

Susan EH Thomas

BEING MINDFUL

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR THOUGHTS
TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE...

**...by Simply Changing
the Way You Think**

YOURADVOKIT.COM

Introduction.....	4
CHAPTER 1: What is Mindfulness?	7
Mindfulness in Daily Life	9
CHAPTER 2: How to Start Using Mindfulness	12
Step 1: Breathing	13
Step 2: Senses	13
Step 3: Body Scan meditation.....	14
Step 4: Focus on Breathing	15
Step 5: Let Your Mind Wander	16
Tips for Rapid Improvement	17
CHAPTER 3: Introducing Cognitive Restructuring	20
A Brief Primer on CBT	20
Techniques Used in CBT	23
CHAPTER 4: How to Use Cognitive Restructuring in the Real World	25
Fear Setting	26
CHAPTER 4: Stress and Flow States	30
Chronic Stress	32

Positive Stress.....	34
Tapping Into Hidden Powers	37
CHAPTER 5: Why You Should Visualize.....	40
Embodied Cognition	40
Visualization for Productivity	42
CHAPTER 6: The Power of Belief.....	44
How to Become Socially Fearless With Hypothesis Testing.....	44
The Law of Attraction.....	47
CONCLUSION	49

Introduction

If there is one ability that you could learn that would make every single aspect of your life better, what would it be?

Undoubtedly, it would be the ability to control your emotions and to control the way you think.

This might sound like a surprising claim but the ability to control your emotions and the way you respond to a situation is not only the secret to happiness, but also the secret to being able to get whatever you want from life.

Why? Because it's our perception of events, more than the events themselves, that dictate our happiness, mood and performance.

Not only that, but our emotions and the neurotransmitters that control them are what alter our ability to focus, to remember information and to be creative.

Let's imagine a scenario where you're trapped inside a ski lift that has broken a wire and is now hanging by a thread. The slightest movement could make that remaining wire snap. Chances are...you're not going to survive.

What happens to you in this situation? You freeze of course but at the same time, your body becomes instinctually more active. Your brain knows you're in danger, and thus it causes certain neurons in the brain to fire and release neurotransmitters. These neurotransmitters include; dopamine, cortisol and norepinephrine.

Meanwhile, the sympathetic nervous system responds to these cues and begins producing more chemicals of its own.

Specifically, a part called the adrenal medulla will secrete adrenaline and noradrenaline and this will result in numerous physiological changes in your body: your heartrate increases, your muscles contract and your mind races.

In the meantime, and unbeknownst to you: a rescue crew has been frantically working below and has secured the lift. You're completely safe.

The reaction of your body is in response to your belief and your perception of the situation and NOT the reality.

As you'll see, there are many scenarios where we believe we're in more danger than we truly are, resulting in the stress response described above.

Even more shocking, is the fact, we literally create for ourselves; so much negativity every single day of our lives – merely because we perceive our thoughts [about anything] as “facts” instead of the perceptions they really are.

In essence – and in a lot of ways, we are creating our own misery, upset, problems and worry.

But it doesn't have to be or even stay that way.

If you could gain control of your emotional response then, you could prevent that stressful response and instead stay calm and focussed.

But the power of controlling your emotions is much more profound than that. And the ability to increase your confidence can lead to all kinds of

changes in your life that result in you being more productive, more successful... even wealthier.

But mindfulness isn't about greed. If you've been blessed to have received a monetary gift or generate an income through using this beautiful approach...it is only because you've the kind of compassion and heart to back it up. To use it for the better good, wisely or generously with others; in one way, shape or form.

The marvel of mindfulness doesn't stop there. Controlling your emotions also means you'll be able to overcome stressful situations...even phobias; like public speaking, spiders and driving in the snow.

Likewise, controlling your emotions can help you to avoid arguments and contention in your relationship[s]; resulting in a more harmonious and happy home/work life. Our emotions can make us more powerful and efficient too.

For instance, did you know...

...that you can increase muscle fiber recruitment and potentially tap into superhuman strength by getting into the right mood?

...

...or that the correct combination of neurochemistry can give you perfect recall?

Here I'm excited to show you how to tap into all these things and at the same time, show you how you can simply get some peace and quiet by calming your mind and taking a well-deserved time out.

Read on and get ready to change your life for the better...

CHAPTER 1: What is Mindfulness?

I could arrange this book in such a way that you must build up to mindfulness. I could talk about how bad for you stress is, or I could talk about neuroscience.

But I'll get to that later. What you probably want to know right off the bat is "what exactly is mindfulness?" Where did it come from? And how can you use it just to get a little bit of peace, calm and relaxation in your life?

We'll look at that first. From there, we'll delve into how you can utilize some more technical neuroscience to tap into the more profound capabilities of your brain.

So, What Exactly Is It?

Essentially, mindfulness is a form of meditation that has been adopted by CBT. *'Cognitive Behavioral Therapy,'* a psychotherapeutic approach that can be used to treat all manners of psychological conditions like anxiety, phobias, addiction, etc.

Mindfulness essentially gives us a tool that we can use to not only calm our thoughts and escape the stressors of the day but also reflect on the contents of our mind in the interests of self-improvement.

For some, meditation may have somewhat of a 'bad' reputation. That is to say, many people may associate it with religion or esoteric ideas and they think that they can't meditate unless they're 'spiritual.'

This can be off-putting for someone who doesn't hold any religious beliefs or who doesn't like esoteric ideas in general.

But in fact, you can practice meditation whether you are religious or not. Meditation is merely a directed attempt to control your thoughts and the content of your mind. Thereby you are able to gain some peace and quiet or at least better able to understand the contents of your own brain.

Often this means completely silencing all thoughts. Many types of meditation, such as *transcendental meditation*, instructs you to think of absolutely nothing. Often this is achieved by focussing on your breathing, a mantra or a physical object like a candle flame.

This can be difficult for beginners though, as they constantly find their mind wandering.

The idea behind Mindfulness Meditation is to not try and empty your thoughts but instead, simply step back and 'observe' them as if they were a third party.

