



The Wise Brain Bulletin

News and Tools for Happiness, Love, and Wisdom

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The Mindful Leader

7 Practices for Transforming Your Leadership, Your Organisation and Your Life

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Leadership is one of the most challenging endeavours we can undertake. At times it elicits the best in us, but at other times it exposes our fixated behaviours, avoidances, competitiveness, fear-based reactivity and values indiscretions.

Mindfulness is the path that allows us to cast light on our “shadow self,” shed our fear-based tendencies, and access our whole, authentic selves. Through this process, it enables us to lead with awareness, courage, compassion and integrity. It aids us in paying attention to the present moment purposefully and non-judgementally. It allows us to experience and accept reality as it really is - not how we want it to be, think it should be, or perceive it to be - but as it really is. Most importantly for leaders, it helps us apply self-awareness in a practical way, allowing us to manage our behaviours in real time.

When Leaders Are at Their Best

When leaders are asked, “What state are you in when you are at your best?” their responses are universal: Physically, they are relaxed, as opposed to tense. Mentally, they are clear and focused, as opposed to being plagued by racing, frantic thoughts of regret, doubt and worry. Emotionally, they are open-hearted and courageous, as opposed to closed, hardened or fearful.

From a neuroscience perspective, this is the same state our brain is in when it’s at its best. In this state we operate from the prefrontal cortex, the seat of conscious decision-making, planning and judgement rather than from the amygdala, the source of fear-based fight, flight or freeze reactions.

This grounded, peaceful state is the promise of mindfulness. This state is the reason why mindfulness matters so much for leadership. Mindfulness provides the base of self-awareness and self-regulation that is essential to consistently accessing our prefrontal cortex and being our best selves in the cauldron of leadership.

Why Mindfulness Matters for Leadership and the Bottom Line

Mindfulness is an essential workplace practice. A critical factor in creating and sustaining job satisfaction, productivity and a healthy bottom line is workplace engagement.

Organisations with high rates of engagement consistently outperform their sector benchmarks for growth across a range of financials. Great workplaces have substantially stronger bottom lines and are superior in performance.

Engagement rests on the cornerstone of leadership. According to research, nothing else has statistical significance on engagement, apart from the behaviour of leaders. As much as 37 per cent of employee engagement can be attributed to leadership behaviour. Leaders who more frequently exhibit exemplary behaviours have employees who are significantly more committed, proud, motivated, loyal and productive than other groups.

Leadership failures are rarely the result of technical competence. Rather, the “x” factor in leadership is behaviour. And the key to transforming leadership behaviour is the cultivation of genuine mindfulness, integrated with leadership research and practice.



The formula is simple: Highly engaged organisations are more profitable and effective. The key to improving your organisation's engagement is your leadership behaviour. And mindfulness - the practical application of self-awareness - is the most effective method to ensure your leadership behaviour is exemplary.

The Research on Mindfulness

Research shows that mindfulness literally changes the structure and function of the brain, providing the following benefits:

- Stress and anxiety reduction.
- Improved cognitive skills, including improved executive functioning, sustained attention, visuospatial processing, and working memory; it also expands our ability to focus attention and suppress distracting information, and increases our information processing speed.
- Enhanced creativity. Mindfulness practice can reduce "cognitive rigidity," thus enabling more flexible responses to situations where we might otherwise be blinded by past experience.
- Stronger relationships, including reduced social anxiety and improved ability to

communicate our feelings, thereby increasing empathy, and decreasing emotional reactivity.

- Increased compassion.
- Spiritual benefits, such as enhancing self-insight, morality, intuition and fear modulation.
- Health benefits, including depression prevention, increased immune functioning, pain control, improved sleep patterns, greater ability to curb and overcome addictions and binge eating, and improved heart health.

All of these benefits have a direct, profound impact on leadership. When leaders are focused in the present they are calm, clear, open, relaxed, engaged, productive and “in flow” - precisely how they need to be to function at their best.



