

GARY HEADS

Discovering
Authenticity through
Mindfulness Coaching

living mindfully



WILEY Blackwell

Living Mindfully

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Discovering Authenticity through Mindfulness
Coaching

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Preface

As the interest in mindfulness and learning to teach mindfulness-based approaches continues to grow, the available information and pathways to teaching this approach will inevitably expand with it. The increasing attention that mindfulness is receiving in the media is fuelling a rapid rise in demand from the general public, especially those who suffer from psychological and physiological issues. This demand will place the spotlight of attention firmly on those that refer to themselves as mindfulness teachers/trainers, as well as those who deliver teacher-training programmes.

This book does not set out to evaluate or validate existing training pathways, but rather to offer guidelines for teaching specific programmes, namely, the Living Mindfully Programme, and the mindfulness-based coaching intervention, Training Individuals in Mindfulness and Excellence (TIME). The plethora of research papers currently available make impressive reading, and although this should be viewed with caution the evidence base is building in support of mindfulness-based interventions. Yet with recommendations by the Mental Health Foundation (2010), the National Institute for Health & Clinical Excellence (NICE; 2010) and the *Mindful Nation UK* Report (2015), we are yet to see mindfulness offered freely throughout healthcare in the United Kingdom.

However, for the past six years in County Durham in northeast England, Living Mindfully have delivered a mindfulness programme available to every resident in that county, accessible by referral from healthcare professionals, and commissioned by Public Health, County Durham Council.

In that time 3,500 individuals have embraced the opportunity either by requesting referral or being offered the option of attending the programme.

When I began my journey in 2005 to train as a mindfulness teacher it was always my intention to develop and deliver a mindfulness programme that was accessible to everyone, to ensure that a place on the programme

was not dependent upon finance, but rather determined by need. That intention has become a reality, but the need for the programme was grossly underestimated, as were the challenges and the time required to make the service the success it is today.

The experience gained from working with hundreds of groups has produced a wealth of information, both practical and insightful. This has influenced both the structure and delivery of the programme and enabled those engaged in teaching to develop their skills to a high standard. Working with vulnerable and at times challenging groups requires a great deal of care and compassion as well as ability. Being able to hold your group when difficulties arise is a skill that is gained only through experience. My own training pathway and that of those who work with me can only be described as excellent; however, with the greatest respect, it did not prepare us to work in this environment. Yet this is the very environment in which we need to be teaching, and it is here that mindfulness has impacted so positively and inspired our teachers in so many ways.

The guidance offered here is an insight into not only teacher training, but also an understanding of what is required to provide a fully-funded mindfulness service to the general public. The Living Mindfully programme is now an established and effective intervention that supports a whole community in their ongoing mindfulness practice. The success of this approach and the continuing research that demonstrates the positive impact upon those referred has led to numerous adaptations of the programme. These adaptations have included working in education, in the workplace, with the unemployed, in alcohol and drug rehabilitation, during pregnancy and with young carers.

The integration of mindfulness and coaching as described in this book has also proven to be an inspiring and motivational approach, especially for those that find themselves either unemployed or at a crossroads in their lives. Through the development of the TIME programme mindfulness-based coaching has demonstrated its potential as a pivotal component in promoting positive change and in inspiring an authentic lifestyle.

My vision is that in the future both mindfulness and mindfulness-based coaching programmes will be accessible to all, simply by visiting a GP, healthcare professional, unemployment agency or as part of career guidance within education. However, to make that a reality those that commission services must have confidence not only in the efficacy of mindfulness, but also in those that deliver the service.

The pages within this book are formulated from the dedication of teachers and participants alike. Whilst the programme has evolved over the years and continues to do so, the mindfulness practices remain the foundation of everything we teach. It is hoped that this book will encourage others to follow in our footsteps and embark on their journey as a

mindfulness teacher or will guide existing teachers and organizations in providing a similar mindfulness service in their area. It may, however, simply plant the seed of curiosity and a willingness to explore the possibility of introducing mindfulness into daily life.

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Introduction

In 2005, as I left a meditation evening in my hometown of Newcastle upon Tyne a chance remark was to have a remarkable influence upon my life, and the lives of thousands of others. We had been practicing Transcendental Meditation (Wallace, 1970), which I had been incorporating into my day and finding useful. As I left the building that night a member of the group asked me if I had enjoyed the class; she ended the conversation by telling me that she had just discovered something called 'mindfulness' and that I should check it out. Upon investigation it seemed that the place that might answer my questions was situated in North Wales, The Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice to be precise. A telephone conversation followed with a mindfulness teacher at the centre called Judith Soulsby; it appeared that the place to begin was to complete an eight-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction programme (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). As it was impractical to travel to North Wales each week, I chose the distance-learning option and completed the programme. I followed the eight-week course with a teacher development seven-day retreat in North Wales, and at the end of that week my vision was clear: to teach mindfulness; to integrate mindfulness and coaching; and to develop an organization that could deliver mindfulness programmes.