Now you're able to think freely, because you're able to examine your thought[s] instead of being obsessed with keeping them at bay.

Now you're able to edit any thoughts that are leading you into trouble.

For instance, you may realize you're constantly thinking of ways to harm yourself [self-harm.] It's the epiphany...that moment that you realize these thoughts aren't good or normal. This approach enables you to work on this issue; or reach out to someone who can help you if it's an issue bigger than you.

This approach is the long term aim of mindfulness when used in CBT.

But here we're using self-remedial therapy for use in your home and within the YourAdvoKit Groups. To remove ourselves from our thoughts and

emotions so that we can get some calm and thereby catch our breath and ready to tackle the day ahead or the evening at hand.

When your mental health is severe, you're in crisis or you truly need the one on one care of a therapist, doctor or psychiatrist; please...seek the proper treatment. AND keep YourAdvoKit self-remedial tools in your mental health toolbox, using and referring to them daily! When your mental health is poor, you can't ever have too many tools in your toolbox in addition to the support of family, friends and professionals. When it's stable, you can't have too many tools in your toolbox, period!

|| MINDFULNESS IN DAILY LIFE

This is what mindfulness refers to in most cases. But it has also been appropriated to mean a lot more. If mindfulness means being more aware of your thoughts, then it can also be applied outside of meditation and to the way you go about your day.

In this case, mindfulness simply means being mindful of what you're focussing on and what you're thinking at any given point. This is useful because very often you'll find that your mind isn't where it should be.

For example, if you are walking through a beautiful scenic woodland but you are thinking about work, then as far as your body is concerned you may as well be at work.

In this case, mindfulness can be used simply to make yourself more aware of your surroundings and help you focus more on what's around you. That means feeling the breeze on your skin, not just looking at the flowers, but

seeing them for how beautiful they are and smelling the fresh air. When you do all that, you will benefit much more from this beautiful scenic woodland and you may even actually ENJOY it.

Likewise, you can use mindfulness to direct your attention to so many other things. For example, physical sensations. So often we aren't aware of how we're sitting, how we're standing, or how we're feeling.

Take a minute right now to think about that. How comfortable are you? Does any part of your body hurt? If you're sitting down, where are you feeling the most pressure? Can you feel your clothes against your body? A watch on your wrist? How warm are you? Are you leaning more to one side than the other?

This kind of mindfulness can be useful if you want to try and fix your posture but also if you want to improve your abilities in sports or just move more efficiently. Most importantly, it teaches you to become aware...much more mindful of yourself and your surroundings.

Being more mindful of the way you talk can help you speak more eloquently, enabling the conversation to sound more intelligent because you've stopped using derogatory words or foul language. This cycle comes full circle and now people perceive you for the person you want to be perceived.

Simply put, if you want to sound more intelligent, speak a little more slowly, drop the cuss words and derogatory comments; and look the person you're speaking...straight in the eyes.

You can also use mindfulness to be happier in everyday life too.

Whenever you feel a negative emotion or are having negative thoughts; it's important to identify them as just that," negative." And just as importantly, the fact they are just "thoughts."

That's the hard part. Because habits are hard to break. But they can just be as hard to make. But when you've conditioned yourself or rather practiced being mindful – when this happens...is when you'll be able to turn that negative, into a positive.

So, you've identified your negative thought or emotion. Now what?

Let's say you realize you're getting angry. Stop yourself dead in your tracks. Acknowledge your thoughts and emotions – acknowledge that your thoughts will be tainted by that.

With practice, this can make you a much calmer and much happier "you."

But what do you find when you try and do this?

Likely, you'll find that you forget. This is just the same way that you forget to pick up bread when your other half asks you to. And it's just the same way you forget to pick up your keys on the way out of the house. Like I just said; habits are as hard to break, as they are to make.

The point is: most of the time we have no control over what we're focussed on or what we're paying attention to. And as such, we find ourselves forgetting things, getting into bad habits or stressing when we should be enjoying ourselves.

Practicing mindfulness both as a form of meditation and during the day can therefore help you to improve your ability to control your thoughts and decide how you want to improve yourself and what you want to focus on.

CHAPTER 2: How to Start Using Mindfulness

Previously we discussed; mindfulness in a nutshell. The next question is how to begin using it.

One option is to use online ‘guided meditations.’ These are simply recordings that instruct you as to what to do as you begin meditating. For example, they might tell you to close your eyes and breathe in and out through the nose. Then they may tell you to think about your body.

One particularly good tool that does this is the Headspace App which can be downloaded for Android or iOS but is also available to use on the web. This will talk you through numerous guided meditations.

Unfortunately, only the first 10 are free. Still, you can learn enough from those 10 sessions to do well enough without the app. Or perhaps, the investment is well worth the money spent.

Generally, most Mindful Meditations will be similar and you can go through the steps without necessarily needing to be talked through it.

And in fact, if you can do your meditation without guidance, you might find you’re more effective at it because you won’t be continuously interrupted by another person’s voice.

Let’s Go Over the Most Common, and Basic Mindful Meditation Steps...

|| STEP 1: BREATHING

The first thing to do is to start breathing. Obviously, we all do this naturally and without a second thought. But this is a little different. Here we're using something called '*equal breathing*' used in yoga.

With equal breathing, you breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. As you do, hold each inhalation and exhalation for 3 seconds (hence the 'equal.')

These long draws in and long exhalations out will allow you to completely fill the lungs with fresh oxygen and expel the CO₂.

You can use any kind of breathing so long as it is slow, deliberate and full. But the equal breathing is suggested as it helps reinforce the positive habit of being mindful.

Slow breathing is the best way to indicate to the body that the coast is clear and you're safe. We breathe quickly when we're stressed to get more oxygen into our bodies. And we breathe more slowly when we are relaxed.

Thus, breathing deeply and slowly will help us to exit the 'fight or flight' state and in turn, enter the 'rest and digest' state.

This should fix our heartrate variance, reduce cortisol and get us ready to enter a relaxed state.

|| STEP 2: SENSES

Next, is to focus on your physical senses. This means noticing the smells, sounds and even the temperature around the room. Your eyes will normally be closed, so sight is not a part of this step.

