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Mindfulness and Emotional Intelligence

Principles and Practices to Transform Your Leadership Life

“[T]here is a limit to the role of the intelligence in human affairs.”

—James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (1955)¹

A Leader Fails to Notice

Jonathan, a 52-year-old chief academic officer (CAO) of a large suburban district in California, is a scholar. Not only does he work tirelessly planning professional learning in his district; he also finds time to write several articles for professional trade publications and has authored a chapter in a well-received book on new forms of teacher evaluation from an administrator’s point of view. Recently promoted, he has asked us to observe him during a senior staff meeting to help him with some “communication fine-tuning.” We happily agree. After some preliminaries and a couple of agenda items are announced, we observe Jonathan talk for almost 12 minutes about his goals as a

new CAO, the latest district strategic planning session, and the books he is reading. He appears not to observe the body language of others in the room, and sometimes seems only distantly aware of their presence. Finally, he turns to his executive staff to ask whether anyone has anything to contribute to the “discussion,” yet before anyone can reply, he shifts into another discourse about the iPad policy at one of the district’s schools. His colleagues begin to give each other side glances, adjust their clothing and hair, move about in their seats, and reach for their phones but Jonathan doesn’t seem to notice. What skills and attributes does Jonathan need to help him become a more effective leader? How might he develop them? (And have you ever been like Jonathan, or worked for someone like him?)

Throughout this book, we have made the case for why and how mindfulness supports and nurtures your capacity to notice what is happening within yourself, and with others—or to develop emotional intelligence (EQ).² We think these are central leadership skills, and as most know, they are now considered the foundation of leadership development. Increasing your ability to notice what is happening both inside and outside yourself, and then make reasonable and wise judgments based on an evaluation of these awarenesses, is supported by mindfulness practice. These EQ components are like Russian nesting dolls, supporting each other as mindfulness based-practices nest within mindfulness.

Dan Goleman’s groundbreaking work on EQ is the foundation for this chapter. Goleman notes that these competencies are twice as important as cognitive and technical skill.³ EQ is a range of sensitivities that help you manage yourself and your relationships. EQ and mindfulness both center on a quality of awareness, and both promote prosocial behavior. The practice of mindfulness as with the development of EQ supports leadership that is grounded, centered, and effective, as well as awake to the wisdom of the heart, mind, and spirit. EQ makes for better leaders who bring a range of awareness to their school and to life. Mindfulness makes for leaders who are aware of the complexity of the school environment *and* aware of themselves and others. It is impossible to lead others when you are walking around mindlessly unaware of yourself, your emotions, and your values. Emotions affect your thinking, attitude, and mood, and these in turn affect your actions and behavior. You don’t leave emotions behind when you show up at work. We think, feel, and act. The leader’s capacity to hold tension and ambiguity without becoming reactive, to sense and understand the feeling of others and yet make tough decisions, to understand what motivates others toward

change, and to build relationships across networks and with individuals is critical to transforming leadership through mindfulness. Mindful awareness supports EQ in that it builds the capacity to engage experiences—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral experiences—without clinging or attaching to an outcome. With nonjudgmental awareness, mindful school leaders are able to engage multiple and sometimes competing perspectives, taking in the larger picture, fostering fair and reasonable decision making, supporting greater trust and openness.

EQ Component 1: Self-Awareness

To return to Jonathan, the CAO who opened the chapter, we sit with him and settle in to learn a little bit more about him. Raised in a family that he describes as “hyper-achievement oriented,” Jonathan said that he was raised to “show what you know”; that’s how you got attention and praise in his family of origin. Consequently, he read avidly and rarely left work before 7 p.m. He seldom ate lunch because of the “unrelenting demands” of the job. He observed about himself that he had a hard time delegating work to others and found it difficult to ask for help, and was also, in spite of his real intellectual gifts (appreciated by many!), too ready to take up space with others to lecture them about what he knew. These clear self-observations helped set him up to develop critical new emotional intelligence capacities, using many of the exercises in this book.

A self-described explorer by nature, Jonathan was open and willing to try mindfulness practices. To get more connected to himself, more grounded, he began to use the Body Scan (see Mindfulness Practice Aid 2.3, “The Body Scan,” page 62) and, surprisingly, after only his first 45-minute practice session was able to identify that the pain at the back of his knee was related to the way he tightly gripped his shoulders. Within a few practice sessions, he looked more relaxed and “felt better in his skin.” This led to a few more openings. He began to notice how tiring it was to “always be the expert,” and to also question his familiar patterns of hyper-responsibility. Through more honest conversations, where he was able to open himself more, he made some connections between these beliefs and how hard he worked and how frequently he found himself impelled by the need to tell how much he knew. In a breakthrough moment of self-awareness, he said, “I don’t have to do it all myself. I don’t have to have all the right answers. I can ask for help and still be OK.”

Self-awareness is multilayered. It includes the capacity to recognize how your feelings affect you and others, and, in turn, how your environment shapes you. Self-awareness is awareness of your thoughts and emotions, as well as how they sit in your physical body, in the moment. With this awareness, you can begin to recognize the impact of your behavior—your words and actions, what you say and do, how you say it, and physical sensations: a tightening in your stomach, clenching your right hip, difficulty fully inhaling (to name just a few common ones). As you become more attuned, you begin to understand that your actions and beliefs are not isolated, but rather are interconnected: Your school, your family, and your environment are all a part of a large universe connected by thinking and feeling. A self-aware leader begins to recognize in a conversation, or after a long day, when she is at an emotional or physical tipping point, and exercises self-regulation. You sense the physical cues, the physical sensations in your body—when your face is flushed, or when you feel exhausted or hijacked by emotions, or when you need to give yourself a break or adjourn a difficult meeting for the day.

