




Mindful@Work

mindfulness training course
of 6 weeks

Foreword What can mindfulness do for you?


Mindfulness means
paying attention in a particular way:
on purpose, in the present moment,
and non-judgmentally.
Jon Kabat-Zinn

You're about to embark on a mindfulness-training program. Hopefully it will be a fascinating and enriching journey of discovery for you, just as it has been for the many thousands who undertook it before you. It is a journey that will not only provide you more insight into how your mental capital functions, but will also offer you exercises to develop and strengthen that capital further.

By now there are literally thousands of scientific studies describing the effects of this training. Mindfulness has a positive impact on your mental alertness, your focus, your authenticity and your commitment. Your communication goes smoother, you can better cope with stress, you experience a surge in creativity and you discover a greater freedom of choice in your reactions. Your sleep quality improves, the risk of a burnout decreases and your quality of life increases.

Mindfulness training requires patience and discipline. That is why the guidance of your trainer and the social support of your group are important to grow along this path. It's as if you'll be following a mental start-to-run plan in the next six weeks, not to make your physical muscular strength more supple and stronger, but to strengthen your mental resilience. Your mental start-to-run starts here!

We wish you a fascinating and enriching journey!

Team Itam

Introduction How is the training program structured?

“You can't stop the waves,
but you can learn how to surf.”

The six sessions form a logical whole in which each session builds on the previous one. There are three steps in this process:

STEP 1: CALMING THE MIND BY STOPPING AND LANDING

It is important that you first learn to find peace of mind so that the dust can settle and you can have a sharper view of the situation. The bottom line is that you learn to cope better with restlessness and stress. By finding inner peace, you'll be less prone to react on autopilot.

S of stopping

Firstly, mindfulness teaches you to stop. The ability to stop is the first essential basic skill. It sounds simple enough, but in our daily rush it is often not easy to stop, even if only for 2 minutes. This ability enables you to let go and put things into perspective. For many people, this is a vital exercise.

L of landing in this moment

The aim is to arrive in the present moment. You can do this by making conscious contact with your body. After all, your body is always 'here and now', while your mind is constantly shuttling back and forth between past and future. You learn, so to speak, to come home to your body, in the present moment. Literally by just sitting or lying down. You can pay attention to the sensations of your body and the movements of your breath. You bring your mind to rest and let the dust settle.

You'll learn:

- to arrive in the present moment
- a set of basic techniques to create peace, stability and relaxation
- how to come home to yourself

You'll experience:

- an increase of your quality of life
- a better sleep quality
- an increase of your productivity
- a decrease of your impulsiveness

STEP 2: EXPLORING THE MIND - OBSERVING WHAT EMERGES

Then comes the time to observe and open up to what's happening. Because when you stop and land, thoughts, sounds, emotions, physical sensations inevitably come along. You'll notice what comes along, but you don't get stuck with it. You'll accept what passes by and just let everything happen. You observe what emerges with a frank, gentle attitude. Without striving, without judging, you dwell on the richness of this moment.

Your mind is your main working capital. Yet you may rarely, if ever, dwell on the workings of your brain. How do cognitive and emotional processes function and what is their impact on your stress levels and your behavior?

You'll learn:

- to get to know your own mental patterns better
- to establish more conscious contact with your body, which is an excellent stress barometer
- to break through your habitual patterns and your autopilot

You'll experience:

- an increase in your creativity and your ability to think laterally
- more freedom of choice, allowing you to make decisions better in accordance with your personal values

STEP 3: CONNECTING MINDS - ACTING FROM INSIGHT WITH WISDOM

You'll react less impulsively, but from a broader perspective, with more insight and stability. That's what we call acting with more wisdom. Mindfulness is certainly not an invitation to passivity. It is an attitude to life that helps you to act authentically and driven by value.

You'll search for your own personal values and needs and how you can realize them in your daily conduct. You'll get acquainted with various communication styles. You'll build a connecting dialogue with others, both at home and at work.

You'll learn:

- to draw up a value-driven, personal action plan
- to communicate more efficiently through nonviolent communication

You'll experience:

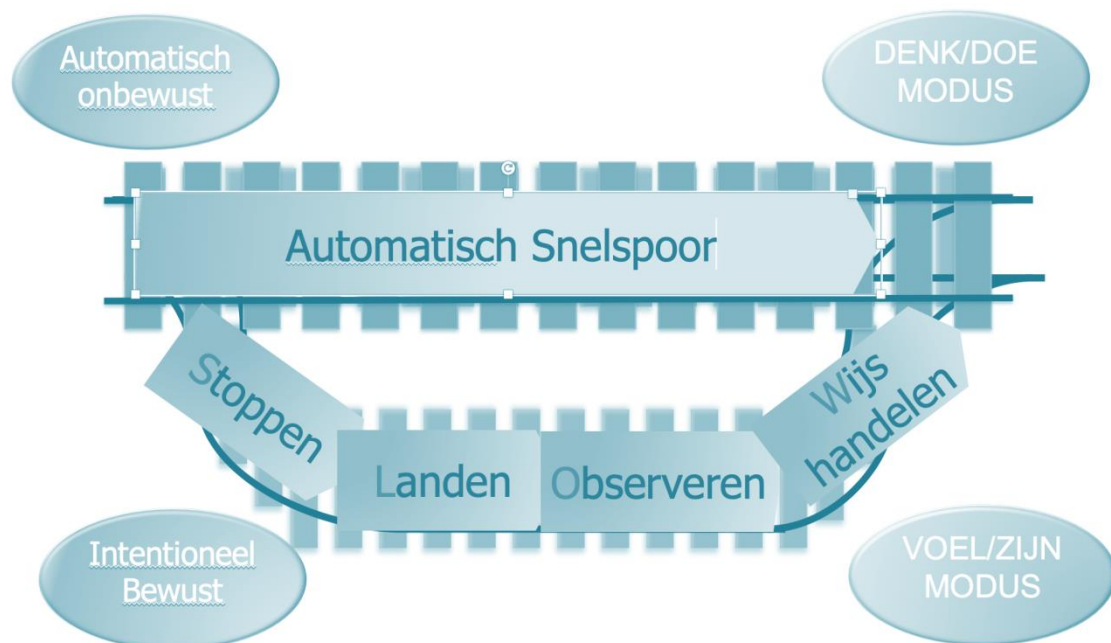
- your authentic personal leadership style
- how liberating it is to live and work in accordance with your own values

SLOW an acronym that summarizes the whole process

Introduction Switching to the SLOW track

"When The Winds Of Change Blow,
Some People Build Walls,
Others Build Windmills"

Mindfulness training will make you aware of the doing/thinking mode in which your mind is trapped, automatically and unconsciously (this automatic fast track is also known as autopilot). You'll learn intentionally and consciously to switch to the feeling/being mode of the SLOW track. This will eventually bring you back to the active thinking/doing mode, enriched with wisdom. So it is not a sidetrack, because those tracks usually have a dead-end.



This SLOW schedule will also serve as guideline for the coming 6 weeks:

Week 1 - 2: learning how to STOP and LAND via breath focus, body scan...

Week 3 - 4: learning to OPEN through sounds and sensations, through yoga, through thoughts and emotions

Week 5 - 6: learning to act with WISDOM through acceptance, through value-driven action, through nonviolent communication

The nice thing about the SLOW acronym is that it also has a meaning of its own pointing to a pleasant side effect of this attitude to life: namely that you'll run less through life and you'll stand still more consciously and experience what you are feeling at that moment. SLOW'ing is not a plea for a slower life, but for going through life acting more consciously.

It is important to practice daily. The effect of this training depends on the formal exercises. It is best to insert these exercises as a fixed ritual in your day. Just as you brush your teeth daily, you can also brush your brain daily from now on.



Have you Brushed Your Brain Today?

WEEK 1

Calming the mind

TO STOP AND LAND

Mindfulness: a description

The automatic pilot

To stop and land

Body scan

Week 1 calming the mind to stop and land

●●
Yesterday is history.
Tomorrow is a mystery.
Today is a gift.
It's called PRESENT

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

In essence, mindfulness comes down to training a special form of being attentive, which is also called mindful awareness.

- It is conscious attention: you decide to let go of your autopilot with the aim of consciously looking at what is passing through your body and mind. Looking mindfully is therefore the result of a conscious decision.
- It is an open form of attention: you are open to everything that passes by in your mind or body here and now, you do not reject anything, you do not exclude anything, whether it is pleasant or not.
- It is gentle attention: you do not judge or condemn, and when judgments do come, you look at them graciously, without self-reproach.
- Your attention is focused on what is happening in the present moment: usually our thoughts are mainly busy contemplating the past or planning or fantasizing about the future. There is nothing wrong with that in itself, but this automatic behavior can cause us to lose contact with what is happening here and now.

WHAT SCIENCE SAYS ABOUT MINDFULNESS TRAINING

In recent years, thousands of scientific studies have appeared on the effects of mindfulness. This makes mindfulness an evidence-based practice. It turns out that mindfulness has an effect on your brain that is visible on brain scans relatively quickly (i.e.: after a trajectory of a few weeks). For example, your amygdalae - two almond-shaped nuclei that are seen as your alarm buttons - literally shrink and calm down after just 30 hours of practice. Sometimes even a reduction of reaction by as much as 50% was observed!

Scientific research also shows that working with mindfulness increases your resilience - the speed with which you recover from a stressful event - and stimulates your creativity, as well as having a positive effect on the way you interact with yourself and others.