The objective is not to 'seek out' sound or strain to hear them. Instead, just notice the sounds you normally wouldn't hear.

You may find you can hear creaking in the house. Perhaps you can hear your neighbors? Can you hear the rain or wind outside; hitting the tin roof or blowing against the house? The birds and/or traffic?

I have [as many people do] a condition known as Tinnitus. Many find it extraordinarily annoying. At times, I do too. But when I was able to submit to this condition was when I realized I could use the constant ringing in my ears to my advantage and teach myself how to be mindful.

This is always a fantastic example of just how little we normally pay attention to and how much richer our experience becomes when we practice mindfulness.

It's also a great way to get into that habit and to start relaxing the body even more. Even if we have a constant ringing in our ears!

|| STEP 3: BODY SCAN MEDITATION

"Body scan meditation" is sometimes described as being its own thing but it can be used as part of any meditation session.

The idea is to become more aware of your own body as we described earlier but to do this by systematically starting at the top of the head and then gradually moving down and through to the toes. Noticing how you feel at each stage throughout.

This is a great tool to use if you have a difficult time getting to sleep.

You do this by way of completely relaxing the muscles first by tensing and then releasing each part of your body as you move through it.

You'll find you carry large amounts of tension everywhere from your face muscles, to your neck, to your arms and legs that you didn't even realize. But once you recognize this and let it go, you'll feel far more relaxed. This will enable you to fall into a deep and restful sleep.

But for now, we're just scanning the body and using this to become more mindful of ourselves and to begin the process of introspection and self-directed attention.

|| STEP 4: FOCUS ON BREATHING

After noticing each part of the body, return to the chest and pay attention to the way it rises and falls. As you do this, you can also take this opportunity to fix your breathing.

Chances are, when you first notice your own breathing, you'll find that you are breathing in a manner your chest expands first. But the most effective breathing should be from within your abdomen. You'll see it move first and then followed by your chest.

Referred to as "abdominal breathing," begin by allowing your stomach to relax and then protrude by filling your lungs with air.

A quick, and easy way to learn how to do this is by laying down; with your back on the floor [or a bed,] and with the palm of your hand [or a light book] on your belly. The goal is to take in a deep breath all the while raising your palm [or book] as you take a deep breath in.

This is an easy trick for learning abdominal breathing and once you've got it, isn't necessary. It's that easy to learn and then do.

This abdominal breathing technique is effective because the process opens space in your abdominal cavity allowing the lungs to expand in that space. This type of breathing allows you to take in more oxygen, and triggers the hormones that promote relaxation.

But most of us don't use this kind of breathing. Our postures are hunched over, preventing us from being able to take this deep, full breath. The result we end up with is breathing in a more shallow and faster breath. In turn, increasing stress and cortisol.

These are a lot of steps, so If this is a bit overwhelming in the beginning, don't focus as much on the abdominal breathing and just notice your own breath. But take this opportunity to count your breaths as they come in and out.

It's this part that works much like the transcendental meditation by quietening down a lot of the activity in your mind.

As it becomes second nature to you, is when you can begin introducing the abdominal breathing to complete the technique. But it's not detrimental if you can't or don't start out this way.

|| STEP 5: LET YOUR MIND WANDER

When you're in the moment, is the time to let go and let your mind do whatever it wants. Now your aim is not to try and control or silence your thoughts.

Instead, you simply let your mind wander naturally – or stay completely still if you want.

Imagine you're "watching your thoughts go by like clouds." Headspace describes your thoughts in these cases as being "cars in the road."

Headspace emphasizes the importance of watching the 'cars' go past but not running out into the road to chase the traffic.

The idea behind this way of thinking is considered "detached observation."

My therapist taught me to put my thoughts on a pair of legs...any legs. And depending on my mindset and mood, is what determines which legs I "attach" them to. If I'm angry, or sad, I put them on chicken legs and watch them walk right out the back door. Good riddance to you negative nillys!

After you have done this for a while, you can simply allow your mind to gradually return to a normal state, or back to where you were before you started and gently open your eyes.

|| TIPS FOR RAPID IMPROVEMENT

Meditation can be difficult for some. Other's don't want to give it a try because of what they perceive it to be. But I believe, as most all professionals and successful Mindful Meditation users will also attest that it deserves a good try. Because the benefits are bountiful.

But why do some fail and what's up with the negative backlash?

It's difficult to get immediate results;

- a. When you are a beginner.
- b. You're not particularly patient to begin with.

Mindful Meditation is wonderfully therapeutic. But it **can** [but not always] take time and patience. If you just so happen to be in the minority of people it doesn't work instantaneously for, you may in fact achieve poorer results because it will backfire, releasing stress hormones.

Likewise, try not to get too upset with yourself if you try it and your mind keeps wandering or you keep getting distracted. If you get itchy, it's fine to scratch. If you need a glass of water, get up and get one.

Don't try and force anything, just let yourself 'be' as you are.

If you want help jump-starting your progress though, then you should consider 'priming' yourself.

Priming is a term used in psychology that simply refers to preparing the brain in a certain way. Sometimes that means influencing the answers we give to questions by showing certain stimulus.

But in other cases, it means changing our emotions. In this case, it pays to do something calming but nevertheless requires focus just before you try meditating.

For example; you might try relaxing in a beautiful location such as a beach, a forest, or a meadow. Novel scenery increase neurotransmitters and hormones associated with focus, while being in natural environments has been shown to make us more relaxed and to encourage slower brainwaves.

Finally, don't be too ambitious in regards to how often you intend to meditate. Another classic mistake is to set out with the idea that you're going to meditate for 30 minutes every day. This is destined for failure unless you currently spend 30 minutes of every day bored out of your mind.

Start with something small – even just 5 minutes before you wake up – and then you can build on this habit.

Like all things in life, practice makes perfect. And whether you were blessed with patience or not; it can be obtained. The irony here is this...If you're on the short end of the patient stick; Mindful Meditation is by far one of the best forms of therapy to obtain them!