Self-awareness carries with it a quality of accurate self-assessment and self-regulation—for instance, if you are delivering critical feedback to a contentious staffer. If you are unaware when the conversation turns heated and don't notice your heart beating faster, your palms getting sweaty, the rising tone of your voice, or the growing feelings of anger and defensiveness, before too long you are talking louder, cutting off the staffer in midsentence, and defending your position. With self-awareness, you engage in self-regulation and can:

- Avoid overreactions that may be potentially damaging.
- Be in a better position to think clearly and act in a way that fits your deepest values.
- Be in a better position to take in the fullness of the situation.
- Consider another's point of view.

Entertain the possibility that you may not have sufficient information to make a decision.

A self-aware leader is flexible in thinking and acting and demonstrates a willingness to consider others' views within reasonable limits, even when doing so might challenge one's beliefs, be contrary to one's beliefs and thinking, or conflict with one's agenda. We believe that the mindfulness exercises suggested throughout this book do begin to build the kind of flexibility and self-awareness that are the underpinnings of true emotional intelligence, which as we've

described is now classically defined as having a range of sensitivity to one's self and to others.

EQ Component 2: Self-Regulation

A critical benefit of a regular mindfulness practice is the capacity to regulate ourselves emotionally: to notice when we are tired and jumping to conclusions, when all the world seems dark and stormy and threatening, or to observe that we may be a little too emotionally buoyant and not able to assess risk in the moment. When we are able to self-regulate, we are able to recognize what's happening to us emotionally or physically or spiritually, inwardly and outwardly, and have the capacity to control and redirect disruptive impulses and moods. The kind of cognitive control that is required to perform under pressure—composure, focus, and flexibility—is not something you can easily maintain when you're emotionally hijacked or your reserves are too low to show up as your better self.

Here's an example in Valerie's leadership life. Recently, I was working with a prominent Quaker high school to implement diversity within the curriculum. (I am also a Quaker.) My role was to facilitate discussion on diversity among members of the school's diversity committee, using the Courage & Renewal approach of individual and self-reflection, listening and asking open questions to build trust and authenticity for courageous conversations on diversity within the school. I was working directly with the school's diversity committee of faculty, administrators, and parents tasked with implementing diversity within the curriculum. We held a series of meetings which began with looking at diversity from the lens of our own biographies, and then examined some models as a way of uncovering our own hidden bias and implicit assumptions. At our last meeting, a math teacher and active member of the committee turned to me and in a visibly annoyed tone said: "If other people want me to get to know them, they have to come to me and tell me what I need to know. I can't read their minds." In that moment, I felt a flood of anger in my face, and my mind flashed back to the many indignities of living as a black woman in a racially polarized culture: feelings of being disgusted by belittling comments and the false projections. I recognized in the moment that if I said anything, I would likely regret it. Thankfully I regained enough emotional composure and internal balance to pause and then replied, "So let me stop you right there, John. Can you imagine another approach that might turn the tables, that might look more

like you and the other person equally reaching out as opposed to the other person telling you what you need to know?" The math teacher hesitated, and then said, "Well I'm not sure what that would look like." I replied, "Well, I'm not sure either, but every bone in my body says that waiting for the other person to tell you what you need to know puts a lot of pressure on them." "You may be right," he said. Clearly this was a murky, unsettled, and emotionally charged exchange that could have gone down in flames. Since the encounter, I've thought about lots of other things that I could have or should have said, and second-guessed myself. The big learning for me, though was that in the moment, I noticed my anger and felt the rush of it flash up in my body. I knew what was happening and controlled the impulse to respond in anger or rage. I recognized my feelings—appalled, furious, and agitated—and allowed them to be there without acting on them. I allowed the mental flashbacks of other racially charged insensitivities to be there too (which was *really* hard), and I chose to respond without pretense.

As Daniel Goleman notes, "People who are in control of their feelings and impulses—that is, people who are reasonable—are able to create an environment of trust and fairness. . . . The signs of emotional self-regulation, therefore, are easy to see: a propensity for reflection and thoughtfulness; comfort with ambiguity and change; and integrity—an ability to say no to impulsive urges."⁴

EQ Component 3: Motivation

We are passionate about our work with the Center for Courage & Renewal, consulting with organizations and schools and facilitating retreats for educators and other professionals to strengthen one's inner capacity to lead a meaningful life and the clarity and courage to bring one's true self to one's work. As we mentioned in the Introduction to this book, when Valerie passed the bar exam, she had no intention of practicing mindfulness or leading retreats. Her focus and motivation was making money and getting out of Brooklyn, which was not the swanky place it is today. She spent years on the run—running from undergraduate to graduate school and then to law school and the bar exam, and then to the so-called job of her dreams. The only problem was that the job made her sick: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. For years, she trained herself not to question her "success" and believed that the good job and nice house (out of Brooklyn) meant that she was worthy. It wasn't until she came face-to-face with divorce and then her own infertility that she began to wonder about the

“success.” But by then, she was deeply invested in the job: the regular paycheck, the pension, and health care.

