

## Mindfulness in Coaching

Mindfulness (*sati* in the Pali language; *smriti* in Sanskrit) traditionally has been translated as ‘things remembered’. This use of ‘remembering’ has had two broad and distinct, yet related elements: 1) remembering in the sense of memory, and thus relating directly to things from the past; and 2) remembering in the sense of recognition – a shift in perspective that makes possible the experience of insight or awakening (in most broad terms: remembering the present moment). To recognize is to recognize – to think (and perceive) ‘again’, and to do so from a slightly different and new orientation. It is this new perspective that has growth potential, self-liberating/reflective capacity, and intrinsically beneficial effects. Lastly, it’s of importance here to mention that insight (*vipassana* in Pali) is distinct from, yet intimately related to mindfulness; generally speaking, insight occurs as a result of mindfulness. Simply put, mindfulness is sustained attention.

In mindfulness meditation practice, practice involves growing the capacity to observe the changing nature of sensations and thought forms, and this increasing ability very often empowers the practitioner/client two-fold: 1) being able to notice in a sustained way that all experience naturally flows and changes reminds the client of the changing nature of things, and this in turn can result in an increased psychological space from that which challenges them (usually some recurring circumstance, thought, or feeling) – they viscerally ‘realize’ that they can let go of old habits, fusion tendencies, debilitating self-imposed limitations, and also of the unconscious harms they’ve unwittingly perpetuated; and 2) strengthening the capacity for mindfulness by noticing the *reality of change* also expands one’s ability to be with difficult circumstances (both internal and external), the ability of which lessens reactivity – for if we truly know in an embodied way that all experience will change if given the opportunity, then things like impatience and aggression can lessen their grip in favor of a more balanced response. Most reactivity is in effect like saying ‘no’ to reality, and thus it only acts to further frustrate the individual – as we surely all know on some level, life/reality is not *in the way*, life/reality *is* the way. When one maturely comes to terms with this truth, then their efforts to direct and *consciously choose* their own life’s course will no longer feel thwarted but will instead be experienced as having real acting power; within the coaching context this power is experienced as thrust or traction with regards to the client’s presenting situation. Mindfulness, via sustained attention and its resultant reduction in reactivity, allows one the space to truly choose – and to truly choose is to *respond* to what actually exists before us (here, ‘before us’ might be understood both as ‘in front of us’, but also as ‘prior to us’; prior to any unhealthy ‘us-ing’ or self-imaging that may be occurring). Or put another way, mindfulness is the embodied capacity to choose *differently*; differently in the sense of some *thing* different, but also to choose some *how* differently, to choose in a different way.

In conclusion, growing the skill of mindfulness is growing the ability to be with reality as it is; when we can be with reality as it is we can then see that truly very little manipulation or control is actually needed. Unconsciously (and at times consciously), we each attempt to manipulate reality for our own benefit – some of us do this more skillfully than others, but none of us can do it better than the natural way in which reality itself will flow if given the chance. Mindfulness lessens our reactivity so that we might give reality the opportunity to show us how it naturally addresses and accomplishes a given present-moment ‘need’; instead of trying so very *hard*, via mindfulness we might learn to try *easy* – trying hard simply results in *hardness*; trying easy results in *ease*. To find ease we must try differently than we have before; to assist clients in this process, we as coaches must encourage the skill of ‘looking again’, looking with and through the fresh eyes of mindful attention.

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