The Seven Disciplines of Mindful Leaders

Mindfulness alone is not enough. Even with serious mindfulness training we can still be poor leaders. Fully integrating mindfulness into leadership is the key to exponential progress.

The Mindful Leader marries research-based mindfulness practices with leadership behaviours, providing a practical model for improving your leadership and your life.

The following seven disciplines of mindful leadership aid leaders in deeply integrating mindfulness and leadership, thereby expanding leadership capacity and enjoyment.

1. Be Here Now

Through mindfulness we develop, both internally and externally, a clear-eyed view of the world. We see reality as it is, not as we want or don't want it to be. We are present to what is happening in front of us, right now, this very moment. Right now is real. Everything else is memory of the past or imagination of the future. Reality is always now. And mindfulness is living in and being fully present to the now.

The Opposite of Mindfulness

The opposite of mindfulness is absentmindedness. We spend most of our time either ruminating about the past or worrying about the future. In this state, we can neither be self-aware nor truly aware of others.

Absentmindedness manifests in our lives as aversion, craving and clinging, delusion, and fear. It keeps us irritated, frustrated, angry, anxious and numb - the very opposite of the qualities needed for effective leadership.

To overcome the detrimental effects of absentmindedness we must learn to cultivate our capacity to be truly present to what is happening in ourselves and the world in real time.

Presence: The Antidote

Only when we are present do we truly have the gift of choice. Otherwise, we're ruled by habit, slaves to conditioned responses and thoughtless actions.

Being mindful of the present moment allows us to observe and experience painful emotions without being sucked into them, or without allowing our behaviours to be dictated by them. Mindfulness releases us from the oppression of incessant

Greetings

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[Rick Hanson, PhD](#), edits the *Bulletin*. [Michelle Keane](#) is its managing editor, and it's designed and laid out by the design team at [Content Strategy Online](#).

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thoughts. It sheds light on things we've been resisting and gives us the courage to stop resisting.

When we're present, we're able to manage ourselves. We notice things that make us think, "How did I ever miss that?" or "Why have I been acting like that for so long?"

One mindfulness student described it this way: "It is such a relief when I remind myself that I can only be here now. When the workload is overwhelming I remember that the best thing I can do is just be present and do what is in front of me. It is so incredibly helpful. The stress melts away and I become so much more productive."

2. 200 Per Cent Accountability

The story is told of a princess who, walking barefoot in her father's kingdom, stepped on a thorn. In pain, she demanded of her father's advisers that the entire kingdom be carpeted. One adviser made her a pair of sandals and kindly encouraged her to wear them instead of carpeting the kingdom.

Like this princess, we often believe our conditions need to be okay for us to be okay. This mindset is at odds with the accountability needed for great leadership. Our "carpet" becomes our team, our customers, our boss, the economy, etc., and we can fail to put on the sandals of accountability.



When not taking accountability for our actions, we engage in rationalisation, defensiveness, denial, attack or blame, which makes us lose our mindfulness and our credibility.

Mindfulness practice brings us in touch with the truth of things and provides us with a level of profound honesty. From this place of honesty, we cannot continue with our blaming and denying. We realise we are often the authors of our difficulties, and so we look to change our own behaviour first. In doing so we inspire others to do the same.

What is “200 Per Cent Accountability”?

When leaders recognise how they have been blaming others for their difficulties, they often then swing to the opposite side of the scale and blame themselves for *everything* that happens in their team or organisation. The truth is that neither the leader nor the team is 100 per cent to blame for what happens. The real equation is 100 per cent accountability from the leader plus 100 per cent from each team member, equalling 200 per cent accountability. This is almost always the truth of things.

A partnership where one person takes full accountability and the other takes little or no accountability will not work in the long term. Moreover, it assumes perfection in one human being but not the other - a delusional view of reality.

Taking Accountability Requires Inner Kindness

If not done mindfully, taking accountability can become a form of harsh self-judgement and inner torment. Mindful accountability is neither attacking ourselves nor rationalising our behaviour. It's just plain, objective truth. The key is being kind and compassionate with ourselves. Kindness allows us to look with non-judgemental curiosity and honesty at our behaviour when we have acted poorly or transgressed our values.

