



Mindfulness and Leadership Mastery by Ken Giglio

Mindfulness has become a cultural phenomenon, appearing everywhere these days from self-help books on eating and relationships to courses for the military and Fortune 500 corporations. Time Magazine calls it the “Mindful Revolution.” Leadership training and coaching have also leveraged mindfulness for years to develop more Mindful Leaders, and recent studies in the field of neuroscience highlighting the benefits of practicing mindfulness (enhanced focus, emotion regulation, empathy, and creativity) have only accelerated this trend.

As a long-time practitioner of mindfulness meditation, I’ve integrated my mindfulness practice into my work as an executive coach: as fits with my commitment to personal growth and the growth of others, the journey of mastery. Mindfulness practice has helped me increase my ability to pay attention and be present, and has deepened my understanding and insight into myself, others, and the world around me.

Mindfulness, as I define and practice it, is *a Way of Being attentive and present in the moment, a non-judging tuning in to the flow of experience as it happens*. Through this “practice” of being here now, we deepen our insight and connection with ourselves and others by learning more about how we feel and think—Peter Senge calls it “seeing our seeing”—and by attuning to others’ emotions and thinking.

Mindfulness is fostered through practice—mental training, exertion, and perseverance are involved—and leaders who train their attention and are consciously present set the stage for positive behavior change. We all have this in-born capability to be more mindful versus mindless, the times when we are operating on autopilot and not in the moment. As Daniel Siegel, author of *The Mindful Brain*, notes, “How we pay attention promotes neural plasticity, the change of neural connections in response to experience.”

My coaching work with senior leaders and teams is grounded in everyday mindfulness. Meditation is not required, just “the simple act of actively noticing things,” states Harvard psychologist, Ellen Langer. I address the presented coaching and business goals through a mindfulness framework of three interrelated “Ways of Being:” **Attention and Presence With Self, With Others, and With the System.**

Attention and Presence with Self

Being mindful gives the leader a way to genuinely look at themselves, to cut through the layers of self-stories, biases, and emotional reactivity that get in the way of what is really happening. We know the critical importance of being self-aware of emotions and accompanying thoughts from over three decades of emotional intelligence studies and supporting leadership assessments from Goleman, Mayer, Salovey, and Bar-On.



Attention and Presence with Others

Being a mindful leader also opens a window into our colleagues' world through what I like to call "professional empathy." The discovery of mirror neurons has revealed that empathy is a biologically-based human quality, which gives us all the capacity to actually experience others' feelings of joy and pain by being attuned to facial expressions. Developing leadership competency and mastery, according to research on effective senior leadership teams by J. Richard Hackman of Harvard, is the ability and practice of understanding the content and meaning of what a person is saying and the ability to reflect back the feelings the speaker associates with the content.

Attention and Presence with the System

Being attentive and present with the system means broadening our leadership awareness and perspective, to see ourselves and others as part of a dynamic, ever-changing system and culture. It is about paying attention to the organization cues and currents to better understand who gets what done, and how to drive successful execution and change in the organization. Leadership authors Katzenbach and Khan in *Leading Outside the Lines*, define leaders who are attentive and present with the system as having a high "Organizational Quotient," which is exhibited by balancing IQ and EQ to "tap into both the formal and informal elements of an organization to accelerate behavior change and performance results."

The mindfulness practice I introduce at the outset of every coaching engagement is *Mindful Observing – Self, Others, System*. I always start with a self-observation practice as it lays the foundation of the leader's mindfulness practice and fosters leadership mastery—the discipline and practice of continuous growth and learning.

The Practice: Observing Self

Imagine you are divided into two separate persons: (1) a "Doer," one who engages and reacts in life; and (2) an "Observer," who watches and experiences life as it happens.

Be fully present and observe yourself objectively. Be curious, open, and accepting. Notice your internal states (thoughts and feelings) as well as how you behave. Notice how you communicate and engage with others. Simply be aware and pay attention without judgment to the physical, emotional, and thinking aspects behind how you show up as a leader.



Guiding Questions:

Context:

What am I observing about myself and how I engage and interact in specific settings and situations as well as with different people?

Themes and Patterns:

What themes and patterns do I see emerging from what I am observing?

Learning:

What am I learning about myself from this practice? Action:

What actions will I commit to take from my insights and learning?

