

Joan Marques

Abstract

This chapter, possibly more so than others, focuses on leadership as a process that begins within the leader. The underlying assumption in this chapter is that we cannot be good leaders to others if we cannot lead ourselves well. The chapter touches on a behavioral pattern to which many people fall prey: the sleepwalking mode. People who sleepwalk, move through the motions of personal and professional life without questioning whether they still matter to them. Mindfulness, the opposite of sleepwalking, is a critical skill for a leader to develop and maintain, because it has a major influence on the type of decisions this leader will make, and the type of influence this leader will have onto followers.

Introduction

Leadership is first and foremost a personal relationship. It is kindled by the leader's passion for a goal and manifests itself through behavior. History has presented us numerous examples of people who had a goal that others considered senseless, from the great inventor Thomas Alva Edison, who failed hundreds of times with his invention of a commercially viable light bulb, but chose to see his failed attempts as "ways that did not work," to Abraham Lincoln, America's 16th president, who had a life marked by setbacks, losses, and defeats, and refused to see himself as a failure, even when everyone else made fun of him. From Mohandas Gandhi, who had such a frail appearance in a time when leadership was closely linked to a set of physical traits

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(“tall” and “white” being some of them), that very few would have considered him capable of firmly and doggedly leading India to independence, to Nelson Mandela, who served 27 years in prison, because he believed in and strived for equality for black and white in South Africa, where “apartheid” was the main ideology for the longest time. Mandela became the first black president of South Africa in 1994. These leaders all had their own challenges and opportunities, but they first and foremost believed in themselves and were mindful of what they had formulated as their life’s mission.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a flexible cognitive state that results from drawing novel distinctions about the situation and the environment (Carson & Langer, 2004; Langer, 1989). A mindful person actively engages in the present and is sensitive to context as well as perspective. A mindful approach is the foundation as well as the outcome of noticing new things (Carson & Langer, 2006). According to Carson and Langer, mindfulness can enhance self-acceptance, which, in turn, brings greater peace of mind. When we lack self-acceptance, we may experience emotional troubles, resulting in anger and depression (Carson & Langer, 2006).

The following traits can be distinguished in mindful people:

1. They view objects as well as situations from different perspectives, and
2. Based on the context of an issue, they can shift their perspectives (Carson & Langer, 2006).

The opposite of being mindful is being mindless. A mindless person rigidly adheres to a single perspective without considering contexts or perspectives (Carson & Langer, 2006). Mindless people compartmentalize experiences, behaviors, objects, and other people into inflexible categories. They are trapped within a single perspective and are incapable of shifting their viewpoints in order to see the other side of a situation, story, or experience. In other words, they lack respect for others’ viewpoints, because they are so caught in their own.

In his book, *Coming to our senses*, Jon Kabat-Zinn describes mindfulness “as moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, that is in the present moment, and as non-reactively, as nonjudgmentally and as open-heartedly as possible” (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 108). Kabat-Zinn’s definition could also be attributed to something called *respectful awareness*, because it combines the nonreactive, nonjudgmental, open-hearted foundation of respect to specific attention in the present moment.

Respect

Respect is embedded in the way we treat people and other living beings. Some people think that respect is classified: they only show respect to those that hold higher positions than the one they hold, and disrespect or ignore those who hold

subordinate positions or represent a lower ranked status in society. Other people think that respect is limited to our interactions with other human beings, and that other living beings are not worthy of respect. Of course, that is not the case. There is much to be questioned about the mindfulness level of a person who only grants respect to other human beings, but abuses or ignores his or her pets.

Real, deep, genuine respect goes beyond just honoring human cultures and behaviors, and understands the importance of honoring all living beings, as they all have a right to exist, whether or not we interact, appreciate, or understand them. In order to evoke and nurture this degree of respect, we have to reflect in a way that is not exactly common among business practitioners, but it is not impossible. Everything on planet earth was created for a special purpose. On our quest to progress, we, the humans, have disrupted many cycles and sequences of life, forcing them out of their protective habitats and into those we now call ours. This is, for instance, why we find bugs and roaches in buildings, because we build with wood, which comes from the trees in which they used to live. Each living being was placed here with a special task, and we should be aware of that. We may not like everything, but we can still practice the mindfulness to respect it.

Respect is not always easy to give. Some people seem to do everything to make it difficult to grant them any respect. People, who disrespect others blatantly, because they feel superior to those, are hard to like. Yet, mindful leaders understand that even those souls need respect, just as much as the downtrodden and dejected ones.

