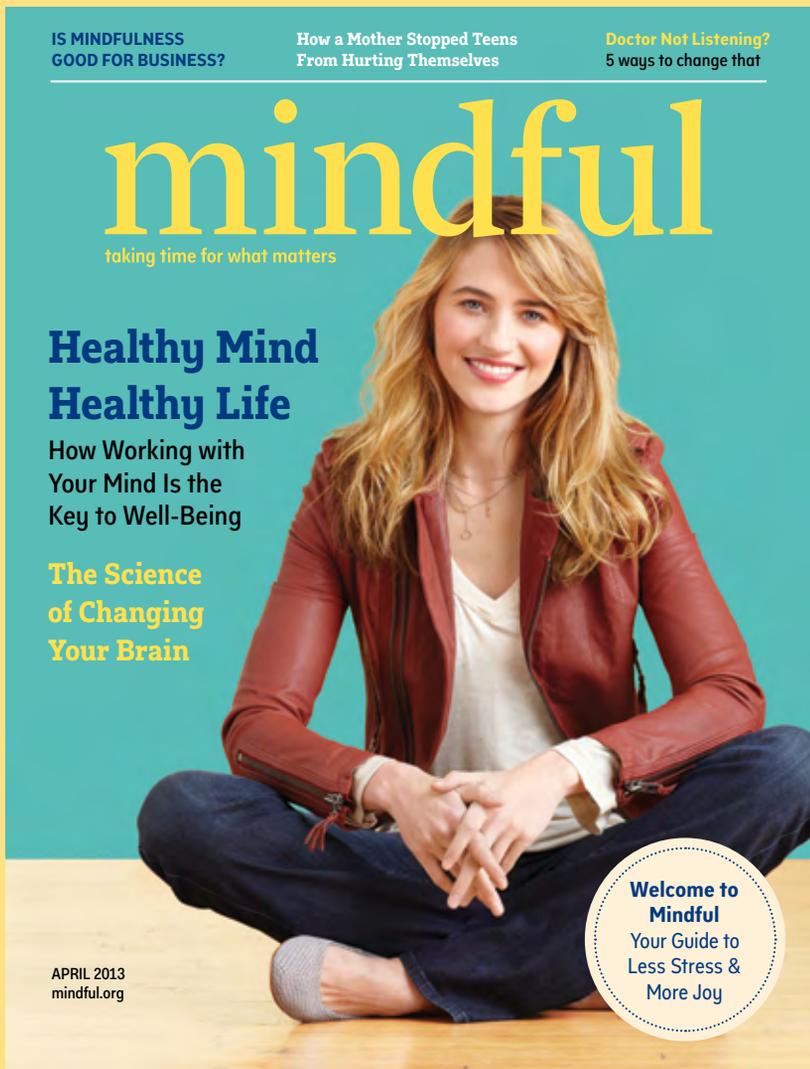
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**You are mindful. And this is your magazine.**



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