Mindfulness is the practice of directing awareness into our present-moment experience: of ourselves, of each other, of the world. Through the simple practice of becoming aware of our thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and sensations as they arise and pass, we cultivate internal states with certain reliable attributes. These attributes are highly relevant to us as coaches, to our clients, and to the generative capacity of the coaching relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Coach/Client Experience</th>
<th>Implications for Coaching</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>Focusing and directing attention:</td>
<td>Supports impulse control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stabilizes inner state</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reveals action urges prior to acting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bare Attention</td>
<td>Staying present to thoughts, feelings, and sensations:</td>
<td>Loosens ego-driven identity needs</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Slows mental chatter</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Makes present-moment experience available as coaching content</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Observing ourselves, others, and events as they are:</td>
<td>Develops equanimity and neutrality</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Produces spaciousness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supports facing reality honestly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letting Go</td>
<td>Seeing that all experiences arise and pass:</td>
<td>Reduces identification with emotions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Develops patience and “lightness”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lowers reactivity and attachment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dis-identification</td>
<td>Witnessing our experience:</td>
<td>Places awareness outside experience</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Builds neutral objective awareness of self (the Subject → Object move)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Develops access to new behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present-Moment</td>
<td>Awareness of the present moment:</td>
<td>Provides choice points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reduces felt time pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Produces leadership presence</td>
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</tbody>
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Coaching Toolkit:
Five Levels of Mindfulness Application

ONE: On-Going Foundational Practices For Coach

**Sit regularly:** Commit to a regular attention (sitting/meditation) practice. Even ten minutes a day builds access, over time, to the reliable attributes of mindfulness: executive control, bare attention, acceptance, letting go, dis-identification, and present-moment awareness. These attributes are fundamental to sustainable resilience and behavior change.

**Do somatic (bodymind) practices:** Engage the entire nervous system through awareness practices that involve the body. Sports, martial arts, yoga: almost any “physical” activity can be repurposed as a somatic practice when it is a) coupled to a purpose, and b) done regularly, over time, and with awareness.

**Self-observe and reflect:** Pay attention to your own internal experience during the course of your activities. Use structured self-observation practices to reflect on your habitual behaviors and focus attention on the direct experience of the underlying drivers and the urges that precede these behaviors.

**Inquire:** Engage in regular inquiry practice. Inquire into your own experience, tracking sensation and thought, and reporting it out to a partner, a journal, or an audio recording device. Inquiry is a wonderful way to keep you present in your experience and to follow it into deeper levels of understanding.

**Do psycho-spiritual work:** Request supervision, coaching, spiritual guidance and/or other support in support of your own on-going integration and development. Mindful attention consistently reveals the habits, rooted in our history, that manifest as triggers and attachments that reduce our flexibility and resourcefulness. However, recognizing and releasing the deeper levels of these triggers without outside support and perspective is difficult. (This, of course, is the premise of coaching in the first place! We need and deserve this ourselves.)

TWO: Specific Session Techniques for Coach Prep, Self-Management, and Post-Session Reflection

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Center yourself: Take a few minutes, every time, before your coaching sessions, to prepare yourself internally for the session. Center yourself, let go of whatever you were just doing, and align your attention towards this client and this moment.

Use templates to structure a routine: Create a system around your coaching sessions that encourages mindfulness. Build templates for a consistent pre-session routine that reminds you to:

- clear your mind from distractions,
- orient to the client and set an intention,
- recognize and manage your mood and distractions
- bring awareness to habits that you want to work with or cease, and
- focus on competencies that you want to develop.

Stay connected: Build your coaching presence through maintaining awareness of your own internal experience, of the client, and of the context throughout the session. Practice noticing the inevitable triggers and distractions, and build the competency of bringing your attention back, over and over.

Invite biological co-regulation: Your own settled, mindful, centered inner state invites the same with your client. Mindfulness and settled presence in your own nervous system has a biological regulating effect on that of your client. Think of your nervous system as a resource, the condition of which is of great service to your client.