As our general sense of respect expands, so will our mindfulness toward other living beings. The beauty of it all is that there is a mutual dynamic at play here, because when we practice mindfulness, we begin to cultivate deep respect for other beings and their circumstances, most of all, their emotions (Khong, 2011).

The Sleepwalking Mode

When we implement our work or home activities without investing too much thought in them and without wondering what the meaning of these activities is to us, we are sleepwalking. Sleepwalking is an ongoing, *mindless* way of performing for a paycheck in order to pay the bills and hopefully have some extra spending money left. It's also the mindless way of fulfilling all our chores within a nonwork relationship, without ever wondering whether we still find fulfillment in this relationship, situation, neighborhood, or team, and in the things we do. When we sleepwalk, we do not wonder about whether what we *do* is in line with what we *like*, and if not, how we could change it. Many people sleepwalk, because they don't realize that there is an alternative to the way they go through life. They simply go through the motions and don't engage in any reflection. There may be sporadic moments that something like a deliberation emerges, but those moments soon subside and the sleepwalking resumes. The moments of deliberation most often happen when they get shaken up by an ordeal, such as the loss of a loved one, or an unexpected but major change in their career or job.

Sleepwalking is the opposite of being awake. People who sleepwalk, move through the motions of personal and professional life without questioning whether they still matter to them. There are many instances of sleepwalking around us. Human beings have a tendency of becoming mindless and do things either because they have done them for a long time or because they were done this way for a long time. Mindless continuation of traditions is an often occurring form of sleepwalking. Something was once done this way, and nobody wonders whether it still has a purpose today.

Some forms of sleepwalking are even brought within religious or cultural realms, making them even harder to challenge or change. Some people go to their church or temple two or three times a week, simply because the tradition has been set that way for decades. Unfortunately, they don't even pay attention to what their pastor or preacher says. Once out of their religious home, they live like savages with each other, mistrusting and insulting each other; unwilling to support any social cause; and filled with senses of discrimination, greed, and hatred. These are all serious forms of sleepwalking. Some cultures prohibit their members from dating and marrying outside the racial or cultural boundaries. Youngsters who choose to oppose this rule get disowned and possibly even abandoned from their family or from the entire community. Protection of the ethnic purity is so important to them that it overbears any common or humane sense. And mindlessly, the tradition is observed year after year, decade after decade, without ever considering the bigger picture of human interconnectedness.

Sleepwalking has a lot to do with focusing too much on the details and forgetting to zoom out in order to obtain a broader scope. Discrimination of any kind is also a form of sleepwalking: it is an act that is based on superficial differences, mostly external or acquired, without considering the many overarching commonalities. Those who discriminate hold beliefs that they are somehow better than others, either because of their race, culture, education, age, status, or another parameter they erected and labeled as important. The mind-set these discriminating folks nurture was most likely adopted from previous generations without any screening or critical reflection about its purpose, sense, or origins.

Sleepwalking can lead to a lot of trouble, not only for the person who sleepwalks, but also for those who get affected by this behavior. In the case of racism, for instance, the racist may not even suffer as much from his or her behavior as those who are subjected to the act. Oftentimes, however, sleepwalkers experience the disadvantages of their ways. Refusing to change is almost always equal to falling behind, especially in these times of continuous change.

So, why is sleepwalking such a widespread phenomenon? It is because human beings, by default, are creatures of habit, hence, change averse. We love to dwell in our comfort zones, and that is understandable to a great extent: once we have developed a pattern, it is just easier to follow the same trend repeatedly. It requires less mental energy to find our way through our routine. It is like performing on autopilot. But there are limits to everything: performing on autopilot for too long can derail our focus on new trends, and new trends keep emerging, whether we like it or not. Especially in professional circles, it will be self-destructive to behave like a sleepwalker.

Still, people fall prey to this mindless trend. We often make choices that feel good at one time, and then fail to keep track of the changes around us, and even those that happen within! Many people cannot understand their own change process. If they liked what they did once, how can they dislike it today? If they made such a deliberate decision to be where they currently are, how can it seem so unpleasant or unsuitable today? Of course, the answer is not too hard to retrieve: everything changes. Nothing is permanent. We live in a world where even our life is not infinite, let alone our relationships or professional circumstances. We are in constant flux, and regularly move up and down the ladder of progress. There is no guarantee that the trend will always be upward. Those who have experienced the economic downturn of 2008 can attest to that. Many people lost jobs that they thought would be theirs for the rest of their professional life. From one day to another, they had to give up their prestigious homes and some even became homeless. If there is one thing that doesn't change it is the fact that life is unpredictable. Because of this unpredictability, we owe it to ourselves to remain mindful and refrain from sleepwalking.