Mindfulness is originally a Buddhist meditation technique that is known as Vipassana. Internationally this training method has become known as MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction) and MBCT (Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy). Attention training is a technique that is about 2,500 years old. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a microbiologist and teacher at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, introduced mindfulness in his hospital to help patients who could no longer be helped by the Western medical world. Meanwhile, experience shows that the technique(s) improves the quality of life of a very wide audience. Jon Kabat-Zinn describes mindfulness as: "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmental. This kind of attention nurtures greater awareness, clarity and acceptance of present moment reality."

Mindfulness is successfully applied to various target groups including people with anxiety disorders, depression, psychosis, cancer, and chronic pain. Today, the technique has also found its way into the business world. Studies prove that mindfulness is effective in combating stress, preventing burnout and optimizing aspects such as authenticity, commitment, etc.

The Itam-training offers you a scientifically based ensemble that combines Eastern wisdom with Western psychology.

We'd like to ask you not to take what you've just read for granted. Rather, we invite you to explore this yourself and with your peers during the course of the program.

- What do you notice going on in yourself during the course of the training?
- How does that play out for you?
- Perhaps it increases your quality of being, of life?

We are looking forward to your feedback.

THE AUTOMATIC PILOT



Come and see for yourself
Ehipassiko

When we eat, brush our teeth, open the door, have a conversation or drive the car, we are usually on automatic pilot. This means that we are not really aware of what we are doing; we live part of our lives in a state of unawareness. This automatic skill is necessary for us to navigate our way through life.

Besides the advantages this automatic pilot offers it also has many disadvantages. Sometimes we 'drive' a large part of our lives without really being aware, without the richness of observing the unique moment. What's more we are also prone to reactivity. Specific thoughts, emotions and sensations are awakened in us, outside our conscious will. This automatic reaction often has a negative impact on our mood and induces stress.

By becoming more aware of our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations, at all times, we offer ourselves the possibility of choice and freedom. The objective of this programme is to increase your awareness. This allows us to react appropriately and consciously to unique situations instead of automatically.

This is a mental training course. Simply attending the lesson once a week is not enough. Compare it to learning to play the piano.

'Practise makes perfect' also applies to this course.

THE BODY SCAN

"With the body scan you bring your body and mind together
in one and the same place: the here and now."

The aim of the body scan is to learn to direct your attention by being consciously present while noticing all parts of your body. You stop and land in the present moment, you visit your body, so to speak, with curious, candid attention. Moreover, the body scan can have a relaxing effect, although that is not the primary goal.

Don't expect anything. Let go of every expectation. Don't judge. Give the exercises a chance. Think of it as an experiment. You don't have to like it. Just do it. Take notes. We'll discuss your findings next week as a part of the next session. There are audio files with different durations. We suggest once a day, if that's feasible for you.

Note: sometimes the trainer decides to do a breath focus instead of a body scan in session 1. The instructions for this can be found on pg. 14.

WEEK 2

Calming the mind

TO STOP AND LAND

Breathing

Doing versus being

The qualities of mindfulness

Thoughts, emotions & physical sensations

Week 2 calming the mind to stop and land

●●
You don't have to like it,
just do it.

BREATHING: FOCUS

Breath is life; The breath is always there, at all times, flowing by itself like a river.

In this training course we use breathing as an anchor to bring awareness and stability to the body and mind when we deliberately choose to be aware of it. We can tune in to it at any moment in our daily lives; our breathing is always there.

We do not usually notice our breathing, it is just there. One of the first things that we do in attention training is to consciously come into contact with it. We observe how our breathing changes with our mood, our thoughts and our movements.

Be careful, we are not going to try and control our breathing. Sometimes it may be that you control your breathing or have learned to control it. This can also become an automatism. If you notice this in yourself, you can note this tendency to control and continue to observe your breathing. During this training course we learn to notice the breathing, observe it and experience it in an interested, respectful way.

You could say that these exercises train a 'mental muscle'.
Even if you do not always see the point of the exercises, you will still notice that small changes occur in all kinds of life situations through practising mindfulness.

Just do it!

TIPS FOR FOCUSING ON BREATHING AND THE BODYSCAN

Even though sometimes you won't see the point of the exercises, you'll find that in all kinds of life situations small shifts will occur by practicing mindfulness.

Perform your meditation under the 'right' conditions:

regular, frequent, peaceful, non-judgmental and accepting

- Anything that emerges during meditation is allowed to be present; they are your experiences in the present moment, consciously devote attention to them with acceptance; this is what the exercise is all about.
- Approach your experience of each moment with the following attitude: "OK, this is precisely how it is now".
- Whatever happens (thinking about something else, feeling nothing, losing concentration, experiencing nothing, falling asleep, etc.) just stay with the experience of the moment. Be aware. Don't see it as a distraction but as a vital part of the exercise.
- If your thoughts are all over the place, be affectionately aware of the thoughts (as fleeting events). Gently bring your thoughts back to your breathing or the part of the body on which you were focusing.
- If impatience, boredom, doubt or irritation emerge, also be aware of this event and bring your attention back to your breathing or the part of the body on which you were focusing.
- If you try and suppress thoughts, feelings or sensations it will only serve to distract you.

DOING VERSUS BEING – MODES

“
You are a human being,
not a human doing

We humans are usually always busy, always wanting to do things, plan, think. The mindfulness training teaches you to discover that it is also valuable to be ordinary once in a while, without a doubt.

DOING

Be driven by a **goal**.

Comparing, **evaluating**. The difference between how it is now and how it 'should' be, wanting to solve it or make it as small as possible. Constantly measuring how far we are from our goal.

Solution-oriented

Limited attention to the present, thinking about the **past, present and future**.

Multitasking

Automatic thoughts and feelings are quickly **'triggered'**.

Little attention to **subtle** feelings and body sensations.

Ability to endure discomfort is low -> **rapid response**

BEING

Just being present, **without wanting to achieve anything**, without making demands.

Observing, experiencing without judging, without wanting to be different, just seeing what is, without intervening.

Neutral observer

Let be what is

Strong attention to the here-and-now; past and future are less prominent.

Single-tasking

Automatic thoughts and feelings **are less likely to be 'activated'**.

More attention to **subtle** feelings and body sensations.

Ability to endure discomfort increases -> **patience**

THE QUALITIES OF MINDFULNESS

In the mind of the beginner there are infinite possibilities.

In the mind of the specialist only a few.

Zen

Our default setting is to respond to situations on autopilot (often out of suspicion, attachment, judgment, impatience...). Through mindfulness you train yourself not to respond out of these automatic reactions, but to use a different frame of values.

Mindfulness is built on 8 fundamental values. These values represent the foundation of the exercises. These values ultimately form the link to everyday life.

Trust and confidence

In you and your feelings - In your own authority, your wisdom - In your goodness

Letting go/Letting be

Not being attached, not holding on to or pushing away thoughts, feelings, body sensations and experiences.

The acceptance

Wanting to see things as they really are in the present moment makes it possible to act appropriately. "You have to accept yourself as you are before you can really change. »

Non-judgment

Position as an impartial witness of his experience

Patience and patience

Let things unfold at their own pace. Why rush at certain times to reach others that are "better"?

Endlessly starting over

Keeping a beginner's mind, fresh (research) eyes. See things as if for the first time, pay attention to all observations, thus creating possibilities.

Not striving

Letting go of goals, not being attached to an outcome or the thought of achievement.

Mildness

Compassion, loving kindness: a quality that has to do with wanting to be good, honoring, forgiving and loving someone unconditionally, yourself included.

Empathy

Softness (also towards yourself), appreciation and gratitude (for the present moment). Generosity (being able to give without expecting anything in return).

These values represent, so to speak, the bright stars in the firmament. Imagine that you are sailing on the high seas and all you have to determine your course are the sextant and the position of the stars. These stars, then, lead the way. You don't have to reach them, but they show you the direction. You can engage with these values similarly.

THOUGHTS, EMOTIONS AND PHYSICAL SENSATIONS

Mindfulness confronts you with what is
in you right now, in your turmoil.

Erik van Vooren

These constitute the building blocks of our lives. They influence each other all the time. Learning to notice and handle them is the stepping-stone to much wisdom.

Some thoughts, emotions or physical sensations are pleasant, others aren't. The examples below can be helpful when filling in a calendar of pleasant and less pleasant experiences:

Physical sensations/feelings: tension in the abdomen, neck, head..., lump in throat, pressure on chest, cramp in stomach, stabbing pain in head, burning tears... goose bumps, jitters, cold, hot, pulling, pushing, trembling, tingling, beating, sharp, dull, flowing, soft, relaxed, tense, movement, quiet, sweating, cramping, constriction, laughing, weeping, trembling, sweating, blushing...

Thoughts:

- judgments: this is fun, this is annoying, I'm so slow, the voice is irritating, the mp3 doesn't work, the body scan takes too long...
- future: I'll never learn this, I still have to do all sorts of things; how will tomorrow be.... ; if I don't master this by now, I'll never learn...
- fantasizing: maybe tomorrow will be better/ worse/ easier/ harder/ if I hadn't had an accident, then... ; if my boss would've...
- holding on: it feels so nice; I don't feel like letting this go; it was so nice then..., why is it now...; I liked that holiday resort so much, I want to go back to it...
- disgust: I don't want to deal with that person; I don't want this feeling; I don't want this pain...

