

MINDFlow,
the Path to Mindfulness-in-flow
in Relationships, Work and
Home Life

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By

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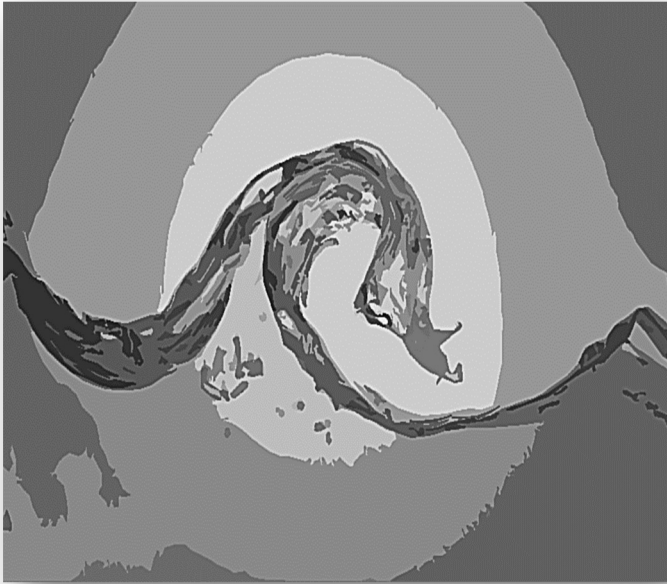
The staff, coaches and consultants at Integral Development helped me put the things I describe in this book into practice.

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INTRODUCTION



CHAPTER ONE

MINDFULNESS AND FLOW

*On the surface, it seems that the present moment is only one of
many, many moments.
Each day of your life appears to consist of thousands of moments
where different things happen.
Yet if you look more deeply, is there not only one moment, ever?
Is life ever not 'this moment'?*
—Eckhart Tolle

Remember when you were a young child and you just played? The days were long, everything was fresh and new, and you didn't think of tomorrow or yesterday. You were just in the moment and life just was. You were in the flow of life.

The purpose of this book is to bring back the full experience of the present moment into your life. It provides skills and techniques to help you silence the chattering thoughts that fill your mind. It will show you how to reconnect with an extraordinary gift that is always in front of you—this present moment. Furthermore, this book shows that the only place where you can obtain genuine satisfaction is in the here and now, the present moment. It describes the reasons we only get true satisfaction when we're in the moment. By learning how to be in the moment, you also provide what others most value from you—your presence.

What does it mean to be in the present moment? Being in the present moment is to be aware of the sights and sensations around you right now. It is to be aware in a non-judgmental way. It is awareness of the feelings in your body right now, the pressure of the chair against your back, any tightness in your

stomach, the feelings and tensions within your face and the sensation of air on your skin. Being in the present moment is being aware of what is, and allowing what is to be as it is. Experiencing the present moment is where true satisfaction in life and work occurs.

Can you remember moments when you were doing something and time stood still and you felt this tremendous satisfaction and contentment? These moments often happen when we are playing a sport, when we are walking in nature, are with our best friend, when listening to music, doing something creative or playing with children. They are special moments.

A paramedic described a situation that happened when he walked by a building where a man was threatening to jump off a four-story ledge.

“A number of people on the ground tried to talk the man down but he was becoming more adamant. I’ve always been afraid of heights, and just seeing the man up there made me fearful. At one stage, he was getting very excited and it looked like he was going to jump.

Without thinking, I started climbing up the ladder. As I climbed, I could see, feel and hear everything vividly. Somehow my fear left me, and my feet and hands were doing exactly what they needed to do. Time slowed down.

When I got onto the ledge near the man, I spoke to him very calmly. What I said came out just right and showed him I didn’t want him to jump and that I cared about him.

It was only after we both got down that what I’d done hit me, and my knees began shaking. And I felt this overwhelming feeling of happiness and gratitude to be alive”.

