# 21 Days Of Mindfulness



# DR. MICHELE WILLIAMS



Professor Michele Williams, Tippie College of Business, University of Iowa, has taught negotiations to executives, entrepreneurs, MBAs, and undergraduates at leading schools of management for over 15 years. She is a co-author of the Four Capabilities Assessment. The research and work of Dr. Williams (University of Michigan, Ph.D.), focus on

Building Cultures of Trust
Women in Leadership & Entrepreneurship

She addresses two challenges that organizations face:

Building Cultures of Trust — Building, maintaining, and repairing trust in team-based relationships and across demographic and organizational boundaries; Sustaining high-performing, cross-boundary relationships.

Women in Leadership & Entrepreneurship — Social construction of gender; Gender equity within firms and across established and entrepreneurial ventures; Factors affecting women as team members, boundary spanners, and business owners.

Michele, a tenured, associate professor and the John L. Miclot Fellow in Entrepreneurship, is a member of the Management & Entrepreneurship faculty at the University of Iowa's Tippie College of Business. She is also the John L. Miclot Fellow in Entrepreneurship and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Faculty Fellow. In addition, she is a scholar with the Smith Family Business Initiative at Cornell's Johnson College of Business and on the board of W.E. Cornell, a program for emerging Women Entrepreneurs. Previously, she was a member of the faculty at Cornell University and MIT's Sloan School of Management.



# DR. MICHELE WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

She has authored papers and case studies, published in notable academic journals, and speaks at academic and professional conferences on her topics of research. She produced a unique course offering on Women in Leadership, Negotiation & Entrepreneurship and has spoken on this topic at JP Morgan. She is co-authoring The Four Capabilities Leadership Assessment—an online 360° assessment used by organizations to enhance the leadership potential of managers.

Dr. Williams earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology at Johns Hopkins University, her Master of Arts degree in Education from Teachers College, Columbia University, and her Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior from the Ross School of Business, University of Michigan.

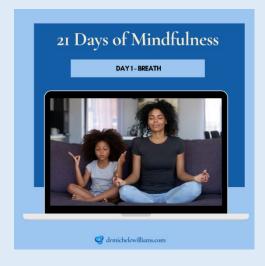


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# Welcome to 21 Days of Mindfulness

As with many people, my life was turned upside down by the COVID-19 pandemic. My kids were both at home, trying to do online school. I had one week to move my courses fully online. This is not usual, and I was lucky to be able to work from home. Then came the events of that summer, the killing of George Floyd and protests. I jumped in to help my organization become more inclusive.

I was exhausted. I almost instinctually turned to journaling and mindfulness, transforming my dated planner into a micro-journal. I started posting on Twitter daily, first with 21 days of journaling, soon followed by 21 days of mindfulness, affirmations, etc. This micro-blogging successfully reduced my own stress level and increased my inner peace, but what happened next surprised me. People started to tweet back! To my surprise, I connected virtually with old friends, work, colleagues, and new people. Sharing this experience made it even more rewarding and stressreducing.



If you are experiencing stress, exhaustion, or overwhelm, you are not alone. A majority of American adults surveyed reported feeling emotionally overwhelmed by the perceived "constant stream of crises" over the two years preceding 2022 (APA, 2022).

I invite you to join me on this journey into mindfulness and micro-journaling. These are two research-based stress reducers and doing them in the community adds a third stress reducer: **connection!** 

I hope you enjoy this FREE 21-day Challenge. If you enjoy it, invite a friend to do it with you. I would also appreciate your considering a contribution to the Circle of Red program by the American Heart Association, which supports heart health for women and children: https://www.goredforwomen.org/

Mindfully Yours,

Dr. Michele Williams



# What is Mindfulness?

Mindful living is about living in the present moment without judging yourself or others. For many people, mindful living is not natural. They tend to live on autopilot. The problem with this is that autopilot mode often amps you up. For example, you're driving to your favorite nail salon to get a manicure. You're excited about treating yourself.

But as you're driving, you start thinking about the argument you had with your spouse three weeks ago. Before you know it, you're all fired up again. Instead of living in the current moment, you found yourself re-living the past. This makes it hard to move on and can lead you to carrying around anger and other unpleasant emotion.

#### Mindful Living = More Calm

Instead of reacting emotionally to situations like people do on autopilot, you can choose to focus on the current moment without letting your emotions take over.

You might see a distressing story on the news. You feel angry and sad. But instead of reaching for your phone to distract yourself, you stay in the moment. You acknowledge your emotions without judgement. This frees you from losing a day of productivity because you were fixated on this one moment.