Slowly, very slowly, after a series of stops and starts, she left the dream job and regular paycheck to take the shaky step of creating a new and different life that she hardly had a way to describe to others and could barely understand herself. She was clueless about how her law school training would serve in this new work. Today, her strongest motivation is to be part of transformation in others and in herself because she believes your transformation affects her transformation, which then leads to societal transformation. (This wasn’t what she had in mind when she went to law school!)

Recently, we co-lead series of four seasonal retreats held for professionals in the fields of education, health care, and law. The participants met for one weekend each season at Pendle Hill, a beautiful and bucolic Quaker retreat center in suburban Philadelphia, in an environment that nurtures their needs and creates an opportunity for personal transformation. We often use tools for personal and group reflection that may be unfamiliar to school leaders, such as poetry, mindful movement, video, art-making, and small- and large-group dialogue within a structured setting. We also spend much time reflecting on the retreat design and rhythm, carefully selecting pieces that don’t just enliven the retreat, but touch their own “inner leader” or “inner teacher,” and also encompass various cultural traditions, allowing participants to interact on a deeper level with the material. Often, people are unsure about their motivation for attending the retreat. They show up with uncertainty and doubt, taking the first step toward trusting their “inner leader.” We set the tone for the retreat on the first night with the *Touchstones*, guidelines designed to set boundaries and establish safety and group norms, mentioned in Chapter 4, pages 121–122. Many of our participants are school leaders and other educational professionals who say they don’t know where to begin, feel intimidated, or have little or no time to ask big questions about motivation, life passion, and purpose.

Participants are invited to speak about the intense yearlong practice of mindful self-inquiry: holding and asking open questions; staying open in the face of uncertainty, doubt, and resistance; living with paradox; practicing mindful listening; and valuing diversity. They report that what motivated them toward change was finding a deeper sense of purpose and meaning to their lives, to discovering themselves in ways that surprised even them. Awareness of thoughts and emotions, awareness of physical cues, and a sense of intuition support understanding motivation, which forms the basis for purposeful action.

Practice Pointer—Using a Poem to Build Emotional Intelligence

In our work with the Center for Courage & Renewal, leading retreats for school leaders and others, we often use poems or poem fragments as a way to understand one's motivation and direction. Judy Brown's poem "Fire" speaks to creating greater spaciousness in our lives. How might you use this poem in your own self-inquiry practice?

Fire

What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water would.
So building fires
requires attention
to the spaces in between,
as much as to the wood.
When we are able to build
open spaces
in the same way
we have learned
to pile on the logs,
then we can come to see how
it is fuel, and absence of the fuel
together, that make fire possible.
We only need to lay a log
lightly from time to time.
A fire
grows
simply because the space is there,
with openings

in which the flame
that knows just how it wants to burn
can find its way.

—Judy Brown⁵

Take a few moments to reflect on these questions. There is no right or wrong.

- How do you create “breathing space” in your life?
- What can you learn about yourself, your motivations from giving your attention more fully to those ordinary moments of life, to the “spaces in between” the wood?
- What insights, observations, and surprises, and what new learning about your own motivations, are there for you?

EQ Component 4: Empathy

Carlos is the head of an independent K–12 college preparatory school. He wants to increase the racial and ethnic diversity and engage administrators and faculty in discussions around this issue. In conversations with his staff who are white and middle class, Carlos hears the same thing over and over again. Individuals at his institution say, “I don’t see color. It’s just not an issue for me. Aren’t we beyond that? Besides, we have several new Korean students, and they seem to be doing fine.” He comes to understand that he must deliver a clear message about why diversity is critical to the school’s mission.

Carlos calls a staff meeting and begins by talking about his own experience with diversity. He acknowledges that his perspective is subjective and limited. He says, “I’d like to know what you think would be meaningful and important for the school to accomplish, and for us together to consider ways that we might do that.” And because he has been practicing many of the exercises in this book, although this is a very stressful moment, he is able to be aware of his body language, his tone of voice, and the pacing of his words. Reading the discomfort in the room, he says, “I understand this is new territory for us and that we may be moving outside of our comfort zone. We are all in a learning zone.” Still unsettled, a longtime science teacher asks, “What if we simply can’t recruit more diverse students given the demographics of our location?” Carlos takes a moment to check the physical sensations in his body and his posture. He replies, “I can sense the uncertainty in your question and maybe even some fear of failing. I have to admit, I

have those feelings, too. I know this is not something that I can figure out alone, and I do know people who can help us. Would you be willing to explore that approach?"