Mindful Leadership Case Example

One of my executive coaching clients, a physician leader who was newly assigned to head a clinical department in a top-rated health system, was charged by senior leadership with reorganizing his department to better align with the health system's strategic plan. In our work together we used a mindfulness framework and practices to support his transition into the new role, which included managing former peers and reorganizing and building a new team with three new hires.

Preparing to transition into his new role, the leader first, through mindful self-observation, tuned into his purpose—"building bridges between clinicians, administrators, and patients." This insight tapped the leader's significant energy and intrinsic motivation to serve, and commitment to a plan of action followed. As the plan to reorganize the team took shape, it became clear that certain positions on the team would need to be repurposed and upgraded, setting the leader up for several tough conversations, which he initially avoided. By shining the light of attention on how he was feeling (conflicted and guilty) and what he was thinking ("I'll hurt these people if I make these moves"), he was able to break free of his self-limiting mindset and execute the needed team changes. A "reality check" conversation helped him see that his overplayed strength of caring for others was holding back himself, the team, and even the long-time employees who were exited.

Building on his increased self-awareness through mindfulness, the leader turned his attention and presence to others, beginning a practice of noticing how his team members were reacting to the changes within the team and across the hospital. He learned, for example, through deep listening and observing body language that a former peer and now naysaying team member was not interested in the leader's role as he had thought but in a different role she felt blocked from. Being there with his colleague and exhibiting understanding for what she was interested in and how she felt about the situation (professional empathy) changed the dynamic, and though the once naysaying team member did not get her desired role, she supported the leader in driving his change agenda.



Incorporating insights from his growing self-awareness and awareness of his team members, the leader broadened his awareness to take a fresh look at the health system’s evolving culture and politics. His organizational savvy and situational awareness were above average, so he knew where the landmines were planted and how to navigate in a hierarchal environment. Leveraging this strength, he incorporated his political and organizational savvy into the onboarding plans for his new hires. For example, he covered in the plan preferred communication styles for specific leaders as well as alerted his new players of those in the organization who would need a more “trust, but verify approach.” He also shared his most important learning in his years at the hospital—being transparent and inclusive even if it felt risky, because it’s the foundation of building trusting relationships.

Looking Ahead

Most Boards would agree they want wise and compassionate (Mindful) leaders, women and men who are in control yet not controlling, focused on the business and, more importantly, partnering with the people who make the business possible. A mindfulness framework that integrates self-development, relationship building, and organizational savvy leads to leadership mastery. The question is, do we have the courage and perseverance to foster mindful leadership in ourselves and those we work with? And are we willing to consistently ask, “What is happening now?”

About Ken Giglio



Ken Giglio is principal of Mindful Leadership Consulting, LLC, a leadership consulting and executive coaching firm that partners with executives and teams in Fortune 100 – 1000 organizations. He leads a global team of highly experienced executive coaches that link leadership to an organization’s strategic business objectives. Ken has a background in financial services, where over a twenty-two year career he held several leadership positions. He transitioned to his executive coaching career in 2000.

Ken develops leaders who are self-aware and agile in the moment—leaders who are focused on business strategy, building effective relationships, and achieving sustainable performance and results. His executive coaching and consulting are focused on “Mindful Leadership,” the courage to confront and shift the self-limiting mindsets and behaviors that undermine personal and organizational effectiveness.

Ken has worked with hundreds of executives and teams in a broad range of organizations across diverse industries including financial services, utilities, technology, engineering, energy, pharmaceutical, healthcare, luxury retail, apparel, accounting and manufacturing. In addition, he has extensive experience coaching and developing executives and teams across company divisions—marketing, technology, learning and development, finance, sales, research, and consulting at the following levels: CEO, president, CFO, managing director, SVP, and director. A partial list of companies he has partnered with includes: The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, Citigroup, BASF, Bayer, David Yurman, Deloitte & Touche, Firmenich, Johnson & Johnson, Jones Apparel, Linde, Macquarie Bank, MetLife, Nielson, Nestlé, Pfizer, Prudential, PSE&G, RBS, Spectra Laboratories, and UBS.

Ken holds a degree in Psychology from Fordham University and obtained his Executive Coaching Certification from The Hudson Institute of Santa Barbara, an International Coach Federation accredited program.