Regardless of the measures we take to safeguard our life and circumstances, we don't have the ability to ensure that our life will be a smooth ride. And when we review challenges from this angle, we may be able to see their purpose: they shake us at our core and force us to refocus. If only for a short while, we snap out of the sleepwalking habit and understand the need to think creatively.

Thinking creatively is an immediate consequence of mindfulness. As we become more alert of the shifting conditions of things around us, we realize that old solutions will not effectively solve new challenges. Our chance of success increases tremendously when we apply creativeness and stop doing what everybody else does (Nissley, 2009). As an example, when we lose one job, we should be mindful in looking for another one in exactly the same field. This is what most people do. They try to recapture the same routine, even if they are forced to do it elsewhere. Instead of doing this, they could consider the disconnect from their prior work and habit pattern as an encouragement to explore a different path.

Individuals are not the only ones who sleepwalk. Organizations can also fall prey to this behavior. This is understandable, because organizations are run by people, and if the people driving the organization are unaware or unwilling to apply necessary changes, the organization may land in an indolent situation that will harm its competitiveness and general performance and growth. There are numerous examples of businesses that once thrived but lost their edge due to sleepwalking. Within the organizational context, sleepwalking is usually equal to lack of innovation (Newman, 2010). Major business corporations such as General Motors and Ford, once the biggest and most prestigious car companies on the globe, have been losing market share and profits due to their failure to keep up with younger generations of automakers.

Vijay Govindarajan, who is a professor at Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business and the coauthor of "The Other Side of Innovation" (Harvard Business Review Press, along with Chris Trimble), explains that successful companies often fall prey to three drawbacks that dearly cost them: (1) a physical trap, where they are stuck with huge investments in obsolete strategies and processes that hinder them

from innovating; (2) a psychological trap, where they keep focusing on the steps and activities that once made them successful without realizing that those actions and strategies no longer work; and (3) a strategic trap, where they only focus on the here and now, and fail to prepare for future trends (Newman, 2010). Some well-known companies that have fallen into one or more of the above “sleepwalk” traps are as follows:

- Blockbuster, a company once so successful in video renting, which fell into the strategic trap of failing to consider future trends, thus inspiring new entrants such as Netflix and Redbox to come up with more innovative ways of bringing movies to our homes (Newman, 2010).
- Eastman Kodak, absolute leader in the world of camera productions for almost 100 years, but then falling prey to category 2 and 3 traps: failing to move itself psychologically into the digital era, and consequently, losing the momentum of implementing the strategies required to maintain its leadership position in this industry. The company has been searching for new markets to break through, but its stock price has fallen far beneath what it used to be (Newman, 2010).
- Motorola, soaring to the position of global leader first with car radios, then with two-way radios, and finally, the first mobile phone. Unfortunately, Motorola also made category 2 and 3 mistakes, failing to jump on the smartphone bandwagon in time, thus causing this pioneer to rapidly and painfully lose its market share to newcomers (Newman, 2010).
- Sony, which was once a major player in the industry of sound and video equipment and other consumer electronics. However, the company started diverting its focus into different directions, including film and music, and got distracted from its product lines leadership. As a result, new players in the consumer electronic field took over and offered the world the innovation it needed in this regard (Newman, 2010).
- Toys “R” Us, which had its heydays as a retail store for toys in the 1980s and 1990s, filling the needs that existed in the US market at the time. However, as the new millennium started, the once aggressive merging and acquisition policy of Toys “R” Us was brought to a halt by giant discount houses such as Target, Wal-Mart, and Amazon, leaving the company in struggling mode, complete with store closures, layoffs, and downsizing (Newman, 2010).

The Reasons Behind Sleepwalking

Here are some of the reasons why so many people sleepwalk through their life instead of engaging in mindfulness and taking a critical look at their whereabouts:

1. They feel that thinking is a passive pursuit. They claim that they are too busy to sit and think. And that, while there’s nothing lazy or passive about thinking.
2. They confine their thinking to their current field of action, or they have learned to think within the boundaries of their daily environment.

