

Pathways: Your life is now!

December 2015 Newsletter



“Now”: It’s only here once

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e-Thoughts — You won’t believe this...



Your phone rings, your IM pings or you get pulled out of the “now” in some other way. What’s the cost and how can you stop it? **More...**

Wallflower, social butterfly or somewhere in between? Here are some tips for handling holiday parties. **More...**

Are you living with too much clutter? It may be keeping you from thinking, feeling and doing your best. **More...**

What I learned about mindfulness from opening a cookie. **More...**

Getting help

Confidential support, information and resource referrals are available for a variety of concerns — both work and personal. Call for assistance for you, your household members or your adult children under age 26, whether they live at home or not. Call or visit us online today!

“Now”: It’s only here once

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Your phone rings, your IM pings, you get an email or modern life interrupts you in some other way. It happens to all of us. In fact, it happens too often.

Instead of living in the “now,” we’re mentally all over the map. Today’s lifestyles can keep us from enjoying the present for very long.

Where are you when you’re not present?

Are you thinking, planning or worrying about the future? Are you replaying or stuck on something from the past? In either case, you’re letting the present slip by without fully enjoying it. And it’s a unique moment that will never happen again.

The price you pay

Not living in the present has consequences. Your daily life can feel fractured, jumbled and disorganized. You may lose some of your ability to focus and complete tasks.

In fact, have you ever lost your train of thought in the middle of your own sentence because your mind was wandering? It’s happened to most people — and it’s a perfect example of the distraction that keeps you from being “mindful.”

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness can sound complicated but it’s not. It’s just paying full attention to whatever you’re doing right now. It’s about living in the present. It can take effort and practice.

The benefits of living in the “now”

Mindfulness has many benefits, including¹:

- Experiencing more of your life by increasing your awareness
- Feeling less anxious

- Acting less impulsively
- Loosening up and having more fun
- Enjoying better relationships

Mindfulness is worth the effort

Harvard psychologist, Ellen Langer, says “Everyone agrees it’s important to live in the present but the problem is how.”² Here are some suggestions for learning to live more mindfully¹:

- 1. Know the basics of mindfulness.** Mindfulness is about focusing your attention purposely. It’s about increasing your awareness, senses and experience of a particular moment.
- 2. Keep it simple.** You don’t need to be mindful all day. In fact, short bursts of mindfulness seem to be the most beneficial.
- 3. Notice more.** You can be mindful while you’re brushing your teeth. Just tune in to the sights, sounds, tastes and feelings of that daily act. Be mindful when you go for a walk or eat your meals. You may find that each of these routines is really more interesting than you ever thought.
- 4. Breathe.** Focus on your breathing. That’s one easy way to get yourself to be mindful at any time. When you pull back into yourself and focus on your breath, you’re creating quiet time. That can help you block out everything else.
- 5. Be unselfconscious.** Do you spend a lot of time thinking about how you’re doing? That’s called selfconsciousness. The opposite is “unselfconsciousness”¹ and it’s one of the keys to living in the now. Rather than watching and judging yourself, just be yourself.

What you’ll notice as you become more mindful

Mindfulness is calming. It helps you focus and decreases stress. Think of it as training for your brain so you can live a happier life.

¹www.psychology.today.com. Accessed November 2015

²www.harvardmagazine.com. Accessed November 2015

Survival skills for holiday parties

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Social skills can get a real workout during the holidays. You may be on the guest list for office parties, family and neighborhood gatherings and other events. And you're usually expected to arrive with lots of holiday spirit!

Whether you're a social butterfly or wallflower — or somewhere in between like most of us — it's a good time to think about ways to handle social situations. Here are some tips to consider:

1. Arriving. It's not unusual to feel awkward when first entering a party — especially when you don't know anyone. Your best friend in this situation? A smile.

People are drawn to others who seem happy and at ease (even if you're faking it!). You can bet there are other nervous guests who are hoping to talk with someone.