Emotions:

- happy: pleasant, excited, exuberant, energetic, great, calm, relieved, involved, active, happy, liberated, euphoric, enraptured, cheerful...
- sad: sadness, low energy, empty, miserable, unwanted, discouraged, ashamed, not appreciated, melancholic, void, loveless, gloomy, jealous...
- angry: furious, irritated, disgusted, pissed off, betrayed, deceived, disappointed, displeased, discontent, indifferent...
- afraid: panicky, vulnerable, threatened, confused, intimidated, nervous, uncertain, doubtful, jumpy, anxious...
- confused: vague, directionless, bewildered, indecisive, distracted, foggy, disorganized, ambiguous, insecure, numb, hilarious...

Pain and fatigue: a different story altogether!

It seems so obvious to classify pain or fatigue in the list of physical sensations. But when you pay attention carefully, these often turn out to be a mixture of experiences. These experiences are also constantly evolving, sometimes from one moment to the next.

The guest house

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Rumi

WEEK 3

Exploring the mind

OPENING UP TO SENSATIONS AND SOUNDS

Physical sensations
Being aware of stress
Coping with limitations
Mindful energy management

Week 3 exploring the mind opening up to sensations and sounds

REMAINING PRESENT IN THE MOMENT

"Everything that has a beginning has an end.
Make peace with that, and everything will be alright."
Boeddha

So far, we have focused on the first two letters in the SLOW model, namely Stopping and Landing. This is important to build up the necessary peace, focus and stability. (Calming the mind). Now you are ready to move on to the letter O in the SLOW model: Opening up to Openly Observe what is happening in the present moment. (Exploring the mind).

As well as being aware of our breathing we cultivate attention for the body as an anchor in the here and now. You can do so by being aware of your posture at any moment of the day.

- Which sensations are you experiencing NOW while you are reading this? (Hard, soft, cold, warm, flexible, stiff, movement etc.)
- Which sensations do you experience when you stand up?
- Which sensations do you experience when you sit down?
- Which sensations do you experience when you walk?

Patiently practise the perception of what happens. The body is always there. This enables you to assign mindfulness a place in your life.

Stress awareness

Use your body as an effective stress barometer! Examine which signs of stress are present in your thoughts, emotions and physical sensations. You can consult these lists of possible signs of stress to help you on your way.

Physical: headache, indigestion, stomach pain, sweaty palms, sleep problems, dizziness, red patches on the body, stiff neck, pain in the shoulders, back pain, restlessness, tiredness, ringing in the ears ...

Emotional: feeling annoyed with everything, being on the verge of exploding, being unhappy for no reason, powerlessness, anxiety, nervousness, anger, loneliness, upset, doubting, apathy, feeling empty, distrust, intolerance

Cognitive : memory loss, lack of creativity, inability to make a decision, lack of humour, can't think clearly, constantly worrying, constantly planning, thinking of running away ...

That means to patiently practice observing what is around. The body is always present. Soon it will become a second nature to be conscious of your slightest movements. Be aware of what you are doing. That way you give mindfulness a place in your life.

COPING WITH LIMITATIONS

Paying attention to your own body brings you closer to the here and now of your own experience. The Yoga exercises teach you to get in touch with your body, to know and respect your own boundaries. You'll experience that there are soft boundaries, where there might be some margin left to push ahead a little further, on the one hand, and hard boundaries that kindly invite you to 'go there but not further', on the other hand.

This story of boundaries applies to one's daily routine as well. There you can notice that there are boundaries that are sometimes determined externally, for example because you want to meet the expectations of others. You want to achieve what the other person has: 'If that is possible for them, then I can do that as well'. Other boundaries are shaped by a kind of internal norm, for example by setting the bar high, higher, highest, your own 'musts', finding yourself valuable only when this or that is met, persevering, no bellyaching, wanting to go faster/better yourself. This is the boundary of 'never enough'.

All these conditionings or habitual patterns reveal themselves in small things. The trick is to learn to notice them.

For instance, in yoga:

- Don't compare. Not with your neighbor or with yourself at other times. What is your body telling now? Try noticing whether there lurks an internal voice inviting you to compare anyway.
- Use your breath as a yardstick. If you are out of breath or your breath is balking, then you're probably standing on the verge of the boundary or you've crossed it already.
- Pain is a warning from the body. Don't keep going at times when you feel pain. Explore the border zone. Stay just below the pain threshold.

APPLICATION OF BODY AWARENESS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Be aware of what boundaries do to you. Are boundaries new challenges that you have to overcome immediately? Or do you tend to give up long before the boundary is in sight because you are convinced you won't make it anyway? Every time you touch a boundary, your body will promptly inform you.

Assume maximum responsibility. Often, in those situations, we externalize the cause of our tension onto another person. However, you can learn to turn this 'difficult moment' into a SLOW-moment by using the following diagram:

The diagram will answer the question: who or what is responsible for my problem? The cause can be found in the following places:

	CONTROLLABLE	INCONTROLLABLE
INTERNAL	1	3
EXTERNAL	2	4

This table basically comes down to the fact that people grow and become dynamic when the problems are assigned as type 1.

This does NOT imply that type 1 means that you are guilty or that it is your fault. It only implies a space, an opening by managing what is present in a different way.

The more you view the cause of your own situation as type 4, the more you will consider yourself to be, and behave as, a victim. This will be reflected in your communication with co-workers, colleagues or customers. You will also take this home to your family members and it forms the basis for a certain bitterness.

Mindfulness is a fundamental invitation to grow. It's up to you...

MINDFUL ENERGY MANAGEMENT

You just got back from your summer holiday. You're heading for work full of energy. New ideas can count on the support and appreciation of your colleagues, during a meeting there is time for humor and the atmosphere breaths openness.

How come a few weeks later this feeling has disappeared? Difficulty getting out of bed, not feeling like wanting to face the day, working requires more effort... and, yet, some people still arrive whistling through a December day. Why is that? Where does he find the strength and the energy?

Set the battery analogy aside

In daily life we speak of energy as a certain amount of limited energy. Statements like 'I'm out of energy' or 'I still have energy for that' give us the impression that we have a built-in battery like the one in a mobile phone.

However, that analogy is not entirely accurate. Because when you're lying on the couch exhausted and you receive a phone call from someone who's presenting you with a great idea, you can suddenly feel filled with more energy.

So energy is something that can be stimulated. There are things that give you energy and things that cost you energy. It's useful to have an overview of these things for yourself.

To this end, the following exercise can shape an image, so that you can make conscious choices stemming from being in contact with yourself.

What (who) costs energy - what (who) gives energy?

What is positive for me?

Go through an average day. What makes you feel alive and present in life? (Energy givers)

What reduces my energy?

Which activities reduce your quality of life? What makes you feel worse? (Energy wasters)

Remember that there are numerous activities you can't avoid: an accepting, wise attitude is key here.

- How can you put more time and effort into your energy givers and less into your energy wasters?
- Maybe - if you consider a different attitude towards that activity - you can turn an energy waster into an energy giver?

TIPS: TO NOT USE/CONSUME MORE ENERGY THAN NECESSARY (AT WORK)

Working with to-do lists and task lists. Our brain constantly ruminates and regularly alerts us to what we still have to do. This consumes a lot of energy and gives us little peace of mind. It is best not to use our brains as a storage medium. That's why it's good to write those things down we still have to do: a to-do list for things in the short-term, another for of tasks in the long-term.

Don't postpone. The longer you delay, the more energy it takes and the more effort it will require to finally get the task done. Just get started, without worrying or putting yourself under needless pressure.

The efficiency of your work increases if you:

- do one thing at a time and until it is finished: finalizing a document, calling a colleague, it's best done consecutively. This allows you to devote your full attention to that single activity and that will bring calmness to your work; set aside your inner multitasker; our brain isn't capable of performing two things at the same time.
- bundle your tasks: divide a large pile of work into smaller sub-tasks and - as described above - deal with them one by one.
- consider what you are doing and 'accept' your task: take a moment to realize that the task or activity you have chosen is the only task of that very moment. Practically you do this by thinking about it for a moment, preferably at the beginning of the activity. Fulfill the action with natural attention and fully accept each action as your task at that moment. Stay flexible; it's normal that you can't fulfill that task with full attention all of the time.
- give full attention to 'knockers': if something comes in-between tasks, such as a colleague needing help, or a phone call, interrupt your main activity and give your full attention to what is happening. By switching completely, you experience the interruption as a separate item instead of a disturbing factor. You also won't get stuck between two things. If you would like to continue working, you can of course do so. If something comes to mind that you will have to do later, then that's also a 'knocker-out'. Visualize for a moment what you have to do to carry out the task. For check-up, you can put the action in your diary.
- Get to know your own peak hours. A morning person is immediately cheerful and wide-awake to face the day. For others, it works differently altogether. Either way: we all have a certain moment of the day when we are much more productive. Do your most thought-intensive tasks during those periods when you naturally feel more energetic. The 'mindless' tasks can then be performed at times when you experience an energy drain, whether it's in the morning or during an afternoon dip.
- reserve time slots and pour them into a schedule: to render your own peak hours even more efficient, you can take advantage of the scarcity of the time that's available to you and put it into a schedule. You can work with time slots in order to be able to finish something. To make sure your projects are realizing progress, it's also best to make sure to put these blocks into a schedule. For example, following up emails every day from 9 am to 10 am, work on project x every Monday from 10 am to 1 pm. Maintain that schedule consistently.
- dare to be unavailable and unforeseen: dare to be 'unavailable' to colleagues once in a while and leave room in your planning for unforeseen circumstances or for things that might not run the way you would have wanted them to.