3. At work, they are not rewarded for creative thinking. There are still many work environments—and bosses—who can get very displeased with out-of-the-box thinkers or healthy risk takers.
4. They may also be subject to peer pressure, sometimes even unconsciously. Especially those of us who are very close with our family or friends may want approval from them, but if they are traditionalists, they will not encourage anything out of the ordinary, or anything that may require you to move away.
5. They may face self-imposed blockades, which so many people maintain, such as self-esteem issues, or fear for what others may think of them, which prohibits them from wading into areas outside of their mental comfort zone (Lavine, 2009).
6. They are subjected to a highly routine-based (mechanistic) environment, which does not encourage critical thinking, because the actions to be applied are highly repetitive. This is why we often see telephone operators, checkout clerks, and airline personnel sleepwalk through their days, mechanically fulfilling the tasks that were outlined for them (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000).
7. They may come from cultures or living environments where mindfulness was punished, or where mindless following was rewarded (King & Sawyer, 1998) (Fig. 10.1).

Effects of Sleepwalking

The effect of sleepwalking on business entities is decline, unless they manage to reinvent themselves and come up with a product or service that restores their position in their field. The effect of sleepwalking for human beings could be considered

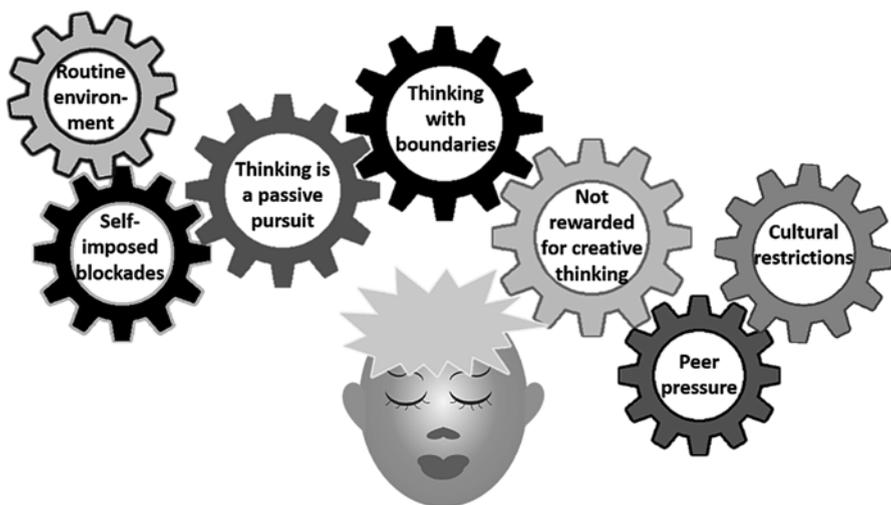


Fig. 10.1 Why people sleepwalk

similar: we, too, can first fall off the bandwagon, but then wake up, and come up with a way to reinvent ourselves in order to return to the point of fulfillment or prestige we desire. That's the beauty of being alive and thinking: regardless of our mistakes, we can correct them and move on, sometimes even better than before.

However, when we are in sleepwalk mode, we may not think too deeply about it, but we usually feel depressed, and it is no secret what depression can do to us. Being unfulfilled and unhappy for long periods of time reduces our patients and can turn us into moody, grouchy people. Health wise, it can cause us to acquire high blood pressure; push us toward destructive habits such as alcohol, drug abuse, or overeating; and possibly lead to a stroke, a heart attack, or other psychosomatically driven diseases.

On the other hand, mindful performance keeps us fulfilled, even though it would be foolish to think that every day will be at an equal high. Even wakeful people experience downs sometimes, because life is happening to them as well. They just don't allow these setbacks to get the best of them, and bounce back much quicker than sleepwalkers do. Overall, the quality of their life is therefore at a much higher level.

Keeping Track of Sleepwalking

Before we can do something about sleepwalking, we have to be aware that we do it, and that is often the biggest challenge. It's almost as challenging as trying to discover that you sleep while you are asleep. The tendency to sleepwalk is so widespread, so common, that many people will choose to remain in denial and claim that they are not sleepwalking, but very wakeful instead. Yet, multiple psychology researchers are now sharing the conclusion that most human performance is mindless, hence, based on sleepwalking. "Without deliberative and reflective conscious activity, humans are simply mindless automatons" (Bandura, 2006, p. 164).

