

January 24, 2023 6 MINUTES TO READ · 1300 WORDS

Mindfulness 101: Hello February, Goodbye New Year's Resolutions?


By Scott L. Rogers

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Welcome, 2023! As the holiday season meets the new year, our good intentions for personal and professional growth can butt up against the reality of habit and years of conditioning. It's amazing how optimistic we can be at the prospect of implementing a new (or renewed) game plan, only to witness our motivation fade. While it may be tempting to conclude that it was all wishful thinking, often it is that *the state of mind from which the good intention emerged* is an elusive one. It's like that great idea that comes from nowhere that you don't write down because you're sure you'll never forget, only to be unable to retrieve it a short while later. The key is to maintain, or at least be able to retrieve, the inspired state of mind.

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It can be hard to implement change because the conditions for change can be unreliable and transient. These include the capacity to remain focused (as when your plan to exercise is derailed when a quick Internet search takes you down a rabbit hole), regulate emotional reactivity (as when your commitment to become a better listener succumbs to the agitation you feel when being challenged in a conversation), and calm an agitated body (as when you reach for that drink when feeling tension in your chest, notwithstanding your plan to cut back on alcohol). Once this happens a few times, the motivation and confidence in implementing change can quickly fade. This is where mindfulness can offer a helpful assist.

Whatever your New Year's resolution or intentions to improve aspects of your life and connection with others, the glue that can help implement positive change might be found in a few minutes of regular mindfulness practice. One reason is that mindfulness can help us redirect a distracted attention, self-regulate our emotions, and reclaim a steadier state. So, as January turns to February, rather than dismiss your good intentions as wishful thinking, introduce a little mindfulness practice and see if it might help things fall into place, even if just a little bit.

Mindfulness Practice

Many who resolve to practice mindfulness find it to be challenging, and their practice never quite gets off the ground or quickly fades. Below are five tips to help establish and maintain a daily practice. If one of your New Year's resolutions was to learn about mindfulness or to develop a regular practice, these tips might

prove useful. And if mindfulness has not been on your mind, but you notice resolutions slipping away, mindfulness practice may help to get you back on track.

As a reminder, a basic mindfulness exercise involves paying attention to an object arising in the present moment (such as the sensations of breathing), and when you detect the mind is wandering, bringing attention back to the object. The object of attention need not be the breath; it instead could be the feel of your hands, a nearby sound, or an object such as a spot on the ground or a candle. Were you to sit regularly and do this for between six and 12 minutes, you would be practicing mindfulness.

As simple and short as this instruction is, many will forget to practice or, shortly after starting, get up to do something else like eat some chips, pick up their phone to look for texts or check emails, or tackle an item on their to-do list. You know the pattern. Below are six tips that can help you establish a new pattern.

- 1 **Just sit.** For many, the most challenging aspect of mindfulness practice is taking their seat in the first place. It is all too easy simply not to do it. So, for starters, just sit, even if you don't stay in your seat as long as you planned. Better to sit for one minute than to not sit for 12. Take it slowly and be patient. Each time you do, you'll be reinforcing this new behavior.
- 2 **Your number-one technology is you.** As amazing and entertaining as your smartphone is, your brain is ever so much more so. Rather than begin the morning by outsourcing your technology, look to the one already embedded in you. Once the brain gets revved up with emails, texts, and the news, it can be especially challenging to settle into a period of mindful reflection. So, if you wish to practice in the morning, save smart-device usage until afterward. And should you practice later in the day or in the evening, minimize the use of technology immediately beforehand. Afterward, you may find yourself better focused and have an easier time falling asleep and staying asleep.
- 3 **Set a timer.** Set a timer so that you can offload the task of keeping track of time. Six minutes can be a good start. It's the length of time I suggested in my first book for lawyers, *The Six Minute Solution: A Mindfulness Primer for Lawyers* (Mindful Living, 2009), and it's the amount of time suggested in my just-released book, *The Mindful Law Student: A Mindfulness in Law Practice Guide* (Edward Elgar, 2022), written for all readers. We lawyers know the relevance of "0.1 hours," and sitting for six minutes can help reduce stress and create a larger sense of perspective, [a healthy return on investment](#). You can download the free [SoBe Mindful](#) app (for iOS devices) that provides a series of 6-, 12-, and 18-minute mindfulness practices.
- 4 **Same time, same channel.** If you leave the time you practice to chance, it may not happen as the day's events can be unpredictable, and we often experience a sense of urgency that can override a decision to practice. Because it can be helpful to practice at the same time each day, schedule it on your calendar for a time and length that is reliably available. As for the *same channel*—remember that you are not trying to stop thinking or clear away thoughts. On the contrary, you are watching a show in which you are a primary character (it seems). The practice is to keep watching and observe the thoughts, feelings, and sensations that come and go.
- 5 **Read, but not too much.** There are a lot of terrific books on mindfulness that can be inspiring and helpful. Sometimes, we can spend a disproportionate amount of time reading about practicing mindfulness, with actual practice being a casualty of our intellectual curiosity. View your practice as a healthy combination of the two.

I hope that your year is off to a good start. New Year's resolutions are often aspirations for being the kind of person you already are in so many ways and for living a life of meaning and purpose, which you already do more than you may realize. Many of us strive to accomplish more and be more, and it can be challenging to find the sweet spot of achievement and ease. One resolution you may wish to consider, if you haven't already, is to be good to yourself this year.

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