

4 Quick & Simple Ways to Change Your Life NOW!

Lesson One - Awareness

"Nobody sees a flower, really - it is so small we haven't time - and to see, takes time."
- Georgia O'Keefe

Awareness, mindfulness, living in the present. It all sounds so simple. Yet it's not...

...And, it's so important.

Just think, you're unable to choose to change anything or evolve or do things differently if you're unaware that things need to be different.

Being aware can help us to change our behavior **immediately**. Think of a woman who finds out she's pregnant. The day BEFORE she finds out, she is blissfully drinking a couple of glasses of wine and hanging out at the local smoky bar with friends after working a 14-hour day at the office. The day AFTER she finds out she's pregnant, she stops by Whole Foods after working a more reasonable workday to stock her home with healthy foods and we find her sitting with her feet up, drinking a bottle of water and reading, *What To Expect When You're Expecting!*

However, that example was an easy one.

How about when someone brings to your attention that you're always complaining or pointing out that they're doing something wrong or losing your temper or talking down to them or yelling at your kids. Are you aware you're doing these things or are you on auto-pilot?

Or, how about when you drive somewhere and when you arrive, you don't remember how you got there? You barely remember driving! Where was your mind and awareness?

When we concentrate on being in the moment and paying attention to what we are doing right this second, we can more easily respond to each situation as it arises instead of reacting to the triggers of situations from our past.

Being aware of each moment allows us to escape regret about the past and to eliminate stress and worry about the future. The Buddhists say that there is no past or future, only the present. This concept is difficult to accept, because we have such vivid memories and we can conjure up such horrible "what-ifs." However, it is impossible to change the events that happened in a present moment long ago, what we refer to as the past.

The only way that we can be in charge what we call the future is by making choices in **THIS** present moment. And, to do that with care, we must practice awareness and

mindfulness.

A way to do this is to truly experience everything you do. Our life is filled with distractions. To be more aware and in the moment, do away with as many distractions as possible.

Instead of thinking about the day ahead while you're showering in the morning, get back into your body and its senses. Really feel the water from the shower - enjoy the warmth and the way the needles of water hit your back. Appreciate that you have great water pressure that really rinses the shampoo out of your hair. Oh, and while you're at it, doesn't that shampoo smell good? As you shave your legs, notice how the skin goes from stubbly to smooth in one stroke of the razor. By the time you emerge and dry off with your (notice it!) fluffy cotton towel, you'll feel like you've had a mini-vacation, instead of worrying about who'll pick the kids up after baseball practice or what you're cooking for supper or if the boss is going to be in a good mood. You are unable to take any action about those things while you're in the shower - you can ONLY shower in the present moment.

Of course, like anything worth doing, this takes practice...

When you're cooking supper, cook supper. Pay attention to how the knife cuts the veggies, how the meat sounds when it hits the hot skillet, how that glass of wine really tastes that you're sipping while preparing supper.

Leave the TV off while you're knitting and enjoy the texture of the wool yarn as it slips across your fingers and needles. Notice the tension with which you hold the yarn and the beauty of your stitches. Listen to the very faint sounds the needles make as they move across each other.

Take tiny, tiny bites of the next piece of chocolate you eat. Savor the velvety texture and notice the time it takes to melt in your mouth.

In the next phone conversation you have with a friend, be fully present. No email or internet surfing while you're on the phone. What are they really saying - what are the hidden messages behind the words? Are they hiding their sadness behind a joke?

Does being aware take any additional time? No. Does being aware and in the moment relieve you of stress and worry? Yes. Does that make life happier? Yes!

Life is so short and being aware is a way to squeeze every bit of enjoyment and experience out of our time here. Awareness is the first step in change.

Questions for Pondering and/or Jotting

1. Over the next few days, notice: Are you fully present and in the moment as you complete your tasks throughout the day, or are you stewing about what happened

yesterday or worrying about what's going to happen later this evening or next month?
Are there particular times or activities where you notice this most?

2. Pick a couple of activities where you can practice being in the moment - use your five senses and eliminate distractions. Or, if a distraction happens, like your child wants to talk with you while you're cooking, stop cooking and give your child your full attention - be present with them. I find this practice of mindfulness truly helps the stress level, especially when you feel like you have too much to do. Pay attention, do each task fully and when it's finished, go onto the next one. Multi-tasking is a myth!

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