Throughout my time as a qualified coach I have always encouraged the individuals I work with to find what they are passionate about, and to follow that passion; this I believe is the path that can lead to authenticity, to life purpose, your gift to the world. This was my road map for an authentic journey, fuelled by passion and a desire for this particular work.

In the words of Rumi:

Everyone has been made for some particular work, and the desire for that work has been put in every heart. (Harvey, 1999)

To make my objective a reality I made the decision in 2006 to immerse myself in mindfulness by completing an MSc in Mindfulness -based Approaches at Bangor University, and this decision proved to be a wise one. The next three years were spent not only studying, but also developing and delivering mindfulness-based programmes, working predominately with the long-term unemployed in partnership with Jobcentreplus, the employment agency within the Department of Work and Pensions.

In 2009, I formed a social enterprise, Living Mindfully, with the aim of raising public awareness of the benefits of mindfulness-based approaches by delivering mindfulness programmes, and mindfulness-based coaching to individuals and groups of all ages. The development of the organization and the diversity of programmes it now delivers has expanded at a significant rate, and this period of rapid growth has enabled the company to keep pace with the tidal wave of interest in mindfulness that has emerged throughout the world.

The Living Mindfully Programme

In the first year of developing the Living Mindfully Programme, the Mental Health Foundation released a report that detailed recommendations for expanding mindfulness services throughout the United Kingdom. Within this report a survey of General Practitioners (GPs) and their attitude towards mindfulness-based approaches provided insights that helped to shape the provision of information, education, and training of those healthcare professionals charged with referring clients to the programme. The survey indicated that in general GPs viewed mindfulness positively as a healthcare intervention; however, they rarely, if ever, referred their patients. The reason for this was judged to be the fact that mindfulness interventions were not widely available. It was, therefore, reasonable to assume that a mindfulness service covering a whole county would attract referrals from healthcare professionals once its availability was circulated.

Although referrals were steady from the beginning, it soon became apparent that in order to build an established long-term service a concentrated effort would be needed to educate referrers to the potential benefits of mindfulness, and the criteria for referring suitable patients. To this effect, a concerted period of promotion was embarked upon, including personal visits to health centres, Introduction to Mindfulness presentations, workshops, and an open invitation to healthcare professionals to attend an eight-week mindfulness programme. This offer turned out to be pivotal to the success of the programme. The fact that many took up the offer of attending an eight-week programme and developed a personal mindfulness practice proved to be a key factor in

establishing the service. Importantly, they gained a real insight into the nature of the programme and into the commitment and time required. Attending the programme not only informed their decision-making when assessing the suitability of their patients, but, as their feedback suggested, also impacted significantly on their own overall health. After an initial 12-month period, the programme was commissioned by Public Health, Durham County Council, as an ongoing mindfulness service. One year later, Public Health at Darlington Borough Council also commissioned the service.

In the subsequent years the Living Mindfully Programme has been commissioned and delivered to a wide-ranging client base; the following list demonstrates the diversity of interest:

- public sector staff under potential threat of redundancy;
- local authority departments, to address workplace stress;
- police officers, to develop resilience when dealing with stressful situations;
- university students, to assist with exam pressure;
- young carers;
- long-term unemployed;
- those recovering from drug and alcohol addiction;
- pregnancy and beyond, for clients at risk of post-natal depression;
- trainee radiographers, to develop resilience and reduce potential burnout;
- schoolteachers, to address workplace stress;
- family nurse practitioners;
- mental health practitioners and coaches;
- men's support groups;
- veterans support groups;
- vulnerable and at risk young people.

In 2015, the Living Mindfully Programme was subject to a research project funded by Public Health, County Durham, in conjunction with Northumbria University (Mitchell & Heads, 2015)

Abstract

One hundred and twelve women and 37 men, with an average age of 50 years were referred for mindfulness training with a range of chronic psychological issues. All participants completed the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale before and after the mindfulness-training programme (Tennant et al., 2007). A significant overall effect of pre and post training was found and the difference was not related to a specific disorder. The results suggest that a 'brief dose' of mindfulness training

can have a positive impact on measures of well-being in a manner that is not related to patient characteristics. A follow-up of 28 participants confirmed that participation in the Living Mindfully Programme significantly enhanced psychological well-being immediately after training, and this benefit is maintained for up to four years after training. Continued practice of mindfulness meditation showed an insignificant relationship to well-being scores at follow-up. Qualitative data suggests that the Living Mindfully five-week programme is an effective means of developing emotion regulation and psychological well-being.