The paramedic was in the moment doing exactly what he needed to do. He was mindful of his movements, the ladder and the other person and everything flowed. This situation describes mindfulness-in-flow. Imagine if we could enter this

state of flow more often where we experience being the best we can be.

The Power of Flow

This book is about those times when we are in flow, when we are in the ‘zone’, engaged in an activity that absorbs us in the moment. Flow is described as the best experience in life. It is those magical moments that connect us to life.

You can see flow around you. Close your eyes and listen to the flow of the movement of people, cars and nature around you. You can turn on a tap or light switch and see the flow of water and energy that keeps us alive and the world functioning. We watch the flow of excellence in individual and team sports.

History is the flow of human and natural events that shape this very moment and will shape tomorrow. We have learned that the earth and the universe are one gigantic interconnected natural flowing system of energy made up of minute atoms that combine into air, water, earth, stars and solar systems.

Flow is a portal that connects us in the moment to the vast universe we are part of.

Mindfulness in Flow

The aim of this book is to show you how to experience mindflow, mindfulness-in-flow. Mindflow is not concentration or absorption but mindful awareness at the *point* of the moment. This point is the optimal, worthwhile experience of each moment. Understanding and experiencing mindflow leads to a life that flows and contributes to the great flow of life.

Mindflow is a process which leads to beneficial and important outcomes for us personally, in our relationships, our work, and for the world. Through mindfulness and flow you can become fulfilled and make a valuable contribution. Mindflow involves a precise four step process, R.A.I.R., which

brings the very specific skills of mindfulness into the specific conditions of flow.

This book will have a useful impact on you if, when you are walking, instead of thinking of the past or future, you feel your feet on the ground. When you are eating food, instead of thinking about something else, you taste what you are eating. While talking with a friend, you listen to the sound of their voice instead of thinking what you will say in response. You will know this book has added value to your life if the next time you start to worry or get upset, you drop your immediate reaction and respond in the best way possible. This sounds easy to do but often our mind is off to a thousand different places. To bring it back to the present moment is going against a habit pattern built up over years.

This book is both a ‘how to do’ and a ‘how to be’ book. It is a description of processes for self-awareness and fulfillment that involve the body, heart, mind and spirit. Its major value lies in actually doing and experiencing the exercises described in daily life, not in just reading about them.

Our modern lifestyle has created a contradictory world. There is considerable material abundance available to some while others live in poverty and hardship. Often those who have material prosperity have troubled relationships, internal ‘demons’ and are dissatisfied with their life.

Many of us live our lives without experiencing much of it. We spend a large portion of time in our inner world of thoughts and feelings. When we begin to look closely at what happens in our normal moment by moment existence, a simple but extremely powerful fact dawns on us. A great portion of the time, we don’t actually experience what is occurring but are absorbed in thoughts, interpretations and judgments about what is happening. More specifically, an inner voice in our mind is continually commenting, judging, classifying and interpreting what is occurring at the time: “*I like this*”, “*I don’t like that!*”,

“*Look how overweight he is!*”. This self-talk is going on almost all the time like a radio program in the background.

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist Monk states;

*“We often become so busy that we forget what we are doing or even who we are. We forget to look at the people we love and to appreciate them until it is too late. Even when we have some leisure time, we don’t know how to get in touch with what is going on inside and outside of ourselves. So, we turn on the television or pick up the telephone to escape from ourselves.”*¹

Our self-talk comments on what is happening at that moment. Other times, our mind goes off to something totally unrelated. Many people are unaware of how much of the time they are self-talking and daydreaming. External information and events trigger associations and memories, and in an instant, we drift into our inner world. A blue car drives by: internal thought, “*That’s like Mike’s car! I wonder if he and Carol ever worked out that money problem they had. Mike was always spending money impulsively. He...*” And so, the internal thinking goes on and on, and the sounds and sights that occur right in front of us are not experienced. Like a butterfly flitting from one flower to another, the busy, multi-channel mind replays past memories like old movies and projects what it anticipates the future to be.

