

Being-in-the-moment

A new use for a wise old way of thinking
Andrew Burnham

Being in the moment is a mode where instead of reacting to events and people, we choose how we direct our attention and awareness of them, and respond. This saves time and energy and brings other business benefits.

Getting out of your head

Who has not been caught up by having their buttons pushed and reacting immediately, usually with less than an optimal outcome?

Yes, they would prefer to be more responsive and creative. But reacting is a cycle. You might wonder why you so easily veer into feeling worked up, agitated, and stressed knowing that you would rather feel calm and centred, and focus on constructive action.

What is “being in the moment” like?

Being in the moment is the mode where action can flourish and stress is absent. Creative responses are more likely when we’re in the moment. Authenticity and thinking on one’s feet also come easily from this mode. When we are in the moment we are very powerful because we *respond instead of react to challenging situations and people.*

Two Core Skills

Being in the moment is comprised of two overarching skills. The first is **awareness**, and the second is **attention**. We are well aware of what is going on around us, but are hardly ever aware of how we process what is going on. A reactive cycle takes us out of the moment, so we’re less effective. Awareness of how we process what is going on is important for leaders and organizations because it saves time and energy.

Awareness

New, better responses to work, leadership and life arise naturally when we are first aware of what goes on ‘upstairs’. Our ‘doing’ follows our state of being. Once a leader keys in on this awareness, s/he has a powerful mode to use. They reclaim their attention and can now direct it in purely constructive and creative ways. Awareness is a first step because we can control only those things that we are aware of.

Reactions

Once this awareness is generated, we notice that much time and energy is spent reacting to people and situations. A reaction is a conditioned way of processing the world. It is automatic and uncontrolled. When we say ‘he/she really pushed my buttons’ we are describing a reaction.



Someone or something happened and we are now thinking in a way that is both uncontrolled and likely to lead to further agitation and stress.

No Time to Think

Some reactions, like the ones that get us out of harm's way, are necessary to our survival. You saw a bus careening down the road and you leapt out of the way. Your mind reacted and you did not have time to become agitated or stressed about the bus careening down the road. You did not have time to think, "Oh, this is rather negative." Or "Why does this always happen to me?" Your focus was simply on action.

Being in this moment

You were naturally in the moment. The external event was processed quickly enough that you created no blocks to action. Blocks to action happen when we process an external situation or person in a way that causes an internal problem for us. We know when we are turning an event or person into a problem when we take on stress, anger, anxiety or a host of other negative states. This is the true problem, as negative reactions waste time and energy.

Conserve Time and Energy

Unlike the split-second jump out of the way of a bus, there seems to be all sorts of time and energy available in our work days to

create negative reactions. These block action as well as creative responses. They hinder relationships, and slowly turn promising people into puddles of anxiety.

Attention

Attention means the thing we are focusing on; what we are 'thinking about'. With awareness, we have the opportunity to direct and control our thinking in a manner that yields the best results.

Responding

When we are responding, rather than reacting, we have the space in our mind to generate solutions, creative or otherwise, navigate easier through conflict, and be calm and centred under pressure. When we are responding we have choice. When we are reacting, there is no choice made.

There are simple and effective ways we can learn how to respond.

Is 'Normal' Working for You?

Some of us think that it is only normal to react to challenging situations and people. Isn't it just natural to have a negative reaction and get into a negative frame of mind when faced with certain people and certain situations? Isn't that just the way it is? Is the way you are reacting having a positive effect on your work? Does it help your interactions with others? Does stress



add to the bottom line? Would you choose to be stressed if you knew you had the option not to be? No one would choose to be encumbered and hindered from achieving more and successfully taking on new challenges if they were aware they had a choice.

Become a Scientist of your Own Mind

Our mind is accustomed to thinking whatever its wants when it wants. At first it resists the mode called being in the moment. To get there and stay there, become like a scientist; keenly interested in getting to the truth of what is happening in your mind -- especially during difficult times. What are you focusing on? Do you have a choice?

Watch where your focus goes

A biologist observing the behaviour of seals doesn't get upset when some seals are gathering here and others are gathering there. She is just interested in what they do. She is not interested in what they should do. The only reason why she may be interested in what they should do is that it is different than what they were doing yesterday. Like the biologist, we first want to discover what is happening and make no judgments about what we think should be happening. Of course politicians should be honest, your food should arrive warm, your boss should appreciate you more, and so and so should

be different. But then, these are not the real problems. Our 'problems' come from what we focus on.

Help Others

What it would be like to be calm, centred and focused, despite what is happening on the outside? Isn't this an essential tool for leaders, change agents and forward thinkers? Like the invention of the computer, would it help us do almost everything better?

Management from the Inside

As you learn to be more in the moment you will still take action, manage situations and people, plan, anticipate reactions, innovate and lead. All these management activities become easier, less stressful and more enjoyable when you are in the moment. You will also find that you are more creative and constructive in all of your activities.

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