So far, this chapter has shared information to help make us aware that (1) there is such a phenomenon as sleepwalking or enduring mindlessness; (2) it leads to undesirable effects for the person who sleepwalks as well as those who are closely affiliated with this person; (3) it can be turned around through mindful behavior and creative thinking.

We should realize, however, that becoming and remaining mindful is not easy. It might help, therefore, to be mindful of the following:

1. Being mindful is not a one-time project. It requires ongoing effort, because it can evaporate so easily when we settle into our activities, work- or lifestyles. Fortunately, mindfulness can be polished regularly, for instance through meditation, or through regular scanning of our thoughts (Junttila, N/A), and asking ourselves whether we are being mindful or are being mindless. The more we ask ourselves that question, the more deliberate our actions will become, and the fewer mindless moments we will have.
2. Life is a continuous sequence of mindfulness disruptions, which may come in many forms: problems at home or work, relationship issues, loss or illness,

which can give rise to old bad habits, distract us from our mindfulness efforts (Junttila, N/A), thus propelling us back into sleepwalking mode.

3. The many distractions and setbacks in work and private life may cause our mindfulness efforts to stall regularly or progress so slowly that we get discouraged (Junttila). Of course, setbacks are the best opportunities to prove our determination and test our mindfulness. But that is easier said than done.
4. Our goals may infringe on our mindfulness efforts (Junttila). We may get so geared up about reaching a goal that we suddenly realize that we have placed our mindfulness efforts on hold and have fallen into many of our old sleepwalking habits. Goals are great, but they can also be powerful distractions to remaining mindful.
5. Achieving our goals may cause another major infringement on our mindfulness (Junttila). If we reach a goal and don't set a new one, we run the chance of becoming languid, and losing the zest to move on. Lethargy is one of the major drivers of mindlessness. Lack of activity equals lack of purpose and that equals lack of a reason to nourish mindfulness.
6. Dreading our current circumstances can also become an obstacle toward mindfulness. It may lead to depression and rob us from the will to focus. However, dreadful situations are also a great opportunity for sharpening our mindfulness efforts and understanding the purpose of the current moment in the wholeness of our lives (Junttila).

Practicing Our Mindfulness

Mindfulness can be induced in several ways. A frequently practiced way is meditation. One of the most well-known forms of meditation is Vipassana, or insight meditation, which is the meditation practice in which Siddhartha Gautama, generally referred to as "The Buddha," engaged when he gained enlightenment. Vipassana has emerged into a global movement, and is even more westernized than, for instance, Zen, because it does not require traditional techniques (Coleman, 2001/2002). There are Vipassana meditation centers in all parts of the world. Because it can be practiced in a nonsectarian way, it is attractive to Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

Vipassana literally means "special seeing" or insight. Being a system of mindfulness techniques, Vipassana draws attention to the breath and to every object of consciousness (Wrye, 2006). Business people, academicians, but also prison inmates, seem to experience significant transformations when engaging in this meditation practice. In the past decade, popular US sources such as *Publishers Weekly* (Martinez, 2008) and *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Rickey, 2009) have written about the usefulness of Vipassana for prison inmates, stating that it has helped them break their cycles of anger and revenge. Vipassana is a useful instrument in attaining expanded and purified consciousness, and it appeals to people from all religions, cultures, and backgrounds, because it only requires concentration of the mind by observing one's natural, normal respiration, without adding any sectarian verbalization or any visualization, and imagination. There is little to object to purifying the mind at the deepest

level, by observing the interaction of mind and matter within oneself, at the level of body sensations, because that, too, is universal (Goenka, 2006 and 2008).

Engaging in Vipassana meditation starts with the obvious: finding a suitable place where you can sit comfortably without interruptions. It is also recommended that you wear easy clothes, so that you don't get distracted by tightness or pain.