- don't consider 'important' and 'urgent' to be identical: if you only do the work that's in front of you, you are doing well in the short term, but in the long run this will put less urgent matters on an endless waiting list. As a consequence, relationships, sports, relaxation... will seem less important than your boss or colleague who is waiting for your mails and results.
- if you consider 'important' and 'urgent' to be synonymous, you may end up in a problem zone. Instead of saying, 'I don't have time for this', it's better to say: 'This is not a priority now.' This actually turns 'I don't have time to have lunch with you' into 'It's not a priority for me to have lunch with you.' It doesn't feel right to say that and that's exactly why it will work, because you will occasionally allow yourself to have lunch and work on your relationships. You can prioritize almost anything you need to do.
- at the end of the working day, draw up a list of three top priorities for the next working day.

Digital detox tips:

- Keep a digital diary for a while:
- How many times do you check your e-mail, Facebook, mobile phone or another channel?
- How much time does this consume?
- Where do you do this?
- How do you feel afterwards?
- Check your e-mails at fixed times instead of interrupting your tasks for incoming e-mails.
- Divide your e-mails into folders: delete - delegate- do.
- When you send an e-mail or message, first tune in with the intention of doing so.
- Before sending a friendship request, check if you really want to follow-up that person.
- Don't open your work mail after a certain time, or during the weekend.
- Turn off your mobile phone or other channels during a (family) trip.
- Use a radio alarm clock instead of your mobile phone as an alarm clock.
- Do not immediately reach for your mobile phone or tablet during moments of waiting.

WEEK 4

Exploring the mind

OPENING FOR THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS

The mental 'poison'

SLOW

Managing stress

Managing thoughts and emotions

Week 4 exploring the mind opening for thoughts and emotions

THE MENTAL 'POISON'

Work pressure, work overload, deadlines, difficulties, pain, uncertainty, sadness, perfectionism, etc. These may be less agreeable things but they are nonetheless a part of life.

The way we cope with these issues determines whether they control our life or whether we can manage them creatively.

There are three reactions that ensure that unpleasant experiences get worse and transform into suffering:

1. Attachment, desire, wanting more and the urge to protest

We find a situation unpleasant and long for it to be different. We think we will find 'happiness' there somewhere. One typical expression of this is 'if only'. If only that would work out, if only I had that job, if only I could satisfy that customer, etc. To repeatedly arrive at this point and ensure the desire is constantly shifted. Note that this habit also transforms into suffering with pleasant situations. When things go well you do your best to try and prolong the situation. It is a form of control that you also continue to apply when the situation is uncontrollable.

2. Dislike, aversion, anger, hate, irritation and fury

A situation is unpleasant and we want it to end. We oppose it and become angry. It may involve internal elements such as certain physical complaints, thoughts or emotions you experience. You respond to sorrow with anger and self-pity. It may also involve external situations or persons. A co-worker, colleague, your partner or child that does something you find rather disagreeable. Sometimes our reactions are not proportionate to the event. Inappropriate reactions usually add fuel to the fire and cause the other person to become more tense and irritated.

The American mindfulness trainer Shinzen Young expresses it in a simple mathematical formula:

$$\text{SUFFERING} = \text{STRESS} \times \text{RESISTANCE}$$

3. Ignorance, lack of awareness, delusion

On the one hand this third category of mental poison demonstrates that we are extremely ignorant about our own reactive patterns. We are often so lost in thought and emotion that we don't realise there are negative or automatic thoughts. In fact we often seek out a lack of awareness.

We opt for the escape route offered by a lack of awareness:

- Sometimes in books, films, sport, sex, shopping etc.
- Sometimes in our work. By immersing ourselves in our work we can sometimes push aside unpleasant life events.
- We can also sometimes do this with food, alcohol, medication or drugs.

THE S L O W - MODEL IN PRACTICE

As your awareness increases, you will see - step by step - that these three subtle habits present themselves almost as in a continuous stream.

You're not supposed to fight these "mental poisons", because then you replace opium.

You enter into a relationship with what is 'there' and you do this by applying the S L O W model.


1. STOP First and foremost: learn to stop! Whatever you were doing: talking, writing or walking. This is the most difficult step. Therefore it is important to regularly incorporate conscious moments when you pause throughout your day.

2. LAND Then land in the here and now, in the present moment. You do so by focusing on your body or on your breathing. This is how you put your automatic pilot 'on hold' for a while.

3. OBSERVE You now have a moment to observe your thoughts, feelings, sounds and physical sensations that are in the foreground at the present moment. You observe them without allowing yourself to be carried away or resisting. Without trying, without judging, with modesty, patience, trust, a beginner's mind, with full acceptance and ready to let go (= the foundations of mindfulness).

4. WISE ACTS Instead of reacting on automatic pilot as we usually do, we consciously choose whether or not to adopt a particular action. This is possible because we are fully aware of the processes that are going on inside us. This allows us to act wisely with complete freedom (or not to act at all).

UNDERSTANDING STRESS BETTER


It's not the stress that kills us
It's our reaction to it
Hans Seyle

What is stress?

Stress = a reaction to a stimulus or condition that causes tension, a reaction that prepares for action.

There is a distinction between:

- stressor: the condition that causes stress (traffic jam, person, work,...);
- stress reaction/response: the reaction/response to that stressor (sweating, venting, crying, taking a moment to breath, stepping outside, ...).

Stress is the process that entails a consequence of the stressor and, at the same time, gives rise to a stress reaction/response.

Types of stress

Positive stress:

- prepares you mentally and physically for challenges, keeps you sharp and ready for action;
- no damage, passes quickly, interspersed with moments of recovery.

Negative stress:

- the challenge is greater than you can handle, without moments of recovery;
- negative tensions: danger to health;
- major and long-term effects on the central and autonomic nervous system (affecting brain connections).

How does the brain react to stress?

1st brain: oldest brain or reptile brain: works autonomously and does not listen to reason, instinctively starts working in the event of a stimulus of danger or a stimulus that is interpreted as danger; in this brain the automatic stress reactions of fighting or fleeing are situated, among other things.

2nd brain: emotional brain or the mammalian brain: associates the stress stimulus with emotions, which causes the brain to hold on to the stimulus. (Consider a rabbit: after about 20 seconds the stress is gone, they don't make that connection.)

3rd brain: frontal brain or neocortex: reasoning, choices, thinking about thinking... just by thinking about an experience that could give stress, or has given stress, we experience the stressful experience without being in the actual situation (e.g. post-traumatic stress experience)!

How does the body react to stress: Sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system

Certain situations are experienced as stressful and are interpreted by our brain as a danger. As soon as the brain detects danger, part of the brain triggers an alarm: that part is called the amygdala.

The sympathetic nervous system is activated: nerves that run from the spinal cord to all organs and ends of the body. It also activates the adrenal medulla, which secretes the hormones adrenaline and norepinephrine. This puts your body in a state of readiness. It makes you ready to fight or flee. Just like in prehistoric times, when humans had to flee from or fight against predators.

Your heart rate accelerates. This is needed to pump blood to your muscles. Your breathing becomes faster and more superficial so that your muscles receive more oxygen. The fine blood vessels contract so as not to waste blood in case you were to be injured. That's why you turn white and have cold hands when you're under stress. The secretion of sweat increases, to avoid overheating if you have to flee or fight. After such a stressful incident, your body usually finds peace again. The adrenaline level returns to normal. If, however, you experience stress for a long time, your adrenaline level will be constantly too high, like being in a car with a depressed gas pedal with the brakes broken.

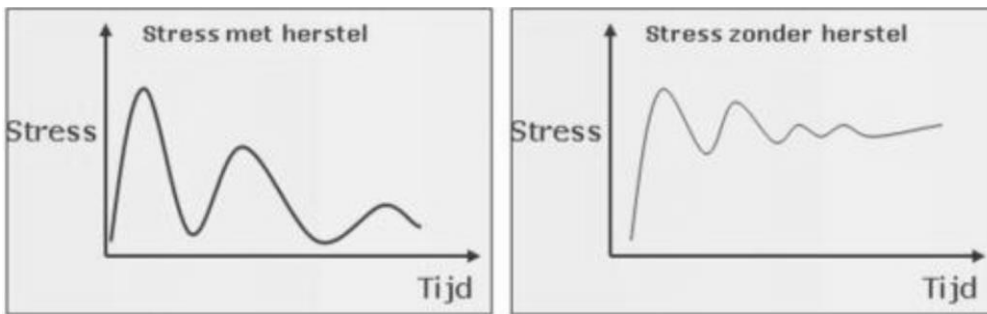
In addition, a second process takes place: the adrenal cortex produces cortisol. The most important function of cortisol is to ensure that you can also cope with the threatening situation in the long run, by increasing your blood sugar levels, among other things. After all, you need this 'fuel' to fight or flee.

This second system of cortisol production occurs when you end up in a state of stress for a prolonged period of time and you are no longer able to handle it properly. Research has shown that the production of cortisol particularly increases with passive problem management: when you freeze instead of fighting or fleeing.

One of the negative consequences of the cortisol production is that certain functions of your immune system are temporarily shut down to save energy. The immune system takes care of recovery processes. For example, inflammatory reactions to promote wound healing, or long-term defensive processes. If the immune system is shut down or works at a low level, you can get inflammations more often. In the long run, too high a cortisol level can cause your brain to shrink and you can experience concentration problems.

Your body sends you signals telling you to take it easy. Its built-in protection mechanism causes you to develop all kinds of complaints. Your body tells you that you need to withdraw in order for it to recover. That is why you can see burnout as the starting point for your recovery. Your body has applied the brakes so as to prevent worse (cardiac arrest, death).

Healthy stress?