#### Mindful Living Makes You More Appreciative

During unenjoyable moments, like while you're cleaning your home or compiling boring data for a client, it can be tempting to let your mind wander. But part of mindful living is staying in the moment, even if that moment is unpleasant or uncomfortable.

However, just because you're staying aware during an unpleasant moment, you don't have to give into feelings of negativity. Instead, focus on giving thanks. For example, you might say something like, "I'm grateful that I have enough clients to pay my bills" or "I'm lucky to have a home to clean". Now, you've managed to stay in the moment without letting yourself focus on the negative.

#### Mindful Living Improves Your Mood

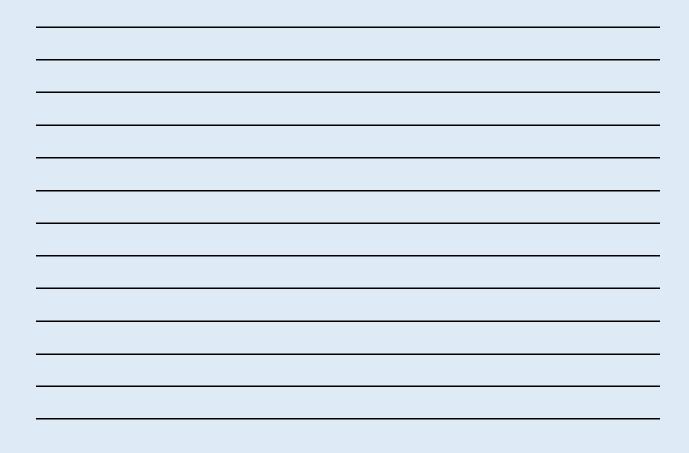
Few things can improve your mood quite like mindful living. Often, anxious thoughts are the result of worrying about the future while sad thoughts are related to regretting the past. Mindful living helps because it forces you to stop overthinking. Unless there's something you can do to change your past, you have to accept what's happened in your life. If you do find that you're frequently haunted by regrets or always worrying about tomorrow, it might be smart to speak to a trained counselor who can help you move on.

Mindful living is one simple way to improve your life. Try to spend a week focused on mindful living and see how your thoughts change.

#### **DAY 1:**

# Mindfulness involves attending to the present moment. Today, take a moment to take a few comfortable deep breaths. Observe your breath; it feels, like a pattern.



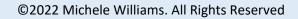


#### **DAY 2:**

#### Take time to notice the nature around you.

- An indoor plant counts!





#### **DAY 3:**

#### Ready for day three! Pets show us how to be mindful at rest & at play.

Do you have a pet? Reflect on everything you love about them.



#### **DAY 4**:

1. Stand by a body of water, fountain or patch of snow.

2. Look at it as if for the first time. What do you see, smell, sense?



#### **DAY 5**:

Have a mindful meal this morning. Eat very slowly and carefully, chewing many times before swallowing. Notice the flavors and textures.



#### **DAY 6:**

## Do you ever find yourself listening to someone with one ear while doing something else at the same time?

This weekend, try listening and summarizing what your child, partner, friend or parent says.



How does it feel to focus fully on them?

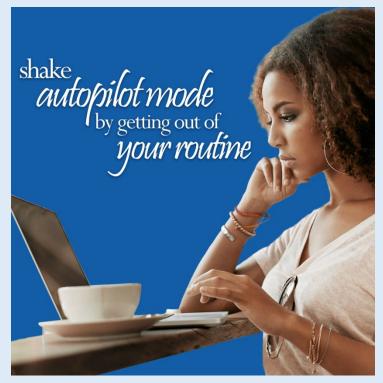
#### **DAY 7:**

#### What mindful action will you take today?





# Why You Struggle with Living on Autopilot



Living mindfully is an attitude that you can cultivate in your life. But first, you have to be willing to let go of autopilot. Many people live on autopilot without realizing it. You find yourself living the same cycle. You wake up, send the kids to school, do your job, eat dinner, and go to bed. Then tomorrow, you do the exact same things again.

If you want to break the cycle of autopilot, you have to understand what causes it. Once you know this, you can change your outlook so you're living in the present. If you're living on autopilot, it's most likely caused by one of these reasons.

#### **Too Much Familiarity**

When you learn something new, it requires the best of your awareness and energy at first. But the better you master it, the less effort it takes. For example, think of riding a bicycle. When you were first learning, you needed to invest all of your brain power in doing it. Once you learned this skill, you didn't need to pay as much attention. You could ride your bike on autopilot.