CHAPTER 3: Introducing Cognitive Restructuring

Mindfulness and cognitive restructuring go together like wine and cheese. In CBT, mindfulness is usually used in conjunction with cognitive restructuring to the point that they are inseparable.

Using Mindfulness Meditation and mindfulness in waking life is going to help you learn to step back from your emotions and over time, you'll find that you become calmer, more focussed and happier.

But it can be used for so much more once you recognize the power this tool has for bringing about change. The point is that once you identify negative thoughts that are negatively impacting your life, you can now change them. And that's where cognitive restructuring comes in.

But first a little more on CBT.

|| A BRIEF PRIMER ON CBT

CBT is one of the most popular therapeutic options for treating mental illnesses amongst most major health organizations. The approach was introduced relatively recently and is a natural extension of another school of psychology that reigned around the 1950's.

That school was 'behaviorism' and was entirely defined by the notion of conditioning and association. The idea was that if you experienced two stimuli at the same time often enough, they would eventually become linked.

Today we know this to be true: in neuroplasticity 'neurons that fire together, wire together.' This means that if two neurons fire at the same time often enough, they eventually grow a very strong connection which might cause the other to fire involuntarily.

This was demonstrated famously by Ivan Pavlov who experimented on dogs. He rang a bell whenever he fed the canine participants and over time, this created an association via 'positive reinforcement.'

Ultimately, this led to the dogs salivating whenever the bell was rung. As far as their brains were concerned, bell = food.

This same idea was then applied to human psychology. The hypothesis was then applied that we could learn phobias by associating negative experiences with harmless objects.

Likewise, it was theorized that you could treat a phobia via 'reassociation.' If you continuously condition someone to associate that stimulus with positive things again, they eventually lose that phobia.

This method proved successful in various studies.

We learned how to gesture when we reached for things as babies, because people passed them to us. We learned to walk because we kept falling when we didn't do it right, etc.

Everything we did was believed to be entirely motivated by the reward centers of our brain, which in turn helped us form new associations and develop new behaviors.

The things we didn't learn ourselves directly, we learned vicariously through social conditioning, watching others and by their example.

For years, this idea reigned supreme but eventually it started to lose favor as it was unable to explain every aspect of our psychology. Ultimately, it became apparent that there must be an additional 'internal' element. That is when the 'cognitive' puzzle piece fell into place.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy takes behaviorism and applies the idea that you can also reinforce experiences, both positive and negative, by thinking about them.

For instance, you can learn to be afraid of heights even if you've never been higher than a two-story building.

How?

One instance would be by continuously thinking about how terrifying it would be to take that kind of fall. In other words, if you keep imagining that falling must be dangerous. You tell yourself things like "that railing doesn't look safe," then you are creating your own fear!

What's more, is that each time you think something like this and then stay away from heights, you are essentially reinforcing that belief just as though you had fallen.

Another example is not self-made but rather transferred and one I've experienced myself. Someone else has told you to "be afraid." A mother for example.

My mother is fearful of most everything. Because of that, growing up...she inadvertently transferred that fear [her fear] onto me. She may as well have put me in bubble wrap. My childhood looked a lot like this;

"You can't go on the high school ski trip; you'll break a leg."

"You can't go to the movies with your best friend, you'll die in a car crash on the way there."

"You can't go swimming, you'll drown."

Needless to say; I've had my fair share of fears to conquer. Mindful Meditation has saved my life in more ways than one.

The idea behind CBT is to use the principles of behaviorism but to combine these with the cognitive aspect.

While this may sound like scientific jargon to you...try and push those thoughts aside. Because what it means in just one word for you is **“hope.”**

Because of this CBT discovery...because of this science “jargon,” you now have in your possession the information to begin writing your next chapter; and the one after that. And the one after that! Perhaps your destiny?

And now this science jargon is pure power and a beautiful, wonderful thing.

|| TECHNIQUES USED IN CBT

One example of this is to use Mindfulness Meditation. Simply by choosing not to let your thoughts and emotions affect you, you can become less controlled by them and thereby less susceptible to your own fears and apprehensions.

It's a fabulous technique that we've delved into up to this point. But let's take a little detour now, and look at another wonderful technique used in CBT.

Because there are many more aspects to CBT and these tend to fall under the heading of 'Cognitive Restructuring' or “changing your thoughts.”

One example is *‘thought challenging.’* Here, you simply breakdown one of your thoughts or beliefs and assess its accuracy.

For instance, let's say you are afraid of speaking in public because you fear people will laugh at you if you stutter. This is a debilitating belief that is ironically making you much more likely to stutter. How do you remedy this?

You need to step back and assess this fear. Is it realistic? 90% of the time you'll find the fear is unfounded. Chances are, most people would not be rude enough to laugh at you in the first place if you did. Even if they did, it probably wouldn't matter because it's most likely you'd never see them again.

At the end of your day...why does it matter what anyone thinks anyway? You are amazing and that's what matters.

Another example is one that marries the ideas from CBT with more traditional notions from behaviorism. This one is called 'hypothesis testing.'

Essentially, you're testing your theory. And whether it will work or not. You must be a bit bold for this, but the bolder you are the better the results and you are for it.

"Success is not final; failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts."

If you're afraid people will laugh if you stutter during publicly speaking, then you need to purposefully stutter in public. This proves what will happen in that particular scenario. You'll likely discover that nothing happens. People are kind and gracious. Perhaps even sympathetic. And they'll just wait for you to finish and start again.

CHAPTER 4: How to Use Cognitive Restructuring in the Real World

We've gone over Mindfulness and Cognitive Restructuring. We've discussed how the two are linked: and how we use mindfulness in order to identify the negative thoughts and then we apply cognitive restructuring in order to change them.

Mindful Meditation helps treat things like phobias, anxiety disorders, addictions and so much more.

But what if your mental health is stable. You've not a care in the world...Is there still a place in your life for this form of cognitive restructuring?

But of course there is! You can use cognitive restructuring to improve aspects of your thought process that aren't 'broken.'

