

May 25, 2021

7 MINUTES TO READ · 1500 WORDS

Mindfulness 101: A Road Map to the Landscape of the Mind

By Scott L. Rogers

Share:



In navigating life's inevitable ups and downs, it can be helpful to have a road map. In this month's column, I'll be sharing with you a *mindfulness road map* called the "Landscape of the Mind" that many find useful when riding the roller coaster of emotion that can be an all-too-familiar experience in the practice of law. I'll also share with you a simple practice for using it and a little of the neuroscience that helps explain why turning to it at challenging times can lessen the intensity of agitated feelings such as anger, doubt, frustration, and fear.

The Landscape of the Mind

The Landscape of the Mind offers a bird's-eye view of the mental and emotional field we inhabit as we experience life. Running through the center of the image is the Freeway of Flow, where we are purposeful, productive, creative, clear of mind, connected, and courageous. Feel free to add other desirable attributes. This is the state of being present and grounded that we all know and experience from time to time. We don't need to practice mindfulness to be on the Freeway of Flow. But in today's [volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous](#) world, it is easy to lose track of where we are. Take a few moments and study the image below. What places do you recognize from your own experience?

a mind adept at mental time travel. This high-level mental capacity serves us well at times—learning, planning—yet can be the source of great suffering when we are unaware of where we are or of the path we took to get there.

In the bottom right of the image, we see one of the most common and consequential of places—the Dungeon of Doubt. It is here we find ourselves hesitating, wondering whether we are good enough, and second-guessing our actions and decisions. Imposter syndrome. Up to the left in the Cave of Our Dark Side we experience doubt's close cousin, shame.

And then, of course, there is the Roller Coaster of E-motion. You may have been on it earlier today, and you are likely to find yourself on it again soon enough. Importantly, life offers all of us periods of celebration and joy and of loss and despair. This is the true ride of our life, one [for which we were made](#). The ride that we end up taking, however, often greatly exaggerates its highs and lows. We crave the pleasant, perceiving it to be so much more than it is (this job, this relationship will save me!), and we can so deeply resist the unpleasant that we view it as far worse or enduring than it will be (I'll never get through this, this is the worst thing ever). In her book *Real Happiness: The Power of Meditation* (Workman Publishing, 2010), author and educator Sharon Salzberg offers us the important reminder that mindfulness is being able to tell the difference between what's happening and the story we are telling about what's happening. Realizing this insight helps to steady the ride.

The Short Practice

A simple and short practice you may find helpful when feeling overwhelmed or otherwise agitated is to look at the image and locate yourself in it. Ask yourself, “Where am I?” Are you afraid of being blamed for something in the Valley of Fear or wishing you had a new iPhone in the Well of Wants? Have you been swept away by the River of Regret, or might you be lost in Lust Lagoon? In all likelihood you will be able to find where you are. If not, write it in as you likely will find yourself there again soon enough. I created this image about 15 years ago based on the places I know only too well. Thirty years into this mindfulness practice, and I still know them all. Perhaps, though, just perhaps, I wander off a little less often, and when I do, I realize it sooner.

The Science

There is a world of difference between being lost in thought and waking up out of mental forgetfulness. Perhaps you know the powerful shift from being angry to being aware you are feeling anger. Or the pivot from ruminating over a regretted past experience to being aware the mind has been lost in rumination. This enhanced awareness of the landscape of the mind is cultivated through mindfulness practice. In addition, there are a variety of mindfulness practices that cut to the chase and involve noting or labeling one's experience. At its simplest level, when focusing attention on an object and then realizing that a thought has arisen, one notes silently “thought.” So, too, with a feeling or body sensation—“feeling” or “sensation.” A slightly more nuanced practice involves labeling the content of the thought (“past,” “dinner”), the feeling (“anger,” “fear”), or the body sensation (“hunger,” “itch”). [Research](#) has found that by labeling or naming one's emotional state, the activity of regions of the brain associated with that state may subside, thereby changing the intensity of the experience. This can be summed up with “to name it is to tame it.”

Learning from the Attractive Nuisance

You'll notice that the image is subtitled “The Attractive Nuisance” as a reminder of the tort law doctrine that arose out cases such as when those boys went for a swim on a hot day in what turned out to be a toxic body of water. Notwithstanding the risk, they were drawn to it because of some inviting quality. We can ask ourselves why we visit anger and fear, jealousy and doubt again and again. It tends not to be pleasant, yet we return. In this respect, much of the landscape is an attractive nuisance. It may well be that there is something we can learn about ourselves and each other by visiting these places, and perhaps that is why we are drawn to them. But to learn requires us to remain steady and grounded when there. When we find ourselves wandering off, it can be helpful to return attention to the task at hand—or to the breath, as a steadying agent. Otherwise, it may prove very painful. With practice, we are able to approach these places with a more stable attention, better equipped to learn lessons that can awaken the heart and ease the mind.

[Download the PDF of this article](#)

ENTITY:**SOLO, SMALL FIRM AND GENERAL PRACTICE DIVISION****TOPIC:****PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Authors

**Scott L. Rogers**

[Scott L. Rogers](#) is a nationally recognized leader in the area of mindfulness and law, as well as a teacher, researcher, and trainer. He is founder and director of the University of Miami School of Law's [Mindfulness in Law Program](#), and he co-founded and co-directs the University of Miami's [Mindfulness Research & Practice Initiative](#). Scott is the author of five books including the recently released *The Elements of Mindfulness*.

Published in *GPSolo eReport*, Volume 10, Number 10, May 2021. © 2021 by the American Bar Association. Reproduced with permission. All rights reserved. This information or any portion thereof may not be copied or disseminated in any form or by any means or stored in an electronic database or retrieval system without the express written consent of the American Bar Association. The views expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the American Bar Association or the Solo, Small Firm and General Practice Division.