- Most people meditate in sitting position. This is particularly useful for beginners. You will develop your most favorite seating position over time. This can be full or half lotus, tailor cross-legged position, one leg in front, kneeling on a soft bench or cushion, or sitting in a chair (Thatcher, 2012).
- Sit straight, yet relaxed, and close your eyes.
- Focus on your breathing. You can do so by concentrating on the airflow in and out of your nose, and sensing how it enters and exits or you can focus on your abdomen, right above the navel. You will then start experiencing the sense of rising and falling of the breath: as you inhale, it rises, as you exhale, it falls (Thatcher, 2012). This is an awe-inspiring activity, which our body does all the time, even when we sleep, yet we pay so little attention to it. Now is the time to focus on the miracle of your breath and release thoughts of past or future. Just focus on your breathing at this very moment.
- Your mind may start wandering as you continue breathing. Don't get upset or disheartened. It takes time to take control of this ever-chattering, moving busy body. Once you become aware of the wandering, just bring your mind gently back to the moment, and reconcentrate on your breathing. Don't worry about the nature or contents of your thoughts. Just see them as "thoughts," whether good or bad. Perceive them as an outsider and redirect your attention back to your breath. To increase your focus, you may think of the movement your breathing makes, and speak out the words in your mind: "rising, falling, rising, falling" (Thatcher, 2012), or "breathing in, breathing out, breathing in, breathing out." While doing so, make sure you don't force your breathing in any particular pattern or speed. Let it happen naturally, as it always does.
- During your meditation, you will notice the sense of itching, tingling, or tickling. It's something we deal with all the time, but normally don't pay much attention to. During meditation, however, these physical sensations become obvious and may even be experienced as annoying. Don't get upset. Observe your physical sensations with a calm outsider's perspective, and you will find that they will subside. Just like your breathing rises and falls, you will find your physical sensations arising and passing. In fact, observing the arising and passing of your bodily (e.g., itching) and mental (thoughts) sensations is very helpful in realizing that everything in life arises and passes the same way: difficult situations and people, but also good ones: they arise and pass. The awareness of arising and passing is critical for understanding the uselessness of many of the things we frustrate ourselves with.

The focus of Buddhism on mindfulness and awareness in all our actions and nonactions is not a threatening one to any religion and is therefore one that can find easy acceptance in large communities. The authenticity of Buddhism lies in the fact

that, throughout the centuries and the creation of multiple schools of Buddhism, it has managed to sustain the main message of its founder, which is human consciousness. When consciousness is practiced, we gradually rise above our ignorance, and move toward wisdom (Thich, 1998).

Here are, in conclusion, three additional activities that can help us practice mindfulness regularly:

1. Engage in constructive dialogs with people who have proven to be creative thinkers. If you know them well and feel comfortable to do so, ask them what qualities they see in you. What skills and talents do they think you have? What areas can they envision you in? Keep in mind that any idea is worth considering (Marques, Dhiman, & King, 2009).
2. Look at yourself from the other side: what are employers looking for today? Do you represent that? How? Try to put yourself in the shoes of various people you meet. Perhaps their job, their activity, their direction may spark an idea within you that is useful toward your next career (Marques et al., 2009).
3. Consider the big picture. Take some distance. Step out of the daily routine, and go, if only for one day, to a place that inspires you. It does not have to be abroad, out of state, or even outside the city. Just a place you enjoy being. Places that break the daily rhythm also help open your mind and expand your horizons (Marques et al., 2009).

Case Study 10.1: Mindfulness About Success

Sam Polk is a former Wall Street trader, who found himself in the grip of the infamous “Golden Handcuffs” and found the courage to break free from them (Shin, 2014). “Golden handcuffs” is a term used for the many reasons why people stay in high paying jobs that they hate. Employers implement golden handcuffs on their employees by, for instance, deferring their bonus pays to keep them on the hook even if they would rather leave, or by stipulating that employees who want to exit the business have to return part of their bonuses. Employees encounter golden handcuffs in the form of their addiction to wealth, their extravagant life style, an irresistible boost in income just when they plan to make their exit, or their fear of regretting leaving such a lucrative job if things don’t work out as expected in hindsight (Shin, 2014).

Sam Polk, like so many of us, was raised with the mind-set that money can solve all the problems of the world. As a young boy, he often heard his father talk about the importance of being rich, so, as a young man, Sam’s perceptions were along the same lines. Having gone through a tumultuous college experience, Sam finally landed a summer internship at Credit Suisse First Boston, where he had his first brush with big money-making possibilities (Polk, 2014). He did not get a permanent job offered by CSFB, but his mind was set, and after graduating, he landed a job at Bank of America, and

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embarked on the journey of climbing the Wall Street ladder. He became a bond and credit default swap trader, and saw his income increasing. He rented an expensive apartment, visited expensive restaurants, and could get seats in first rows of important sports games, due to his lucrative relationships. He was making millions, but kept comparing himself to those who made even more: his wealth addiction grew.