Healthy tension curve

Unhealthy tension curve

The peak with healthy stress is as high as it is with unhealthy stress, but with healthy stress there is an alternation between relaxation and tension. If unhealthy stress persists for a longer period of time and one is given little time to recover, the risk of absenteeism increases. If the pressure persists for too long and there are no possibilities to recover, the stretch will run out.

STRESS REACTION VERSUS STRESS RESPONSE

“
Between stimulus and response there is a space.
In that space is our power to choose our response.
In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

Viktor E. Frankl

TO REACT happens automatically and unconsciously. At such a moment your behavior is entirely determined by the behavior of the other person or by your own conditionings.

- FLIGHT: You feel threatened by the stress, you don't want to face it (anymore), you avoid the problem... you flee from it.
- FIGHT: You are going to fight the stress, either by acting against yourself (ignoring, silencing, denying, condemning...) or against another person (getting cheeky, snappy, angry, grumpy...).
- FREEZE: You are so overwhelmed by the stress that you are no longer able to react. You are paralyzed and you fall silent, in words and deeds.

TO RESPOND requires sufficient mindfulness/attention in order to see what is actually happening and to consider your freedom of choice. Meditation overturns the obviousness, the automatism guiding your reactions. By consciously using the breathing space for unpleasant experiences, we give ourselves the opportunity to consciously respond through mindfulness instead of reacting automatically.

Pointing out stressful situations is already half the work. You will notice that it is not your life that is stressful, but that you have a number of stressful things in your life that you're able to solve. This gives you a lot of breathing space as well as the opportunity to acquire new behavioral patterns.

In this way, you take up responsibility for your own life. In this way, you cultivate your response-ability: the ability to give response.

REMANING IN THE PRESENT



This moment is the perfect teacher

Patiently practise by experiencing what it is. Make it second nature to observe even the smallest movements that you make. You can train yourself to be in the here and now and you can train and develop this alertness:

- When you are waiting (lift, computer, meeting, etc.)
- When you are stuck in traffic (when my car stops, so do I)
- When walking from one room to another
- By consciously drinking a cup of coffee, tea or water
- Experience sensations in your body when you are having a conversation with someone
- Observe experiences when working on your computer (sitting position, focus, effort, etc.)
- Notice automatic reactions (note the intention to view an e-mail when it comes in, etc.)
- You can observe your own thoughts and emotions during meetings. If you feel tension or frustration you can literally eliminate them by writing them down (don't do this if you are recording the minutes of the meeting 😊)

SIMPLE BUT NOT EASY

It takes perseverance, strength and discipline to draw your attention to your body again and again, to establish contact with the present moment over and over.

Paradoxically as it may sound, it seems like an effort, but it is relaxing to keep returning to the present moment. It enables you to be more conscious in life, even outside of meditation moments. You will gradually notice that, precisely by paying attention to the simple movements of your body, you will experience more energy and force of live in the present moment.

COPING WITH THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS


Mind is Minding
Leslie A. White

There are quite a few people who try and achieve a deeper level of peace through mindfulness. Somehow, perhaps due to numerous media images, people are convinced that one practises in a lotus position with a broad smile and an empty head. Nothing is further from the truth.

Careful observation of our 'human system' teaches us that the windmill of the mind is almost never still. We describe it as: The mind is minding. Our mind works the same way as a cow chews the cud in the meadow. Anything can appear, in the form of words, inner dialogues or in the form of images. With mindfulness, after the initial weeks of training, we will also now allow thoughts and emotions as objects.

We will only do this in week four. In the initial weeks we mainly made contact with the body. We did so through physical impressions, which with some training, gradually became easier to recognise. Thoughts and emotions however belong to a different category. The instrument remains the same (we continue to use our attention), but the object of our focus shifts to the more subtle formation of thoughts and emotions.

From session 4 we no longer advise you to 'park' your thoughts but to make them valuable exercise objects. Explore whether you observe that you are immersed 'in thoughts'. In other words you are kidnapped by your own flow of thoughts if you are not aware of it. This often results in emotion. If this is the case you may also be able to observe your moods and emotions. These moods may be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Learn to recognise moods and realise that thoughts are not facts.

Learning to identify 'thoughts' can help prevent 'the spiral of thoughts and emotions' receiving new input. In other words observation becomes a protective agent. It is enough to observe, with open attention, that thoughts are present and to mentally record this as 'thinking, thinking, etc.' Sometimes thoughts are powerful, sometimes they are subtle or they whisper to you. By touching upon them the thoughts can sometimes disappear, but not always. As long as they remain clearly in the foreground continue to simply identify them.

WEEK 5

Connecting minds

WISE ACTION

Acceptation and passivity
The turmoil in life
The prayer of serenity
Personal values as a compass

Week 5 connecting minds wise action

FROM ACCEPTANCE TO ACTION

Flexibility is mandatory
ADHD is the standard,
And burnout is the consequence!
Paul Verhaeghe

During weeks 5 and 6 we will move on to the last letter in the SLOW model: W of Wisdom. It's the way the mindfulness training is expressed in your behavior and your communication with other people. (Connecting minds)

We live in turbulent times. We are increasingly confronted with uncertainty. Day after day we are invited to deal with change in a flexible way. Whereas in the past you could be pretty sure of your function, your partner and your job, loyalty is now disappearing in many areas. We live in a fast-paced, flashy, ever changing society.

There seems to be a tendency in our society to avoid stability at all costs. This is not necessarily negative, because dynamic processes are particularly valuable. But it also implies an invitation not only to seek stability and strength outside yourself.

Through mindfulness you learn to make peace with that which is, to work on an unconditioned stability, equanimity. Whatever the circumstances, you can always find strength and stability in your own system.


Through mindfulness you'll get to know that power from a different angle, namely from a being mode: you let things be as they are. A mode in which you let the three subtle habits of the mind (aversion, desire and ignorance) gently lose power by rebalancing awareness, concentration and energy.

The consequences of this mode of being are that a certain acceptance can occur, that letting go and not striving are the basis of your constructive actions. You learn to make sharper analyses and to focus on those places where your behavior can make a difference.

In this sense accepting is not the same as becoming passive or giving up. It forms the basis of a constructive attitude to life.

The first step is simply to pay attention (awareness). That step allows you to perceive, to be aware without the ghost of the past or emotional discoloring. By cultivating such awareness, you strengthen the ability to accept and nurture the power to make wise decisions.

BASIC GUIDELINES


Your mind is like a parachute,
it only works when you open it!
Anthony J. D'Angelo

"As if acceptance is something you can do, a skill you can employ. Acceptance is not an activity you can perform as a result of a wilful decision. Accepting is to stop acting. Acceptance is nothing more than the absence of resistance. It is the quiet consciousness that gives space to everything that you are confronted with internally, impartially and without judgment. Once you make acceptance an activity that you can let loose at some point, disappointment is guaranteed. " Erik van Zuydam

Acceptance is achieved in two steps:

1. You open yourself up to what is present from one moment to the next (thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, etc.)
2. Observe how you manage them. Such as rejecting or pushing away unpleasant experiences and clinging to pleasant experiences. Each of these reactions is the opposite of acceptance and ensures that we create more stress and suffering in the long term.

A less forced way to assume experiences is to first stop wanting things to be different from what they are. Accepting an experience simply means that we create space for things that happen instead of wanting to do something else.

One sometimes speaks of the two wings of mindfulness: with the first wing you look at what you are experiencing here and now; with the second wing you contemplate your reaction to that experience.

MANAGING THE TURMOIL OF LIFE

Being totally and utterly in the present moment means: living with what is, what occurs, without condemning or justifying it. Each problem you perceive clearly, is resolved.

Krishnamurti

The above quote can be enlightening and although it is always calm in the eye of the storm ... it can sometimes be extremely violent on the edge.

For this purpose we describe several exercises that can offer the necessary stability in times of crisis:

- Use your breathing and awareness of your body to stabilise yourself. These elements are always available to you. Following the movement of your abdomen and observing the body as a whole are stabilising actions in themselves. If you don't immediately find peace, realise that this is also not the objective. Remember that you are making room for what is present. The problem carries the solution with it.
- If thoughts and emotions are too overwhelming and you are literally engulfed you can persevere and continue to wait patiently (everything that has a beginning also has an end). Or you can make your way to the side of the swimming pool by, for example, performing a counting meditation: breathe in - one, breathe out - two, breathe in - three, breathe out - four, and so on until you reach ten. Lost your place? Simply start again from the beginning.
- A clock meditation can also help you land in the here and now by focusing your concentration. You watch the dial and closely follow the second hand for one minute, second after second. With a digital clock you can combine the counting meditation when watching the numbers.
- Sometimes you can also just stop for a while by going to do something completely different. You could focus attentively for a while on some music. Follow the notes of the music remaining focussed, and if you drift off, just bring your thoughts back to the music.

SERENITY PRAYER

Sometimes there will be situations where change will prove to be difficult or impossible. In these situations, there lurks a danger of trying to solve an unsolvable problem. By not letting go, one eventually causes a feeling of helplessness, frustration and annoyance in oneself. In these cases, you can still maintain dignity and control by making a conscious decision not to want to control the situation and accept it as it is. Choosing not to take action may then be the best choice.

SERENITY PRAYER

Give us grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
which should be changed.

