**Mindfulness and Maintaining Focus**

Building mindfulness into our daily lives has a lot of benefits personally and professionally, from increased focus and improved memory, to reduced stress and less likelihood of long-term conditions such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.

We have within our reach a very accessible way to bring back calm and focus in challenging times. Here is a simple 4-step process to help you:

**Pause**. Slow down your thoughts and body movements and pause in-the-moment so you can take a step back. If your mind is still busy, picture a giant 'pause' button in front of you and imagine clicking on it to completely pause your thoughts and emotions.

**Notice** where your attention is going. Are you focusing on problems and imagining what could go wrong? Observe with curiosity, a 'beginner's mind'.  Simply acknowledge what comes up and how you're experiencing it just now, without judgement or telling yourself off (this is basically mindfulness in action).

You might have a mental image, or sounds, or physical feelings and emotions. This is natural and we're wired to respond to what our subconscious perceives as a threat. When we understand this, and acknowledge it, we then have a choice in how to respond. We don't have to engage with it.

**Breathe**. When we are having these natural, unconscious reactions to challenges, all sorts of things can happen which are not helpful to how we would *consciously* choose to be. We might notice an increased heart rate, breathing is shallow and faster, we may start to sweat, or have cold hands.

The first thing to do to ease this is: take a deep breath. Gently drop your awareness into your body. Notice the feeling of the cool, clean air in your nose as you breathe all the way in.... and the warm air as you release a relaxing breath all the way out. As you focus on your breathing, notice how your body softens, allow yourself to let go, and notice how the tension starts to drift away. Ideally do this for at least 2-3 minutes, regularly, for lasting results. I've provided a recorded meditation to guide you through it.

And if you find it a challenge to be still, moving around can help. Go for a walk, run, dance, do exercise of any kind that suits your fitness level. Or do something creative. The main thing is to change state to a more resourceful way of being.

**Focus**. Now you've cleared some head-space and calmed the fight-or-flight reactions you can choose what you will focus on, in line with the outcome you want (rather than the problem or fear that you *don't* want). It could be a specific goal or simply imagining being peaceful and positive, or calm and focused.

And your brain has more capacity for thinking, now that you have more oxygen and less stress hormones running around!

Tuning into the senses is very helpful to experience a positive state as if it's already happening...what are you seeing, hearing, and feeling?

What you focus on you get more of. What do you want to create more of in your work and home life? Keep practising and, over time, you will form new habits and patterns of thinking to bring about more of the results you want.

You can use this 5-minute meditation to guide you through it: [https://youtu.be/6c0ASX3CV0Q](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutu.be%2F6c0ASX3CV0Q&data=02%7C01%7Canne.macintosh%40bgateway.com%7Ca35e845c5c174dc555ec08d7d71205e7%7C50374495fdde4d04bc5c574982680e19%7C0%7C0%7C637214344718717607&sdata=y6dXv3FeJTCTjK9qye1Rj2QWHKadm332WzmDlJlz1AU%3D&reserved=0)


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