Here Carlos is able to be empathetic about the discomfort of the speaker, and of others in the room; his mindfulness practices support his capacity to imagine and feel their emotions. An empathetic response does not necessarily mean you agree with the other person or that you avoid tough decisions (recall the swim coach example in Chapter 4, page 144). Instead, an empathetic response, supported by mindfulness, has a quality of care and kindness. An empathetic response is nonjudgmental. The foundation of mindful action is understanding, kindness, peacefulness, appreciation, and happiness (recall the mindful mind states on pages 89–90). There is a sensitivity to your own and to another's condition. Empathy is the ability to recognize the emotions of others and to "feel into" them. Since the capacity to understand what someone else may be feeling and sensing is key to maintaining meaningful connection with them, mindfulness helps build our receptivity to this. We think this is an extraordinarily important leadership skill. Daniel Goleman suggests why empathy is particularly critical today for leaders: "The increasing use of teams; the rapid pace of globalization; and the growing need to retain talent. People who have empathy are attuned to the subtleties in body language; they can hear the message beneath the words being spoken. Beyond that, they have a deep understanding of both the existence and the importance of cultural and ethnic differences. . . . Leaders with empathy do more than sympathize with people around them. They use their knowledge to improve their companies in subtle but important ways."⁶ Google engineer and author Chade-Meng Tan, in *Search Inside Yourself*, says that "empathy increases perceived similarity."⁷ When you perceive that others share your views and beliefs, your response is measurably different on an unconscious and neurological level, and we believe mindful practice makes this possible.⁸

How might you use empathy, even when a tough decision is called for, to promote kindness in yourself and within your school or family? How might such a response support your leadership, your life?

Think About It

How might you in your next conversation create a more empathetic relationship? What would you say? What are the risks? How might this help you be a better school leader?



Practice Pause

Loving-kindness or *metta* is an ancient meditation practice that supports empathy, kindness, and compassion for one's self and others. The word *metta* comes from the Pali language, meaning friendship. In this practice, we generate a quality of self-acceptance, friendliness, empathy, connection, understanding, and warmth in stages. Begin by setting aside quiet time and lie down comfortably with your eyes closed and take a few deep breaths. Gently and silently offer these words to yourself: "May I be safe. May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I be at peace." Repeat the phrase silently to yourself several times, and when you notice that you are distracted, that's OK; just begin again. Be gentle with yourself. Allow the breath to anchor your attention. Next bring to mind someone you appreciate or someone you feel kindness toward, and picture that person in your mind's eye and silently direct the verses to that person: "May you be safe. May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you be at peace." Bring to mind next the person you may have difficulty with, and if it is appropriate and you feel ready, direct the verses to even this person: "May you be safe. May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you be at peace." Notice emotions and sensations as you silently repeat the verses and again be gentle with yourself. Finally, expand your awareness to take all the people in your family, your friends, your neighborhood, your town, your country, all beings, and direct the verses to all beings: "May you be safe. May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you be at peace."

A Leader Grows EQ Through Mindfulness Practice

Allison, a new assistant principal in a large urban school district and an avid runner, had "an issue with trust." She described herself as a cautious person who seldom relied on others and preferred to offer help rather than to accept it. She had a nagging sense that this pattern was related to her childhood. Her mother died when she was 4, and she was raised by her paternal grandmother. She described herself as having little use for "touchy-feely stuff," keeping her emotions "under wraps." Allison's get-it-done-myself style had caused turmoil in her school because colleagues seldom were included in her decision making, making people feel disconnected from the life of the school, and creating underlying feelings of distrust among central office staff.

This pattern started changing after Allison began practicing mindfulness and supportive contemplative practices to "help with stress on the job." She journaled and patiently observed feelings as

they arose in the moment. Much to her surprise, she noticed how her emotions changed without her realizing it. Sometimes, when her mind wandered to “feeling lost,” instead of busying herself, going out for a run, or turning on the TV, she “allowed the feeling to be there, and just breathe.” At first, she practiced for 10 minutes at night at home, and then she slowly began practicing during the school day, noticing her feelings and then jotting a note about how she felt. She realized that she had been avoiding feelings of fear, of “being lost” because it was easier to ignore than to “deal with it.” Over time, she realized that the fear was “part of her unfinished business,” and that to regain trust in herself and others, she needed to look at this.

This advice has been repeated in Jon Kabat-Zinn’s numerous writings. In studies with chronic pain patients, he urges patients to turn toward their pain. Many of these patients report hating their pain, wanting it to just go away. Kabat-Zinn’s clinical trials demonstrate that turning toward painful sensations, rather than distracting yourself or adopting a grin-and-bear-it, stoic approach, is a better way of reducing the level of pain experienced.⁹ Instead of outwardly pretending that she wasn’t feeling distress, while inwardly feeling tied in knots, she began to allow painful feelings to be and to acknowledge them, reacting less to them. As a way to soothe and comfort herself, she extended her journaling to the questions below. Less than searching for “answers,” Allison said that asking these questions “was opening a door to her heart that had long been closed.”

- What is the root of the feeling?
- Why am I feeling this way?
- Is there a pattern?
- How might I approach this differently?

Again, there are no right or wrong, good or bad, responses. Instead, these questions are prompts for self-reflection as a tool of self-awareness, self-understanding, and self-confidence.

