



# Mindfulness minus meditation: making the mindful most of everyday moments..

by Bill Cropper – The Change Forum

Based on materials and experiences drawn from our self-coaching guide & its accompanying clinic on Mindful Leadership in Action © Bill Cropper 2014-16

I often like to start my [Leading with Emotional Intelligence](#) clinics with a self-check-in. I chart-up a Mood-o-Meter with a scale from 1 (really down) to 10 (really high). Then I ask people to check in with themselves: (1) *Where are you on the mood-o-meter right now?* (2) *Can you name a feeling or two that goes with that?* And (3) *Is there a story to explain why you feel like that just now?* Many of you will twig immediately that this is a *mindful-moment* exercise.



I'm encouraging people to attend to the present moment – to check-in to what they feel, to name a few feelings, and to relate them to whatever thoughts they're entertaining in their heads at the time. *Focusing* yourself like this a few times a day is one of a multitude of simple, everyday ways you can train your brain to be more mindful – to cultivate presence and attentive action, increase calm and clarity, and at the same time, ease-off some of that stress we accumulate in busy workplaces.

In writing the self-coaching guide that goes with my [Mindful Leadership in Action](#) clinic, I was mindful that many leaders I come across automatically think of mindfulness as '*inaction*' – as mainly meditative, passive and very possibly, impractical! But you don't have to do lengthy meditation routines to be mindful. (Though research categorically shows it's a very effective way to cultivate it.) Nor does it mean retreating into a meditative huddle or 'omm-ing' around work serenely in a saffron-coloured tie (*though the fashion-statement value might be transcendent*). You can do [mindfulness-in-action](#) just as well.

Ed Halliwell, co-author of [The Mindful Manifesto](#) recommends practising mindfulness while you do routine, every-day activities we normally do on auto-pilot without thinking. I'm fascinated by the possibility of *making the mindful-most* of these kinds of everyday moments; that we can start to integrate routinely into our everyday life.

You don't have to reserve these moments for times of formal meditation. Sure you can do it sitting cross-legged on a cushion. But you can also do it while you're driving, cooking, eating, showering, swimming, walking, painting a fence or drinking a cup of tea. ...Now that's starting to sound



like one of those old Vic-Bitter Beer Ads, but they're all rich opportunities to practise a moment of mindfulness. That's the home-front. There's just as many work moments leaders can use to exercise mindfulness, building it into your routine work-week, and simultaneously training your brain to be more focused, present and attentive. Such key mindfulness traits not only enhance the discipline of your thinking, but also the quality of your actions.

So let's look at a few of these everyday activities you can transform into mindful moments and practise on a daily basis. Many of these are things we typically don't pay much attention to. Fact is, we often use them as an excuse to let our mind wander, worry or hurry us along in whatever direction it dictates. All of which means, we're not being mindful and present.



### 1. Mindful Dish-washing

**Minds-Off:** The most dead-boring job in the whole household – demeaning drudgery, devoid of challenge, mental stimulation or sense of achievement. Thoughts like these make it more so. So you let your mind wander elsewhere to take your mind off it. OK. I have a dishwasher too, but you get what I mean. Give it a rest and turn this into a mindfulness activity instead.

**Minds-ON:** Be mindful of how it feels as your hands dip into the water. Be aware of its warmth. Pick up one piece at a time. Take an extra moment or two to focus on giving it a slow, thorough clean. Breath out and relax any body tension as you place it in the dish-rack. Notice thoughts distracting you from focusing on this task, and let them go as you pick up the next item to wash, and re-focus. Let yourself notice textures, shapes and how you handle each item. Take note of how you feel as you finish.

### 2. Mindful Eating

**Minds-Off:** Now here's one we all definitely do – often very distractedly with damage to digestion too. We eat on the run, while we're doing something else. It's the very essence of mindless eating. *We grab, gulp and gobble* our way through the day, hardly noticing what we shove in our mouths, and certainly not stopping to savour this potentially delicious and nutritious moment of mindfulness.



**Minds-ON:** *Slow down and savour – don't dive in and devour.* Stop. Really take in what you're about to eat. Attend to colours, aroma, taste, texture. Small bites. Move each morsel round in your mouth before you chomp on in. Notice different flavours as you chew slowly. Count each chew per mouthful or make each last say 15-20 seconds – and don't think of the next mouthful till you swallow this one. No matter what your day holds, you're going to eat. So why not use this small mouthful of time to chew your way into the present moment and do a favour to your digestive track. And be mindful of when you're full too!

### 3. Mindful Tooth-Brushing

**Minds-Off:** Teeth are the last thing you think of. You have to do it but it's almost all on auto-pilot. You're vaguely aware of picking up the brush, slopping on toothpaste and rapidly running it round your mouth – often, while you roam around the house looking for other things to do while you're doing it. You move your focus quickly from *dentals* to *mentals* – thinking about what's coming up today, footy match tonight, trouble with the kids or what to say to your boss about that uncompleted report.



**Minds-ON:** Focus on the feel as you pick-up the brush and tube-on the paste. Mentally label each move if you like: *"picking-up"*, *"squeezing"* and *"brushing"*. Notice the flavour

and texture of the toothpaste, how you move the brush round your mouth and it's feel on each tooth. What about how you hold the brush, move your arm, the brushing sound in your head, the touch of the brush on your teeth and gums? As thoughts pop up, brush them aside (ha-ha). Re-focus on each methodical move in the brushing process.

