

the
NOW
effect

HOW A MINDFUL MOMENT
CAN CHANGE
THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

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Introduction

A man lies dying in a hospital bed. He has spent his entire life building for the future, doing what needed to be done to amass wealth and raise his status to a level he thought worthy. Now he has reached the end of his days and finds himself filled with remorse rather than satisfaction. In his final moments, he turns to his doctor and says, “I spent my whole life stepping on people in order to get to where I want to be, and now there’s no one left for me. It’s only now that I realize it’s so simple. It’s who you love and how you love and the rest of it—the rest of it never mattered.” That is a powerful lesson, yet he has little time left to make use of it.

He came to clarity at the end of his life; what if you could get this clarity now?

The psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl said, “In between stimulus and response there is a space, in that space lies our power to choose our response, in our response lies our growth and our freedom.” What if an awareness of that space, that moment, could change the rest of your life? That’s the promise that millions of people, including professionals in mental health, medicine, education, business, sports, and even politics, have begun to realize.

We have to wonder why Google, one of the most successful

companies in the world, offers a program to help its employees hone the ability to be more present. Why are health care companies instituting courses in engaging with the now for their employees and corporate clients? Why are a growing number of elementary schools teaching their children mindfulness practices? Why is Congressman Tim Ryan of Ohio passionately lobbying for the government to practice being here now? Why did Phil Jackson, arguably the most successful NBA coach of all time, encourage his players to practice mindful basketball? Why are mindfulness programs growing in more than 250 hospitals around the country and many more around the world?

The Now Effect is fast becoming one of the best-researched and most-talked-about phenomena today. Learning how to intentionally engage with the now isn't just a promised pathway to an abstract enlightenment but is becoming a practical way to alleviate stress and pain, cultivate emotional freedom, and even create a stronger, healthier brain.

Research shows that how we pay attention and what we pay attention to have a dramatic effect on how our brain grows. When we're on sensory overload, which happens often in our overconnected culture, we kick into autopilot to find relief. When we're on autopilot, our brain makes choices for us. So if we often entertain anxious thoughts, we're likely to strengthen connections in the brain that facilitate that type of thinking. If we intentionally focus on being present and more compassionate toward ourselves, we're likely to create a brain architecture that supports being kinder and more compassionate. This is real and powerful.

The way you wake up in the morning, do your work, eat your food, interact with your digital devices, and engage with friends, family, colleagues, acquaintances, and strangers over time all become

routine. The ability to make things automatic enables us to function, but when life itself becomes routine, we miss out on the choices, possibilities, and wonders that are all around us.

Cultivating an awareness of the spaces in our lives that are happening right now is more than just moving along a pathway to self-realization, changing your brain architecture, or stopping your destructive behaviors. In this space there is a rich territory that has the potential to open your mind to possibilities you may have never thought existed before. You can become naturally flexible in your decision making, become able to regulate your body in moments of distress, calm your anxious mind when it's snowballing with thoughts, have greater focus at home and work, feel empathy and compassion toward yourself and others, communicate more effectively, and be more aware of what is most important to you. The secret is in the spaces.

the space between

In short, the Now Effect is the “Aha!” moments of clarity in life when we wake up to our truths. It's the moments when we come home after being berated by a customer and see our child running toward us, reminding us of our value. It's when we hear of a friend's family member passing away and reconnect to the loved ones in our lives. It's the moment we see a baby's smile and all our stress drifts away. It was on the sunny day of September 11, 2001, that many people around the world woke up and connected to what was most important. No matter how we get there, we find what is sacred and precious in life when we enter into the spaces of awareness that occur all around us.

Sometimes it seems like a cosmic joke that these spaces of clarity, which reveal the essence of life and our innate wisdom, are so slippery and so easy to become disconnected from.

The simple yet subtle truth is that life is decided in the spaces. However, the power to choose our responses comes only with an awareness of that space. As we practice becoming aware of the spaces in our lives, we soon come to understand that these are actually “choice points,” moments in time when we are aware enough to choose a response. One response may be to bring mindfulness to whatever we’re doing and break free from the ways of thinking and behaving that don’t serve us. Mindfulness is the ability to pay attention, on purpose, while putting aside our programmed biases.

You’ll be exposed to mindfulness practices throughout this book, but you’ll also be turning the wheel a notch further, refining the focus with specific techniques that are tailored to prime your mind toward spaces or choice points. In a short time, those spaces of awareness will begin dropping in on you like moments of grace throughout the day, guiding you with more freedom to live as if it matters.

This is exactly what the writings and practices in this book intend to help you do.

When you think about it, there is no other time than now. Even our stories and beliefs from the past and our hopes and worries about the future are occurring right now. By doing the practices in this book, you’ll begin to notice and engage the spaces in your life and not only experience greater clarity but, throughout the process, create new experiences and stories that positively influence the way you naturally see yourself and the world. You will be changing the way you think *before* you think, realizing the Now Effect.

my story

It was a summer night in 2001 when I found myself doing exactly what I swore I would never do. There was a time in my life when I was living in San Francisco, working hard but playing *much* harder. I could often be found hanging out with friends at clubs south of Market Street, living what we called the “high life,” experimenting to the point of abuse with drugs and alcohol. At the time, I was one of the top salespeople at a telecommunications company, and my mind always justified my behavior: “As long as you’re doing well at work, everything is okay.”