Sam Polk's wake-up call came from the very bosses he initially envied. He suddenly realized how self-absorbed their addiction to wealth was, and how little anyone in this Wall Street world seemed to care about the destruction their uncanny trades caused the real world. Sam exited Wall Street because he became aware that he was dissatisfied with an annual bonus of \$3.6 million! While this may seem ridiculous to many of us, Polk felt this way because he compared his bonus to the \$150 million bonuses of his bosses. This comparison made his bonus seem meager and underpaid (Shin, 2014). Sam realized that he had become one of the many wealth addicts of Wall Street, who all want to snap out, but cannot find the courage to do it.

In retrospect, Sam can see the mental trap he landed in. Before he started working in the finance industry, he thought that \$225,000 was a lot of money, yet, within a few years, his definition of "a lot" had tremendously augmented. Sam realized he needed help. He made the very daring leap away from Wall Street, but in the months after doing so, he would sometimes wake up in cold sweat, doubting whether he had made the right decision (Shin, 2014).

After leaving his position, Sam became aware of another interesting fact: he saw how quickly everyone moved on without him. He also realized how much he had related his sense of security and worthy living to his bank account. To break out of this mental habit, he travelled to Mexico and India, and finally started a new life in Los Angeles, away from Wall Street. At the time he wrote his story, Polk found that only one former colleague worked up the courage to leave Wall Street as well. All others who expressed the desire to break free were still "hooked."

So, can Sam Polk be seen as a mindful person or not? Some people may find that he is, because he was wakeful enough to turn his back to a lucrative but dreadful job. Others may want to hold off on their opinion until they find out what Polk has done with his life at a later stage, in order to find longitudinal fulfillment. Thus far, Sam did quite some volunteer work, started Groceryships, a 501(c)3 organization aiming to create a network of educational support groups to improve long-term health and wellness in low-income communities, and wrote a book. However, once he landed a *New York Times* article, titled "For the Love of Money" (Polk, 2014), Sam was convinced that leaving Wall Street and the hauntingly addictive hedge fund world was the best decision he made, and that he had found a new purpose in life.

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In his Huffington Post blog Sam explains how the nonprofit Groceryships came into being. He was watching a documentary on healthy eating with his wife, a psychiatrist, and the topic of lowering cholesterol the natural way came up. This deeply touched his wife, as she had been troubled for about a decade with high cholesterol, and had been steadily taking medication to keep it under control. Now learning that she could potentially lower her cholesterol the healthy way and even do away with the medication got her in tears. The couple gave up meat and sugar, and struggled with withdrawal symptoms, but eventually started losing weight and feeling better. A few months later, the couple saw another documentary, in which the magnitude of hunger and obesity in America was presented. Sam and his wife decided to put together an organization that could be instrumental in educating low-income families in eating healthier, and Groceryships was born.

Questions

1. After reading about golden handcuffs, please explain which specific forms of golden handcuffs Sam Polk was captured by?
2. Is Sam Polk a mindful person, in your opinion? Please explain your answer.
3. After his Wall Street years, Sam Polk started Groceryships. Please visit the website (www.Groceryships.org) and review what this organization is exactly doing. Next, read the online article, “A money addict’s neoliberal fantasy: Sam Polk and his civilizing mission” by F. A. Sheth.¹ After reading both sources, do you feel that Groceryships will be successful? Why or why not?

Chapter Summary

- **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is a flexible cognitive state that results from drawing novel distinctions about the situation and the environment (Carson & Langer, 2004; Langer, 1989).

The following traits can be distinguished in mindful people:

1. They view objects as well as situations from different perspectives, and
2. Based on the context of an issue, they can shift their perspectives (Carson & Langer, 2006).

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¹Sheth, F. A. (Jan 23, 2014). A money addict’s neoliberal fantasy: Sam Polk and his civilizing mission.

A millionaire ex-hedge funder devises a demented way to “pay back.” No thank you—here’s what he could do instead. *Salon*. Retrieved June 12, 2015, from http://www.salon.com/2014/01/23/a_money_addicts_neoliberal_fantasy_sam_polk_and_his_civilizing_mission/

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- **Respect**

Respect is embedded in the way we treat people and other living beings. Real, deep, genuine respect goes beyond just honoring human cultures and behaviors, and understands the importance of honoring all living beings, as they all have a right to exist.