#### **Too Much Information**

Have you ever had a computer or laptop overloaded with advertisements? Dozens of them pop up and fill your screen. You try to close one but another five open instead. If you're like most people, you fix this problem by hitting the power button and shutting your computer off.

This is similar to what happens when you have too much information in your brain. There are dozens of things you need to remember and do. But when your brain is overwhelmed with information, it's hard to get anything done, so you start operating on autopilot. Temporarily, this is helpful but let it go on for too long and you'll barely remember what you did today.

#### **Too Much Work**

The more tasks in our lives that are done by habit, the less alive we feel. This makes it easy to disengage from your daily life and start living on autopilot. While you may not be able to throw away your to do list, try to approach your routine tasks in a different way. For example, instead of buying groceries from the same store you always do, go to a store where you don't normally shop.

Mix up the menu for the week so that you're trying new dishes. Blast music while you work on a client's project.

#### **Too Little Passion**

After being diagnosed with a serious illness that would take the use of his arms in the future, one man focused on living more mindfully. Everyday tasks like making a sandwich or cleaning the bathroom became enjoyable because he delighted in the fact that his muscles were still functional. You don't have to suffer a serious disease in order to regain your passion. Just focus on doing everyday tasks slowly and mindfully.

Learning to live in the moment is a process. Don't feel bad if you struggle with it at first. You'll get the hang of it if you keep trying.

#### **DAY 8:**

#### Do you start your day rushing?

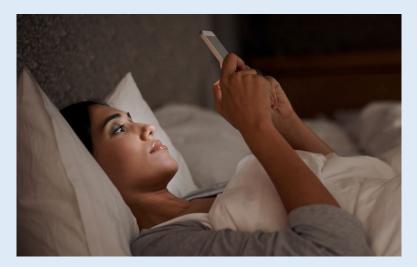
### Try taking just 5-10 minutes to start your day mindfully. Wake up and spend a few minutes breathing and observing your breath.

Then spend a few minutes on a second mindful activity of your choice.



#### **DAY 9:**

# What can you add to your Night-time Routine to make it more mindful?





#### **DAY 10:**

Use all of your senses as you prepare dinner tonight.

1. Touch, smell, observe the aromas, textures, shapes, and colors.

2. Enjoy connecting while you prepare your meal.





#### **DAY 11:**

#### Podcasts can be mindful. Check out:

- 1. Meditation in the City
- 2. Mindful Meditation Podcast

Listen: https://rebeccali.org/category/guided-meditation/





#### DAY 12:

# When outside, briefly lift your face to the elements and allow yourself to feel it on your skin.





#### DAY 13:

#### Watch a training passing as if you are seeing a train for the first time.

Do you typically greet a passing train as 1) an opportunity to pause and reflect or 2) an obstacle to getting someplace to do something?





#### **DAY 14:**

#### Let's celebrate today by being mindful in our relationships. I am going to start by playing a traditional board game with my family. What about you?





# The Mindful Way to Deal with Frustrations and Problems

The ideal time to be mindful is when you're encountering a frustration or a problem. But this can typically be the hardest time to be mindful. Maybe a co-worker accidentally deleted your report or your spouse said something insensitive that really hurt you.

Whatever the situation, you're feeling a lot of emotions at once.

It's normal to want to blow up and let everything out. While this solution might seem helpful at first, the fact is that this approach is often harmful to your relationships. Instead, it can be helpful to deal with your frustrations and problems by staying mindful.

#### Start with Awareness.

Often, we want our emotions to be heard, so start by acknowledging how you feel. Try saying something simple to yourself like, "I'm angry that (person) did (action)." Take a few deep breaths. Acknowledge other emotions you feel bubbling to the surface like overwhelm, anger, sadness, jealousy, etc.

#### Analyze Your Emotions.

Where are these emotions coming from? Are they linked to something that happened recently? It's important to pause and ask yourself if your emotions are in proportion to what happened. Sometimes, we react to a minor incident because we're not acknowledging a problem in another area. For example, someone spills coffee on your desk and you're tempted to yell at them. But you pause and realize you're angry because you received bad news in an email earlier. You just attributed those emotions to the coffee spill.

#### Look for Alternatives.

Sometimes, a frustration or problem comes along that can be handled easily. Ask yourself if you can change the situation. For example, getting angry about an invoice mistake that was made six months ago isn't helpful. Ask yourself what your choices are and which one is the best response.

#### Think It Through.

When your frustration or problem has to do with someone else, think about it carefully before you decide to confront them. Could it be that you've been projecting your emotions onto someone else? Can you explain how they feel? Are you willing to step in their shoes for just a moment to look at this situation from their perspective?

