Mindfulness – Achieving Emotional Control Through Meditation

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Basic premise for medical students

- Motivation to participate:
  - Will I be able to perform?
  - Will it make a difference?

Change Process: Social, Professional, Educational, Recreational…

- What?
- So what?
- Now what?

- This is how we can think about meditation and mindfulness

What?

- Meditation is the practice of maintaining a focus, i.e. an awareness
- Meditation is a skill that develops over time
- Like any other skill, improvement requires practice
- Not…
  - Relaxation
  - Resting
  - Aimless
  - A luxury of time

So What?

- Meditation helps you find your gift
  - “The meaning of life is to find your gift, the purpose of life is to give it away.” Pablo Picasso
- Improves body’s response to stress
  - Reduced levels of stress hormones
  - Reduced levels of inflammatory markers
- Combats depression and anxiety
  - Improves parasympathetic tone
  - Rewires frontal connections for healthier decision making
- Addictive
  - Ruins the enjoyment of substance abuse
  - Rewards with self-awareness and self-acceptance
  - Peer led mindfulness program for medical students

Benefits Of
MEDITATION
Reduces pain and enhances the body's immune system.
Reduces feelings of depression, anxiety, anger and confusion.
Increases blood flow and slows the heart rate.
Provides a sense of calm, peace and balance.
Helps reverse heart disease.
Helps control thoughts.
Increases energy.
Reduces stress.

“So What” Continued – Distraction and Control

- Meditation helps to control distraction
- One way to boost our will power and focus is to manage our distractions instead of letting them manage us. Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*
- Distraction Interferes With
  - Sensitivity to others
  - Sensitivity to yourself
  - Focus
  - Performance

Automation: A Special Type of Distraction

- How does this type of distraction manage us?
- Is automation something only for machines?

Automation of thought extinguishes mindfulness

- Our brains are designed to automate everything we do
- We become unconscious
- Mindfulness extinguishes automation

Can You Make Yourself Be Mindful?

- Western thought: Make it happen
- Eastern thought: Let it happen

Let's Let It Happen – Practicing Deliberate *Distraction* (from Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence)

- 15 minute exercise
- 2 minutes of instruction plus practice; 13 minutes of practice
- Eyes closed, roll shoulders forward and then back to straighten the spine
- Fill lungs from the bottom up at your own pace; empty from top down; optional – silently say "one" as you breathe out
- Relax your face; passive attitude
- Bring a distraction to mind; silently say "no" and push it away to clear your thoughts. Repeat. Try to extend the clear moment and minimize the distraction moment.

So, What Just Happened?

- What were you aware of?
- Did you sense your self?
- Do you now define relaxation and resting differently?
  - Mental disengagement vs physical disengagement

Now What?

- First, become mindful of the distractions and your ability to suspend them.
- Then, continue to become mindful of your *self in the present moment*.
- When you are ready (this could take up to a year), try to open up your awareness to the environment.

What is Water?

- Fish story, “This is Water” (YouTube, Daniel Foster Wallace, Need to do a fresh YouTube search due to copyright issues)
  - The most obvious things in our lives can go unappreciated.
  - These are things you already know, but they have lost your attention.

- Today we thought for a little while about the “water.”