

Insights from 10% Happier by Dan Harris

“There’s a reason why business people, lawyers, and marines have embraced meditation. There’s no magic or mysticism required—it’s just exercise. If you do the right amount of reps, certain things will happen, reliably and predictably.” – Dan Harris

What happens when I start meditating?

Less reactionary

“What mindfulness does is create some space in your head so you can, as the Buddhists say, ‘respond’ rather than simply ‘react... A successful dotcom friend of mine said that once he started meditating he noticed he was always the calmest person in the room during heated meetings. He called it a “superpower.” – Dan Harris

Meditation gives you the ability to detach and observe a situation, without impulsively reacting to it. This creates a temperament that is essential for leadership. It can also prevent you from saying something to your boss that you’ll later regret.

More resilient

“I had long assumed that the only route to success was harsh self-criticism. However, research shows that ‘firm but kind’ is the smarter play. People trained in self-compassion meditation are more likely to quit smoking and stick to a diet. They are better able to bounce back from missteps. All successful people fail. If you can create an inner environment where your mistakes are forgiven and flaws are candidly confronted, your resilience expands exponentially.” – Dan Harris

Less fearful

“Striving is fine, as long as it’s tempered by the realization that, in an entropic universe, the final outcome is out of your control. If you don’t waste your energy on variables you cannot influence, you can focus much more effectively on those you can. When you are wisely ambitious, you do everything you can to succeed, but you are not attached to the outcome—so that if you fail, you will be maximally resilient, able to get up, dust yourself off, and get back in the fray.” – Dan Harris

More present

“Many people live habitually as if the present moment were an obstacle that they need to overcome in order to get to the next moment. And imagine living your whole life like that, where always this moment is never quite right, not good enough because you need to get to the next one. That is continuous stress... When you have one foot in the future and the other in the past, you piss on the present.” – Dan Harris

“We spend almost every waking moment lost in thought. This is what mindfulness is cutting through. The enemy of mindfulness is to be distracted by thought – thinking without knowing that you’re thinking.” – Sam Harris, author and neuroscientist

“When you see that there’s something better than what we have then it’s just a matter of time before your brain is like, ‘Why the fuck am I doing that? I’ve been holding on to a hot coal.’ ” – Dr. Jud Brewer, mindfulness researcher at Yale

3 Ways to Start Meditating:

1. Download a guided meditation (I suggest using a smartphone app like ‘Calm,’ ‘Headspace’, or ‘10% Happier’).
2. Go for a walk every morning and pay attention to the sights and sounds around you. When you notice yourself thinking (labeling, ruminating about the past, or worrying about the future), just bring your attention back to the sights and sounds.
3. Sit upright in a chair, set a timer for 7 minutes, and close your eyes. Feel your breath moving and naturally flowing in and out of your nose. When you notice yourself thinking, gradually return your focus back to your breath.

“Every time you get lost in thought—which you will, thousands of times—gently return to the breath. I cannot stress strongly enough that forgiving yourself and starting over is the whole game. As my friend and meditation teacher Sharon Salzberg has written, ‘Beginning again and again is the actual practice, not a problem to overcome so that one day we can come to the ‘real’ meditation.’ ” – Dan Harris

“If you give your brain enough of a taste of mindfulness, it will eventually create a self-reinforcing spiral—a retreat from greed and hatred” – Dan Harris