

“To be mindful is to experience the vividness of this moment, without judgment.”

Warning: It is highly unlikely that you can read this whole article with full attention. As you read, your mind may fill with thoughts and judgments about what is written, what you want to eat tonight (or other trivialities) and, in the midst of it all, you might remember that you forgot to return someone's call.

Read on, but at the same time notice when your thoughts run off. Notice the commentary and distractions. In other words, read mindfully.

To be mindful is to experience the vividness of this moment, without judgment.

If you are truly mindful, you see what is going on right now. Your eyes don't deceive you. Your thoughts do not fool you with clever rationalisations, illusory interpretations and never-ending judgments. You hear not only what people say, but what they mean. You listen to understand, not to confirm what you think is right. In short, you connect with reality. Now.

Mindful leaders are people who face reality and this is no small feat! Reality is daunting at its very best, and to look "it" in the eye without wavering takes courage and a whole lot of discipline. They look deeply into the current state of themselves, their organisations, their people or their environment. They see the impact they are having on lives and life.

Mindful leadership requires courage. Why did so few people see the growing black hole

beneath the world economy before it started to gobble up households, banks and businesses? Leaders, managers, entrepreneurs, analysts and average people were not paying attention to the signs. We did not see what was right in front of us because our minds are cunning indeed – it refutes what the eyes see and the ears hear. The mind twists and turns fact for one main purpose: to make you feel safe and powerful. It manages your emotional state with a vengeance because the ego's life literally depends on it.

This is where the courage comes in: to be mindful of the mind's lies means that you begin to see past them and through them. You are aware of the tricks and hence stop falling for them. Instead you look deeper – consciously, to see fact in its full glory. You see your own role in it.

Imagine our political leaders connecting with their role in the reality of service delivery, safety and security. Imagine they begin to see how their policies and practices fail the neediest. Imagine individual politicians acknowledging their behaviour is corrupt and selfish although they sit in public office. Imagine.

Imagine the executives of organisations really seeing the impact of their decisions that drive their profit but deplete communities. Imagine they understand the anger of striking workers instead of dismissing them as being purely opportunistic? Imagine.

“ It takes commitment to change the habits and established thinking patterns and attitudes. ”

Imagine teachers and parents really seeing the children they serve? Imagine they actually understand and feel what an adult's power is in the mind of the child? Imagine they take the time to listen to children's fears and not measure the validity of that fear based on adult criteria?

Mindful leaders have the courage to see what is and to take accountability for the part they play in it. Before they can do this, however, they need the courage to admit that the mind is not the dependable, objective old faithful they thought it was.

Mindful leadership requires discipline. To see through the layers of illusions the mind creates is easier said than done. To be able to do this takes practice, more practice and then some more. It takes commitment to change the habits and established thinking patterns and attitudes.

The big question is how you start running your mind rather than being run by it. How do you embrace thinking as a tool rather than being led to believe that you are your thinking?

The good news is that the practices that will enable you to change this are truly simple. The bad news is that you have to practise them with rigour, determination and daily discipline. To end with more good news: the fruits of your labour are endless. Practising mindfulness will not only enable you to see reality with greater clarity; it will enable you to make better quality decisions that stand the test of integrity. The fruits are pervasive in-

deed. You will be less stressed!

You will notice small things that give you pleasure and joy that normally pass you by! Your blood pressure will be healthier! Your patience will increase! You will be a better listener! You will know and feel that you are alive! You will manage your time better!

And I can continue the list, but I will rather pause here to invite you to think about your day so far. How often was your body and your mind in the same place? How often did you notice the fact that you are alive, that you breathe?

The simplicity of mindfulness practice is that you practise to notice that you breathe. Notice what you do and say. Notice what is happening around you. Notice that you are here, now.

As your capacity to be present grows, your capacity to connect with reality develops.

If I see, smell, hear, touch and taste the quality of our world, our relationships, our collective work, I know that one thing can address the wrongs of corruption, indifference, laziness and apathy: it is the power of mindful leaders that can connect with reality, see the systemic nature of the underlying causes and then act.

Mindfully, of course!