



MINDFULNESS FOR LAWYERS

A Short Handbook

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Principles of Mindfulness

Being in the present moment
and out of your head.

Observing your experience as
it is, without judgment.

- Seeing thoughts *as thoughts* rather than getting lost in them.
- Attending to *sensory experience* as a gateway to the present moment.
- Turning toward present experience rather than resisting, even when it's unpleasant.

“Accept the present moment as if you’d invited it.” -Pema Chodron

“Be here now.” -Ram Dass

Sitting Meditation

The Posture:

- Straight spine.
- Feet under the knees, flat on the floor.
- Try sitting toward the edge of the chair.
- For more, google “shinzen posture” for Shinzen Young’s guide, “About Posture.”

The Technique:

- Rest attention on the sensations of breath at the nose.
- When you notice that attention has wandered, gently return to the breath.
- Breathe normally.

Sitting Meditation: Pointers

- Meditation is not about “emptying” the mind. Let the landscape of sounds, sensations, and thoughts continue in the background.
- Your mind will wander, and that’s okay. This isn’t about stopping the wandering; that’s impossible. It’s about noticing and gently guiding the mind back.
- When you notice you’ve wandered, briefly savor that recognition before returning.
- Apply gentle effort. No need to strain.
- There is no failing at this, no doing well or poorly. There’s only practicing or not.
- Optional: apply a light mental label to a distraction (e.g., “thinking,” “itching”).

Mindfulness Methods for Daily Life

- Rest attention on the breath at the nose.
- Rest attention on sensations in a specific body area (e.g., the soles of the feet).
- Rest attention on an entire sense field as a broader anchor (e.g., sound, the visual field, body sensations).
- Apply a light mental label (e.g., “thinking,” “tingling,” “heat,” “sound”).
- The mindful pause (good spot treatment for stress-outs):
 1. Take a deep breath
 2. Tune into body sensations
 3. Guide attention to the breath at the nose
 4. Carry on

Anxiety and Difficult Emotions

Resisting or avoiding unpleasant feelings only exacerbates them.

The key: acceptance, not avoidance.

- Let the feeling stay; be willing to feel it.
- Tune into sensations in your body.
- Resist fleeing into anxious thinking.
- Taking a mindful pause (p. 5) can help.
- Mental labeling (p. 5) can also be useful.

“The best way out is always through.”

-Robert Frost

“It’s already here. Let me feel it.”

-Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindful Productivity

- Start your work session with a mindful pause (p. 5) to calm and stabilize the mind.
- Try alternating timed work sessions with short, timed breaks. Use breaks to practice a mindfulness method (p. 5) in a relaxed way.
- Try not to skip your breaks, even if you're on a roll. They help you stay centered and mentally fresh.
- Breaks are good for mindful observation of movement: standing and stretching, walking to the water cooler, or walking to the bathroom.
- For more, google “primer to the pomodoro” to find “Productivity 101,” a Lifehacker.com article on the Pomodoro System of alternating work with breaks.

Maintaining a Sitting Practice

Daily practice will transform your day-to-day experience for the better.

- Daily consistency trumps length of sit. Sitting for even one minute is fantastic.
- Sit first thing in the morning. It's the easiest way. If that's not workable, aim for the same time every day.
- If resistance arises, mentally shrink the session length until the resistance fades. (*"Could I do 15 minutes? No, too much resistance. What about ten? Still too long; the thought puts me off. Okay, five? Hm, I feel like I could sit for five."*)
- Use a timer (e.g., "Insight Timer" app).

"Practice now. Don't think you will do more later." -Dipa Ma

Getting Better Sleep

As with anxiety, resisting sleeplessness only exacerbates it.

Being less concerned with falling asleep will help you sleep better.

- You can't will yourself to become sleepy.
- If you're not falling asleep, don't lie there and "keep trying." It will only stress you.
- Get up, do something relaxing for about 30 minutes, then go back to bed. Repeat as needed.
- If you become sleepy, great. If not, don't worry about it.
- Remember: missing sleep is very common and isn't a big deal.

About Mindfulness for Lawyers

Mindfulness for Lawyers teaches methods that busy lawyers can use right away to reduce stress, improve productivity, and experience a deep sense of peace.

Derived from ancient meditation methods and validated by modern science, mindfulness is a simple mental practice that introduces a calmer, more satisfying mode of being.

Mindfulness for Lawyers was developed by two lawyers and former Harvard Law School classmates, one a mindfulness expert and the other a senior big-firm associate.

About the Creators of MFL

Jon Krop is a graduate of Harvard Law School and has been practicing mindfulness for almost a decade. He has studied with teachers from around the world, including a seven-month silent retreat under the guidance of meditation master and neuroscientist Upasaka Culadasa. Jon is an associate at a public-interest law firm in New York City.

Chuck Walker is a graduate of Harvard Law School and a senior associate at the Houston office of an international law firm. Mindfulness has helped him keep his stress levels low and productivity high while navigating the challenges of big-firm practice.