The results emanating from this research are very much in line with the feedback received from participants not only upon completion of the programme, but also over a much longer period. Because of the extensive support provided, a community of what could be described as mindfulness graduates has emerged. The number of individuals registered on the Living Mindfully database is considerable, and growing. Many regularly attend practice sessions, monthly practice groups, silent days, and retreats, as well as corresponding via email or telephone to ask practice-related questions. Although this level of support is time-consuming and expensive, the results far outweigh any cost implications; without this facility many past participants feel their daily mindfulness practice would be compromised.

With demand growing, the inevitable conundrum arises of how to build capacity and where to find mindfulness teachers trained to a level that will not only continue, but also enhance the delivery of the service. This proved initially to be a challenging proposition, but eventually teachers presented themselves and a core teaching team was created. They arrived by various means; some approached the company directly having completed training elsewhere, whilst others were past participants who had been inspired by their own experience to begin the journey of helping others to develop mindfulness skills. It was those individuals that had initially begun as participants that proved to be central to creating the shift towards not only delivering programmes, but also training mindfulness teachers. The creation of an in-house training programme to provide comprehensive training and experience has proved to be a solid foundation for both pupil and teacher. The understanding and wisdom gained through this process has led to the development of the Mindfulness Practitioner Training Programme, a 12-month training programme that began in September 2016. The training is intended for those wishing to teach the eight-week Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction Programme and the Living Mindfully Programme.

After a year of research and inquiry the Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group published the *Mindful Nation UK* Report (2015). I was delighted to be asked to contribute to this groundbreaking and potentially influential publication. The contents of the report make

interesting reading, and I would urge readers to study the findings; however, for the purposes of this book we will concentrate on access for GPs and the scaling up of mindfulness services in the United Kingdom. Contrary to the interest in mindfulness from both the general public and healthcare professionals, access to mindfulness-based interventions remains extremely limited. Although 72% of GPs wish to refer patients, only one in five actually has access to a programme in their area (Crane & Kuyken, 2012). Several NHS Trusts have developed mindfulness programmes; however, they are relatively small scale in terms of patient numbers and the only other option open to individuals is to attend a private programme and self-fund.

If we look at these outcomes compared with the delivery of the Living Mindfully Programme in County Durham we can immediately see the effect of a fully commissioned mindfulness service. In the last five years over two hundred programmes have been delivered, with in excess of three thousand places allocated to participants.

Throughout this intense period of both establishing and delivering a mindfulness service I have come to realise that investing in and maintaining high standards of teaching and ongoing training, although essential, are only one part of creating a fully functioning service. In the embryonic stages of development it soon became apparent that the volume of correspondence, reporting, and course administration would require additional non-teaching staff and the development of bespoke software. Producing workbooks, CDs, recordings, and constant website updates on this scale is both time consuming and costly. This level of investment and organization would be required whether the service was part of the NHS or delivered by a social enterprise or private company.

It is hoped that our expertise and experience can be of assistance in fulfilling the recommendations set out in recent publications, that in the future access to mindfulness-based interventions are available to all those that request a referral from healthcare professionals. The guidance within these pages is offered to those that wish to teach and as a model to expanding mindfulness into mainstream healthcare. It is presented not as a definitive solution, but rather as a tried-and-tested option.

Training Individuals in Mindfulness and Excellence

In addition to the Living Mindfully Programme this book also includes details of Training Individuals in Mindfulness and Excellence (TIME), a mindfulness-based coaching programme that can be delivered in conjunction with the mindfulness five-week programme. TIME has been