In other words, this isn't just a tool for healing but a tool for self-improvement too. And there are countless ways you can use it to make yourself calmer, more confident and more productive.

Likewise, there are many things that are like cognitive restructuring but don't technically fall under the same heading.

We'll be returning to this concept in a bit. But for now, let's look at some alternative ways to control your thought patterns and some alternative motivations for doing so.

|| FEAR SETTING

We think of fear and anxiety as being a short-term response to a situation or stimuli. But in fact, our fear and anxiety can be much longer term and affect how we make our decisions or set our goals.

Tim Ferriss proposes a concept called 'fear setting' in his book "[The Four Hour Workweek](#)" as a tool you can use to overcoming your fears and start getting what it is you want out of life.

For examples: a career change, a career break so you can travel the country or travel the world, or starting your own business. These are ambitious dreams; all admirable, and all take courage...And they are all achievable! Life is short, so with the help of this technique you should at least give it a shot!

Perhaps you've been thinking of doing these things for a long time. Or maybe I'm giving you the idea for the first time. But the problem is you're afraid. You fear you'll end up without a job, a partner or a home. It's scary, there's no denying that.

Because you made the decision to close your eyes and jump, you'll be unemployable when you return. Your mate will have grown tired of your irresponsible decisions and you'll be penniless because of the choices you've made. You'll be forced to claim bankruptcy and put your house in foreclosure because of it. Now your broke, homeless and alone.

Hmmm...pretty dramatic huh? But I'll bet it's what you were thinking before I even said it, weren't you? Because it's exactly the kind of thing we humans think on an unconscious level **all the time**. And the very reason humans are naturally "risk reluctant." Not necessarily a bad thing. There's a reason for it.

But we've become too reluctant, to a point our lives are stagnant, and we make it difficult for ourselves to move upwards and forward.

We evolved in the wild where 'risk' would generally mean 'lions.' As such, we learned to become more sensitive to risk and to defend our assets more than we go after new assets.

But today risk is very rarely anything life threatening. More likely, risk will mean 'getting yelled at.' But we blow it out of proportion because we're risk reluctant people.

Next, we're going to go over "thought challenging." We're going to take these beliefs and fears and challenge them by looking at just how realistic they really are.

Tim Ferriss' technique is perfect for this. But I'm going to break it down for you here so you get a good idea as to what this should look like when you're working through it.

First, think about what it is you want to do and why you want to do it. Now think about all the things that are holding you back from taking the plunge.

If we're talking about taking a career break, then your list of fears and reasons may look like this:

- Your current savings is low
- You don't want to leave your partner for that long
- You're afraid your job won't be there when you get back
- You're afraid you won't be able to find subsequent employment

- You're afraid that you might ultimately end up destitute, in debt or homeless

Now let's assess each of these beliefs. To do that, we're looking not only at how likely they are but also how you'd cope if it were to happen. Think of any uncertainties and things you can do to prevent them from being likely.

This is an excellent exercise for working through the pros and cons as it's extremely thorough helping you work through every point, problem and probability.

- **Now's not a good time, you don't have much money**
 - There's never actually a good time. And if you travel smart you don't need much money
 - You can work online while you travel
 - Now is probably better than later
- **You don't want to leave your partner for that long**
 - They may not mind
 - If it's important to you; it's perhaps important to them
 - It's preferable to feeling resentful toward your partner because they prevented you from seeing the world
 - They may want to come with you
- **You're afraid your job won't be available to you when you get back**
 - It very well could be. Don't assume it won't and discuss it with your employer first.

- Do you really love your job that much?
- **You're afraid you won't be able to find subsequent employment**
 - This is highly unlikely - if you're skilled then travel will simply add to your resume
 - You can find a new job and agree to start later
 - If necessary; take a part time position or start a side business to supplement your income in the meantime
- **You're afraid that you might ultimately end up destitute, in debt or homeless**
 - You can live on savings a long time so long as you've prepared
 - You can earn money in other ways
 - Consider your parents or friends. While generally NOT a first choice, it beats living on the streets. It also beats living in fear and never taking chances!

Now it's time to consider the alternative. To never travel. That would stink. Do you really want to spend every single day stuck in your office? Without ever accomplishing the dreams you've always wanted to fulfill? Let this be the day to motivate you more than the fear paralyzes you and make the decision to take that plunge.

The same technique can help you to make the decision to start a new career, to move to a new country, or to do all the countless other things that you've been dreaming of doing.

CHAPTER 4: Stress and Flow States

We're only halfway through the book and already you've learned some pretty useful skills. You now know how to enter a mindful state at any given time to better appreciate your surroundings or at least are able to escape stress for a few moments of respite.

But let's rewind and look at that stress in a little more detail.

What is it about stress that makes it so serious?

Why are we trying to combat stress? And is stress always bad?

Stress is something that is sorely misunderstood by a lot of people. Stress is not really 'one thing,' rather it is a spectrum of responses that occur in response to dangerous situations.

That being said; the "reactions" you may have because of stress can indisputably save your life. On the other side of the coin...stress can literally kill you. It's an art. And finding the balance between good stress and bad or rather – what to do with it when it happens to you.

Let's discuss this in greater detail, so you can fully understand what I mean and how you can find "your" fine line.

When you detect danger, your body responds by releasing hormones and neurotransmitters that trigger the 'fight or flight' response.

This is the response we described earlier and it is modulated by the following hormones/neurotransmitters (neurotransmitters are like hormones but they affect the brain more directly and don't last as long):

- Dopamine
- Epinephrine
- Norepinephrine
- Serotonin
- Cortisol
- Glutamate
- Testosterone
- Oestrogen

Together these cause a variety of symptoms you're probably very familiar: but perhaps unaware why they're happening. Some you may not be aware are happening.

Including:

- Sense of dread or doom
- Widening of the veins | pupil dilation
- Resistance to pain [caused by increased adrenaline]
- Increased sensitivity to sounds and light | tunnel vision
- Shaking | muscle tension | sweating | rapid breathing
- Racing thoughts | inability to concentrate | increased heartrate
- Suppression of the immune system and digestive system [this occurs so that more blood and resources can be sent to the brain and muscles]
- Increased blood thickness to encourage the blood to clot in case of an injury

In short; our bodies go into 'high performance mode' by diverting energy and supplies away from maintenance tasks and less immediate urgent processes.