William James, a 20th century philosopher and psychologist, spent considerable time studying consciousness. After many years he concluded that the average person had very limited awareness: “*Compared to what we ought to be, we are only half awake.*”

Mathew Killingsworth, a doctoral student at Harvard University, has shown that for about 47% of our day we are not in the present moment.² Almost half of the time, our minds wander off somewhere else. When we are not present our productivity suffers since we are less efficient and make more mistakes because we don’t see what is in front of us. What is

even more startling is that when the mind wanders we experience more moments of unhappiness. This occurs because the mind drifts to personal concerns and worries. Killingsworth also found that our greatest moments of happiness occur when we are in the present and immersed in the task—in flow. During these times we experience a state of deep quiet like being at the bottom of a deep ocean- the ocean of here and now.

Our ability to think has been a high point in human development. Logical thinking has led to scientific discoveries and technologies which improved our health and helped define and understand the laws of nature and the ability to control events in the world. Thinking also provides us the ability to examine a situation and determine how to improve it. This ability has increased the production of goods and services. Thinking is what we do much of the day as we consider the events, challenges, problems and opportunities open to us.

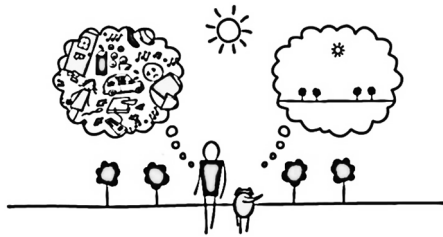
Thinking is useful when it helps us experience life to its fullest but not when it interferes or discolors our life. It can become a burden if it restricts us from living the life in front of us. It is a burden when it focuses primarily on *me*: my concerns, my wants, my expectations, my likes or dislikes. Thinking is a tool and we can learn when to use it and when not to. Thinking, like a car engine, can be useful to get you somewhere like planning the steps in a new project. But we don't need to leave our car engine running all the time. If we keep our car engine running when it is parked, it will eventually burn out. The same is true for the human mind. We need to learn ways to help our mind-engine go quiet and recharge itself.

The next step in our development is therefore, to learn when to think and when a state beyond thinking is useful. The ability to be in the mindflow state results in clear and efficient thinking while staying relaxed, calm and in the present. Being in this state connects us with our authentic, natural self, moment by moment. This is easy to say, but only a few 'enlightened'

individuals have the ability to live fully moment by moment. The practices and techniques of mindflow that are described will bring you into this present moment, the *Now*, where you become your best self, which lies beyond our changing emotions and chattering mind.

Mind full or Mindful?

Many philosophical, psychological and spiritual traditions state that higher levels of consciousness are important for the enhancement of human wellbeing. Mindfulness has become a popular way to increase wellbeing. The



Mind Full, or Mindful?

idea of mindfulness has its roots in meditative, spiritual traditions where conscious attention and awareness are actively developed. The Buddha called this state of non-judgmental awareness *sati*, or mindfulness, to see things as they really are.

The first time someone hears the term mindfulness it may sound odd. It suggests that the mind is full of something. To be *careful* means that the mind is full of care, so mindful could mean that the mind is full of the object of your attention: “*Be mindful of small children crossing the road since school starts today.*”

The state of mindfulness referred to in this book is when the mind has awareness of what is occurring in the moment. It is fully aware of the sensations, sounds and feelings happening outside ourselves and within our body and mind.