Commit to regular post-session self-observation: Use a template for reflection after each session about your inner experience, habits that showed up, and triggers and distractions.

THREE: Mindfulness-Based and Somatic Techniques Used With Client During Session

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Modeling/disclosure: Model present-moment awareness through sharing your own internal experience, emotions, etc. While it is obviously important to not make your own experience the focus, disclosing your own experience appropriately builds intimacy and safety, and models awareness for the client.

Request self-observation: Ask the client to observe and report on her inner experience, in this moment. This invites mindfulness and presence. This can be a request for her thoughts, what she is feeling, or what body sensations she is experiencing. Reporting on present-moment experience increases mindfulness.

Teach an attention practice: Provide live, real time instruction with mindfulness, on centering, or on directing attention. Doing so builds skills during the coaching session, and provides direct experience that can be built upon in subsequent sessions or in fieldwork.

Hold space: Allow silence, maintaining your own mindful attention during the silence. This deepens the sense of presence, and supports the client’s capacity for attention to what might be emerging. The deeper your own internal silence, the more powerful the space that the silence introduces into the flow of the coaching conversation.

Direct attention into sensation: Ask the client to report what he is sensing in his body. Since sensations only exist in the present moment, asking the client to witness or self-observe what he is noticing internally brings him into mindful presence. In addition, tracking changes in these sensations over time refines the process of self-observation, and invites awareness of the shifts in state that often accompany self-observation.

Ground with client’s strong state: Drop your attention and ground your own state as your client is having a strong experience (difficult emotions, energy release, feeling overwhelmed, etc.) Through the process of biological co-regulation, your stable dropped state serves as a resource to your client’s nervous system during this strong experience. (Think of a crisis situation in which someone says “I don’t know how you stayed so calm when that happened, but your calmness helped me do what I needed to do.”)

Offer assessments, followed by a question: Reflect, through in-the-moment feedback, what you observe in language, in emotion, and/or in physical posture or other somatic observations. It is most often helpful to follow the assessment with a question that invites the client to share what they are noticing, or to respond to how the assessment rings true (or not) for her. This resulting self-observation is a move towards presence.

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FOUR: Specific Practices/ Techniques For Client Fieldwork

Include mindfulness practices in fieldwork: Incorporate a short, regular sitting practice into client fieldwork. Call it an “experiment,” if that helps invite openness with your client. Even 10 minutes a day can have tremendous benefits. Providing a little research background on the health, psychological, and leadership payoffs will be helpful for those clients for whom this is new and different. Provide a narrative of relevance so that clients connect mindfulness to an outcome that they care about.

Include self-observation practices in fieldwork: Design regular practices with your clients in which they pay rigorous attention to their inner experience during their daily activities. Structured daily reflections build clients’ skills at witnessing the thoughts, emotions, and sensations that precede behavior. Over time, this builds client awareness and choice. Self-observations can be designed for clients for developing awareness around:

- Habitual and unconscious default behaviors that create problems
- Choice points that the client seems to override, falling into unhelpful patterns of thought or behavior.
- New behaviors the client seeks to cultivate, but that don’t come naturally.

Include somatic practices in fieldwork: Repurpose physical practices the client is already doing, or custom design somatic practices that are particularly metaphorical for the client’s coaching issue. Either way, engaging the client’s entire nervous system in the change process greatly accelerates development.

FIVE: On-Going Foundational Practice For Client

When clients are at the stage of being primarily focused on business results and leadership efficacy, they are unlikely to want a long-term practice for its own sake. However, at later developmental stages, the client may begin to see resilience, mindfulness, and qualities of presence as foundational, and may seek on-going practice that goes beyond the initial coaching engagement.