So smile and approach a small group or another person who's alone. Suddenly, you're the one who's cool and confident.

2. Starting a conversation. Questions are often the best conversation starters. You might ask: "How do you know [host's name]?"

You can also ask a question about something you're likely to have in common with others. Examples might be a current cold streak, traffic jam or news story.

3. Keeping up the conversation. When you ask a question, be sure you listen to the answer. Don't be too quick to jump in with your own opinion.

Good listening can prompt more questions and reveal common interests. Before you know it, you may forget you were nervous and be engaged in an easy conversation.

4. Observing e-courtesies. Turn off your cellphone or put it on silent. It can be very rude to take a phone call or check your email while you're talking to someone. If you must take a call or answer a text, excuse yourself and step into another room.

5. Taking time out. Feel free to take a breather. You don't have to interact nonstop. Get recharged by taking a few quiet minutes on the terrace or even in the restroom.

6. Leaving. Thank your hosts for a terrific time and pat yourself on the back for your success!

Time for your end of year clean up?

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Are you living with more clutter than you'd like? Here's a good way to find out.

Ask yourself: How much time do I spend each day looking for important bills or mail, my keys or even my glasses? How about those last minute searches for things my kids need as they're rushing off to school?

Reasons behind clutter

Sometimes clutter comes from the inability to make decisions - like what to keep and what to throw out or give away. Maybe you're a "saver" or just have such a busy schedule that there's little time to get organized.

Many of us live cluttered lifestyles and, as a result, we may get less done. Why? A cluttered workspace or home can make you feel unmotivated and depressed. It can even hinder clear thinking.

Ready, set, organize

Here are some easy tips to help get you started:

- 1. Use common sense.** Your "stuff" didn't build up in one day and you can't make it all go away in a day. If you take on too much at once, you may get discouraged and give up.
- 2. Be logical.** Plan your de-clutter project. What room or area needs the most help? Or what part of the room? Perhaps it's your kitchen counter or dining room table. Make a plan and try to stick to it.

3. Get a supply of big trash bags. One thing you don't want to do is to re-clutter. That is, you don't want to just move your clutter from one area of your house to another. It's decision time! So get strict with yourself and toss things you really don't need.

4. Give everything a home. Everything should "live" in a particular place. Your bills can go in a specific drawer or shelf. Your recipes should have a home, too. Clothes from yesterday or last week: How about the hamper? Or the "going to the cleaner's" bag or bin? Put all coats, scarves and hats in a closet. When everything belongs somewhere, it's much easier to form a new habit of putting it all away.

5. Celebrate. When you accomplish some de-cluttering, congratulate yourself! Give yourself a reward like an hour of reading or relaxing. Then... back to work!

Get started — even in a small way

The hardest part of de-cluttering is getting started. Once you make a dent, you'll find it's easier to keep going. Just think of how nice it will be to live in a more organized space... that's good motivation!

e-Thoughts — You won't believe this...

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Our e-Thoughts feature provides close-up views on topics and areas of interest from everyday life.

While writing this month's bulletin, I opened a fortune cookie that actually said "Live more in the present." Pretty crazy, right? Just as I'm writing an article about mindfulness?

So I decided "someone" must be sending me a message. After reading and writing about all the benefits of mindfulness, it seems like it's time for me to listen up.

My plan is this: Every afternoon I'm going to stop working and spend five minutes sitting in one place, concentrating on nothing but my breathing. I'll see how that goes and then increase to two times a day.

Also, I stand in lines a lot. You know: at the supermarket, at the drugstore. I'm going to try to spend those minutes being "here." Rather than fret about the line, I'm going to try to be calm, aware of my surroundings and calm. Yes, calm twice. After all, I'm not great at waiting so I think I need to mention it twice.

You probably didn't get the same fortune cookie as me. But are there signals that you could use some mindful moments in your day? If so, try it out. Hopefully, you and I can both learn to live in the "now" and enjoy the present more.

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