

Mindfulness and winning

By: Veronica Cool July 19, 2015



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This was a good week. A really good week.

We landed some new clients and submitted a bid for a government contract that can have a tremendous impact on Baltimore. We were invited into a joint venture with a larger contractor.

But, even better than that, we placed two young people into professional jobs, changing their paths while enhancing the employer's organizational culture.

Also, a conversation with another business owner and dear friend resulted in a great reminder — the resiliency of the entrepreneur, a rediscovery that we are so much stronger than we ever thought possible. Her joy in overcoming prior challenges in rebuilding her businesses made the success so much more meaningful. Her joy became mine. And our girls won the World Cup!

Every so often, I like to savor the wins, spending time reviewing the process, enjoying the journey. I realize that we are so busy rushing to the next thing and the next thing, fixed on crossing off our to-do list. And as our accomplishments fatten our bios, the level of fulfillment never budes because we are on the perpetual wheel.

Saying no is a challenge. The desire to advance our careers simply adds to our to-do list, and being fulfilled and living intentionally becomes difficult.

Focusing on the overall goal, or my life plan, simplifies most of my decision-making process. After all, we plan our vacations, our retirement, the kids' college, our diet and the next diet. If we take Oprah's suggestion of writing your obituary and chronicling your legacy — in essence, living your life backwards — we can create a more purposeful life.

There's a distinct path after high school, towards college, law school or MBA and then into a job. Then what? Marriage, doctorates, world peace?

I recommend we think, contemplate and allow the time to become strategic and intentional, otherwise known as becoming mindful.

Part of this process includes colossal failures. But I've never failed, just learned humongous lessons that won't be repeated. Acknowledging that more can be accomplished with "good enough" than perfection has also lifted some weight off my shoulders.

I recently discovered the work of Dr. Ellen Langer, Ph.D., a social psychologist and the first female professor to gain tenure in the psychology department at Harvard University. Her research on mindfulness has greatly influenced various fields, from economics to health. It reveals that by paying attention to what's going on around us, instead of operating on auto-pilot, we can reduce stress, unlock creativity, and boost performance.

A March 2014 Harvard Business Review interview with Langer addresses some valuable benefits to mindfulness outside of yoga and better sleep. She explains that "mindfulness is the process of actively noticing new things and when you do that, it puts in the present. Making you more sensitive to perspective and context. It is being engaged."

Benefits included increased innovation, added charisma and being less judgmental. She cites multiple cases documenting these benefits, including when the performance of orchestra musicians improved when encouraged to tweak their routine performance slightly. The result was a more robust, vibrant piece, played with increased engagement. By being engaged, and authentic a salesperson becomes more charismatic, likable. He or she establishes a stronger connection to the client and toward understanding the root need driving decision making or the purchase. After all, you buy from people you like, not the one treating you like a number and pushing a product on you.

And we tend to categorize people, mindlessly. Or judge them by a trait or single instance, preventing us from forging deeper relationships or using their talents effectively. Mindfulness, per Langer, "helps you appreciate why people behave the way they do." Or as I've written previously, it permits us to walk in their shoes and minimize or eliminate biases and stereotypes.

Incorporating mindfulness into our everyday world is doable, and no, I'm not recommending we all break out our yoga mats and start chanting, although that would work wonders for employee morale! One way to approach change is to start small. Begin by including a piece on mindfulness in your employee newsletters. Encourage the team to be present and authentic with your clients. Ensure your professional development training curriculum covers mindfulness. Not only can mindfulness reduce stress and anxiety, thereby improving our health, but there is the added benefit to the business of increased innovation, improved performance and greater productivity. Make the changes bearable, bite-sized. And begin to reap the rewards.

I can assure you that there were problems and challenges this week. But I am not writing about the problems. I choose to be mindful and savor the wins. Amigos, till next time.

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<http://thedailyrecord.com/2015/07/19/veronica-cool-mindfulness-and-winning/>