If and when this happens, it can be a great service to connect the client to a teacher, class, books, videos, or other resources. Encourage your client to take on a regular practice of some sort, and/or commit to any of the strategies in the above section on Foundational Practices for the Coach.
Sample Coaching Self-Observation Templates

Pre-Session Self-Observation
1. What Voice* am I seeking to develop? How will I do this during this conversation?
2. What habit am I seeking to work with more mindfully? How will I pay attention to this during this conversation?
3. What’s my mood right now?
4. How have I prepared for this conversation?
5. What is important to hold in mind about this client?
6. What is my intention for this session?

Post-Session Self-Observation
1. What did I notice about the Voice* I am developing?
2. What did I learn about the habit I am working with? How did it show up? What triggered it? What sensations and emotions and narratives were associated with it?
3. What’s my mood right now?
4. What will I do differently next time?

Coaching Sessions Learning Summary
1. Date/duration/client initials for each conversation.
2. What were two or three areas of self-observation over these conversations?
3. What are you doing differently as a result of this self-observation?
4. After these conversations, what do you see as your learning edge?
5. What is your strategy to address this learning edge?

* The Voices refer to seven unique roles that a coach plays; these are described in The Mindful Coach. For Voice, you could substitute any competency or awareness that you are seeking to develop, and that needs mindfulness and focus.

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A Primer on Working with Habits

The Anatomy of a Habit

Habits are conditioned patterns of behavior. We can think of them as our default responses to life’s complexities. We learned them well, presumably, because they worked for us earlier in life. And, given who we are now and our current life circumstances, we may begin to discover that these habits limit our creativity, render us ineffective, or cause us to suffer.

This work is not about trying to figure out the origin of a habit. Rather, we are learning to observe the habit as it arises, in all its nuances and subtleties. With this self-awareness (really, an expanded sense of our own truth in a given moment) we find ourselves with a choice about whether to act out the conditioned habit, or, choose a new response that may be more useful.

Habits have five elements. These include a trigger, a constellation of conditioned responses that arise rapidly and sequentially through three levels of experience, and a resulting behavior.

- Trigger: something happens around us that we sense, and that evokes a response.
- Somatic response: how our body automatically responds to this sensory input. This is the biological organism responding, and is observable as sensation (energy, tension, tightness, warmth, numbness, etc.) Generally, this is the first element of a constellation of linked responses.
- Emotional response: the feelings that arise, based on our deep history. Observable as emotions (anger, anxiety, joy, excitement, etc.) This follows the somatic response.
Mental response: the “mental formations” that provide meaning for our experience, and rationale for our response. Observable as language (stories, interpretation, justification, etc.) Because this is the highest order of response, it generally follows the first two, although the entire constellation can arise in less than a second.

Resulting behavior: the behavior that flows out of the constellation of phenomena that arises. Observable as acts (movement, speech acts, etc.)

A helpful view is to be curious about your habits, and to “make friends” with them. Habits are there because the organism that is you has learned well how to get along in the world. Your habits have served their purpose. Now, you are becoming curious about their subtleties, and bringing awareness to the entire constellation of what arises with this habit. This is different from working at changing the behavior. Rather, you’re expanding and deepening your awareness of something that is in fact quite complex and miraculous.

The secondary effect of this awareness is that, down the road, you’ll become able to sense the first arising of the pattern, and choose whether to go the rest of the way with it or replace it with something new. The journey starts with your self-observation.

About Self-Observations

Traditional approaches to changing behavior often rely on good intentions. However, real change requires first being able to observe ourselves doing what isn’t working, and knowing what an alternative might be. Then, we must interrupt our well-rehearsed automatic tendencies and, in the heat of the moment, replace a habitual behavior with an unfamiliar one.

Self-observations are key to this intricate process. Self-observations help us:

- Develop the capacity to observe our behavior objectively, almost as an outsider might see us,
- Replace the inner critic that makes it more difficult to change with a neutral acceptance, and
- Eventually, to be able to stay present during an event, and choose a more effective response.