#### 4. Mindful Showering

**Minds-Off:** Step in forgetting to adjust temperature first. Ouch, too hot! Brr, too cold! Once we find the right balance, luxuriate in the spray of water over your body, then instantly zone-out – vaguely washing hair and body while your mind strays to a million other things as you break into singing a favourite tune.



**Minds-ON:** Adjust temperature before getting in, avoiding “ouchy-brrr!” distraction. Notice the feel of water contacting your skin, streaming down your body. The sound it makes hitting the shower-screen. What about physical actions like applying shampoo, massaging your scalp, soaping your body and the different feel of rinsing off. What about the fragrance of shower gel or shampoo? Stepping in and out of the shower, turning off the water, and then mindfully towelling yourself dry? Be one with bathing. Maybe your partner will smell the difference too.

#### 5. Mindful Vacuuming



**Minds-Off:** OK, maybe I'm pushing it with this one, yet all those 'housey-chores' are great opportunities to exercise mindfulness – mopping, mowing, sweeping floors, folding washing. Vacuuming can be vicious trauma to some (notice how thoughts make it so). The noise alarms, back-aches, you rush around rubbing the carpet randomly thinking of nicer things you could be doing and to top it off, you find you vacuum weighs a ton and doesn't suck!

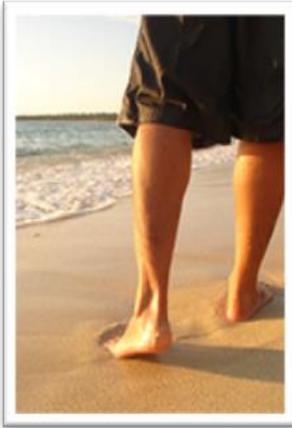
**Minds-ON:** Vacuuming is another activity we do while our mind is occupied with other things. So bring all your attention to focus on it. Notice the area to vacuum. What may get in the way? Notice your stance and the way your hands grip the vacuum (just as you would with your golf swing). Get into the body-rhythm or moving slowly and methodically back and forward as you go and slight changes in pressure or direction. What about the sound of the vacuum, your breathing and how you bend and flex your body?

#### 6. Mindful Waiting

**Minds-Off:** We all hate waiting and we all have to do lots of it. Can you see that long line at the airline counter or security check-in as a chance to practise a bit of mindfulness? You'll feel calmer if you can. But many of us feel frustration and impatience well up inside, as you stand body taut, jaws clenched, amazed at how long each person in front of you loiters at the counter or is served so slow it's got be in slow-mo'?

**Minds-ON:** Transform that huff of impatience into a sigh of accepting serenity. After all, you can't do much more. Pay attention to thoughts that fuel impatience and set them aside. Notice tensions in your body and relax them on each out-breath. In fact, it's an excellent time to practise mindful breathing. Feel your feet on the ground, your inhalations and exhalations. Note how you're standing or focus your attention on an object. Note any sense of urgency that wells. Dispel it. Stop time-or-phone-checking for distraction-value. Be in the moment. Just mindfully wait and de-stress while you're doing it.





## 7. Mindful Walking

**Minds-Off:** We put a lot of time and effort into learning how to walk and now we do it, most of us ignore it. We rush and hurry, not noticing how we walk or at what pace. Worse, we walk-and-text – an accident waiting to happen – our minds full of stray thoughts, not paying attention to our gait or surroundings.

**Minds-ON:** Walking brings you a step closer to mindfulness every day. Focus on how each foot lands and lifts as they alternately make contact with the ground. Sense the rhythm – how your left and right foot alternate – and what happens with the rest of your body (arms swinging, knees bending, calves stretching and thighs tensing). As your mind strays bring your attention back to the physicality of walking as you relax, breathe and **let go of tension**.

### And Re-Focusing a bit

Mindfulness is always about being mindful of something. If you drink your tea mindfully, it's mindful drinking. If you walk mindfully, it's mindful walking. If you focus on the act of brushing your teeth rather than think about other things while you do it, it's mindful tooth-brushing. Giving fully-focused-attention to whatever you're doing is a simple but effective mindfulness exercise for everyday life. In fact, most meditation retreats encourage you to do everything mindfully while you're there, including cooking and cleaning. The trick is to switch off the auto-pilot, notice your mind-strays, come back to the present moment and focus on the physicality of what you're doing right now.

While mindfulness doesn't have to be sitting still on a cushion, it does require the ability to achieve a mental stillness of sorts that many leaders fear, since it implies not doing things. The ultimate goal is to be able to focus. There are creative ways to build this practice into your life without the need to set aside time in a separate, silent place, if that's not your thing or it sounds too daunting. But whatever methods you choose, plus or minus meditation, you still need to train your brain by doing mental exercises like some of these we've listed above that make you, and your brain, re-mould your circuitry for more focus, presence and attention rather than just react on auto-pilot all the time.

In our ***Mindful Leadership in Action*** clinics, we encourage people to put together a practice regime that includes some of these simple, everyday 'homey' routines and write their own instructions for them. Not only do they create a state of calm that can relieve stress and anxiety, they're also training your brain to focus in other ways in other contexts at work. By the way, don't make this a serious affair. Make it a game to play with yourself. The seven home-spun practice ideas I've outlined above easily extend into the work and leadership space too. Our ***Mindful Leadership in Action*** self-coaching guide has many tools and ideas for speaking mindfully, listening mindfully, thinking mindfully, acting mindfully and leading mindfully. If you're looking for ways to enhance the quality of your leadership actions and sharpen your focus and thinking capacity, ***Mindful Leadership in Action*** may provide a pertinent platform for you... Perhaps I'll see you at one of my clinics?

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