Our strength, speed and ability to fight or climb increases making us more powerful and better able to respond.

These responses evolved in the wild to help us protect ourselves in case of danger. If we saw a predator, or a forest fire, then these changes would help us escape the danger. Likewise, we become better fighters when competing with members of our own species for resources.

This serves us well in the modern world too.

And often in the modern world, this response can be exactly what we need. If someone were to pull a knife on you or worse yet a gun, this response gives you the best chance of running away and living another day.

But the problem comes when the threat isn't of the physical kind or of an 'immediate' threat. Often we're our own enemy. We simply live in a world that we didn't quite evolve for. Meaning in many instances our systems are essentially outdated.

|| CHRONIC STRESS

Unless you've already been practicing mindfulness, or have conquered the ability to be confident; then more than likely your body will react in just the same way as it would if you saw a forest fire.

And in this case, none of the changes would help at all. You'd be more likely to stutter when giving a speech; you'd appear sweaty and your voice might even change. Your entire appearance and demeanor would change in the blink of an eye and in front of the crowd you're speaking.

And when you panic it eventually creates a vicious cycle. Causing you more and more stress. Literally, you can hyperventilate and pass out as a result of the stress!

Also known as an anxiety attack – stress truly has this kind of profound affect!

The most common areas of stress “contention” are: finances, distain in our jobs or career choice, our children and their misbehavior or family turmoil.

But these are all topics we can’t run away from; and we most certainly can’t fight them. Or we can and we do and that’s where we get ourselves into trouble.

The vicious cycle that makes us sick, increases the risk of heart attacks, fever, the flu, even cancer – has now begun. And won’t stop until we grab it by the horns and put an end to it.

This fight or flight response will continue at a ‘low level’ for a long duration of time. For some people, over their life span. This is what we call chronic stress and it’s unhealthy for more reasons than stated above.

Chronic stress supresses our immune and digestion systems. This can lead to malabsorption as we are unable to receive the nutrients from our food vital for living a healthy life.

Stress is extremely disturbing to our sleep. When we are sleep deprived; we are more susceptible to disease.

And eventually, stress can cause the catecholamine neurotransmitters that allow us to focus to become depleted. This is called ‘adrenal fatigue’ and is linked to depression and chronic anxiety.

Note as well that no neurotransmitter and no hormones work in a vacuum. If you increase one, you alter others. And when you increase cortisol

(associated with chronic stress in particular) you also increase ghrelin – the hunger hormone.

This in turn encourages what's called 'lipogenesis' [the process by which acetyl-CoA is converted to fatty acids and is stored in the body in the form of fat] rather than used for energy. And it gets worse...

In fact, cortisol breaks down muscle by producing "myostatin" signalling the body to break down muscle for energy.

As you can see, it's just as important for your physique as it is your mental health, you begin learning the mindful ways of meditation. Erasing stress when it's not necessary; and using it to your advantage when it is.

...Mindful Meditation is a wonderful technique for balancing this beautifully orchestrated dance.

|| POSITIVE STRESS

We've determined just how detrimental stress and the effects it can have on your mental and physical health. But just as important learning how to avoid it, you need to know how to use it to your advantage as well.

Stress can be an extremely powerful and positive tool for many reasons and in many areas.

For instance; enhancing physical performance.

If you're in any kind of competition or sport such as a race, or surfing; then this response is exactly what you need to perform well and place first or at the top.

The ideal scenario would be receiving all the benefits of the fight or flight response, without the negative impact. Imagine if you could gain that kind of focus and increased muscle mass but without the sense of dread and fear.

And you can!

Psychologists call this a 'flow state' and it is triggered during moments in which we are highly focussed on something we enjoy.

The example given most often is extreme sports. Instances athletes describe as "the world seeming to slow down around them while they achieve amazing moves," feeling more alive than they've ever before.

We also experience flow when we're completely focussed on the work we're doing, or when we're so deep in concentration that we've lost all track of time.

During this state, we produce similar neurotransmitters and hormones but with the addition of another called 'anandamide.' Considered the bliss hormone that is also connected to abstract and creative thinking.

FUN FACT: Anandamide is produced naturally in our brains, but it's also a chemical found in marijuana.

Remember though, this isn't just 'one state' but rather a spectrum of states and severities and combinations of states and severities. We can be slightly stressed or very stressed. We can be slightly alert, or very alert. We can be alert and angry, alert and happy or alert and scared.

It's useful to think of the brain in terms of 'states' so long as you realize there are countless states in between. And if you're human...it's more than likely that you're somewhere here on the spectrum.

Flow states help us to perform at our best and focus more. They don't cause negative effects because the difference between them is – enjoyment!

The trick is in learning how to tap into that enjoyment of whatever you're doing and see it as a fun challenge rather than a chore or daunting task. When you've achieved this little trick, you've "mastered the flow!"

Find the fun in what you're doing [especially if it's not an option and something you must do.] Find a passion within it and learn to enjoy it.

If you can't beat 'em, join 'em, right?

You can do this by using similar strategies of the cognitive restructuring we've already gone over.

You'll also need a low level of 'eustress.' Eustress is the equivalent of chronic stress but is a more positive form. Eustress is the kind of stress that motivates us to do things.

For example, if you have an exam coming up and you don't experience any stress at all, then there is a good chance you're not going to study for it. More than likely, you won't do well because you didn't prepare.

Having just the right amount of low level 'stress' is exactly what you need to ensure you start studying early enough and do the best you can.

Eustress doesn't just have to mean negative motivation; it can also mean positive motivation. For instance, stress induced by fearing that you may not achieve the things you want to achieve; is in fact, based on positive stress.

|| TAPPING INTO HIDDEN POWERS

There's also a type of stress that can unlock a phenomenal physical and mental potential. While I'm not insinuating, anyone should or will be able to train themselves to the point they can access this kind of ability after reading this book; I do however, want you to realize that this kind of power exists and is extremely realistic.

