

for attending to present moment experience that help counter the tendency to default to “mindlessness” when automatic pilot is switched on. Below are three techniques Langer advances.

NOTICING NEW THINGS

Take a few moments each day and notice things in your environment that you’ve gotten so used to they may no longer register—the color of the walls, the grain of wood on your desk, the placement of pillows on a sofa, the shape of eye glasses worn by a colleague, the leaves on trees swaying outside your window. While a meditative practice may lead one to more naturally and spontaneously appreciate these nuances, Langer approaches it from reverse and encourages a direct, intentional, cognitive engagement.

CREATE NEW CATEGORIES

Expand your judgments of yourself and others by looking to complementary interpretations that take into account that judgments are not stable and independent of context. “Impatient” might be recast as “concerned,” “bull-dog” as “committed,” and “rigid” or “slow” as “conscientious.” Doing so allows you to free yourself from fixed conceptions, see the larger perspective found in each moment and across interpersonal interactions, and create new categories for enriching arguments, writings, collaboration, and well-being.

SHIFT FROM A PERSONAL TO UNIVERSAL ATTRIBUTION IF UNCERTAINTY

In one of Langer’s most creative applications in the realm of working with uncertainty, she advocates shifting from a “personal attribution” of uncertainty to a universal one. What this means is more fully recognizing that “uncertainty is the rule for all of us and not just for the individual.” For example, if you don’t know an answer to the question “will we win this motion?” but believe it is “knowable” you may, out of insecurity and fear, overreact to the inquiry by unnecessarily retreating or recklessly charging forward. Retreat and you miss opportunities while charging forward can lead to unwise action and advice, all while feeling undue stress as the future plays itself out and the answers come to be known. In contrast, by adopting a universal attribution of uncertainty, i.e., “I do not know and it is not knowable” you are more likely to: not take personal those times when you do not know the answer, more comfortably acknowledge that such is the case, be freed to engage in more productive problem solving, and sleep better at night.

If Langer’s approach appeals to you, you may find good summer reading with: “Mindfulness,” “On Becoming an Artist: Reinventing Yourself Through Mindful Creativity,” and “The Power of Mindful

Learning.” She also wrote “Counter-Clockwise: Mindful Health and the Power of Possibility,” which grew out of her social psychological research looking at the influence of beliefs, expectations, and mindset on the aging process. You may recall hearing about the group of septuagenarians who, as part of her study, attended a 5-day retreat where stereotyped beliefs about age were disregarded and the environment primed an earlier time in their lives. You can read more about this small-sample study and Langer [here](#). Participants were instructed to immerse in the experience from the vantage point of a time when they were twenty years younger. The art on the walls, the music played, and magazines were from that era, and they engaged in discussions that brought them back in time. When all was said and done, their cognitive abilities and physical strength improved. They did not meditate or do cognitive exercises or strength training. Langer’s message is that they were freed from the trappings of limiting beliefs. That is to say, they were more open and receptive to possibilities—attributes available to us all, throughout our careers and lives.



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