

## MINDFULNESS, CHOICES & ACTIONS

First and foremost, in order for a community, a family or an individual to truly thrive, we need to be mindful of our choices, our behaviors and our actions. With our busy, over-stimulated, chaotic lives, we tend to forget the need for being mindful in our daily existence. We often make the easy or familiar choices and act on them, even if they aren't good for us, our community or our environment.

The most important components of a thriving life are those of being aware of the world around us, making conscious, educated choices and acting upon them. Listed below are important components of a more mindful, healthy, happy, prosperous, thriving life.

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## Be aware of the choices you make.

The greatest gift we have is the ability to make choices. We may not always have control of the circumstances we find ourselves in. However, we do have total control over how we react to those circumstances and the choices we make.

We need to be aware of these choices. Stop and think about each one and make sure the choice you are about to make is good for you, your community, your finances, etc. These can even be the smallest choices – from what items you purchase to the food you put into your mouth. When you become aware of the choices you are about to make, you also become aware of the alternatives to that choice. Think back on a time when a choice you made didn't turn out as well as you had hoped. What if you had been aware of your alternatives? When we understand our choices have power, we can avoid many of the problems that are a result of poor choices, or even choosing not to choose.

Habits are just unconscious choices we make over and over again. To break unwanted habits, you need to be aware of the choice to take repetitive action over and over again. You then need to stop making that choice. Awareness is the key.

*“There is a choice you have to make in everything you do.  
So keep in mind that in the end, the choice you make makes you.”  
~ Anonymous*

### How to be aware of your choices:

When you wake up each day understand that you, not others are in control of your choices. Choose to make the best choices that will enhance your life and those around you.

- Be in the present moment when you make a choice.
- Understand the implications of the choice and your alternatives.
- What are your emotions at this moment of choosing? Are they playing a role in your decision making?
- Be aware of and honor your own personal values.
- Be aware of where you want to be in life, both short term and long term. Then make choices that will take you there.

*“What is right is often forgotten by what is convenient.”  
~ Bodie Thoene*



**Here are some questions to ask yourself when making choices. This applies to the small and big ones.**

1. Will this enhance my life or detract from it? (Do I really need to eat the Big Mac and fries for lunch and how will I feel afterwards? No, I will have a turkey sandwich instead and feel good the rest of the afternoon.)
2. Is this moving me in the direction I want to go in my life? (Will this purchase of an item I don't necessarily need keep me from my goal of buying a home? Yes, because it means I am not saving money.)
3. Am I making this choice in a place of love or a place of fear, scarcity or abundance? (Am I choosing to stay in this relationship because I am afraid of being single? Yes, so I am choosing to leave it because I love myself enough to do what is best for me.)
4. Is this in line with my core values? (I truly value local, sustainable agriculture so I am going to choose to buy my produce whenever I can at the farmers market.)

Your choices and habits are determining the direction of your life.  
Choose them carefully and wisely.

**Remember not making a choice to act is still a choice.**

### **First steps:**

Pick a choice you make every day (what you are going to eat for breakfast, are you going to exercise today, how are you going to react to your kids who aren't doing their homework), and before you make that choice (what you are going to eat, are you going to stay on the couch with the TV remote in hand, or how you are going to react to your children), stop and think for just a second on which choice will be the best for you. Not the easiest or one that you usually make, but the best choice.

*“Right actions in the future are the best apologies for bad actions in the past.” ~ Tryon Edwards*

*“In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing. The worst thing you can do is nothing.”  
~ Theodore Roosevelt*



*Being aware of the choices we make helps us thrive in all areas: family, community, health, environment and our economy.*



## Be the change you want to see.

The great leader Mahatma Gandhi taught that we should “be the change we want to see in the world.” In other words, lead by example. If we want others to take actions, make changes or behave in different ways, we need to first make sure we are engaging in those behaviors as well.

When we are making those changes, taking actions that aren’t easy, or when we start behaving in better ways, we can inspire others to do the same. As we make positive impacts on our lives and those around us, others will see it is possible and beneficial to change, and to make their lives better.