At some of the seedier clubs, there was a man I often saw who looked wasted away, as if the life had been sucked out of him, as he frantically danced all night—clearly with the support of some kind of speed. The mere sight of him would immediately make me feel disgusted. I remember turning to my friends and saying, “God help me if I ever turn out like him.”

It was about 5 AM one Monday morning when I had been up for almost two days that I found myself in the backseat of a broken-down limousine with that very man and his equally strung-out girlfriend. She too looked like a shadow of a human being. If I’d had a mirror and my mind had been clear, I might have said the same about myself. I had intentionally sought him out at a club because I wanted to see if he had anything to help me stay awake long enough to get me through the workday. It was my darkest hour, and a voice began to percolate within me: “Please help me, how did I ever get here?” In that pain and desperation something became clear as the voice continued, “Your life is worth more than this; there are too many people who love you for you to throw it all away.” In that

moment I was thrust into a space of clarity where I knew what I had to do. As I jumped out of the car, I made the choice to walk all the way home and begin my recovery.

Though I'd love to tell you that in that moment I was transformed forever, that's not the way it played out, and frankly, when it comes to our deeply ingrained habits, it's usually not the way it plays out for most people. In the days that followed, my resolve began to weaken as I gradually stopped noticing the spaces of choice and began living on automatic again. It was just a few weeks later that I found myself engaging in the same old patterns.

The principles and practices in this book are what released me from being stuck in the habitual ways of living that didn't serve me, and gave me a life of greater freedom.

the top 10 benefits of the now effect

- You will literally change the way you think before you think and break free from subconscious beliefs and old programming that don't serve you.
- You'll have access to more choice points in life, bringing back a feeling of aliveness and opening the doors to greater potential, opportunities, and possibilities.
- You'll become more flexible in your decision making and responses to people and challenges.
- You'll increase your emotional intelligence and be able to relax more effectively in moments of distress.
- You'll be able to focus better at home and at work.
- You'll open up to feeling more grateful, forgiving, loving, hope-

ful, empathic, and compassionate—all key components of feeling good.

- You'll tap into the wisdom that lies within you and make your intuition more reliable.
- You'll feel more connected to yourself and others, a critical ingredient of feeling well.
- You'll literally rewire a stronger and healthier brain.
- You'll change your life by breaking out of the habitual patterns of living that don't serve you.

I wrote this book to give you easy access to the essence of the Now Effect and to show you how to apply it to your life. Part I, "Getting Started," is meant to give you the best foundation to prepare you for the rest of the book. Part II, "Training Ground," gives you the fundamentals to start experiencing the Now Effect. It challenges you to bring these exercises into your life in a number of different ways. Part III, "Know Your Mind, Change Your Brain," illuminates the reality of your thoughts, beliefs, and mind traps. Doing the writings and practices in this section will teach you how to break out of a limited mind and into greater freedom. Part IV, "Priming Your Mind for Good," is where you begin to draw your mind away from its automatic negative biases and nurture feelings of gratitude, forgiveness, joy, hope, kindness, compassion, and resiliency. Part V, "Know Your Brain, Change Your Mind," gives you insight into the inner workings of your brain. When you can picture what's going on under the hood, it helps you move into a space of awareness where you gain access to choice points to make changes. Part VI, "Working with Difficult Emotions," is what all the prior sections have been preparing you for. Learning and prac-

ting how to relate differently to what's difficult are at the center of transformation. Part VII, "Getting Connected," introduces you to the reality of our interconnectedness, positively changing the way you relate to the people in your life. And Appendix A, "Deepen Your Practice," provides longer practices to give you the option to expand your experience. If you aren't able to make space for this section in your life right now, it's here for you when you're ready.

Most chapters in the book end with Now Moments, specific reflections and practices for bringing aspects of the Now Effect into your life. You'll also notice that certain chapters have bar code images in these sections. You can scan these codes with your Smartphone to be brought to a video of me leading you through a practice. To access these videos, simply download the free Microsoft Tag app at <http://gettag.mobi>. If you don't have a Smartphone, there will be links provided to the videos that you can type into your computer.

To give you the best chance for success for making the Now Effect come alive in your life it's important that you stay connected to a community of people who are also interested in this.

Take this moment right now to register for *The Now Effect* community at www.elishagoldstein.com and stay connected and informed as you move through the book with an option for daily Now Moment reminders, a weekly newsletter, and even a free once-a-month live call to help answer your most important questions.

I'm offering this to make sure you have the optimal foundation for making the changes you desire and giving yourself the best chance to live the life you want—right now!

This book is an opportunity to unlock the confines of your mind and begin a playful adventure. You will soon see the doorway into the space of awareness that might have seemed so elusive before. It's through these spaces that you will realize the Now Effect and begin to change the rest of your life.