used as a stand-alone four-week programme, as well as being delivered before or after the Living Mindfully Programme. A specialist employment team seconded from Jobcentreplus originally commissioned the TIME programme, the remit being to address psychological issues that were impacting upon their client's abilities to find employment. The subsequent three-year pilot also formed the basis of my MSc thesis at The Centre for Mindfulness, University of Wales Bangor (Heads, 2011). In terms of positive outcomes regarding employment, the programme was a resounding success, even warranting praise in the House of Commons (2012). However, it was within the research that the future direction of the programme was to be found. The aim of the study was to examine the effects of a mindfulness-based coaching programme on quality of life, motivation, and self-esteem. The quality of life and motivation measures showed a significant increase, however, self-esteem levels decreased. This perhaps suggests a certain degree of acceptance and authenticity associated with participating in a mindfulness intervention, the fact that previous studies (Carson & Langer, 2006) had found a positive impact when fostering acceptance and authenticity made the results worthy of further investigation. The link between mindfulness and authenticity is in my opinion a fascinating and potentially transformational concept; the suggestion that mindfully informed choices are less influenced by the ego and are linked to outcomes characterized by low ego involvement (Brown & Ryan, 2003) seemed to be evident in the choices and actions taken by those participating in the TIME programme. Discovering authenticity through mindfulness-based coaching can perhaps provide a step beyond the ego-driven choices we make that dictate life's path, the conditioning, judgements, and negativity that can cloud our thinking and keep us locked in an automatic and unfulfilled existence. The emergence of the true self can be spawned by acceptance and authenticity, bringing forth unlimited possibilities, cultivating creativity, intention, and passion. It is through mindfulness that we can become aware of thoughts, emotions, feelings, physical sensations, behaviours, and speech. By exploring our direction in life with self-awareness we open to the possibility of following an authentic path; this is the essence of the TIME programme.

The programme delivered over four weeks consists of one, four-hour session per week, and is taught in a group format. This allows participants time for reflection, and to practice exercises and techniques week by week as the programme unfolds. The sessions are as follows:

- Week 1 Confidence and Self-esteem;
- Week 2 Negative Beliefs and Emotions;
- Week 3 Communication;
- Week 4 Planning the way forward.

The combination of mindfulness and coaching can be transformational for many participants; those individuals that have experienced the Living Mindfully and TIME programmes are best placed to describe the shift into authenticity and the new-found purpose they have experienced. Therefore, at the beginning of each chapter you will find a testimonial describing the impact that attending the programmes have had upon individual lives. The words are both heartfelt and inspirational, and a testimony to the ability of human beings to instigate positive change.

It is hoped that the contents of this book will go some way to influencing those that commission services to consider the potential of mindfulness and mindfulness-based coaching as an option. If the Living Mindfully and TIME programmes described in these chapters encourages participants, teachers, and trainers to step forward and become the catalyst for a more intuitive and authentic way of life, then the time taken to write these words will have been well spent.

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Sarah

Mindfulness has opened up a whole new world of possibilities; it woke me up to life. I came from a very poor and tragic place, I was in a women's refuge, isolated and very alone, with poor self-esteem. I found it difficult just to leave the refuge, felt very ashamed and saw no future in my life. I just felt doomed to failure, and expected life to be bleak and full of disasters.

Mindfulness connected me back with my emotions and thoughts, showed me why I felt the way I did and why I think the way I did. I stopped rejecting myself, started listening to needs, emotions, and myself, and started the walk back to being me again. It helped to ground me, to realize what was important in life, and helped with anxieties so that I could face people and the world again and stop being afraid of what 'might' be 'out there'. I learned to change my perceptions of life. Where once I would have left my home on a windy, rain-swept day thinking 'what a miserable day', I now started to appreciate the rainy days, and could see these as beautiful in their own way and quite essential. This is a metaphor also for how I started seeing my emotions and thoughts. We often do not like having what we perceive as negative thoughts and emotions, and as such fight them or ignore them; this is what causes conflicts and blocks us from what we truly are, need, and can be in life. Mindfulness is about being quiet and paying attention to this voice within.

I have recently undergone training in counselling and psychotherapy techniques, and have also started work with a local mental health charity helping to support other people on their road to recovery. I am also training in art at university, perhaps combining art and counselling as a therapy.

1

Mindfulness

I remember Sarah arriving for the first week of her programme; she portrayed both vulnerability and determination in those early moments. Arriving had obviously been a great effort and was subject to great deliberation. As she sat in her chair alongside eleven other participants, her fragility played out by lowering her eyes as if to explore in every detail the contours and patterns of the floor. To arrive at Week 1 of the Living Mindfully Programme had clearly been a difficult journey.

The words that Sarah uses to describe how mindfulness has impacted upon her life may perhaps hold the key to what mindfulness actually is. Phrases such as ‘opening up a whole new world of possibilities’, and ‘mindfulness woke me up to life’ signify some kind of transition or emergence from a state of unawareness, and a certain degree of hopelessness. In relation to Sarah’s description, it is useful to reflect on Ellen Langer’s (1989) evaluation that mindfulness could be depicted as the opposite of mindlessness, where attention is focused elsewhere and behaviour is automatic, without any awareness of one’s actions, including a preoccupation with memories, plans, or worries.