3. Lead from Mindful Values

Without trust, there is no leadership. Knowing your values and being able to articulate them is extraordinarily important for trust building.

Values are our personal code of conduct, our compass that determines our daily choices and actions. Values give us personal clarity when those around us are being driven by fear,



anxiety or other less-than-wholesome qualities.

Numerous studies have shown that when we are not living in alignment with our values we are prone to anxiety and depression. Living in accordance with our values, being in integrity with ourselves, is about more than leading well. It's also about feeling happy with ourselves and our lives.

The Most Important Value for Leadership

Research shows that people prize honesty in their leaders more than any other value. But leaders are failing miserably in demonstrating honesty. In 2014, the public relations firm Edelman gathered data from more than 33,000 world-wide respondents to discover that only 20 per cent of people trust business leaders to tell the truth, and only 13 per cent trust government officials to tell the truth.

After interviewing thousands of leaders, *Mindful Leader* author Michael Bunting has never met a leader who has stated that their team/organisation does not trust them to tell the truth. Since on average four out of five business leaders are not trusted, it's evident that very few leaders *know* they are distrusted. They clearly have a different story of themselves than those observing them.

Mindfulness helps bridge the gap between our perception of ourselves *and* others' perception of us, and gives us the ability to "make the unconscious conscious." From this place we can see where we are out of alignment with our values. We learn to become honest

with ourselves and others, in turn creating credibility and trust.

4. Inspire a Mindful Vision

Research shows that next to honesty, being visionary is the second most valued leadership characteristic.

Effective leaders create a mindful vision for their teams and organisations, a vision focused on making a positive difference and alleviating suffering in the world. The vision reflects the importance of doing something that is good for everyone, not just something that makes shareholders wealthy at the expense of other people or the planet. A mindful vision makes people whole again and awakens the best in them.

Mindful Livelihood: The Basis of Mindful Vision

Mindful livelihood is the active and conscious pursuit of making life better for ourselves and others, and by extension the planet and communities that support our wellbeing. It doesn't make any sense to meditate regularly while running a company that causes suffering for communities, the environment, its suppliers or customers. Mindful livelihood is the integration of our personal mindful practice with how we lead and operate our organisations. It is a truly holistic approach to awareness.

Another way of thinking of mindfulness is carefulness. Mindful livelihood means to be full of care for those within our organisations, the customers we serve, and everyone on the planet as well as the planet itself. It is to care about more than just money and profit and personal gain. It is to be conscious of and show concern for the impact we have on the world.

5. Cultivate Beginner's Mind

To lead is to step into the unknown. Leaders break boundaries and take us to places we have never been before. The art of discovery is the heart of great leadership. No organisation ever became an industry leader by following the best practices of others. We can learn from and build on the lessons and successes of others, but ultimately, a leader must blaze a trail into unknown territory.

The best leaders are those who constantly push us to find new and better ways to do things, to explore and discover, to conquer limitations. They take initiative. They accept risk as an opportunity to learn and grow. They are constantly innovating.

Mindful leaders cultivate “beginner’s mind” to create a culture of innovation.

Beginner’s Mind: The Foundation of Innovation

Beginner’s mind is viewing the world and our experiences with an innocent mind, one devoid of preconceptions, expectations, judgements and prejudices. It is to explore and observe things with a deep sense of openness, much like a child explores the world with curiosity and wonder, with no fixed point of view. It is to lose our “expert’s mind,” which tends to be rigid, calcified, fixated and always right. When we view the world with an expert’s mind, we think we know all the answers, and are therefore closed to new possibilities.



In expert’s mind, we are scared of “I don’t know.” But in beginner’s mind, we realise that “I don’t know” is a powerful position, for it is the beginning of wisdom.

For many of us as leaders, the feeling of “I don’t know” is frightening. We believe we are supposed to be the ones with the answers. We are the ones people are looking to for guidance. As a result, we often pretend to have the answers because we think that having the answers is what gives us credibility and confidence. In fact, the exact opposite is true.