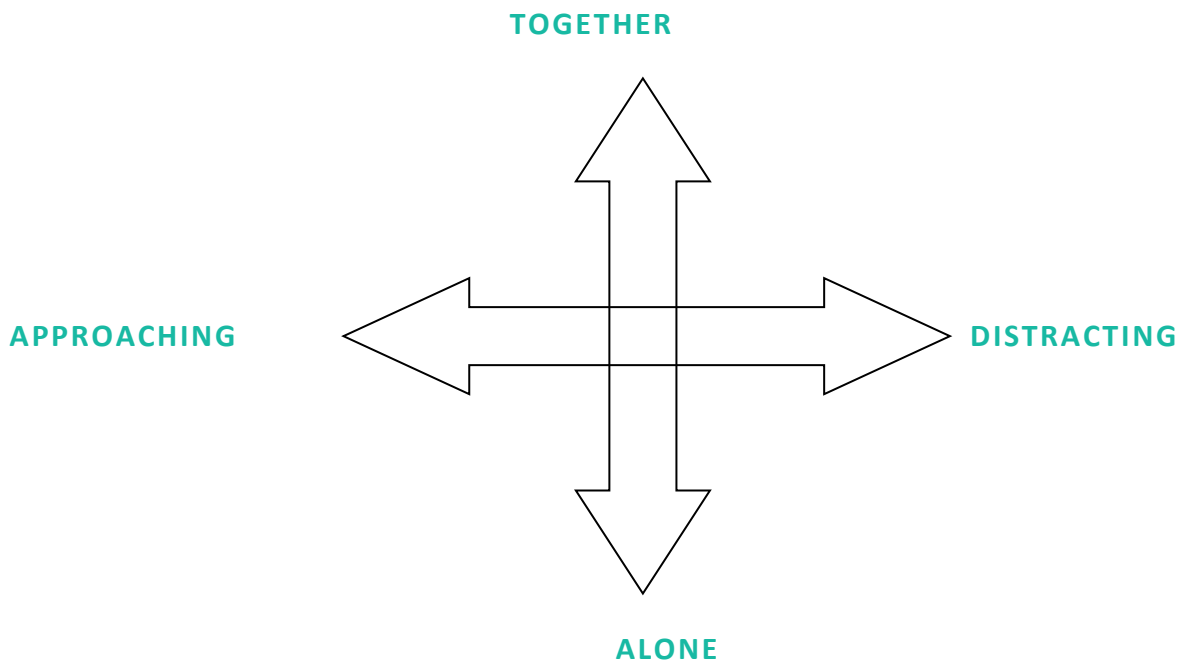
Reinhold Niebuhr

ACTIONS ARISING FROM THE MODE OF "BEING"

It is extremely useful to shift from the active mode of doing to the mode of being for a little while, to then take action from a broader perspective, with stability and awareness. There is also a risk that we then think we 'Must do things Mindfully'. This would be predetermined behaviour, mulled over in advance. Nothing is further from the truth. It means: STOPPING, LANDING and OBSERVING each time.

It means approaching life awake and alert each moment, making conscious choices instead of reacting automatically.

The following model can provide a useful frame of reference in this context:



This gives us four quadrants. The ability to be able to choose which quadrant we are now going to occupy partly concerns our freedom.

You can summarise all of these techniques in the following table:

	APPROACHING	DISTRACTING
ALONE	Meditation, breathing space, making an analysis, writing it down, etc.	Watching a film, taking a walk, eating or drinking, etc.
TOGETHER	Consulting, coaching, etc.	Going to the cinema together, eating or drinking together, travelling, etc.

For each of these interventions you must take into account: the law of the effect

If you try a door handle three times and the door doesn't open, it's a good idea to use the key. So always consider the consequences of your behaviour.

Do take into account that the consequences in the short term are sometimes different from those in the long term. For example, a couple of glasses of wine can be a good intervention, but in the long term may also become a problem.

PERSONAL VALUES AS A COMPASS -VALUE-DRIVEN ACTIONS

For many people, values are not immediately the most defining topic in their daily lives. We are 'busy', working on the concrete achievement of our assignments, be it private or professional.

However, without always being aware of it, you make choices based on personal values. Of course, personal values are in accordance with universal values such as respect for life, etc., but you also possess a personal hierarchy of values. That's why not everyone chooses the same bike, holiday destination, furniture, artwork, etc. Values play a part in making these choices: is it ecological, hi-tech, exclusive, safe, etc.?

Values have the quality that they can never be realized completely, absolutely. Perfection is simply not of this world. Honesty, respect, wisdom, creativity, helpfulness, health, connectedness, autonomy, involvement, goodness, well-being, etc., can never be achieved 100%. So: values guide our behavior, actions and objectives (which we can achieve nonetheless).

Sometimes life forces us to consciously stop and think about what is most valuable. For example, when a life-threatening illness is suddenly diagnosed. To enrich life and make it more meaningful, personal values can serve as our guides, motivators, beacons ... in defining specific initiatives or goals.

A common metaphor for values is the compass. A compass works in two ways: it indicates when you are moving towards your goal and when you are deviating from it. Both are important. With the help of a map, you can plan stages, determine milestones and landmarks, timing, and so on. However, the compass as a metaphor for values only indicates the general tendency. Traveling along a path is done step-by-step, every step counts. Consciously walking along the road is essential to stay on, or return to, the desired chosen route, as long as that remains your choice.

Benefits of bringing value-driven actions into your life:

- Awareness of personal values motivates you, gives you a sense of direction and attaches meaning (sense) to your actions. Values can serve as a powerful guide towards the great goals in life as well as for daily activities.
- They can work as an inner compass pointing out the general direction in difficult times or when making important decisions.
- When these values guide your behavior, you are less exposed to unhelpful thoughts, feelings, moods or bad habits.


WEEK 6

Connecting minds

Communication style
Mindful speaking and listening
Connecting communication
My thoughts
Mindfulness for every day

Week 6 connecting minds communication, thoughts and emotions

COMMUNICATION STYLE


 The highest form of human intelligence
 Is to observe yourself without judgement
 Krishnamurti

A major source of stress and tension for many people stems from communication. The first step is being aware of stress and tension. The next step may involve you discovering that a cause of stress and tension is often a certain style of communication.

We constantly communicate, whether we do so consciously or unconsciously or whether we want to or not.

You have been able to experience the following four styles (see table) during the training course. In general we talk of four communication styles that are listed in a table as follows:

STYLE	ME	YOU
SUB-ASSERTIVE	-	+
DOMINANT	+	-
BALANCED	+	+
PASSIVE	-	-

SUB-ASSERTIVE: I don't count, YOU do.

DOMINANT: I count, you don't count.

IN BALANCE: I account, YOU account

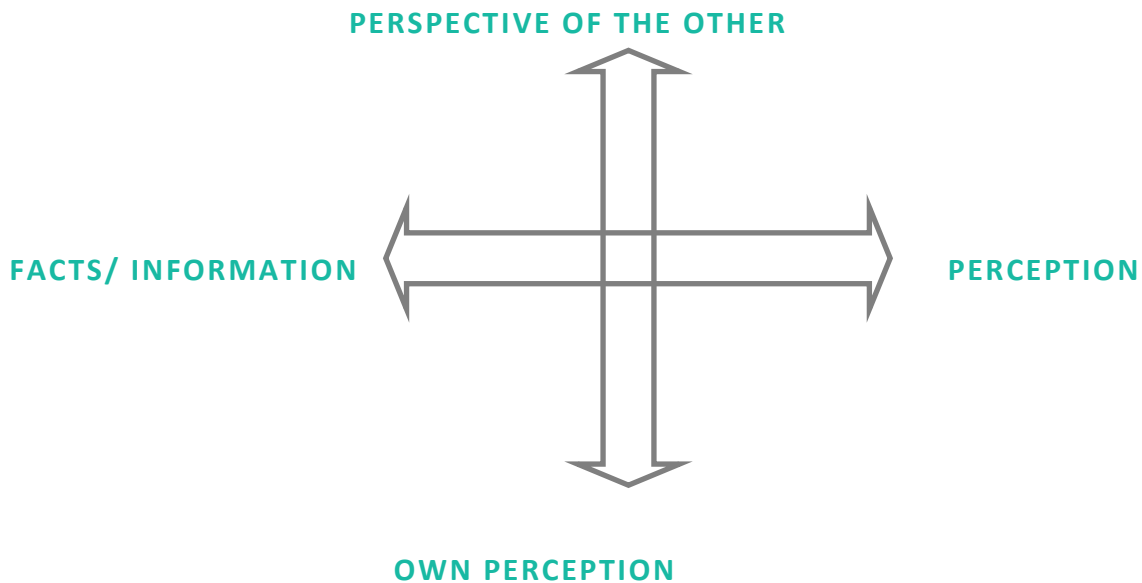
PASSIVE: I don't count, you don't count.

Each style can be useful in a particular situation. Skilful communication involves providing an appropriate response in a given situation.

The following questions may be helpful in obtaining an insight into these styles, their causes and effects:

- What does it mean to want to be right?
- What does it mean to shift the focus o From 'I' to 'we'... o From 'or' to 'and'...
- What is required to do so?
- What is your intention?

MINDFUL SPEAKING AND LISTENING



This communication compass can serve as an orientation point in a conversation, but without losing contact with the present moment.

Axis of the perspectives

Communication occurs between two different parties, each looking at reality, but from a different angle. This results in two different perspectives on reality. From each perspective reality looks and feels different. Both perspectives are important and of equal value.

Those two perspectives are constituents of successful communication:

- who am I and what does reality look like for me?
- who are you and what does reality look like for you?