It's also my hope you realize the possibilities that do exist and the reason that accessing more of your mind and your emotions is so potentially powerful and wonderful.

With that in mind, my first example is of something called a 'flashbulb memory.' This demonstrates the ability we have to memorize things in vivid detail if we think the event is important enough.

Think back to where you were at the time you first heard of the 9/11 attacks. When Princess Diana died. Or perhaps where you were when you first heard about Michael Jackson's or even as recently as Prince's passing. Alternatively, consider a moment that was particularly important in your own life; that had a lasting impact.

Chances are that you can remember these events in far more accurate detail than you can other parts of your biographical memory.

Partly this is the result of repeated rehearsing. When something impactful happens, we play it over and over again in our minds. But it's also the result of neurotransmitters being released that change the way the memory is laid out and makes those connections significantly stronger.

Then there's '*crisis strength*.' Crisis strength, also known as hysterical strength, is the name given to incidents where people suddenly tap into incredible strength.

A classic example here is the Mother who manages to lift a vehicle off her trapped child underneath. How is this possible? While there is very little in the way of scientific research looking at this phenomenon, there is a real theory as to how it might work.

When you contract your muscles normally to lift something, your brain sends signals that travel through your central nervous system and to the 'neuromuscular junction.'

Acetylcholine (the neurotransmitter) is released and this causes muscle fibers to fire. Only we're never quite capable of recruiting 100% of those muscle fibers. On average, we recruit around 30% of them and even a trained athlete will only be able to get up to around 50%.

This is thought to be an evolutionary limitation. The idea being that recruiting 100% of our muscle would leave us completely exhausted and vulnerable to attack. Moreover, it could cause injury by placing too much strain on our connective tissues and joints.

But to demonstrate the kind of strength we have hidden away, just watch anyone who gets an electric shock and gets thrown across the room.

This is caused not by the electricity but by the individual's muscles because they forcibly contract in response to the shock.

This causes them to access 100% of their muscle fiber which is enough to catapult them across the room!

Another way to tap into greater muscle contraction is by stimulating the release of the catecholamine neurotransmitters and fight or flight hormones. It is hypothesized that under times of intense stress, we can engage much more muscle mass and thereby achieve superhuman strength.

Again, this is a spectrum.

But even a minor fight or flight response is enough to somewhat increase your strength in the gym.

Studies show that if we train with loud noises in the background, shouting or music (which also stimulates the release of similar hormones) we can increase more muscle.

So, psyching yourself up before a workout may just be one of the very best ways to improve not only your performance in the gym but the amount of muscle you amass!

Controlling, and not suppressing stress might just be the secret to unlocking your fullest potential.

CHAPTER 5: Why You Should Visualize

So far we've looked at using meditation and cognitive restructuring to change our mental state. But visualization may be even more useful and important. If you can believe it. How could it possibly get better? But it does!

For a long time, it had been assumed our thought process was much like that of an inner monologue that resembled "thought boxes." Much like a comic book.

But research now suggests that we think in lots of "*modalities*." Meaning sometimes we visualize; sometimes we imagine our bodies in action and can almost 'feel' what it is we're thinking. And sometimes we just 'know.'

This latter example is called '*unsymbolized thought*.'

And in fact, thinking with our bodies and our senses might just be what enabled us to develop thought in the first place...

|| EMBODIED COGNITION

Briefly, embodied cognition is the idea that all our thoughts eventually relate back to physical experience.

When someone says something to you, or when you think something, your brain interprets this in such a way that gives it meaning.

You don't inherently understand language, which means the brain must be 'translating' it into some sort of pure meaning.

Psychologists once believed that the brain had a language of its own. They refer to this as '*mentalese*.'

More recently though, many experts adopted the belief that we understand things by visualizing them. When someone tells you a story, you understand the story because your brain visualizes it happening.

When someone tells you they walked through the snow you envision it. You visualize the color white. You imagine the cool air on your skin; and you can almost hear the snow crunching under your feet.

When we think 'higher level' thoughts, we understand them only because we can relate them back to physical experiences via abstraction. Math after all, is fundamentally based on counting...

This is also consistent with the idea that certain areas within our brain light up during visualization just as though we were engaging in the action. If you imagine swinging a golf club, then neurons relating to that movement will fire in your brain.

And as far as your brain and body is concerned, that might as well be happening! So, it makes a lot of sense to combine visualization with your meditation training and your restructuring.

If you have any doubt or need additional convincing that visualization can in fact 'trick' your brain into thinking something is happening and alter your emotional state...test it yourself by reliving an upsetting moment, or thinking of a scene from a sad or profound movie. Any event that's had a profound effect on you. You'll quickly begin to feel the unfavorable emotions you felt as if it were the first time. OR start thinking about your most favorite food, I'll bet your mouth is beginning to water as you do!

|| VISUALIZATION FOR PRODUCTIVITY

Visualization is a wonderful technique for calming the mind, body and soul. And combined with Mindful Meditation you've the power to "right" any "wrong"; or change bad to good.

It is important to understand and learn the art of visualization because it is so effective. And it would be unrealistic to think every time you want to combine the two; you'd have the time, resources or money to physically go to a place that's "the piece" known as visualization.

One way to use this power of visualization, is to go to a place in your mind that makes you most happy during a state of meditation. If you can't meditate in a calm and beautiful environment, then at least you can simulate it in your mind's eye by imagining you're on a beautiful beach, a log cabin in the mountains, or laying in a hammock in a big, sunny meadow.

You can also use visualization to alter your emotional state in other ways.

For example, if you're struggling to focus on your work, then you might utilize visualization to create a little *eustress* to motivate you.

To do this, you simply need to remember why you're doing the work and why it's important to you. Let's say that you're diligently working on a presentation for a meeting: visualize how great it would feel to nail that presentation...knocking it right out of the park.

Then visualize repeatedly what doing that could one day lead to: a higher position in the firm, a better career and an increased salary, all for instances.

