

The [Professional Learning Hub](#), Griffith University, is proud to present Positive on Purpose, a podcast series by Mia O'Brien

## Episode 5 – Mindfulness



*So how do we improve our capacity for attention? What are 'mindfulness' practices?*

*Mindfulness practices require an entire series of podcasts to unpack; so for this short podcast we'll look at a warm up exercise for paying attention to 'attention' and strategies that you can start doing daily to begin a regular mindfulness practice.*

*The most popular warm up activity for building a strong mindfulness practice is breath awareness. This is a simple idea that takes time to develop. It's as simple as turning those little transitions in your day into a mindful 'pause', and using that pause to focus on your breath. So that pause might be the few minutes you need to wait at a red light, are standing in silence in an elevator, or as take time out between tasks during your day. Rather than fill your head with incessant self talk – be deliberate about silencing your mind, and using those pauses to just focus on the breath. Try it and see. It's simple, but harder than you think. But as with all habits, this one will improve with time and commitment to practice; and you'll be well on your way to a mindfulness practice.*

*Now that's not all there is to mindfulness, and avid practitioners will tell you this takes years to develop.*

But here are two strategies to make a strong start. Try doing both every day to establish a regular mindfulness practice:

- i) Mindfulness Practice one – once in the morning, and once in the evening, take about 5 minutes to stop thinking about work, dinner, your partner or kids, the future, the past, television or anything else etc.. Just try to empty your head for 5 minutes; then focus in on your repeated thoughts, mood and feelings. What is your underlying mood or emotion? How is that affecting your overall experience? What is your breath like? Deep and relaxed or shallow and tight? Whatever that 'take 5' moment tells you will be informative – you might find (as I often do) that in the evening you're holding a bit of stress from the day, have shallow tight breathing and are talking with your partner or your 5 year old as if they're your

most unhelpful client. No doubt with a bit of clarity, you'd then like to change that thinking and that mood; and that's what mindfulness is for. A simple check in and reset.

- ii) Mindfulness Practice two - At least once a day, whenever you feel a wave of emotion that is strong enough to take you out of that normal calm 'equanimity' - rather than just rolling with it; take a step back and really *observe* what's happening. Take a kind of 'helicopter view' of yourself as if you were watching yourself in a movie. Name the emotions you're feeling – happy, joyful, amused? Relieved, relaxed, tired? Frustrated, angry, annoyed? Part of the work to do here is to boost your attention and mindfulness by being able to name the emotions, and then explore them a little further, not just live them out without checking them out. So begin simply, just by naming feelings. Over time and with repeated practice, see if you can develop a really refined set of labels for the feelings that you feel. You'll be surprised at how nuanced those feelings and labels can be; and these tiny differences are important. It doesn't take long to realise that what you might have initially called 'anger' is actually 'a sense of hurt or a feeling of vulnerability' for example. And that's an important calibration to make, noticing your feelings in such a detailed way makes you better equipped to address them.

Then, identify the stimulus for that feeling; and that too can be surprising. Sometimes, when I find myself experiencing simmering frustration, I stop, think back, and realise it was something someone said in an email that I read and responded to about 2 hours ago...! Feelings can stick around for a while especially when we're busy and don't have time to consciously process everything; but some emotions never fully go away, and instead can cumulate unhelpfully into an amorphous mass of negativity.

The value in regularly finding a mindful moment is to 'notice' an emotion that has taken you out of equanimity and unpack it a bit; once you've unpacked it you can begin to consider its value. For example, is that email really worth this level of frustration? Is it helping me get the most out of my day or am I losing too much energy over it, and potentially making the entire day feel lousy? In the case of that frustrating email I mentioned earlier, in feeling the frustration, I might take a 5 break to shake it off and reset, before moving on. Because overarchingly, I want my days to feel positive and satisfying, and ruminating over a single email does nothing to contribute to that commitment; so the easy fix is to recalibrate my attention (stop thinking about it) and redirect my emotions (what else is working well today?).

There are two very simple but powerful strategies – practicing them regularly will build a ninja like awareness of where your attention is going every day. And remember, attention is one of the most foundational skills in building positivity; and a regular mindfulness practice – even these two simple steps practiced regularly - can make a real difference to the levels of positivity, deepen your engagement and sense of flow, and boost the levels of wellbeing that you experience each day.

And speaking of engagement, join me for the next podcast where we consider the notion of flow, which according to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, comprises some of the best moments of our lives, so we that's something we don't want to miss out on! What is flow, and how do we achieve it? That is the focus of our next podcast.

I'm Mia O'Brien and you can find me on [mia.obrien@griffith.edu.au](mailto:mia.obrien@griffith.edu.au); please join me again soon for Positive on Purpose: no magical thinking required.