#### **Reach Out For Feedback.**

If you have a coach or mentor you can contact, you should do that. Ask for guidance on how to tackle this problem. Often a coach or mentor can provide a fresh perspective that can help you look at the situation in a new way. Alternatively, you could reach out to a group or community that your part of. Your group can give you the benefit of several different perspectives and it can be helpful to know that you're not the only one dealing with these problems.

Don't berate yourself if you don't handle every frustration or problem mindfully. Instead, acknowledge that you could have dealt with the situation differently and move on. Mindful living isn't about getting it right every time or being perfect. It's about living in this moment.

#### **DAY 15**:

### With the summer gatherings behind us, let's continue caring for others by being mindful of building High-Quality Connections.

These cards, based on work by Jane Dutton, are a resource that I love.



#### **DAY 16:**

## It's hard to be mindful when your phone is within reach and alerts are popping up almost constantly.

Try taking a break and making 1 hour today distraction-free. Have a loved one hide your devices if necessary! Then just observe.



#### **DAY 17:**

#### Do you stop to listen after asking, "How are you?"

#### Take the 6-minute challenge!

Today listen for at least six minutes before interrupting the speaker or rushing off.



#### **DAY 18:**

# Diffuse Tension. Remember to breathe, pause and take their perspective.





#### **DAY 19:**

#### In a year that continues to throw curveballs, be mindful of the effort your employees, team members, and leaders are putting in so that they can keeping everything going.

While you're at it, recognize your own effort, too!!



#### DAY 20:

Why not involve your kids with "Calm Mindfulness Flashcards for Kids."

#### One fun exercise they recommend is focusing your attention on your hands. Then clap 3 times and paying attention to the sensations. Try it



#### **DAY 21:**

# Celebrate with mindful meal preparation, a mindful walk-in nature, or mindful meditation.

And remember to be mindful in your important relationships!



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# **4 Ways to** Start Living Mindfully Right Now

You're probably familiar with the concept of mindful living. It's about staying present in your day-to-day life. Instead of getting distracted by to do lists or worrying about work, you focus on what you're supposed to be doing in this moment. But for some people, the concept of mindful living is hard. They want to begin living more mindfully. They just don't know where to start. If you're someone that struggles with this, try one of these exercises.

#### **Savor Your Drink**

What's the first drink you reach for in the morning? It might be coffee, tea, or a refreshing smoothie. Before you take your first sip of the day, pause. Smell your drink. What does it smell like? Taste it. What is the temperature like? What flavors do you taste against your tongue? Notice how the cup feels in your hand as you take another sip. Swallow slowly and concentrate on how your muscles contract as your liquid travels down your esophagus.

#### **Try Coloring.**

Choose a coloring page that inspires you. How do the colors you have chosen make you feel? What does it feel like to move the pen, marker or pencil over paper? What thoughts are coming up? How are these thoughts affecting you? You may want to journal some of these emotions. It's OK to alternate between coloring and journaling if it helps you.

Understand that you may feel uncomfortable the first few times that you attempt to practice being mindful. This is completely normal and just means that you're not use to living in the moment. Keep doing exercises like the ones above regularly and you will eventually become comfortable with the concept of living mindfully.

#### Go for a Walk in Nature.

Feel the breeze on your skin and in your hair. Do you hear any birds singing? What birds are they? What flowers do you see? What thoughts are coming up? How do they make you feel? Take ten minutes to notice your environment as you walk.

If you want, take a friend on your nature walk but agree to go in silence. Bring a camera and a notebook. Snap pictures of items that stand out. Write down what made them stand out. Is it the color or the texture that attracted your attention? Did you notice a shape or pattern? Was there a sound or smell that attracted you to this item?

#### Listen to Music.

Sit in your most comfortable chair and play some background music that relaxes you. Classical music is a good choice. You can also look for spa music on YouTube.

As you listen, focus on your breath. Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth. Take deep belly breaths. Allow the thoughts to come and go without trying to hold too tightly to them. Examine each thought like an observer.

Pay attention to how your body may be going into resistance, by starting to itch and squirm. Adjust your posture or scratch if needed. Notice how the thoughts and experiences that come up influence how you feel.

# LOOKING FOR MORE



SAYING NO

Looking for weekly tips, tools, and special offers? Join the **Negotiator's Way Newsletter**.

Take control of your career and learn to change things for good. Join the Negotiating Freedom Program - The Art of Saying "**NO**" & "**YES**". <u>Book a call</u> to find out more.



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