



How to Help People Change Using Mindfulness Without Meditation

When we are mindless, we get trapped in habits and feelings created in the past, stuck in rigid perspectives, oblivious to alternative views. This gives us the illusion of certainty, but it also means that we are stuck in an old pattern. One way to think about mindfulness is how we can see or help our clients to open up to see a problem from a different perspective.

For example, when one shows this picture to millennials,



By William Ely Hill (1887–1962) („Puck“, 6. Nov 1915) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

They tend to see it as a beautiful young woman. However senior managers tend to see this as an old woman with a wart on her nose. Seeing both is a more complete picture.

Here's a second example from a recent [New York Times article](#).

Imagine that the numbers in the incorrect Roman numeral equation below are movable sticks. Leaving the plus and equals signs as they are, what is the least number of sticks you would have to move to correct the equation?

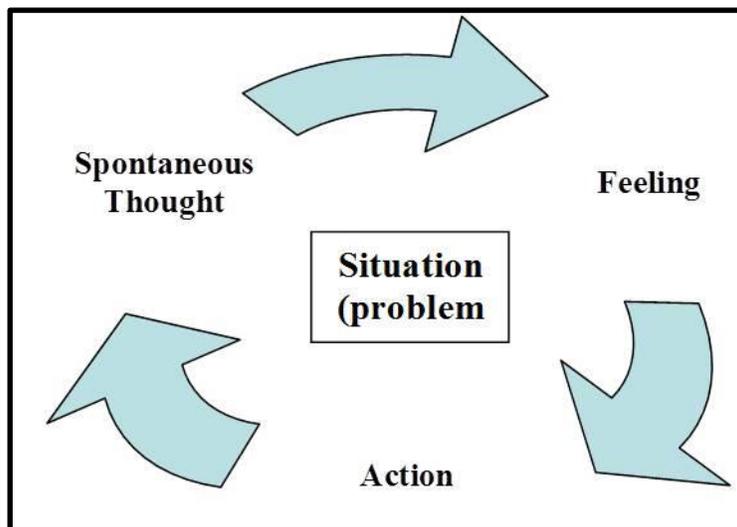
$$XI + I = X$$

The obvious answer is "one." However, a better answer is "zero," which you can see by looking at the problem with a different perspective. By either turning the problem upside down or looking at it with a mirror you can see it as $X (10) = I (one) + IX (nine)$.

The key to mindfulness is in understanding that our perspective is merely one among alternative views, many of which may be right.

But how can we help ourselves and others to see new perspectives? This requires us to be aware of our emotions and to embrace uncertainty. When we're uncertain and unsure, our surroundings become interesting again.

Although many of us like to believe that our actions are based on rational thought processes, there is significant research that points to the following. Situations or problems create spontaneous thoughts that influence feelings, which result in actions.



It's important to notice when one moves away from feeling calm and centered to feeling: judgmental, defensive or self-critical (feeling shame). These feelings are not often easy to recognize, especially because many of us have been thought to avoid or run away from bad feelings. However, it is helpful to notice where you have uncomfortable feelings in your body. Sometimes, you can notice the physical feeling before recognizing the emotion.

Not all stressful feelings are bad. Many are appropriate for the situation. But when stress gets in the way of solving a problem, here are a couple suggestions about how to bring mindfulness without meditation into our day.

1. When you are in a situation that causes you stress, the first step is to realize that you've already made two unwarranted assumptions: 1) that something will happen, and 2) it will be bad. Next, give yourself three reasons that the issue you're worried about might not happen. Notice that it immediately becomes less stressful, because you just went from "it's going to happen" to "maybe it will happen, maybe it won't."

Now give yourself three reasons that, if the situation does turn out bad, good things will happen. Those reasons are easy to find once you ask the question. Now you've gone from thinking "there's this terrible thing that's going to happen" to thinking "there's this thing that may or may not happen, but if it does, it could have both good and bad outcomes."

It's an easy method that leads us to become less reactive to the world. In the end, the entire key to eliminating mindlessness without meditation may simply be realizing that the issue looks different from a different perspective, and then taking that perspective. Source: "Achieving Mindfulness at Work, No Meditation Cushion Required," NYT April 23, 2016

2. In a meeting, when you are at the moment of deciding whether to speak up, take a second to notice the thoughts or stories that pass through your mind. Are you trying to please someone else? Are you trying to protect yourself, or an image of yourself?

Often when people communicate, fear is part of the picture—fear of being exposed, judged, misunderstood, or ignored; fear of misunderstanding the other person. Awareness that our fearful thoughts and feelings are nothing more than fleeting thoughts and feelings can free us from being controlled by them. . . . Researchers at the [Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence](#) have called this a "micro-moment." Their studies have shown that a moment is all we need to reset our perspective and see things differently. Source: [Can We Be Mindful at Work Without Meditating?](#) Leah Weiss

Beyond looking at an individual event with new eyes, change requires creating new neural pathways through continued recognition and acceptance of our feelings, then creating alternative thoughts which leads to different feelings, perspectives and actions.

I look forward to your reactions and comments. Tom@DesignWhatsNext.com