

HUGH & CRYE

What is All This Mindful Business?

By Michael Flocker



We've been noticing an awful lot of references to "mindful" living recently. The term keeps popping up everywhere - in blogs, magazines, brochures and conversation. Did you know that there are mindful living programs, mindful living centers and mindful living organizations? Well, there are, and you should be mindful of that.

When a word is sorely overused in popular culture, its definition often becomes foggy and kind of soupy. So, we ask ourselves, what does 'mindfulness' actually mean? Is it meant to indicate a full mind? Is it the opposite of mindlessness? Or does it have something to do with caution? *Mind your head!* And what is mindful meditation, anyway? Isn't all meditation mindful?

Merriam-Webster defines mindfulness as "*the practice of maintaining a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis.*"

Okay, fine, but we found another definition that we like even better. "*Mindfulness is the alternative to living life on auto-pilot.*"

You know auto-pilot -- that state you were in when you accidentally took the dog's thyroid pill instead of your own prescription. Or the time you drove all the way to the supermarket and then couldn't remember why. Most likely it's because you were

deeply immersed in a toxic swirl of anxiety, anticipation and worry. That's how most of us are living our lives every day, continuously lost in thoughts of unfinished tasks, past regrets, trips to be taken, home repairs, missed goals and interpersonal conflicts.

According to a study conducted by researcher [Matt Killingsworth](#), most of us are living our lives on auto-pilot much more than we realize. In his study, he determined that 47% of the time we are thinking about something other than what we are actually doing. Think about that. That's a lot of unstructured mind wandering. And when the good doctor looked deeper into the study, he found a direct correlation between the wanderings of the mind and feelings of unhappiness.

Apparently, we are happiest when we are fully engaged in the moment, and we are the least happy when our mind is wandering. It is not the activity that brings us a sense of happiness and contentment, it is the engagement and focus we bring to the activity. That is why a child at play loses all sense of time. Children are easily absorbed by what they are doing, because they have not yet developed the tedious and self-defeating habits of constantly worrying, obsessing, agonizing and judging others.

So, mindfulness is essentially about engagement and focus. If you want to be happier, then stay in the moment. All of these articles and books and courses and programs we keep seeing are basically saying the same thing. Remember to slow down and be fully present. Think less, and do more. Reign in the crazy chaos inside your head, and just focus on what is in front of you, right where you are, right now.

As a concept, it's quite pleasant in its simplicity. Nothing difficult to grasp, or hold onto. As we previously mentioned, the term may be somewhat overused as of late, but the intent is good. And now that we know it is also the key to happiness, we very much like the idea of living mindfully. So simple.

In fact, it makes us want to march right down to that mindfulness center, throw open the doors, clap twice and shout, "Pay attention, People!"

Then they will all be happy.