Mindful Practices Develop Compassion and Self-Compassion

We love the work of Dr. Paul Gilbert, professor of clinical psychology at the University of Derby in the United Kingdom and international expert on compassion and self-compassion as applied to clinical populations. In his book *The Compassionate Mind*, he says that focusing on compassion for ourselves and others stimulates the brain and body

to promote well-being.¹⁰ Developing compassion, he says, helps with coping with strong emotions, resolving conflicts with others, and with our outlook generally.¹¹

Nathan, a near-retirement superintendent from the Pacific Northwest, has lived his whole life with a strong inner critic. “If you could hear the way I speak to myself, you would be shocked,” he says. And the inner critic has long had the upper hand. As Nathan begins a mindfulness sitting practice, he becomes acutely aware of the critical voice. At first, he has a hard time separating the voice of the inner critic from most of his thoughts and emotions. He says, “It’s all one jumble.” After weeks of sitting quietly, watching his breathing, and noticing his thinking and his emotions, and especially being aware of the internal voice of the inner critic, Nathan is able to feel his breath and notice when his heartbeat increases as his thoughts turn to the inner critic. He practices feeling a sense of warmth and kindness for himself, and even for the inner critic—something that feels totally foreign and strange at first, but over time, becomes easier. After several more weeks of practice, he says, “What am I choosing to listen to? I don’t need to battle with myself. I know what is underneath all this; it’s an old fear of not being ‘good enough.’ I can trust myself. I’m enough.”

Kristin Neff often speaks on three fundamental guidelines of compassion:

1. Show kindness toward yourself.
2. Recognize that the human experience is not perfect, and that you are not alone in your suffering (frustrations, losses, disappointments, and tragedies). When you notice that something is amiss, this cuts you off from others. You feel isolated and disconnected.
3. Be mindful: Pay attention to your suffering without immediately trying to fix it, deny it, push it away, or ignore it. Pause and recognize what is happening now. (This step is a balance of getting help you need from the appropriate professional when you need it and accepting things as they are, knowing that things change.)¹²

As leaders, we at times hold ourselves to punishingly high, unrelenting standards. We cut others a break, but not ourselves. Neff identifies important roadblocks to self-compassion: the belief that self-compassion is self-indulgent, that being self-compassionate might undermine your motivation, that you might lose your competitive edge. The internalized

message is that self-compassion is self-pity, and self-pity is egocentric—that it is good to be compassionate toward others, and it is bad to be compassionate toward oneself. Neff’s research indicates the opposite, that persistent stress and your own inner critic not only compromise well-being, but also activate the body’s threat defense system, triggering the release of cortisol and other stress hormones. (Add to this the dynamics of the negativity bias we mentioned in Chapter 3, page 94.) Self-compassion, on the other hand, supports your goals out of love, not fear; it encourages persistence, an important motivational mind-set. Self-compassion is not the same as self-esteem, which is thinking positive thoughts about yourself compared to others; rather, self-compassion is about relating to yourself with kindness. The pace and intensity of high-stress school and work environments and the unprecedented levels of exhaustion create a new urgency to adopt practices that not only restore balance but also address the emotional overwhelm experienced by many school leaders. Compassion training is particularly helpful for school leaders who may feel isolated and unable to share their emotions with colleagues, and who may train themselves to ignore warning signs of extreme emotional overload. Compassion is about connecting with yourself and others and that begins with paying kind attention.

Practice Pointers—Ways to Strengthen Self-Compassion

Self-compassion can be strengthened in many ways. Here are three suggestions from Paul Gilbert:

- Use your memory to create a compassionate feeling, recalling a kind, loving, joyful experience (either receiving or giving one) and allowing a sense of compassion to flow in and out of your heart and mind.¹³
- Try compassionate writing—writing down your thoughts, reactions, and feelings and your compassionate response to them.
- Focus on your heart. Make a physical gesture of kindness and compassion toward yourself, such as placing your hand on your heart and imagining compassion flowing into you and this area through your hand. We are programmed to respond to touch, and this simple gesture calms the body and mind, activating the parasympathetic nervous system.¹⁴

Embody Mindfulness—Belly Breath

Belle Linda Halpern and Kathy Lubar, in *Leadership Presence*, say that an important step in cultivating authentic leadership presence is

to breathe, to find “your belly breath.”¹⁵ We use this tool extensively with our clients, and you have read about other school leaders in this book who practice noticing their breath. See Mindfulness Practice Aid 1.1, “Three-Minute Focused Breathing Practice,” in Chapter 1, page 35, and the one-minute and 30-second breathing practice aids in Chapter 2, pages 60–61.

Practice Pause—Belly Breath

Try this belly breath practice:

- Come into a comfortable posture either seated or lying down where you will not be disturbed.
- If you are seated, allow your spine to be comfortably straight, but not rigid.
- Loosen any tight clothing around your waist, and please allow your head, neck, and spine to be aligned.
- Allow your eyes to be closed, if that is comfortable for you.
- Place your dominant hand on your belly and your nondominant hand on your chest.
- Observe, without judgment, the rise and fall of your belly.
- Notice the movement of your dominant hand at the belly and the movement of your nondominant hand at your chest as you breathe in and out of the nose for 10 breath cycles. If breathing in and out of the nose is not comfortable for you, breathe in and out of the mouth. There is no need to force or control the breath. Just be with the breath as it is.
- When you are finished, stretch gently and open your eyes if they are closed.

Jonathan, Carlos, Allison, and Nathan are models of school leaders who are extending themselves, embodying components of EQ.

Practice Pointer—Ways to Bring Mindfulness Into Your Day

Please try these ways of creating mindfulness in your day:

- Practice mindful walking from one meeting to the next.
- Practice one minute of diaphragmatic breathing or belly breathing before a stressful meeting.

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- In your next conversation, notice your impulse to interrupt or finish someone else's sentence, and practice being fully present.
- Practice noticing emotions and feelings without pushing them away.
- Use one of the mindfulness apps in Appendix C, online, page 17, to stop, pause, and breathe.