The word mindfulness is an English translation of the Pali word *sati* meaning awareness or skilful attentiveness (Gair & Karunatilake, 1998). Over 2,500 years ago, Pali would have been the language used by the Buddha when he began to teach the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. If we study these teachings and familiarise ourselves with Buddhist psychology, we will find mindfulness as a core component. Within the Buddha’s teachings there is a statement that is both wise and extremely thought-provoking: that assertion is that suffering is a natural part of human existence (Bodhi, 2010). If we look more closely at this we discover that some of our suffering is existential, we are all subject to birth, sickness, old age, and death. However, we often find that difficulties in life are more personal and self-imposed by nature, and can be influenced by past conditioning, present circumstances, or any number of

interweaving factors. If we learn through mindfulness to relate to positive, negative, or neutral experiences with less reactivity, we may then lessen the impact of those difficulties, especially those that are tinted with automated, judgemental, and critical thinking. Throughout the wealth of research, books, and articles relating to mindfulness the words 'awareness' and 'attention' are scattered like leaves on a blustery autumn day. Explanations of what mindfulness is are in abundance, but for the sake of argument the following has been chosen for its clarity, and simplicity:

Mindfulness is an open and receptive awareness of, and attention to, what is taking place in the present.

(Brown & Ryan, 2003)

This moment-by-moment awareness involves paying careful attention to our thoughts, feelings, emotions, and bodily sensations in an accepting and non-judgemental way. So many of our experiences can be viewed through the lens of reactivity, driven by conditioning and habitual patterns learned from previous experiences as we move through life. We can find ourselves living on autopilot, or lost in daydreaming as we resist the here and now, perhaps disengaging from reality to search for something deemed to be more interesting. Both can be said to be distractions from the actuality of the present moment, and are the opposite of mindfulness (Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2013).

Making a choice to cultivate the skill of mindfulness through regular practice is an option that is open to anyone; however, it does require an element of discipline and it can be challenging. The good news is that it is not something to acquire, but rather something to rekindle, it is already within us, and it is part of being human. There are moments in life when clarity and awareness arise naturally, a fleeting glimpse of what it is like to be fully conscious, completely aware of what is presenting itself in the moment. These moments unfortunately are short-lived and are soon replaced by daydreaming, stories, remembering, or imagining. Introducing mindfulness offers the prospect of learning to expand and sustain periods of awareness; the meditations that are practised regularly can promote a gentle exploration of what is actually happening in each moment, rather than what may be being projected as reality. This may facilitate the unravelling of familiar patterns and past conditioning that may have locked in unawareness, thus creating an ignorance of the present moment.

If practice is sustained then a wider perspective of what is actually happening can be established, including a realization that thoughts about the past or future are simply memories or projections, and the content of those thoughts are not manifesting in this moment. This stance of stepping back and observing can bring a more responsive approach when

attending to arising thoughts, sensations, and emotions; it can help to create choices, rather than the automatic reactions that sometimes trigger as experiences unfold.

The attitudes brought to mindfulness practice are of great importance. This is emphasized by Jon Kabat-Zinn, who suggests that the significance of the seven attitudinal factors of mindfulness constitute the pillars of mindfulness practice, and should not be underestimated (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). It is, therefore, worth taking a moment to reflect on these in more detail.

Non-judging

It is perhaps fitting that non-judging is listed here first, as navigating our way through the judging mind can be a real challenge.

How often do we find ourselves reacting harshly and judging our experience? It can feel like the actuality of the moment is being experienced through layers of ideas, opinions, likes, dislikes, good or bad, so that everything seems tainted, or snap decisions are made based on past experiences. The judgemental mind can sometimes dominate our thinking to the extent that we become anxious or struggle to cope, pushing away unwanted thoughts and feelings. To 'be with' our unfolding experience without judging requires a more compassionate and kindly attitude, a willingness to understand what is unfolding. Can we take the role of an impartial observer to our experience in each moment, whatever it happens to be? Not making a positive or negative evaluation of what we are seeing, feeling, thinking, but simply watching it. If non-judgemental awareness can be cultivated, then the arising of clarity and wisdom will hold the authenticity of the moment.

Patience

To be fully engaged in the present moment requires a great deal of patience, the moment cannot be hurried along to something more interesting, no matter how hard the goal is pursued. When the attention is focused on the breath in mindfulness practice the mind will naturally wander away, venturing into the past or future, or caught up in worries or planning, as if it has lost patience with the breath, and needs to find a more stimulating topic. Just as the attention is returned to the breath, time after time, so awareness of what is unfolding right now is returned again, and again. If the skill of patience is to be developed, it will require perseverance, curiosity, acceptance, and an arising