



FROM THE CEO, DREW DYSON

Measuring Your Mindfulness

Dear Friends,

My mind was racing with thoughts of what I needed to accomplish next. The demands on my time seemed to increase daily and my opportunities to “slow down,” as several colleagues encouraged, seemed to be few and far between. Between teaching, dissertation writing, committee assignments, research, family demands, caring for an aging parent, and more, I simply felt like I couldn’t stop. Thankfully, a good friend took time to intervene, warning me if I didn’t begin to make changes than I would be forced to stop and the consequences would be far more severe. “You don’t need a vacation,” she offered, “you need to embrace mindfulness and cultivate a different way of engaging with the world.”

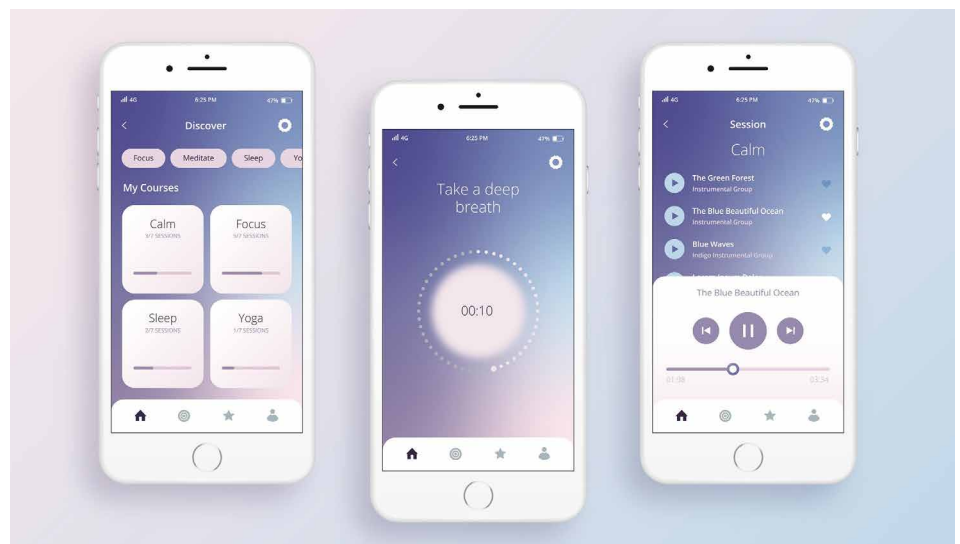
Despite my skepticism, my friend began to introduce me to various practices of mindfulness. She contended at the time that these practices that promote a “mindful state” have the long-term impact of promoting “trait mindfulness.” A recent study out of the University of Maine seems to support my friend’s contention, with a specific focus on the benefit of trait mindfulness in older adults. Specifically, the Maine study found significant correlation between high levels of trait mindfulness and overall well-being and mental health in adults between the ages of fifty-five and eighty-seven.

Trait mindfulness, according to the National Institute of Health, is an individual’s innate ability to pay attention to the present moment without judgment in relation to cognition, emotion, and sensation. The measure used in the Maine study is the scientifically validated *Mindful Attention Awareness Scale* that tracks

one’s level of executive functioning, or “the set of mental skills that allow individuals to plan, track and achieve their goals, including working memory, the ability to switch back and forth between tasks, and the ability to filter out irrelevant information.”

Ultimately, the study concluded that higher levels of trait mindfulness correlated with higher executive functioning, brain health including memory, and overall health and well-being. Further, the study found, increasing trait mindfulness may be a significant “interventionary target” to promote better brain health and overall well-being. So, how does one increase one’s level of trait mindfulness? According to Laura G. Kiken and her team of researchers from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, it is the consistent practice of meditation, understood as “state mindfulness,” over time. “As individuals engender deeper states of mindfulness during meditation,” they found, “they develop a greater tendency to exhibit mindful attitudes and behaviors outside of meditation, in the context of everyday life.”

There are many ways to begin an intentional practice of mindfulness. For some, mindful meditation practices are most helpful. There are



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several well-known and helpful apps out there that can help you focus on mindful meditation for even five minutes per day. The app I use is called “Mindfulness” and is available for iOS and Android. Other highly recommended apps include “Insight Timer,” “Smiling Mind,” or “MyLife Meditation.” All are free and easily available on your smartphone or tablet devices. Others find writing or journaling, with intention towards mindfulness, to be the practice that cultivates their attentiveness. Still others, the movement of mindful yoga or exercise draws them into a state of mindfulness. Those interested can check out PSRC’s “Mindful Chair Yoga & Meditation” offered on Thursdays throughout the summer. In the end, it is important for each person to discover the mindfulness practice that is most meaningful to them and to practice mindfulness with intention.

I am incredibly grateful for my friend’s willingness to confront my freneticism with an invitation to incorporate mindful practice into my life. Rather than give me one more thing “to do,” it gave me a new way “to be” in the world.

All the Best,
Drew A. Dyson, PhD
Chief Executive Officer