Now it's your turn. Please contact us at www.facebook.com/TheMindfulSchoolLeader with your tips for creating mindfulness in your leadership life.

EQ Component 5: Social Skill

Let's return to Jonathan, our CAO from California. To help him gain greater self-awareness of his behavior and social skills, we suggested the Four-Minute Mindful Check-In (see Mindfulness Practice Aid 6.2, page 174) to strengthen emotional intelligence. Initially, Jonathan found it difficult to sit in silence, for even one minute. He found his mind racing, thinking of all his many projects. Over weeks, though, he trained himself to sit quietly, without the sound of TV or radio, and gradually increased the time of his Mindful Check-In to five minutes each morning. He found that he had more energy and focused better throughout the day.

As he began to examine his core values, he realized that he had a strong need to be recognized and appreciated. He recalled that growing up as kid and throughout school, he rarely felt appreciated. His family, he said, "had high expectations and were no-nonsense." With this new insight, Jonathan made the connection between his relentless push for excellence and how this affected his relationship with colleagues. His Mindful Check-In practice was a way of regaining balance and developing his social skills.

EQ and mindfulness are about developing leaders who are aware of the wisdom of the what is happening inside—body, mind, and spirit—and what is happening outside—the school environment, home, community, and relationships. Mindfulness practices, with their emphasis on present moment nonjudgmental awareness, support this wisdom. As we grow in mindful awareness, we gain a critical leadership ability to understand ourselves, to observe what is happening honestly, to respond intentionally as opposed to reactively, to allow for purposeful choice instead of autopilot and defensiveness. Mindfulness and EQ are about the capacity to connect with yourself and to others in meaningful ways: to give and receive honest feedback and to perceive the feelings of others, which is the basis for compassionate action.

Think About It

The Dark Side of Emotional Intelligence

In an article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, writer Adam Grant points to the “dark side of EI.” He notes that in some jobs it is essential to be in touch with emotions and in others it may be detrimental, such as in certain roles in the military. The capacity “to read” others may be used for good or not-so-good purposes, such as manipulating others. It seems obvious, though worth stating, that EI skills should be used to promote well-being and prosocial behavior.¹⁶

Mindfulness Practice Aids

Mindfulness Practice Aid 6.1: Mindful Concentration Exercise

Build your capacity for connectedness and empathy with others by training yourself to pay attention and boosting your ability to focus. It’s very difficult to empathize with another person when you are distracted or tuned out. Use one of the mindfulness apps we list in Appendix C, online, page 17, to set your mindfulness timer for this three-minute, sound-attention training exercise.

- Sit in a quiet place, with the spine comfortably straight but not rigid.
- Allow your eyes to be open or closed—notice what feels most comfortable.
- Notice how you are sitting without judging yourself.
- Feel your feet on the floor.
- Feel your legs, hips, torso, arms, chest, and face.
- Bring your attention to the physical sensation of breathing with a sense of curiosity and openness.
- Locate where you feel the breath in the body.
- Feel the breath come in and go out, accepting things as they are for the moment.
- Observe and feel the in-breath without judgment.
- Follow the breath as it comes into the body.
- Notice the slight pause between the in-breath and the out-breath.
- Follow and feel the out-breath, noticing that the out-breath turns into the in-breath.
- Be with the sensations of breathing.

- Shift your attention from the breath to the sensation of hearing.
- Listen for sound around you. There is no need to strain or to strive to hear. Allow the ears to receive whatever sound is present.
- Focus on sounds close by, such as the sound of your own breathing, and then, after a while, direct your focus to sounds in the distance: street sounds, the wind, birds, car horns, people talking.
- Notice if and when you are creating a narrative, a story about the sounds.
- Notice when you are no longer focused on sounds and when your mind has wandered away from its focus on sounds.
- When you find that your mind has wandered, gently and yet firmly escort your attention back to its focus on sound—sounds close by or sounds at a distance.
- Notice feelings of attraction or aversion to certain sounds without acting on these feelings, without trying to push away or cling to any one sound.
- Observe how the sounds come and go, like passing clouds in the sky.
- Return your focus to awareness of the breath, feeling the fullness of breathing in and out.
- When you are finished, stretch gently and open your eyes if they are closed.

Mindfulness Practice Aid 6.2: Four-Minute Mindful Check-In

At the beginning of each day, take two minutes of quiet time either before you leave home, in the car before you enter the office, or when you arrive in the office before you start your day. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What do I most value?
- How do I want others to perceive me today?

Jot a note to yourself or journal about any insights.

Again, at the end of the day, take two minutes of quiet time. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Did I live today in accordance with my most important values?
- What did I learn from my interactions with others today?

Jot a note or journal about any new insights for one minute.

This simple practice helps leaders gain clarity and strengthen emotional intelligence through greater self-awareness. Reflection on interactions with colleagues encourages better working relationships with others and empathy. Reflection on core values enhances direction and purposefulness.

What outcomes might you expect from this daily practice?

- Greater self-awareness and awareness of others. Change begins awareness.
- Greater calm and clarity by focusing the mind. A calm mind aids focus, concentration, and clarity.
- Greater awareness of values and priorities. This leads to a greater likelihood of acting in conformity with deeply held values.