Mutual openness is the most fundamental characteristic of communication. **Nonjudgmental and mild attention to the other and to oneself. That way everyone has his or her right to exist within the conversation.** When this openness is absent, where one of the perspectives is given a monopoly position, communication will get jammed:

HEATING: You start considering your own perspective as 'the truth' and you remain blind to the other person's perspective. The most dangerous thing you can start to think in communication is: 'I'm right.' (and manipulating reality in accordance). The other person's perspective becomes subject to yours. Characteristic in such a conflict is getting excited, becoming emotional, judging, not thinking clearly, not being open to other people's arguments...

PARALYSIS: You are so overwhelmed by the other person's perspective that you'll become paralyzed, there is fear, shock, pressure... at the expense of your own values and norms, not daring to say 'no'... feeling gagged.

LOSS: You empathize with the other person's perspective in such a way that you lose sight of your own and you submit to the other person's perspective. Be aware that if you are submerged in the other person's story, you cannot, at the same time, take care of the other person.

DISAPPEARING: You are no longer observant, you behave unconsciously. Or you disappear from communication altogether, consciously, out of self-protection/self-care.

It is possible to understand each other and to feel understood. The basis of all ethics is to find a common ground on which everyone's perspective remains respected: put yourself in the other's shoes and keep the question 'Who are you?' in sight with some curiosity.

Check with the other person to make sure you understand him/her: feedback, confirmation questions or checks like: 'What I hear you say is...', 'I feel that...', 'Do I understand you right when...', 'How does this feel to you?'...

Make your perspective known without filling in the other person's perspective: 'I feel... at this' instead of 'You are always like this...'

Axis of facts and perception

Often an interpretation of or a judgment about facts creeps into our communication. This can depend on the inner experience of the sender/receiver at that very moment, on the context, on what happened before, on what is yet to happen... This is the law of karma, of cause and effect.

Be alert for wearing 'clouded glasses'. Often misinterpretation is the cause of miscommunication.

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

Connecting Communication is based on Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication. The starting point of this communication model is that all human behavior and communication is driven by needs.

Connecting communication is connecting with your needs and speaking from there. Connecting Communication consists of four steps:

1. **OBSERVATION:** to objectively observe which situation/behavior gives an impulse to which feelings. To observe without cloudiness.
2. **FEELINGS:** to experience feelings consciously. Talk about what it does to you: 'It makes me feel...'. Often we use 'I have the feeling that...' and then usually an interpretation follows, not a feeling.
3. **NEEDS:** to become aware of one or more (un)fulfilled needs.
4. **REQUEST:** to make a request with the aim of seeing the unmet needs fulfilled. Take responsibility for your needs. A good request is concrete, realistic, formulated in 'plus' language (ask what you do want, rather than what you don't want the other person to do, unless there is really no other possibility), and established in the present moment' (so as to say 'now' whether he wants to do it or not). Leave the other person free in his response; After all, it is a question, not a demand. Accept the possibility that the other person might not want to respond to your request.

TIPS TO 'MAKE ROOM' IN A CONVERSATION

- Use the image of heaven to allow the other and yourself space during the conversation.
- Take a time-out if you feel your emotions are taking a hold of you. This reduces the risk of saying/doing "stupid" things on autopilot.
- Be 'Zen' during each uttered sentence. After listening you can switch your attention and focus on your own utterances. Feel free to insert a moment of silence to refocus. The more familiar you become with this technique, the quicker you will be able to switch between listening and speaking. Or allow silence to last a little longer before answering a question.
- Communicate about your points of view in a powerful but friendly way. Listen to the other but also listen to your own voice and how you want to convey something respectfully: loud and hard ... or quiet and soft. Even if you feel that the dialogue is evolving into a monologue, you can make this clear in a gentle way.
- Have the courage to say no or to state what is on your mind. Thus, you avoid getting entangled in situations in which you would rather not get involved. *Sometimes saying 'no' to the other person also means saying 'yes' to you.*
- Don't make up too many excuses. This will only trigger stress.
- Solve a conflict in a respectful way. "I feel...", "What do you suggest?", "How can we...? There's no point in convincing someone when you're angry. You can only get respect from the other person if you respect the other person yourself. When you say something about the other, you also say something about yourself.
- If you feel that you are going to do damage, it is better to remain silent and confide feelings with your diary.

THOUGHTS

Given that thoughts can have a powerful effect on how we feel and on what we do, here we would like to devote additional attention to this subject to support the practise of meditation.

Thoughts are often automatically activated. If we are repeatedly aware of this they have less of an impact on us. By observing our thoughts it is possible to distance ourselves from them, put them into perspective and bring awareness into the situation in an unambiguous manner. This allows you to free yourself of the tyranny of old thought patterns that emerge automatically.

We can realise deep down that thoughts are simply mental activities, that thoughts are not facts and that we are not our thoughts.

Thoughts and images show us what is going on deeper inside our mind. Learn to view them as guides and do not immediately reject them. We can overcome them if we are aware of them. If we are aware of them we can already interrupt the negative spiral of our most significant automatic, unproductive thought patterns when they begin.

It is particularly important to be aware of thoughts that impede us. Pessimistic, hopeless thought patterns are one of the main factors that prevent us taking action to progress. For example: "It's not going to work anyway, what's the point in trying..."

MY THOUGHTS AND I

It can be very liberating when you can see thoughts as mere thoughts and not identical to yourself or reality.

When you lose yourself in thought, the thoughts take a hold of you. You identify, as it were, with those thoughts. Descartes would say: "I think therefore I am."

You end up in a stream of thoughts without really realizing it and certainly without knowing its destination. Somewhere along the way you wake up and you realize that you were thinking and did everything thoughtlessly. This usually has a negative effect on your surroundings.

With meditative awareness you can recognize the origin of this stressful lifestyle and learn to recognize that thoughts are just thoughts (and therefore relative). This experiential insight helps you to take your life back into your own hands. You do not have to fight thoughts or condemn them. You can simply choose not to follow your thoughts once you are aware of them.

The liberation from the power of the thinking mind comes directly through meditative practice. If you observe the breathing and activity of your mind and body every day for a while without being absorbed in it, you develop inner peace and stability.

You strengthen this inner peace every time you:

- recognize and acknowledge a thought as a thought when it surfaces;
- observe the thought through accepting awareness;
- gently return to the awareness of your breathing and the body when the thought disappears.

In that context you'll understand better why it's so important to train 'the mind'. You'll steadily learn to return to a particular moment with your body and the breath as an anchor.

In meditation, a new kind of understanding can arise through silent observation. You begin to know and accept yourself better, not as you would like to be, but as you are.

AN EXAMPLE

Often thoughts make you do things without really wanting to. An example shows this neatly:

For instance, you think you have a certain number of things to do today. You don't recognize it as a thought, but act as if it is 'the truth' and as if all those things need to be done today. You just do it in a stream of 'compulsive doing'.

The result is often that both the situation and you fall victim of it.

A participant describes it as follows:

"Sometimes I notice that I keep working on computers until very late in the evening ... a reduced quality of sleep is guaranteed... It took me a while before I realized that I didn't have to do it this way at all. It was the inevitable consequence of the fact that I spent the whole day trying to get the things done that I had planned to do that day. When I realized what I was doing to myself, I understood that I was so convinced that everything had to be done that day, that I didn't even consider whether it should be so... tension assured..."

If you do it that way as well, you too will probably feel rushed, tense and anxious without even knowing why. So if you are meditating and the thought about how much you have to do today arises, then be aware that it is merely a thought. Otherwise you risk doing something else again without being aware that you have stopped meditating because of an emerging thought.

When such a thought arises and you show yourself able to distance yourself from it and see it as a thought, you will be able to prioritize and make wise decisions about what really needs to be done. You will know exactly when to stop.

So simply recognizing your thoughts as thoughts can free you from a compelling illusion. It gives you clarity and your life will no longer be determined by those thoughts.

THE ART OF STANDING STILL, MINDFULNESS FOR EVERY DAY

Attention to hands and feet

Sit in a straight, dignified position. Pay attention to your hands joined together on your lap. Keep focused on your hands while breathing in and out five times. Now pay attention to your feet. Pay attention to your feet as you inhale and exhale five times. Now pay attention to your feet and hands at the same time. Pay attention to both as you inhale and exhale five times.

Laser focus

Stand up and look at a point on eye height. Breathe in while you're standing on your toes and making two fists. Exhale as you bring your heels back to the ground and relax your hands. Pay attention to your entire experience and stay focused on the point. If you notice that your attention is being diminishing, kindly invite it back.

Skills to expand your focus

You can practice the ability to expand or narrow your focus. This helps you to look openly and uninhibitedly at what is present. Deliberately broadening your focus helps to acquire a broader perspective during moments of trouble. Even though this exercise may seem like a visual exercise at first, you can involve your entire experience:

Join both hands. Your fingers are located 30 centimeters in front of your eyes. Focus your attention on your fingertips. Slowly separate both hands 30 centimeters apart and shift your attention to the space between your hands. Now move both hands further apart and continue to look into the larger area. Without moving your eye axes, follow your left and right hands simultaneously. Keep your gaze open and now bring your hands alongside your body. Also, connect your antennae evenly to the space around you.

Alternative body scan

Shift your attention simultaneously to your toes and to your fingers, then to your feet and your hands, your lower legs and forearms, your thighs and upper arms, your hips and shoulders, your lower back and abdomen, your upper back and chest, your throat, your face and your head. Then take a moment for your body as a whole.