One CEO, Kevin Pickhardt, explains the need for beginner’s mind in the workplace this

way: “If we’re going to err on one side of how we view ourselves, as expert or beginner, I’d rather err on the side of being a beginner. As soon as we see ourselves as experts, learning begins to slow. I like to embrace learning - it keep us young and sharp and helps us create the culture we want, which is let’s not assume we know the answers.”

6. Empower Others to Shine

When leaders are not invested in building and lifting their team members, their leadership efforts are significantly hampered. People feel their insincerity and ulterior motives, and as a result they become less engaged. On the flipside, when people feel their leaders care about them personally and want them to grow, they begin to shine.

The more our leadership efforts are about us, the less effective we are. The more our efforts are focused on building and encouraging others, the more effective we are.

We learn to empower others by cultivating two attributes of mindfulness: generosity and compassion.

Cultivate Generosity to Release Insecurities and Empower People

When we operate from generosity, what we give returns to us. The more generous we are, the more our heart opens, and the more joy we experience. Ultimately, generosity is the cultivation of connection, from which grows happiness, cooperation and wellbeing.

Generosity practice is a key antidote to clinging. Clinging robs us of a clear, relaxed,



open state of mindfulness. Through generosity, we move from command and control mode to coaching and mentoring mode, allowing us to bring out the gifts in others. We freely give people our time, undivided attention, insights and wisdom to help them become the best that they can be. We learn to let go of control and to give people space, autonomy and responsibility to step up and contribute more.

Compassion is cherishing other living beings; it's seeking to alleviate suffering not just in ourselves, but also in everyone around us. Mindful compassion in leadership is to wish for all your team members, boss and colleagues to be free from suffering, to thrive in their positions, to be happy and fulfilled, just as you wish for yourself. It is to truly see others' struggles and be naturally moved to support them.

Compassion can be seen as a full-hearted embracing of the present. Without compassion it is impossible to fully embrace life as it is, with its pains and struggles. Compassion brings a deep sensitising to the experience of life. With it we become more and more skilful in responding to distress in ourselves and the systems we work in.

7. Nourish Others with Love

Every person in every position is doing work that matters. *They* matter. But too often, people don't know how much they matter because they're seldom told.

The best leaders always look for ways to recognise and praise their people. They truly see their people and take notice of their contributions. They never take them for granted - and people can feel that from them.

Three heart-based mindfulness practices give us the awareness to see and connect with people more authentically than we ever have before: loving-kindness, empathetic joy, and gratitude.

Loving-kindness: The Heart of Mindfulness

As a leader, loving-kindness manifests as thinking less of your own personal ambitions and more on the welfare and happiness of the whole. It is deeply and sincerely caring about your people, and being emotionally invested in their progress and success. And it is showing how much you care about them by regularly and consistently expressing appreciation for their efforts.

The more love we give, the more we generate and the more we receive. Love truly is the source of our greatest strength, the quality that elicits the best and purest in us, and that



fortifies us against hatred, negativity and challenges.

Love also enables us to elicit the best in others, because it allows us to see the best in everyone. It improves our skills as a mentor more than any other factor because it gives us a heartfelt presence that becomes a real force for uplifting others.

Empathetic Joy: Authentic Encouragement From the Heart

Empathetic joy means finding joy in the happiness, success and good fortune of others. It eliminates jealousy, envy or resentment and opens our heart to praise and encouragement. Jealousy feels contracted in the body and is based on the belief that we are not enough and that we don't have enough - in other words, it is an argument with reality, and it's an argument we can never win.

From a leadership perspective, if compassion means "to suffer with," empathetic joy means "to celebrate with." It means being every bit as conscious of people's happiness as we are attuned to their suffering. It's not enough to just offer support when someone is grieving - we must also extend joy when they have succeeded.

Mindfulness opens our hearts to love and connection. It also naturally produces a profound, and habitual attitude of gratitude. Mindfulness helps us see reality as it is, and as we do so, we can't help but see the awe-inspiring beauty and miracles that we're immersed in every moment of every day. In the spirit of gratitude, we find the extraordinary in the ordinary.