*“Always do right - this will gratify some and astonish the rest.” ~ Mark Twain*

### How to be that change:

Know what it is you want to see in your community, your family and your work. This can be anything from more engaged neighborhoods, to families that read more, to co-workers who have a better attitude at work. Then do those actions yourself. Get out into the neighborhood. Pick up a book and start reading with your family. Go to work with a positive attitude.

### Remember true community change starts with ourselves.

#### First steps:

Pick one thing you know others should be doing to make our communities better and then do it yourself. For example, pick up the litter you see on the ground. Don’t wait for someone else to do it.

*“Children have never been very good at listening to their elders,  
but they have never failed to imitate them.”  
~ James Baldwin*



*When we are the change we want to see, it affects our family, community, health, environment and economy and allows us to thrive.*

*“How wonderful it is that nobody  
need wait a single moment  
before starting to improve the world.”  
~ Anne Frank*



## Have a positive attitude.

We all have a way that we choose to look at the world, our lives and the things that happen to us and our families – either positively or negatively. Because we get to choose that outlook, why not look at things with a positive attitude.

When you look at life as a positive experience, the positive results reflect back. When you look at life through a negative filter, all you see is negative. The positive aspects can't get through. It is your attitude that defines how your life looks to you, to others and what you see reflected back.

Yes, things in life often don't happen as we would have wanted them to, no matter what our attitude is. However, when you exist with a positive outlook, these times become challenges and not difficulties.

In addition, when you have a positive outlook you bring more positive opportunities to your life, as opposed to negative experiences. It has been medically proven a positive attitude can help your body in healing. People would much rather be around someone with a good outlook and positive energy. And, people with a positive attitude are happier people, which adds to a happier family and healthy community.

*“It's not what happens to you that determines how far you will go in life; it is how you handle what happens to you.”*  
~ Zig Ziglar

### How to have a positive attitude:

Here are some actions you can take to develop a positive attitude.

1. **Believe happiness is a choice**, that we choose our attitudes.
2. **Be grateful** for each day and what you have.
3. **Get rid of the negative things in your life.** This includes negative people, negative situations and most importantly, your own negative thoughts.
4. **See the positive aspects in all situations.** When something is difficult, see it as a challenge and an opportunity to grow and learn. When you experience loss, use that as a reminder of what is important or as an opportunity to move on to something new. When you experience failure or disappointment, look at it as a chance to learn something, not become the victim of the situation.



5. **See the good and potential in yourself.** How you think about yourself directly determines what the outcomes of your actions will be. If you think you can't do something, then you won't. If you think you are lazy, you won't work hard. However, if you think you can, you end up doing. If you think you are able to accomplish something, you will take the necessary steps to achieve it.
6. **See the positive aspects in others.** Every person has some good inside so look for their strengths and what is positive about them.
7. **Anticipate positive outcomes.** When you go into a situation thinking it will be horrible, it will be. When you approach an activity or situation with a positive attitude (thinking you will have fun, or it will be something that will be a challenge and you can grow from it), your experience will be positive.

*“If you change the way you look at things,  
the things you look at change.”*  
~ Dr. Wayne Dyer

### **First steps:**

Be aware of every negative thought that comes into your head and get rid of it. Each time that thought emerges, develop a way to squish it. Imagine it blowing up, or it becoming a target in a skeet shoot, or you stomping on it with your foot. Find whatever works for you and eliminate the negative thought running around in your own head. This will free up space for the positive ones to enter.

*“Realize that ‘I Can’t’ usually means ‘I Won’t!’”*  
~ Tae Yun Kim

*“Everyone has his burden. What counts is how you carry it.”*  
~ Merle Miller



*When we have a positive attitude,  
we thrive with our community, our  
family, our health and our economy.*

*“People are not disturbed by things  
but by the view they take of them.”*  
~ Dr. Wayne Dyer



## Exist in the present, in the current moment.

Even though we are physically in the present moment (driving the car, picking up groceries, cleaning the house), we are often times not in that moment mentally or emotionally. So much of our time is spent dwelling on the past or worrying about the future that we miss out on what is really happening right now. We don't pay attention to what is going on in front of us. If we are lost in thought, worry, anticipation or just distracted, we aren't present to experience what is happening right now.