16-second meditation

During four beats, breathe in slowly. Then stop breathing whilst counting four beats quietly. Then exhale for four seconds. Now slowly count down four beats without breathing. Davidji calls this the 'sixteen seconds to bliss'. There are no excuses for not doing this, because who can't spare sixteen seconds? It's great to 'disconnect' during a workday and come home to oneself.

Personal check-in

Sit or lie down and close your eyes. Take a moment to turn silent. Compliment yourself for taking this time. You can perform the exercise at the beginning of the day, before you start work, or just in between, any time. Start the mindful check-in by probing your body and mind by allowing the flow of thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations to pass and by briefly absorbing them mindfully. You don't have to do anything with it.

Maybe this is the first break you consciously take today during a busy workday. And when you step out of the doing-mode and into being-mode, you may notice how many sensations, emotions and thoughts are moving in your body-mind system. You don't have to analyze all that now, or judge or find out exactly how it works. Just allow yourself to exist in the present moment, in the midst of everything that presents itself. Thus, you 'check in' with yourself, for a few minutes. And compliment yourself on taking the time.

Let every step be peaceful

Every step is peace; that is the title of a book by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen master. Undertake every step consciously and feel how your feet establish contact with the ground underneath. Also sharpen your senses and perceive the environment with depth: color, smell, crackle and taste... Maybe a bus passing by, a shower of rain... let everything be a real experience for you. Or do this while you go to get a coffee or tea at work, or to and from the toilet, or to and from a meeting. While you go from A to B, being completely present while walking, doing nothing else.

Traffic light and telephone

Count the number of your exhalations when stopping at a traffic light. Or whilst waiting in line for the cash register, the ATM... Counting them in silence whilst being connected to what is happening in and around you.

Is the phone ringing? Let it ring twice, as a call to attention. In the meantime, sit up straight and breathe in and out twice calmly and consciously. Then pick it up. The peace and attention with which you say 'Good morning. This is...' has a beneficial effect on the conversation. At the same time, it is not bad to turn a potentially stressful situation (the telephone breaks in, into what you were just doing) into a moment of relaxation and slowing down.

One-man civilization offensive

Whether you order a drink on a terrace, check out at the cash register or pick up a prescription at the pharmacy, you have the choice to be courteous, friendly and helpful during social intercourse. A nice word, real eye contact, an attentive gesture... Now other people also benefit from your exercises. It also makes you a lot more cheerful, because you often receive a broad smile or cordiality in return. And who knows, if enough people decide to do so, such a one-man civilization offensive might be a nice recipe against the creeping individualization of society.

On the way to work

Feel your posture: feel that you are sitting, feel the touch of your seat, your legs and your feet

Sit 'fully': firm and balanced. Feel your hands: are you clutching the handlebars or your bag? Do your hands feel cold or warm? How are your shoulders? And your stomach?

How is your breathing going? Establish what is noticeable around you: sounds you hear, things you see. Shift your attention to the experience of being on the move. Find out whether you are here or already at work, fully immersed in your thoughts. Whether you are standing still in front of the traffic lights or in a traffic jam, consider whether you can stand still for a moment, being conscious of your breathing.

Arriving at work

Be attentive when arriving at work. Remain seated for a short while after turning the engine off and take a few conscious breaths. Step carefully towards the entrance of the company. Be aware of the movement of your feet. Maybe you can hear yourself walking and feel the contact with the street. Look around you and feel the outside air on your face. Is it hot or cold? Feel the difference in temperature when you come in. When you arrive at your workplace, inhale and exhale consciously.

In the workplace: your own business body scan

At your workplace, take a couple of moments a day to feel attentively where your body establishes contact with the chair: seat, backrest, and armrest. At the same time, notice your feet on the ground and be aware of that contact as well. Then feel how your arms lie on your desktop and how your fingers might be resting on the keyboard. Maybe start counting your exhalations. Then feel the contours of your body. Or do a body check on the toilet.

A-day, A-night

You can declare a day of the week to be an A-day, for example Sunday. Mark it in your diary as such: as a day to do everything a bit slower, more peacefully and more aware.

An A-night can be lived into by consciously feeling your body sink into the mattress and knowing you are being supported. Then count the blessings of your day and subsequently count your exhalations.

Breath of fire

Your breath is always at your disposal. Take a breath of fire for a quick boost out of your belly. While exhaling, pull your navel firmly inwards, towards your spine; the inhalation follows automatically. Slowly increase the pace and feel how you're waking up.

Stressful situations

Take small breaks during stressful periods. Try three conscious in- and exhalations. You can use the following sentence:

"I breathe in and I unwind.

I breathe out and I relax."

Allowing silence

Turn off the radio in your car. What is this like? Too much music can cause even more commotion and activate your stress system. Pay attention to the silence: sitting in the car, driving and experience the peace and quiet to just be there, now. What are other opportunities to allow more silence into your life? Jogging without music? Having an evening without TV? Turning off your smartphone once in a while. This will benefit your inner peace and therefore your creativity.

Look at yourself with humor

Laughing relaxes us; laughing with others has a healing and soothing effect on body and mind; so don't always take yourself too seriously:

- Every time something or someone annoys you, try to see the talent behind it and appreciate that person for it. This insight gives peace and prevents further frustration. Smile in the face of annoyance, let it be there, but don't make it worse.
- Make a habit of looking colleagues or clients in the eye and smile. This way you make a connection and feel connected, which is very soothing and healing. As human beings we all have a basic need for connection, but unfortunately, we have often lost this contact.
- Look for colleagues with whom you can laugh and share fun moments. That recognition is gratifying. Try to not constantly talk to others about everything that goes wrong in your life. If you feel that need, a coach or psychologist can lend a comforting ear. Remember that positive people also attract more positive people!
- Think about the fact that you cannot change others, but you can determine how you feel by laughing more, moving, breathing, going through life more consciously!
- Also look at yourself with humor. Sometimes you'll notice how you'll get excited in traffic. Just point it out: 'Oh yes, the dinosaur in me is waking up.' Know that when the dinosaur wakes up inside you, all you'll see on the road are other dinosaurs. And when you arrive at work as a dinosaur, all you'll see there are other dinosaurs. Recognize what's happening inside you. Maybe you want to take responsibility for it and say to a colleague: 'I feel a bit irritated, so don't take it personally if I'm not so friendly.'
- Allow an inner smile to illuminate your face and body, even if you are in a hurry.

10 minutes of magic

Leave for work 10 minutes earlier and do everything a little more attentively and calmly. Pay attention to the driving itself. Don't make phone calls or send text messages. That brings extra tension. Tune in completely to the experience of driving, the people along the road, sitting in your seat, the music you hear or the silence if you prefer it, the openness of the sky... Take it all in with an open, soft gaze while you drive attentively. Enjoy the ride and let your worries go. Do not wait to enjoy the moment until you have arrived somewhere, because this moment can take a very long time to come along. Notice how 'relaxed' you arrive at work. 10 magical minutes that can benefit your whole day.

Single-tasking

Do one thing at a time for, say, 10' and stick to it! Single-tasking instead of multi-tasking, and turn it into a mental workout: have you 'brushed' your brains today? Take for example, washing your hands. Experience the physical sensations when washing your hands. The water temperature. The soap. How does the towel feel? What about your hands?

A new value every day.

You can choose to live a more value-oriented life with the help of a simple value exercise. Do this in the morning when you wake up and do it in five steps:

1. Allow for relaxation
2. 'What's my value for today?'
3. 'What tone shall I speak in?'
4. 'With what attitude shall I engage in listening?'
5. Then see what your day looks like after that.

Remind yourself of the words of

Choose WNP-thinking

WNP stands for 'with new possibilities'. Whenever you notice you're going down the road of self-sabotage or you're building walls instead of bridges, take a look at your thought world. Which CD is playing? Which one do you want to put on instead? Mark when thoughts are uttered with a victim's voice like 'I can't do that' want to take over. Replace these thoughts with thoughts that unleash possibilities within you. For example: replace 'I can't' with 'How could I?' or 'I don't have time' with 'What is my priority now?' or 'I know how this is going to end' with 'I don't know and I keep investigating'...

ONE FOR THE ROAD

Be the change you wish to see in the world.
Gandhi

Select the meditations that you are going to continue practising.

Also determine the frequency and be realistic in your self-expectations. Create a spot at home where you can continue to practise. You could place a few symbols there such as a candle, card, photographs, statue or incense etc. Nothing is obligatory, anything is possible. You could keep a meditation diary for yourself.

Try and experience as many different aspects of your life as possible in awareness.

Use exercises you have found helpful in this course. These could include breathing spaces, informal meditation, the tips etc.

Remain alert to your stress signs and mood changes.

Don't be too hard on yourself. You cannot always hold back the stress or emotional storms; you can though find a way of dealing with them. Listen to your body. It can help you stay in the here and now and to take decisions.

Actively work on a culture in which you can speak openly with your partner, friends or colleagues about what is really important.

Try and consciously communicate.

What am I saying? Am I saying too much? Too little? What is my communication style?

Visit our website !

<https://www.itam.be>

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters

I

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk
I fall in.
I am lost ... I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes me forever to find a way out.

II

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place
but, it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

III

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in ... it's a habit.
my eyes are open
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

IV

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

V

I walk down another street.

Portia Nelson

WEBSITES

- audio.itam.be with the audio exercises
- chrisgermer.com website of Chris Germer (mindful self-compassion)

Places of silence or retreat

- plumvillage.org
- cadzandie.be
- hetstiltehuis.be
- rustpunt.net
- trappistenwestmalle.be
- koningsteen.be

Apps

- Mindfulness bell
- Insight Timer
- Headspace
- Stop-breathe & think