For leaders, gratitude is also the catalyst for recognition. It makes us constantly look for the good in people and feeds our desire to share our gratitude for a job well done. It is a light we carry with us that people are drawn to because they feel good about themselves when they are around us. Gratitude reverses fear and clinging - two of the core issues that rob us of mindfulness. To be mindful is to be generous; they are inseparable.

Transforming for Good

The world is desperate for great leadership - more precisely, for mindful leadership. Disconnection and disengagement abound in our personal and professional lives. The greatest opportunity of leadership is to make a truly positive and meaningful impact. Given that we spend a significant portion of our lives at work, organisational leaders in particular can make a profound difference - and at a much deeper level than we typically think.

Mindfulness equips us with the tools and capability for transforming ourselves into extraordinary leaders. It helps us overcome our inner resistance to the flow of life and develop a flexibility, an intelligence and malleability that can come in no other way.

To learn more about developing truly extraordinary leadership, visit [mindfulleader.net](http://www.mindfulleader.net).

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Choose Connection

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What thinking does it take
to connect?

It's not after all a brain thing

And yet,

My mind wanders here and there
Roller-coaster loops of indecision and reason
polluting connection with doubt

This way and that, it tugs
Not at my heartstrings but rather at my thoughts
figuring out the perfect way to engage

A wise friend once said, "choose connection."
Let it override whatever the mind throws in its way
The truth is, it's always better once the reaching subsides,
deliberating ceases, quieting the pounding heart

For a long time
I focused only on how it would end
How many more minutes can I have this treasured moment?

Watch the clock, measure the time because at some point,
the inevitable happens
Connection drops
Touch fades
the beep on the phone screams ending
tears dry on cheeks
the heart hurts longing for more

And with that, questioning begins again

Will this hold me?

Was it enough?

Was I honest in expressing my needs not of my head, but of my deepest soul?

These days, I feel being in connection

living delicately right next to these older fears

both alive in a balancing act

My mind speaks clearly

Adding form to chaos

A compassionate steadiness exudes

calming spaciousness

The watchful mind overthinking

A low flying bird circling before landing

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Mindful Eating as a Path to Health and Wellbeing

Satisfying the Hungers of your Body, Heart, and Mind

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Excerpted from *The Mindfulness-Based Eating Solution: Proven Strategies to End Overeating,
Satisfy Your Hunger, and Savor Your Life.*

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Over the past nine years I have listened to hundreds of stories about the difficulties people go through in the hopes of having a better relationship with their food and their bodies. While the issues people face are complex and varied, there is an underlying thread that ties them together. That thread is the natural longing of body, mind and heart for greater health and well-being. Wellbeing, as described by Rick Hanson in his *Twelve Pillars of Well-Being* (2015), requires a complete examination of oneself and one's life.

Whether your struggles are with food, your body, your health, the stress of your career or difficulties in relationships - all of these things that often lead to suffering can be met with mindfulness, described as compassionate, curious and nonjudgmental attention. Mindfulness (Pillar #2 in Rick's model) is the skill that teaches people to look deeply at hunger and all of its manifestations. Mindfulness can be used to examine how, when, why, and how much to eat. But it can also be used to examine your hunger for things like creativity, connection, learning, moving, and sleeping.

Note: This following excerpt is from the chapter: **What Are You Really, Really, Really Hungry For?** The ability to understand your own body, heart, and mind requires a foundation in the skill of mindfulness. Mindfulness exercises and meditations from the book can be found on my website at <http://www.LynnRossy.com>.

Exploring what you're really hungry for on a regular basis will help you reach for food less often while you engage in creating meaning and happiness in your life. The ultimate goal of mindful eating is to relearn how to eat when you are biologically hungry and how to meet your other needs (emotional, mental, and spiritual) with strategies other than food.