It is vital we **WAKE UP** to this moment and not be lamenting the past or thinking about what might happen in the future. All we have in this life is this very moment. The past is over with and the future hasn't happened yet. Right now, this very moment is all we have.

*"The future depends on what you do today."  
~ Mahatma Gandhi*

### How to exist in the present moment:

Begin to notice when you aren't present in the moment and bring your mind back to the here and now.

#### There are many ways to be present:

- Take the time to be aware of and enjoy the daily activities you typically rush through: eating breakfast, talking with your kids on the drive to school, the beautiful flowers on the hillside. Relish every moment.
- Really listen to someone without thinking about what your response is going to be, just pay attention to what they are saying.
- Stay off of your cell phone when driving or walking and be aware of what is going on around you.
- When you are out and about, notice the things you pass by: the signs, plants and buildings.
- Let go of what happened to you in the past. Don't let those experiences define you and continue to shape who you are today.
- Be aware of where you want to go in life (your goals) but give your fullest attention to the steps you are taking at this moment. Are they in line with those goals?

*"You can destroy your now by worrying about tomorrow." ~ Janis Joplin*



*“Be careful not to look so far ahead,  
that you miss what’s in front of you.”  
~ Jeremy Aldana*

Yes, we do need to think about the future so we can plans for our lives.  
But we don’t need to continually worry about or obsess over it.

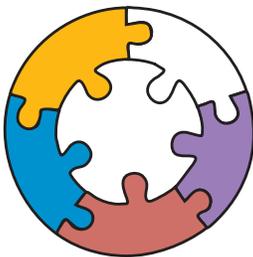
When we are truly in the present moment,  
we can see what needs to be done to better our futures.

Then we can take action by focusing on one thing at a time.

### **First steps:**

When you find your mind headed to places other than the present moment, take a deep breath and focus on your breathing. This will bring you back to the NOW. Do this every time your mind wanders.

*“You cannot do what’s important now for you  
if your mind cannot accept what is happening  
in this present moment.”  
~ John Kuypers*



When we exist in the present we  
have a positive effect on  
our family, health, community  
and our economy.

*“Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery,  
today is a gift of God,  
which is why we call it the present.”  
~ Bil Keane*



## Be grateful and show gratitude.

Being truly grateful is so much more than just saying “thank you” to someone. True gratitude is thankfulness and acknowledging everything you receive. Gratitude consists of noticing simple pleasures and being aware of how much you’ve been given. When you exist within a state of gratitude the focus in your life changes from what you lack to all you already have.

Furthermore, scientific research has shown that gratitude can have positive impacts on our health and well being:

- People who keep gratitude journals on a weekly basis have been found to exercise more regularly, have fewer physical symptoms, feel better about their lives as a whole, and feel more optimistic about their upcoming weeks as compared to those who keep journals recording the stressors or neutral events of their lives.
- Daily discussion of gratitude results in higher reported levels of alertness, enthusiasm, determination, attentiveness, energy and sleep duration and quality. Grateful people also report lower levels of depression and stress, although they do not deny or ignore the negative aspects of life.
- People who think about, talk about or write about gratitude daily are more likely to report having helped someone with a personal problem or offered emotional support to another person.
- Those with a disposition towards gratitude are found to place less importance on material goods, are less likely to judge their own or others success in terms of possessions accumulated, are less envious of wealthy people, and are more likely to share their possessions with others.
- Emerging research suggests that daily gratitude practices may have some preventative benefits in warding off coronary artery disease.