Now take a breath, because it's time to get started.

part I

GETTING STARTED

ALL THE FLOWERS OF ALL THE TOMORROWS
ARE IN THE SEEDS OF TODAY.

—*Proverb*

You can think of the approach in “Getting Started” in the same way that someone might think of preparing a healthy garden. Under adverse conditions, dirt tends to become compacted. When this happens, it’s difficult for water and nutrients to flow beneath the surface and for healthy roots to grow. The hardened soil also makes it difficult for roots to be resilient and makes them susceptible to disease.

All of us have had seeds planted in us from early childhood. This is our early programming; as in the garden, the soil often hardens around these seeds, getting in the way of healthy growth.

In order to create a healthy garden (and mind), we must prepare it for growth by breaking up the hardened surface and making space for the roots to breathe. After this is done, materials

such as compost, wood chips, and grass clippings are added to keep the soil spacious, healthy, loose, and less likely to become compacted again.

In order for any program to create change in a person's life to succeed, that person must feel adequately prepared. I wrote this section to help you understand what truly matters to you and where you want this book to take you, and to introduce concepts that will be built on throughout this book, along with a simple practice to get you started.

The fact is, you are the master gardener of your life, and as you create a rich soil, you will begin to understand which weeds need pulling and which seeds need nurturing to cultivate a beautiful mind.

THE WISDOM IN GOLF BALLS

It is not too uncommon for people to spend their whole life waiting to start living.

—ECKHART TOLLE

A professor stood before a philosophy class holding an empty jar. As the students took their seats, she began filling the jar with golf balls. When they reached the top, she asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was. The professor then took a bag of pebbles and poured them into the jar, and they made their way into the spaces between the golf balls.

Again she asked the students if the jar was full, and they agreed that it was.

But the professor had another trick up her sleeve. She brought out a bag of sand and proceeded to pour the grains into the jar, filling up more of the remaining space. Again the question came: “It’s full now, correct?” The answer was a resounding “Yes.”

The professor then took a sip of her coffee and dumped the rest into the jar, filling up spaces that no one thought were there.

“So what does it mean?” the professor asked.

A witty student raised his own coffee mug and asked, “There’s always room for coffee?”

The professor, along with the rest of the class, had a good laugh. Then she said, “Imagine that this jar represents the space in your life. The golf balls represent what’s most important—family, children, health, friends, things that you’re passionate about—the things that at the end of your life you would be glad you paid attention to.

“The pebbles are essential but less important, such as your house, your car, maybe your job.

“The sand is all of the small stuff in life that we’re trying not to sweat.

“The coffee, well, you already answered that one.”

The professor continued, “There is room for all of this only if you put the golf balls in first. If you put the sand or pebbles in first, there won’t be room for the golf balls. The way we pay attention to our lives works the same way. If you spend your attention or mental space sweating the small stuff in life, you won’t have the capacity to pay attention to what is most important to you.”

This is a classic story that speaks to becoming more mindful of what really matters. I do the same exercise with my clients and students. Why? Thoughts of what is most valuable fly into and out of our minds all the time, and we don’t see the space between our awareness and these thoughts. This exercise provides a physical representation of thinking about what really matters and simultaneously makes us aware of the space in which we have the opportunity to choose a response. The practice of intentionally paying attention to what matters primes the mind to become more aware of what is meaningful.

The biggest question at this stage of the process is, what in life

really matters to you? Is it your relationship to your partner, paying attention to your children, taking care of your body, sharpening your mind, being kind to yourself or others, making room for play, or living with greater ease?

Paying attention to the things that you value in life is fundamental to your happiness. We know that our minds have an inclination to follow the path of least resistance, so we need a compass to help us intentionally come back to our priorities.

now moment

Creating a way to be aware of our values can help us break out of autopilot and guide us back to what really matters.

1. Sit in a space to take care of the golf balls first—the things that really matter. What are your priorities in life? Let's bring some awareness to them, because at the end of the day, the rest is just sand. Make a list in your mind or write down what truly matters.
2. Sitting exercise: Take a few moments to relax, close your eyes, and practice "Breathing in, I am aware of what truly matters, breathing out, I let go of living on automatic."
3. Go find a jar and a box of golf balls or some nice stones. Label each golf ball or stone with something that really matters in your life. If you don't have a physical jar, you can draw a picture of a jar on a piece of paper along with golf balls or stones or perhaps just picture them in your mind. Actions speak louder than words, so check to see where in your life you're bringing action to your values. Maybe you're taking

your partner out to dinner, responding to people and yourself with greater kindness and compassion, being less judgmental, playing games with your kids, getting back into exercise or yoga, making space for that round of eighteen holes, or spending time in meditation.

4. Put the jar in a prominent place somewhere in your house or office where you can't miss looking at it. Every time you intentionally look at the jar, your mind is more likely to incline toward what truly matters. As you do this, you prime your mind to respond to those values during the spaces of your daily life.