Portraits of Practice

6.1 Irene McHenry, PhD, Recently Retired Executive Director

Friends Council on Education
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Co-author, *Tuning In: Mindfulness in Teaching and Learning* (2009)

“I teach my staff mindful breathing practices, and we begin each staff meeting with silence.”

Irene McHenry, Quaker educator, researcher, retreat leader, and mindfulness teacher leader, exudes quiet groundedness and confidence in conversation. A mindfulness practitioner for over 30 years, and an early educator of mindfulness practices in schools long before there were many programs, and long before mindfulness was culturally popular, Irene says, “I’m an explorer!” Irene’s early book (with Richard Brady) on mindfulness in teaching and learning¹⁷ was one of the first to offer mindfulness instruction to classroom teachers, and it is grounded in the observation that “mindfulness practice develops a powerful



foundation for all teaching and learning—the core skills of concentration, observation, relaxation and empathy.” Irene has also been a close observer of the neurobiological research linking mindfulness to improved cognitive function, helping to lead a research project in 2012 in Friends schools using the *Learning to Breathe* curriculum,¹⁸ and was a senior investigator at the 2010 summer session of the Mind and Life Institute. She is especially interested in the promotion of human flourishing in classrooms and schools.

Convinced that mindful practice was uniquely suited to preparing the mind for learning, Irene began some of her mindfulness teaching through experimentation. As a longtime practitioner of meditation, she began using mindfulness practices with young children, teens, and adults in her psychotherapy practice and teaching seventh graders at the William Penn Charter School in Philadelphia. She began to use meditation techniques for centering and quiet focusing during weekly Meeting for Worship, as she noted children and young adults need scaffolding for preparing themselves for worship. “I noticed that even Quakers could benefit from learning how to use mindfulness tools to settle into silence.” Often called “expectant waiting,” silence is at the center of Quaker services, and many children had little practice calming their bodies for this kind of experience.

Irene speaks about her mindfulness practice as simply at the heart of how she lives her daily life: how she leads, how she conceives of instruction, how she grounds herself for her busy and varied days teaching, speaking, and serving as the executive director of Friends Council on Education, a national association of Friends schools. (Irene retired from this position in June 2014. We spoke to her just prior to her retirement.) “I came to Buddhist meditation almost by accident in 1969. I was traveling through Europe with my boyfriend, and we picked up a Dutch hitchhiker who was on his way to a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Scotland, and we decided to go with him. I found so much there of value I began to get trained. Because I was also a Quaker, I began to see some of the similarities between Buddhism and Quakerism, and I realized that Quakers needed tools to get centered and settled for worship, and in schools people need help getting settled and centered for learning. Over the decades, many of my worlds have converged.”

In the early 1980s, Irene began to participate in retreats with Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese monk whose “compassionate teachings, engaged social activism, and abundant creativity in making mindfulness accessible across many religions and cultures was tremendously

appealing to me. He was my teacher in the 1980s, and was starting to develop a following in the United States. He was doing small retreats, and this was all very vivid and exciting.” Then Irene discovered mindfulness-based stress reduction (Jon Kabat-Zinn) and trained with Diane Reibel in MBSR techniques. Finally, she speaks of her gratitude to Shinzen Young, an American meditation teacher, who “helped me see that the practice of mindfulness develops a powerful foundation for all teaching and learning.”

As Irene retires from Friends Council on Education and contemplates the next stages of life, she thinks about the influence these mindful practices have had on her life. “I tend toward being a busy, optimistic perfectionist, a doer kind of person. While I believe I would have found mindfulness practices in some way, I’m glad that I discovered them early in my adult life. I have been tremendously shaped by them, and I am grateful for them. They have helped me move into greater relaxation, contentment, and nonjudgment.” In terms of facing the challenges of practicing, Irene notes that people worry a lot about “whether they’re doing it right and have trouble committing to regular practice. Most people need support, and support is now available everywhere, such as a group (*sangha* or ongoing classes), guided meditations (CDs or YouTube), and/or a meditation teacher, to build a practice. Since mindfulness is really an embodied practice, teachers cannot easily instruct children or adolescents on this without a grounding in it themselves.

“I have been practicing for a long time, many decades, so this is at the center of what I do, in an explicit and nonexplicit way. I tend to do a 15- to 20-minute sit each day, and a 10- to 15-minute movement practice daily. I also do a Body Scan (see Mindfulness Practice Aid 2.3, “The Body Scan,” in Chapter 2, page 62) when I get into bed at night, and I attend a *sangha* once a week, as well as a Quaker meeting every Sunday. I also go on retreat every year, at least one or two long retreats yearly and several one-day retreats. These practices are incorporated into my daily life. I take three relaxing breaths, breathing in and breathing out and focusing on the elongation of the exhale, frequently throughout the day. I teach my staff mindful breathing practices, and we begin each staff meeting in silence.”

Reflecting on the main effects of a long life of mindfulness practice, Irene offers very simple observations. “I notice more. I notice the flowers, the sky, the birds, the wind on my face. I have an attitude of gratitude about these simple things and moments, and a capacity to slow down.” When asked whether mindfulness is the basis for a worldwide movement toward peace, Irene says, “What you can change is yourself. You can look at the reality of what is and work on

what's going on inside of you, working toward inner peace. And how you practice peace and compassion in your everyday relationships has huge impact on others."