Respect is not always easy to give. People, who disrespect others blatantly, because they feel superior to those, are hard to like. Yet, mindful leaders understand that even those souls need respect, just as much as the down-trodden and dejected ones. As our general sense of respect expands, so will our mindfulness toward other living beings.

- **The Sleepwalking Mode**

Sleepwalking is an ongoing, *mindless* way of performing for a paycheck in order to pay the bills and hopefully have some extra spending money left. When we sleepwalk, we do not wonder about whether what we *do* is in line with what we *like*, and if not, how we could change it. Many people sleepwalk, because they don't realize that there is an alternative to the way they go through life.

Sleepwalking is the opposite of being awake. People who sleepwalk, move through the motions of personal and professional life without questioning whether they still matter to them. Some forms of sleepwalking are even brought within religious or cultural realms, making them even harder to challenge or change.

Sleepwalking has a lot to do with focusing too much on the details and forgetting to zoom out in order to obtain a broader scope. Discrimination of any kind is also a form of sleepwalking: it is an act that is based on superficial differences, mostly external or acquired, without considering the many overarching commonalities.

Sleepwalking is a widespread phenomenon because human beings, by default, are creatures of habit, hence, change averse. It requires less mental energy to find our way through our routine. It is like performing on autopilot. Yet, performing on autopilot for too long can derail our focus on new trends, and new trends keep emerging, whether we like it or not.

Thinking creatively is an immediate consequence of mindfulness. As we become more alert of the shifting conditions of things around us, we realize that old solutions will not effectively solve new challenges.

Individuals are not the only ones who sleepwalk. Organizations can also fall prey to this behavior. There are numerous examples of businesses that once thrived but lost their edge due to sleepwalking. Major business corporations such as General Motors and Ford have been losing market share and profits due to their failure to keep up with younger generations of automakers.

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- **The Reasons Behind Sleepwalking**

Many people sleepwalk through their life because:

1. They feel that thinking is a passive pursuit.
2. They confine their thinking to their current field of action.
3. At work, they are not rewarded for creative thinking.
4. They may be subject to peer pressure, sometimes even unconsciously.
5. They may face self-imposed blockades.
6. They are subjected to a highly routine-based (mechanistic) environment.
7. They may come from cultures or living environments where mindfulness was punished.

- **Effects of Sleepwalking**

The effect of sleepwalking on business entities is decline, unless they manage to reinvent themselves and come up with a product or service that restores their position in their field. The effect of sleepwalking for human beings could be considered similar: we, too, can first fall off the bandwagon, but then wake up, and come up with a way to reinvent ourselves in order to return to the point of fulfillment or prestige we desire.

- **Keeping Track of Sleepwalking**

The tendency to sleepwalk is so widespread, so common, that many people will choose to remain in denial and claim that they are not sleepwalking, but very wakeful instead. It might help, therefore, to be mindful of the following:

1. Being mindful is not a one-time project.
2. Life is a continuous sequence of mindfulness disruptions, which may come in many forms.
3. The many distractions and setbacks in work and private life may cause our mindfulness efforts to stall regularly or progress so slowly that we get discouraged.
4. Our goals may infringe on our mindfulness efforts.
5. Achieving our goals may cause another major infringement on our mindfulness.
6. Dreading our current circumstances can also become an obstacle toward mindfulness.

- **Practicing Our Mindfulness**

Mindfulness can be induced in several ways. A frequently practiced way is meditation. One of the most well-known forms of meditation is Vipassana or insight meditation. Vipassana literally means “special seeing” or insight.

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Three additional activities that can help us practice mindfulness regularly:

1. Engage in constructive dialogs with people who have proven to be creative thinkers.
2. Look at yourself from the other side: what are employers looking for today? Do you represent that? How?
3. Consider the big picture. Take some distance. Step out of the daily routine, and go, if only for one day, to a place that inspires you.

Discussion Questions

1. This chapter discussed several ways to maintain mindfulness. Which of these ways appeals most to you, and why?
2. Could you think of a time or instance in which you were mindless? How did you come to the realization that such was the case, and how did you resolve the situation?
3. How can sleepwalking be seen as a major concern from a global (macro) perspective?
4. The chapter reviews a few reasons behind sleepwalking. Think of someone you consider a sleepwalker. What do you consider to be the reasons behind his/her sleepwalking?
5. What is the most important takeaway for you from this chapter?

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