Physical Hunger Versus Cravings

Teasing apart the difference between sensations of biological hunger due to not having eaten in a while and the bodily response you feel when you are experiencing a craving is complicated by many factors. As we talked about earlier, the sensations associated with biological hunger can feel similar in the body to those you experience when you are distressed. Further, sensations of physical hunger can arise even when there isn't an energy need in the body or prolonged food deprivation. For instance, your body can report hunger when you simply see a plate of cookies or when you walk past a doughnut shop and smell fresh doughnuts being made, even if you've just eaten a full meal (Lowe and Butryn 2007).

Food craving has been described as “a motivational state associated with a strong desire for an expected positive outcome” and “the function of food craving will be to initiate bingeing as a means of obtaining relief from the aversive state of intolerable negative affect” (Waters, Hill, and Waller 2001, 883). In other words, craving food can be driven by a desire



to escape from a negative mood or unpleasant emotion, previous attempts at restraining eating, and environmental or social cues. While you might feel temporary relief upon eating at these times, there is a down side. When craving leads to overeating or a binge, your mood is likely to deteriorate even further and, because you're eating more than your body biologically needs, you are likely to gain weight.

However, cravings for food can be differentiated from biological hunger by taking a closer look at what's happening in your body and mind. Here are a couple of examples. Kevin was having a stressful day when he drove past a favorite fast food joint and immediately had the thought, *I want some burgers!* Kevin had often used his burger habit to deal with stress, and he recognized this desire as a craving as opposed to biological hunger. Macy was walking downtown when a swarm of cicadas (very big, black, noisy bugs) flew out of a tree and headed straight toward her. Her first thought was I need a candy bar. Surprised by the cicadas, she knew she was really just afraid. Kevin and Macy had been practicing mindfulness for a few weeks, so they both had an immediate awareness of how their emotions and thoughts had been triggered by environmental and emotional cues to eat.

By stopping and noticing the stress and the fear, Kevin and Macy had essential learning experiences. They could feel their bodies reacting to stress and fear and hear the thoughts,

but not turn to food as a result. In both of these cases, the craving for food left very quickly. Becoming mindfully aware of your bodily reactions, feelings, and thoughts will help you pause instead of react to a craving.

How long does a craving last if you pay attention to it without succumbing to food? I don't have a scientific answer but encourage you to find

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out for yourself. The next time you experience a craving, see if you can notice what is happening - in your body, feelings, and thoughts. How long does it take a craving to end if you don't act on it? It can't last very long - a few seconds at the least and maybe thirty minutes at the most.

This strategy is similar to one called "urge surfing," designed by Alan Marlatt for people recovering from addictions to cigarettes, alcohol, and other drugs (Marlatt and Kristeller 1999). You can think about your craving, or urge, as a wave in the ocean. Surfing the wave of a craving can teach you how to mindfully be with the sensations until they pass. You can directly observe the changing nature and impermanence of cravings rather than feeding them or fighting with them. You can also redirect your attention to something else and, before you know it, the craving is gone.

In order to be a mindful eater, you will need to understand and befriend your "wanting mind." It says you need more food even though you are full. The wanting mind wants pleasure of any kind it can find - food, clothes, shoes, jewelry, cars, flowers, and so on.



Become aware of when you hear the wanting mind grabbing for pleasurable experiences. The important thing to remember is it is insatiable. To the wanting mind, there is never enough. You can become familiar with the wanting mind saying "more" and kindly acknowledge it, but then redirect your attention to the taste and pleasure of the food and the fullness of your body to determine when you stop eating. You can use this same technique with the various emotions you experience that lead to overeating. Befriending your mind and your emotions is the key to changing your relationship to food and your body.

What Are You Really, Really, Really Hungry For?

Eating will only satisfy your physical hunger. If you're eating to satisfy emotional, mental, or spiritual hunger, you might have moments when these needs go underground, but you will never feel satisfied. The only way to end emotional eating is to start looking directly at all of your needs, values, desires, and dreams and start to decide how you will meet them. You will eat when you're hungry, breathe when you're stressed, laugh when you're happy, play when you're bored, move when your body needs to stretch, learn when your mind needs to expand, and love when your heart aches to be broken open.

