



# Balanced Living

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## Changes, Transitions and Growth

### Newsletter Content

- Changes, Transitions and Growth.
- Mindfulness.
- Choosing Your Direction.

Focus on  
the journey,  
not only  
the  
destination.  
Joy is  
found not  
just in  
finishing an  
activity but  
in doing it.

Greg Anderson



**Change can be stressful.** Even good changes, such as completing educational goals, starting a new job or buying a house, can cause emotional upheaval because we are creatures of habit. Our reactions to changes can affect us emotionally as well as physically.

"Change" is situational and external; such as moving to a new city or becoming a parent. In contrast, "transition" is psychological or internal. Transitions are the internal work that helps us to reorient and redefine ourselves and incorporate external changes into our lives.

As you experience change there are steps you can take to navigate your life challenges and make the transitions easier:

- **Use outside resources.** Thousands of people rely on coaches or counselors to help them through transitional periods in their life. By using a coach or therapist you get the depth of someone else's experiences and the benefit of having structured guidance.
- **Remember that change affects everything.** Your life is a whole system so there is no way to make even small changes and not have them influence other parts of your life. Make sure you look at your transitions from a holistic viewpoint.

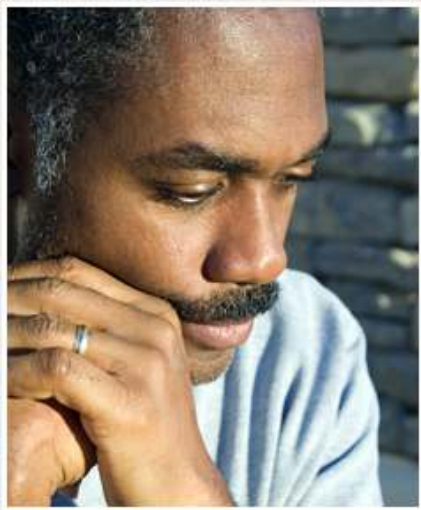
- **Your feelings might be out of balance.** Intense emotions around changes might be the result of attaching old fears and anxieties to new situations. When you do not clean up your old baggage it tends to resurface in times of stress. Make sure you do not make your transition more stressful by compounding your fears.
- **Know that you will feel fear.** Change is the redirection of your path and every time you enter the unfamiliar you will experience some stress and anxiety. This is not a warning signal; it is just a common reaction to the unknown. Acknowledge its presence and keep moving forward.
- **Keep your vision on the horizon.** By knowing where this change is taking you and by keeping your focus on the outcome you will have a much smoother ride. The degree of clarity you bring to your life changes impacts how stressful they are for you. Hold firm to the belief that what lies ahead is wonderful and exciting.

When you change your perspective around a major change and see it as an opportunity for growth, fun and self-learning, wonderful things will begin to happen to bring you joy and growth in your life journey.

# Mindfulness

**"paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally."**

The stress resulting from the many changes in our lives can produce feelings of fear, anxiety and even depression. During a stressful event it is natural to be preoccupied with possible future consequences to the stressor, develop negative thoughts or self talk, and become distracted from the here and now.



There are several ways that mindfulness can help to quiet and calm the mind, which increases the occurrence of positive feelings like enjoyment, appreciation, gratitude and general happiness. Similarly, by cultivating positive emotions, particularly ones involving kindness toward yourself and others, you help calm your mind.

Mindfulness is a skill that takes practice to cultivate and maintain. Why? Let's consider the different parts of the definition...

## **"Paying attention"**

How much of the time are you really paying attention to what's happening

in your life – as opposed to thinking about something else, remembering things, imagining possible futures, and acting out habitual patterns or, more accurately, reacting to people and situations based on old habits of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and behaving?

Paying conscious attention can be especially hard when a current interaction reminds us of past hurts or betrayals – and before even realizing it, we can automatically and defensively respond as if those old experiences were happening again.

All of us have our habitual patterns, our vulnerabilities to automatic reactions based on past experiences of hurt, our "buttons" that can get "pushed." This is particularly true when we are already stressed and/or in a hurry. Truly paying attention in our lives is a challenge for anyone.



## **"On purpose"**

It takes a conscious decision, and effort by one's mind and brain, to pay attention to what's happening in the "present. In fact, such choices and efforts are required over and over again, since we are continually pulled back into habitual ways of processing

information and responding to things. Too often we're on "auto pilot," not even trying to pay attention to what's actually happening in the unique situations and interactions that make up our lives.

## **"In the present moment"**

Most of us, most of the time, are absorbed in memories of the past or visions and plans for the future.

For most people, it is rare to be aware, without some amount of distraction or multi-tasking, of what is actually occurring in the present moment.

Particularly when strong emotions arise, people often respond not to situations as they are, but to reactive perceptions and thoughts based on painful experiences in the past. In the most extreme instances, one may not be "here" in the present, but "back there," reliving the past through responses to present situations.

## **Non-judgmentally"**

This is one of the hardest things to achieve. We so often react intensely to our experiences, particularly unwanted experiences, and to our initial responses to them.

"This is horrible!" "What an idiot!" "How could I do that?!" "I can't take this any more!" "Here I go



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## Mindfulness

Continued from page 2

again." You know the ways you can instantaneously and automatically judge situations, other people, and your own thoughts, feelings and behaviors – often in a chain reaction of increasing judgment and distress.

"I need..." "I want..." "I deserve..." Positive judgments and the cravings they evoke can also be a problem, particularly when they are automatic and intense. We can lose our focus, forget what's important, get caught in cycles of addiction, selfishly take advantage of others, etc.

In contrast, the non-judgmental quality of mindfulness brings great freedom – to see things more clearly, to evaluate situations with some distance from our habitual emotional reactions and impulses, to observe emotions and impulses as they arise without either trying to escape them or letting them carry us away.

We all have at least glimpses of this potential, when we are feeling so positive and relaxed that something which would normally cause strong judgment and negative emotions is seen as no big deal, more clearly for what it is: a passing unwanted experience or temptation to indulge.

But to bring this non-judgmental quality into our daily lives, consistently, even at very stressful times, this is something many of us can hardly imagine. Yet it is possible, by practicing mindfulness (and kindness).

And for those who are vulnerable to remembering and reliving painful experiences from the past, to strong waves of emotion, to intense self-criticism – the cultivation of non-judgmental mindfulness can bring tremendous relief and freedom from old patterns.

## Choosing Your Direction

For some, having a direction is the easy part, but getting there can be the challenge.

For others, not having a direction, or believing it's possible, can be steering them off course.

Whether you have a route mapped out of where you are going and what you want, or you don't, becoming a successful navigator is of the utmost importance.

It can either be a journey of great adventures through uncharted territory, or one filled with stress, anxiety, worry and dread. The choice is yours.

Your map might be filled with detours, construction delays, or road blocks, but as long as you are navigating, and heading toward your destination, the journey can be enjoyable, satisfying and rewarding.



Mike is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Northwest Metro Atlanta, Georgia. He has been in the mental health profession for 20 years and provides psychotherapy for adult individuals and couples.

Please feel free to contact him with comments on topics in this newsletter or suggestions for future articles.