*“We tend to forget that happiness doesn’t come as a result of getting something we don’t have, but rather of recognizing and appreciating what we do have.”*  
~ Friedrich Koeing

*“Be thankful for what you have; you’ll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don’t have, you will never, ever have enough.”*  
~ Oprah Winfrey



*“Some people grumble that roses have thorns; I am grateful that thorns have roses.”  
~ Alphonse Karr*

## How to be grateful:

### Gratitude can start from the simplest actions:

- Notice all the good things that are already in your life – a home to live in, a car that runs, health for you and your children, the ability to vote, food to eat, and so on.
- Express to others the gratitude you feel towards them for things they have done for you, or for just being in your life.
- Keep a Gratitude Journal. Every day write down a few things you are grateful for that day. This way, when you have times of doubt and hardship, you can look to this journal to remind yourself of all you have.

### First steps:

Pick five things in your life you are truly grateful for – your kids, your job, your health, etc. – and think of these things throughout the day.

*“We can only be said to be alive in those moments  
when our hearts are conscious of our treasures.”  
~ Thornton Wilder*

*“If the only prayer you say in your life is ‘thank you,’  
that would suffice.” ~ Meister Eckhart*



Being grateful allows us to thrive  
with our families, community,  
health and our economy.

*“Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues,  
but the parent of all others.”  
~ Marcus Tullius Cicero*



## Forgive.

Forgiveness can be defined as “The mental, and/or spiritual process of ceasing to feel resentment, indignation or anger against another person for a perceived offense, difference or mistake, or ceasing to demand punishment or restitution.” (*Wikipedia.com*) Forgiveness doesn’t mean you have to accept, approve or condone what someone else did to you. But it does mean that what was done no longer has control over you.

It is the process of releasing these feelings that can set you free – free from the past so it no longer has control over your thoughts and how you feel. This freedom can then lead to peace, hope, gratitude and joy.

When forgiveness happens, we naturally let go of the disturbing thoughts and emotions that drain our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. This results in a greater level of health and happiness, not to mention all the benefits forgiveness brings.

Forgiveness can release us from the past and assist us in overcoming resentment or regrets we may have. Forgiveness also allows us to let go of grudges and bitterness and makes way for compassion, kindness and peace.

By not forgiving the other person, you are **ONLY HURTING YOURSELF**. The other person probably doesn’t even realize you have these bad feelings towards them. They may have even forgotten about the incident that lives fresh in your mind every day.

When we don’t forgive, we continually pay the price by continuing to bring anger and bitterness into every relationship we have. If we continue to dwell on the hurtful events and situations, anger and vengeance take root in our minds. These negative feelings can then crowd out the positive ones, leaving us with nothing but our own bitterness and sense of injustice.

While forgiving may not always be easy, it is **always** worth it.

*“Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.”*  
~ Buddha

*“To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.”*  
~ Lewis B. Smedes



## How to forgive:

*(From the experts at the Mayo Clinic)*

Forgiveness is a commitment to a process of change. To begin you might:

- Consider the value of forgiveness and its importance in your life at a given time.
- Reflect on the facts of the situation, how you've reacted, and how this combination has affected your life, health and well-being.
- When you're ready, actively choose to forgive the person who's offended you.
- Move away from your role as victim and release the control and power the offending person and situation have had in your life.

As you let go of grudges,  
you'll no longer define your life by how you've been hurt.  
You might even find compassion and understanding.

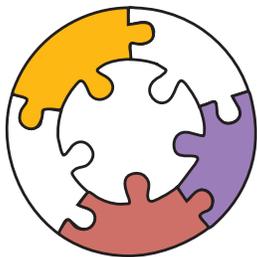
### First steps:

Before you can forgive anyone else in your life, you first need to **forgive yourself**. This can be for past mistakes, actions and other things you regret or are still angry with yourself for doing.

*"When you forgive, you in no way change the past - but you sure do change the future."  
~ Bernard Meltzer*

*"To err is human; to forgive, divine." ~ Alexander Pope*

*"Resentment is like drinking poison  
and then hoping it will kill your enemies."  
~ Nelson Mandela*



*Forgiving ourselves and others  
allows us to thrive within our  
families, with our health and  
in our community.*

*"True forgiveness is when you can say,  
'Thank you for that experience.'"  
~ Oprah Winfrey*