

Practicing Well: Notice It!

Patty Beck | *A Balanced Practice, LLC*

Have you ever done or said something that you later regretted and felt like the only explanation was, “I was frustrated and wasn’t thinking?” You might be fine one minute and then a new piece of information sends your blood pressure through the roof. The next thing you know, you’ve sent an overly aggressive email or spoken harshly with a colleague or loved one, which later leaves you wishing you had behaved differently. It happens to everyone, myself included. While there is no “easy” fix to this scenario, practicing mindfulness is something that can help you to recognize your body’s signals that you are frustrated and notice that you may need a moment to calm yourself before responding to whatever is causing you stress.

Mindfulness always seemed like an amorphous concept to me, but since I began practicing last year, I’ve come to realize that at its core it is about being aware of the present moment. It’s about noticing what is going on in your body and your mind at any given time so that you are aware of what you’re doing, thinking, and feeling as opposed to cruising through your day on autopilot (and falling victim to kneejerk reactions to stress). It allows you to live your life more purposefully and to be more “awake” for it.

Often the way beginners learn is through meditation by focusing on their breath and noticing how their body moves and feels with each inhale and exhale. Focusing on different parts of the body begins to reveal whether they are naturally tight or relaxed and whether they hold tension when you are stressed. I had no idea until I started meditating that I hold tension in my jaw or that I press my tongue to the roof of my mouth when I’m stressed. Now that I know this, I use it as a guide throughout my day to check in and see if my body knows something before my mind does. When I notice my jaw is tight, my first step is to wiggle it to

physically release the tension and my next is to think about what is causing it and whether I can do anything to manage my reaction. Sometimes that’s closing my eyes and taking a few deep breaths, while other times I need to physically step away from my computer for a few minutes or take my dogs for a walk around the block.

While meditation has helped me to hone my mindfulness skills, it does not work for everyone as many people find it difficult to sit still with their breath. The good news is that there are countless ways to practice mindfulness without ever sitting on a meditation cushion (i.e., walking, driving, exercising, cooking, eating, being in nature, etc.). My personal favorite is to practice when I drink my morning coffee. Rather than mindlessly (pun intended!) drinking it while multi-tasking and waiting for the caffeine boost, I notice the warmth of the mug in my hands, the strong aroma of the coffee, the sweet flavor as I take a sip, the heat of the liquid as it warms my chest from the inside, and the feeling of utter relaxation that I experience in that moment. It’s something I look forward to every morning knowing that I have a few minutes (or even a few seconds) to myself where I can simply be engaged in what I’m doing without worrying about the stresses of my workday or my endless “to do” list.

The next time you receive an unpleasant email from opposing counsel, find that a colleague has made a mistake in their work, or see that your spouse still has not done “the one thing” you’ve been asking them to do, take a breath and notice what is happening in your body. Is your chest tight or are your hands clenched? Has your breathing sped up or become heavy? Are you grumbling out loud? Whatever it is, simply notice it. Then take a moment to think about what you can do to interrupt the cycle. Do you need to take a few breaths, physically leave the

space, or call a friend to vent? Learning to notice when we’re upset and then finding ways to pause and deal with our body’s mental and physical reaction can be the difference between regretting our behavior or instead feeling calm and appreciative of our ability to listen to our bodies and manage stress in a healthy way.

We all have our moments where we experience feelings of frustration, irritation, and anger in our personal and professional lives. Mindfulness will not magically stop these moments from happening, but it can help you to understand yourself better and teach you new ways to deal with challenges as they occur. As always, if you are struggling with anything —stress, languishing, anxiety, depression, anger, etc.—please contact your state’s confidential lawyers’ assistance program or a trained mental health provider. After two years in a pandemic, we’re all processing things differently, and it’s okay to not be okay. Be kind and be well! ■



About the AUTHOR

Patty Beck is the President & Owner of *A Balanced Practice, LLC*, where she teaches attorneys practical

strategies for incorporating well-being into their personal and professional lives. Prior to discovering her passion for attorney well-being, she worked as an associate at a large law firm in Minneapolis, MN practicing employment law and as a Claim Attorney for *Minnesota Lawyers Mutual Insurance Company* where she helped attorneys navigate challenging legal malpractice and ethics complaints. Through her experience in private practice and helping lawyers through difficult times, she discovered her passion for teaching lawyers the “little things” they can do each day to improve their relationship with stress and overall satisfaction with their careers. She can be reached at patty@abalancedpracticellc.com.