So when you find yourself reaching for food but you suspect it may not be because you're physically hungry, ask yourself, *What am I hungry for?* The first answer might be a chocolate brownie.

Ask again, *What am I really, really hungry for?* Take a moment to pause and look a little deeper. Are you physically hungry? Are you wanting a bite of a chocolate brownie because you think it would be lovely to savor one right now? Or do you notice anxiety, fear, confusion, sadness, loneliness, grief, anger, exhaustion, or tension? If distressing feelings aren't present, you might go ahead and mindfully have your chocolate brownie.

However, if you notice emotional discomfort of some kind, ask yourself again, *What am I really, really, really hungry for?* In other words, *What do I need right now that would address the feelings I'm experiencing or meet my underlying needs?* The answer to this question won't be found in the bottom of the cookie jar, a bag of chips, or a chocolate brownie.

Discovering how to meet your difficult emotions by sitting mindfully with them or by responding with some kind of skillful action will take investigation, trial and error, courage, and honesty. You can work at this on a couple of different levels. First, you can address and honor your immediate needs, and second, you can work on discovering (or rediscovering) your

Perspectives on Self-Care

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

values and dreams. The first step will prepare you to take the second step and delve into the deeper examination of your life that I braced you for at the beginning of the book.

Honoring Your Immediate Needs

Immediate needs usually fall into the category of physiological needs. When you ask yourself the question “What am I really, really, *really* hungry for?” your immediate need might be as simple as attending to the body by moving, stretching, or lying down for a short nap. Sleep is a highly overlooked need, the lack of which is causing people lots of physical and psychological discomfort. You might need a break from the computer or TV - even if it’s a thirty-second break to take some deep breaths while you’re in the bathroom. You might need to go outside and breathe some fresh air or take in the smells and sights of nature. You might need to drink some water. Hydration is often what people really need when they reach for food. While these all sound simple, our basic physical needs often get overlooked in our too-busy-to-stop culture.

Discovering Your Values and Dreams

Once you’ve met your immediate needs, it’s time to take a deeper dive. If you haven’t been paying attention, life might be dragging you along for a ride you didn’t intend to



take. Looking at where you are now and where you want to be will be an essential step in designing the architecture of your life as well as ending the habit of emotional eating. This step requires your full participation and full responsibility. While you can gather support along the way, no one else has your answers and no one else can do the heavy lifting. When you're busy creating your most meaningful life, food and eating may be a part of that scenario, but they aren't the fix for what you've neglected to take care of.

So what *are* you really, really, really hungry for? Do you know? This question can only be answered in the present. You might have known at some time in the past, but if you haven't checked in for a while, that answer might have changed. How alive is your answer and how does the answer feel in your gut? This is a question you can ask yourself over and over again. Dive every day into your heart and listen to what it tells you. This can be a great time to pull out your journal and give your pen free rein over the page.

Your needs can be quite varied and can be fulfilled in countless ways. Your emotional needs in relationships can be for acceptance, acknowledgment, appreciation, and attention and can be met by asking for what you want and setting appropriate boundaries. Needs for creativity can be met in infinite ways - cooking, writing, painting, home decorating, golfing, gardening, singing, playing a musical instrument, and even in projects we do at work. Career needs tend to relate to expressing our personal selves in the work that we do and can be met by defining our values and figuring out how to articulate them on the job. Mental needs can be fulfilled by engagement of our brain in figuring out problems, learning new information and skills, and exploring the world from top to bottom. Spiritual needs can be met by being in nature, engaging in a church or spiritual community, and listening to inspiring talks or reading inspiring books.

To get back in harmony with your deeper needs and hungers, taking an inventory of your values and evaluating the degree to which you are living them can be enlightening. Living in harmony with your values is one of the most supportive ways to meet your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs. For instance, one of my values is health. Since health is a value I deeply hold, I make exercise and eating green vegetables non-negotiable priorities. I don't even have to think about it anymore. I just do it, because I have made a clear, conscious decision that health is important to me.