"My profession is a calling, and I am called more and more into mindfulness. That is what I want to continue doing in some of the next portions of my life."

Irene McHenry, PhD, was founding head of Delaware Valley Friends School, a founder of Greenwood Friends School, and a founding faculty member of Fielding Graduate University's doctoral program in educational leadership and change. She has taught students from second grade through graduate school, and worked with children and adults in her practice as a psychotherapist.

6.2 Anita Garcia Morales, Former Seattle Public School Teacher, Now a Half-Time Equity and Race Trainer

Seattle Public Schools, and Facilitator at the Center for Courage & Renewal
Seattle, Washington

"Being mindful helped me learn to listen to the brown girl inside me as I walk in the world of white."



We first met Anita Garcia Morales, a 30-year veteran teacher and equity and social justice trainer in the Seattle public school system, in our training as facilitators at the Center for Courage & Renewal in Seattle, Washington. Anita immediately stood out as someone of unusual depth, wisdom, and experience around issues of social justice and race in America. She has capacity to gently, and with great firmness and authority, bring a sense of quiet moral grounding and compassionate curiosity to intense, emotionally charged situations that led us to inquire about her contemplative practice and powerful biography, which she

expanded on when we interviewed her for this book. To meet Anita is to feel oneself in the presence of a strong spiritual force. In our interview, she explained some of the roots of her experiences of “being a brown girl,” the child of migrant farmworkers in America, and finding ways to hear her inner voices and inner teacher as she set out to become a teacher and social justice educator.

Anita was the sixth child of 11, “a migrant farm kid,” in her own words. “I didn’t grow up having anyone’s special ear for the many questions that came up in our life as migrant farmworkers”—there were too many children to be attentive to. So life, for Anita, was often about learning to keep her own counsel and to observe the world around her with her own powerful set of eyes—and to learn to listen to those observations—“to learn to trust the brown girl inside me who is always talking to me. I had to learn to hear her voice, because she is me, even as I learned to walk in the world of white and navigate worlds of great privilege.”

Anita tells us about a particularly searing memory of her childhood, one where the divisions of social class and race were particularly apparent to her. She and her family were driving in the Southwest on a long trip between jobs, the car packed full of children and belongings. The children were thirsty, and her father pulled over to buy drinks for them at a roadside store. On the door of the store a sign read, “No Mexicans or dogs.” Anita recalls her father awkwardly coming back (she wasn’t sure how well he could read English but believed he understood *No* and *Mexicans*) and saying to the children in the car, “I could tell they didn’t have the kind of drinks you wanted.” A deep silence hung in the car for the remainder of the trip, but loud voices with questions clamoring to be answered filled her head.

As Anita recalls, a keen sense of equity and social justice was being born in her, one that she has matured through the decades—supported, nurtured, and clarified by a powerful mindfulness and contemplative practice. Her official biography notes that as a classroom teacher (now retired after 30 years), Anita honored the gifts children brought and created a safe and nurturing environment that allowed them to take risks, make mistakes, and learn. As a migrant farmworker for the first 21 years of her life, Anita sought to include all that had been missing in the many classrooms and teachers she had experienced in her own school career. She is skilled at creating brave and hopeful spaces for people to reflect on why they came to do the work they do with children and families and how to tap their inner resources to continue to do what is needed for our children. Anita firmly believes that the growing ethnic and cultural diversity in our cities, our states,

and the nation hold great promise and opportunities, and that people must not be encouraged/forced to shed their racial/ethnic identities to be successful and contributing members of our society. Indeed, the differences they embody are the gifts they bring.

Currently as a half-time equity and race relations specialist with the Seattle school district, and an independent consultant/trainer/facilitator who works with various Puget Sound school districts on race and class issues, Anita describes several mindfulness and contemplative practices that undergird her work in the world and her work within herself. “I have many practices I engage in. The first perhaps is a practice of listening, listening to myself and listening to others.” She describes preparing herself for a training by learning to sit quietly and understand the work that needs to be done, then planning carefully for the specific circle of folks she will be serving, and finally driving to a training in deep contemplation, gradually readying herself for the work. “All this undergirds my ability to listen, to take in someone’s voice, and to hold the attitude of curiosity and wonder when difficulty or challenging things are coming up, when I sense I want to judge.” A strong journaling practice also is a part of Anita’s mindfulness practice, helping her explore what lies beneath and hold herself accountable to “the brown girl.” “Sometimes I think of myself as being just quiet little brown Anita, and the questions that were alive in her head are still the ones I am seeking answers to. Journaling helps me understand the real importance of what is showing up inside me, and what I need to do about it.”

Walking outside in silence, taking breaks from the busyness of her work, making sure to recharge, and “being in touch with my core values allows me to hold on to what I need to do. I always have a consciousness of race in the white worlds I travel in. I want to work with that in ways that help others, bring greater justice and peace to the world, to expand the world’s understanding. I think I’ve always been contemplative—kept my own counsel—but my ever-growing mindfulness practices are growing these capacities for love and hope.”

Anita Garcia Morales is a former Seattle public school teacher and now a half-time equity and race trainer. She is also a Certified Class Action Trainer, a Center for Courage & Renewal facilitator, and a Certified Positive Discipline Associate Parent and School Trainer. The common thread that runs through all that Anita does is her focus on social justice and equity.

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