Now visualize the opposite: imagine it going wrong and remember why it matters.

You can do the same thing with most anything you're struggling to focus on. By linking what you're doing back to the emotional hook and the reason you're doing it, you can much more effectively find the determination and drive you need to complete it.

Keep your goals in the front of your mind and you'll be much more motivated to get out of bed every day and start working out, or working on a personal project, and can put forth your very best performance at everything you do.

CHAPTER 6: The Power of Belief

These tools are amazing for increasing self-confidence and self-esteem.

It's one reason we're told to visualize ourselves obtaining our goals. When you can visualize yourself obtaining a goal, you produce neurotransmitters and hormones as though you had already achieved it.

As far as your brain is concerned, it's already happened and makes you much more likely to do well when you're performing that particular action.

But the complete opposite is true too. [I'm the queen of this opposite and it's a whole other book!] So, you must be careful. And it's also the big black hole most of us fall into. We're not "good enough, smart enough, pretty or handsome enough."

When we unintentionally visualize ourselves failing, or not achieving our goal[s] – it causes us to produce the fight or flight hormones. This in turn makes us nervous, frightened, anxious, etc. and much more likely to do the negative things we've convinced ourselves of to begin with.

Don't just restructure your thoughts, it's a process. Picture these things going well – and with the backing of your cognitive restructuring learned in the previous chapters; you'll realize and will have proven these [positive] things – and not the negative will happen.

|| HOW TO BECOME SOCIALLY FEARLESS WITH HYPOTHESIS TESTING

In general, removing anxiety and increasing our confidence is a very important tool. And the more you recognize the power of believing in your own ability, the more things will go in your favor.

Another tool used quite efficiently for relieving social anxiety is “*hypothesis testing*.” Even the most confident of us will have social anxiety to some degree. By removing it, we increase our chances of becoming more successful.

Confidence is vital for many reasons. When you exude it, it tends to place you in a higher pecking position. The opposite sex is naturally more attracted to you because confidence is an extremely sexy attribute to have. And it makes the same sex realize perhaps you’re important or an influential figure.

Confidence commands respect and is a wonderful characteristic to possess.

But when you stutter and stammer, are sweaty and have shaky hands...it not only suggests, but SCREAMS you lack it; in either the content of what you’re saying, or in your own importance or actions.

How can you convince anyone you’re confident...when you’re not feeling it yourself? You’ve proven that in your speech and actions. Inadvertently, the hierarchy has now been established and you’ve been knocked down a few pegs because of it. Well that really stinks. And once it’s been established, it’s nearly impossible to get a “redo.”

But by using *hypothesis testing*, it’s possible to go one step further and completely change the way people think about you. As well as, the way you think about yourself AND how you interact with others.

You remove your anxiety by anticipating what could go wrong and testing the outcome before whatever it is you’re about to confront that will require this kind of confidence [without the anxiety.]

Practice, practice, practice...but really put yourself outside of your comfort zone. If you must, because you're embarrassed, or uncomfortable; practice in a surrounding you're not familiar or don't know anyone. This keeps your anxiety a bit lower and fear of running into someone you know, less likely. But the more you practice, the better and easier this will become. I PROMISE!

Find a store you don't often shop. Walk up to the counter and place an order for something. When you do, use a funny voice. Say something purposefully awkward, stutter intentionally or stand in silence for a moment.

It will be uncomfortable – probably pretty painful [metaphorically speaking]. And it will definitely trigger your 'fight or flight' response. But breathe...and use everything you have to push past your anxiety. What you'll learn is that nothing bad comes of this experiment and the transaction is completed as normal.

And you lived to tell about it!

This was the worst-case scenario and nothing bad happened! Do this exercise more and over time. The reassociation will also kick in and you'll learn that there's really nothing to be afraid of.

Eventually things like job interviews, dating and so many other social scenarios will be far less frightening and will not trigger the stress response[s].

The result? When you've conquered confidence – the rest...just seems to fall right into place. Respect, love, peace, calm, blessedness, happiness, courage, strength and the power to be and do whatever you want.

But even without this step, simply practicing mindfulness and learning to distance yourself from your thoughts will help you to become calmer and more confident.

It will also help you detach from negative emotions increasing self-value.

|| THE LAW OF ATTRACTION

Meditation is expansive with many types including meditating on the things you love about yourself.

By combining many of these Eastern types of therapies GREATLY increases your chance of healing. But most definitely increases your self-worth and confidence.

This beautiful cycle will come full circle and eventually make all kinds of big and great changes in your life overall.

And in this closing chapter I cannot close without referring to 'The Law of Attraction.' Or stress enough to you; when you believe yourself to be one way, you become that way.

In other words; if you believe yourself to be highly successful, with a healthy bank account, a well-respected man/woman that exudes confidence – then that's how others will perceive you and that's what you will be and achieve.

You'll naturally take on that persona; and everyone around you will believe you because they've no reason not to.

Most importantly, **YOU** will believe you.

I've seen this happen and work time and time again. I've talked the talk and I've walked the walk. I'm sitting here today, writing this and alive because of Mindful Meditation and The LOA [and my therapist Tim.]

Now it's your turn. If you haven't already; begin working on Module One: The Law of Attraction and then Module 1.1 The Law of Attraction Vision Board.

CONCLUSION

We've covered an awful lot of ground in this book. And my hope for you is that you now realize and understand that mindfulness is much more than just a powerful form of meditation.

Yes, it is that. But even more – mindfulness means being more aware of your thoughts, your body and your beliefs and visualizations. It's being “**proactive**” instead of “**reactive**” to your surroundings, feelings, and thoughts; enabling you to essentially control your own destiny.

YOU are in control. No one is controlling YOU!

That means being a little more alert so you can focus on work. It might mean being calmer for your health and in your social interactions. It might mean being more psyched up for the gym or even changing the way you speak. Or it may just mean being a bit kinder to yourself.

Mindfulness is the key to unlocking the full potential of your mind, body and soul. When you can do that, all kinds of doors start to open for you...and your world begins to look and feel a lot different and one you can actually begin to enjoy.