Self-observations are simply a structure designed to observe a specific behavior consistently. A self-observation usually defines:

- the behavior to be observed (e.g., interrupting others in meetings),
- the timing of the observation (e.g., at the end of the workday, or after a staff meeting),
- the length of time to do the self-observation (e.g., for the next two weeks), and

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• specific questions to be considered about what happened, what your inner experience was, and what the results were.

The questions are designed to shed light on the nuances of the behavior as it arises. Often questions address the somatic, emotional, and mental levels of the experience, as well as observing what impact the behavior had on yourself or others.

Using self-observations over time leads to change generally as follows:

• We use 20/20 hindsight to reflect at the end of our day. We remember that we actually did engage in some heinous behavior (for example interrupting others) earlier in the day. We jot down notes about our experience, and become curious (“Hey! Maybe I really do interrupt!”)

• After several days, because we are collecting data, we become more attuned to the behavior, and notice it sooner. (“Oops! I just interrupted Joe!”) Still hindsight, but closer in time.

• Soon, the internal observer, which we’ve been cultivating, begins to notice what we’re doing as we do it. (“I’m interrupting Beth right now!”) Because the bulk of our awareness is still identified with the seemingly important thing we’re interrupting Beth to say, we likely finish saying it anyway, but awareness is dawning.

• We begin to notice our impulse before the behavior. (“I feel my energy increasing and my back straightening. I feel impatient. I know what we should do. I’m about to interrupt Joe. No, this time, I’m going to hear him out instead. Slow down, relax, breathe, listen.”) Now, we are changing our behavior. But it happened simply, easily, almost by itself.

Self-observations are of tremendous value, and can be designed for nearly any behavior, including both behaviors that you would like to use, or that you use excessively or inappropriately.

**Creating Sustainable Change**

Self-observation, of course, is simply a learning device. It’s a means to build structure and accountability around the very intangible quality of presence, or awareness in the present moment. And, it’s only in the present moment that we can choose something different.

Sometimes, of course, our default instincts are the right thing to do. Our habits are there because those behaviors have historically worked for us in getting what we wanted and needed. However, to increase our range of responses to a given situation, and especially to replace an ineffective but frequently practiced behavior with a more effective and novel one, we must be aware in the present moment of what we are doing.

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Through self-observation, we (and, by extension, our clients) build the capacity to pay full attention to what we are doing at any given moment in time. If we are present, we will notice our habitual behaviors arising before we act them out. The early, often subtle, somatic aspects of the habits are the warning bell that we’re about to do what we usually do. Significantly, paying attention to what’s happening in our bodies is the most direct means into presence anyway. This present moment awareness is what provides us with the moment of choice that Viktor Frankl, Stephen Covey, and countless others have spotlighted for us.

Recent neurological research (see the work of Richie Davidson, David Rock, etc. for example) is increasingly demonstrating that the brain and nervous system is literally capable of re-wiring itself as we learn new habits. It takes energy, commitment, and attention to do so. And, most importantly, it takes repetition of a new behavior, with full awareness.

Therein lies the key to sustainability. With this level of attention to the granular nature of our habits, we become increasingly able to recognize an old habit arising, and to make a choice to do something different and more effective. As we make this choice, with full attention, our brain is literally building new neural pathways. With sufficient practice, the new pathways will become strong enough that they are the new default.

What we experience as “normal” will have shifted, and we will have replaced an old, impulsive habit, with a new and consciously chosen way of responding to similar situations.
Additional References and Resources

Presence-Based® Coaching Resources

Competency Model: presencebasedcoaching.com/pdf/model.pdf
ICF-Accredited Coach Training and Certification: presencebasedcoaching.com/training
Resource Library: presencebasedcoaching.com/subscribe

Books


Further References and Resources

Listing of workplace-specific mindfulness research: mindfulnet.org/page4.htm
American Mindfulness Research Association: goamra.org/

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