Fear can be a very limiting emotion when it comes to our dreams and aspirations. Fear disconnects us from our heart and our inner wisdom. It disconnects us from what really

matters. Ask yourself, *What would I do if I weren't afraid?* Give yourself time to explore the variety of answers that arise in response to this question. You don't necessarily have to jump from a plane, leave your husband, or quit your job, but you might at some point. Start with some smaller things you are afraid of and work your way up. Imagine yourself doing the things you would be afraid to do and then do them. There is power in your mind that you barely access. When we do those things that we fear, we develop self-confidence and resilience. Following your yearnings will be energizing and motivating.

Psychologist Steven Hayes was quoted as saying, "The natural game most of us are in is how to *feel* good. That's not the same thing as how to *live* good" (Traister 2006). Living good is about discovering your deepest values, setting intentions for yourself that honor them, and taking action on them. Take some time with your journal to help clarify your values and provide vision for your life. Use some of the strategies and questions that I've posed to help guide your reflections.

I know I've given you a lot to think about, but please don't let that scare you away. Your hungers in life cannot all be met in one day, one week, or even one year. The key is to write down some specific goals (or even one goal) and move toward them regularly. If you don't know where you want to go, you won't know what steps to take to get there. Once you have set an intention, there is power and magic to it. Every small step that you take is huge compared to taking no step at all. In fact, focusing on the small steps is so much easier and less overwhelming. Every big dream comprises thousands of small steps. Take one today.

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Skillful Means

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

Emotional Validation

Purpose/Effects

Validating our feelings and emotions is a simple yet effective method of managing highly intense emotions. Instead of repressing or invalidating how we feel, which can subsequently heighten our current emotions, validation can serve to soothe intense feelings and make them more manageable. Validation can be used on one's own emotions or in relationships.

Method

Summary

During times of intense distressing emotions or experiences, identify and acknowledge what you are feeling and try to accept and understand your emotions by identifying some causes and explanations for them.

Long Version

When experiencing intense emotion(s):

1. Try to identify the emotion.
 - If you have trouble identifying the emotion- practice various mindfulness techniques including the Emotional Awareness Meditation.
 - If helping another person, you can say, "you seem to be saying that you feel (emotion), is that correct?". Or, "You appear (emotion), is that correct?".
 - If you are unable to identify the emotion and just know that you feel a muddier, more general upset feeling, that is okay as well.
2. Once you have identified the emotion, work with acknowledging and accepting these emotions.
 - See if you can work with accepting whatever you are feeling as a part of your

current experience and acknowledge that this emotion is what is present right now for you.

3. Look for potential explanations and reasons why you or who you are communicating with is feeling that particular emotion.
 - Try to find the source of your emotion by thinking about what makes the most sense as to why you are feeling that way.
 - For example, if your child is upset and crying because their toy was taken by another child, you would validate their experience by reminding them that it is frustrating when a toy is taken and it is okay that they are feeling upset. Another example would be if you or a friend were very nervous before a presentation, simply reminding yourself or friend that it makes sense to feel nervous before public speaking and that the majority of people feel this way so you/your friend are not alone.

History

Emotional validation is widely used by many psychologists, social workers, caregivers and teachers. Some even consider it a natural component of interpersonal communication. Dr. Marsha Linehan, a leading psychologist and creator of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), uses emotional validation as a central tool for her treatment and has done significant work to promote and enhance it in the field of psychotherapy.

Notes

It is important to note that emotional validation does not mean you are agreeing with or supporting your own or another's emotional response (especially if the emotions are very destructive or irrational). Validating means that we are acknowledging and working towards understanding why we (or another person) feel a certain way and accepting that that emotion is here and real for us right now.

One way to get a better idea of validation is to think of its opposite, which is invalidation. Invalidating someone else's (or your own) emotions would include expressions such as, "Stop being a baby", or "Get over it". On the contrast, validating expressions convey understanding, such as, "It makes sense why you feel this way" or "Wow, that sounds really difficult". Validation can also be conveyed to others through facial expressions and body language such as nodding.

Fare Well

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