Mindfulness is commonly defined as the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present. A similar definition is that mindfulness is the clear and single-minded awareness of what is actually happening around and

within us during successive moments of experience. Mindfulness, therefore, is a state in which there is enhanced attention to and awareness of current experience and present reality in an open, relaxed, *non-judgmental* way.³

This non-judgmental aspect is important. Observe how often and how quick you are to make judgments: “*I didn’t like that Uber driver!*” “*That cake isn’t that nice.*” “*I already knew that.*” We judge and therefore limit. This doesn’t mean you can’t judge when to walk across a busy street, what needs to be discussed in the meeting or correct a report that has words incorrectly spelled. Non-judgmental means not having judgments with a negative emotional and egotistical bias (e.g. “*I don’t like him because he said...*” “*I don’t like show-offs*” “*I think staff meetings are boring*”). Non-judgmental can also mean letting go of superficial or naïve positive judgments such as “*Since we won this contract, we must be the best in town!*”

A core characteristic of mindfulness is that it is open, receptive awareness and attention. For example, when eating a meal, one can be attuned to the moment-to-moment taste experience while also being aware of the feeling in the stomach and the conversation and music in the background.

Another major component of mindfulness is that the body and mind are relaxed with the attention open. If the body or mind is tense, then the awareness will be limited and narrow. For the awareness to be fully open, you need to be relaxed. Relaxing the body and mind means letting go of leftover tensions, frustrations and expectations that get embedded consciously and unconsciously in the mind and body.

The present moment is experienced by connecting with your five senses: touch, hearing, smell, seeing and listening. Right now, relax any tension in your body, feel the weight of the body on the chair, and listen to the sounds around you without thinking about them or judging them, just listen to them. For the few seconds while you are doing this, you are in the present.

In summary: Mindfulness is a relaxed, open, non-judgmental awareness of what is occurring now.

Mindflow not Mind Full

“I’ve had a lot of worries in my life, most of which never happened.”

—Mark Twain

It may seem impossible to be mindful and in flow because the ups and downs of life make it hard to always stay in the moment. Our emotions and thoughts get caught up in the trials and tribulations of everyday living.

Here is a situation that portrays what happens during an ordinary day. Brett was feeling under a lot of pressure. It was mid-morning and he hadn’t got half of the things done that he needed to. The project proposal was expected by his boss at 11am, and he had already postponed the time twice, so his boss was getting impatient.

Before he went to work he had an argument with Dee, his partner, because he had promised to book their holiday in June, but he didn’t get around to doing it. Now the place they wanted to go to was full. Also, it was his turn to drop their three-year-old son at pre-school, but Brett didn’t have the time since he needed to get to work early to get the project proposal done.

Meredith, his colleague, had promised to provide the costs for the project by 9am but only got them to him at 10 and when he read it he saw she did a half-baked job. He needed to spend at least an hour redoing it and this would make it impossible to meet the 11am deadline.

And to top things off, he got a call from the plumber who was supposed to fix the toilet problems at home. The plumber said he couldn’t get there today because he had the flu and it wouldn’t be until Monday when he might be well enough to get around to it. Brett could imagine Dee’s response when she

heard this news!

At that moment, Brett could feel the tension in his neck, the feeling of being overwhelmed and a sense of hopelessness. He just wanted to walk out the door and get away from it all, but he knew he couldn't!

Brett wondered, *“Why do I feel so stressed. I feel like I'm on an endless treadmill with no way to get off. What happened to me? Why aren't I happy? I am well off, my family is healthy, I have a good job but I'm not enjoying life!”*

Brett was trying very hard to control things. He also had a good dose of being Mr Worrier since he was afraid of failure. He had to achieve his project deadline and he wanted to control the things in his life including the plumber!

Brett's situation isn't so different from millions of us. We all go through times of feeling stressed, moody and depleted of energy. One day we are tracking through life feeling fine, daydreaming and unfazed, and then all of a sudden, we find that we are getting stressed, have too much to do and too little time to do it. The pace of demands seems increasing and relentless. If we don't get a good night's sleep, we feel flat and tired at work. And we ask ourselves *“How did it get like this? Is this the way my life is going to be from now on? If it goes on like this, they'll write on my tombstone: 'I met budget!'”*

If you asked Brett how he was feeling that morning, he would probably say, “tense”, “frustrated” or “hassled”. Yet it is not one thing that he is feeling, but a mixture of thoughts, feelings, impulses and body sensations. This is shown in the following diagram:

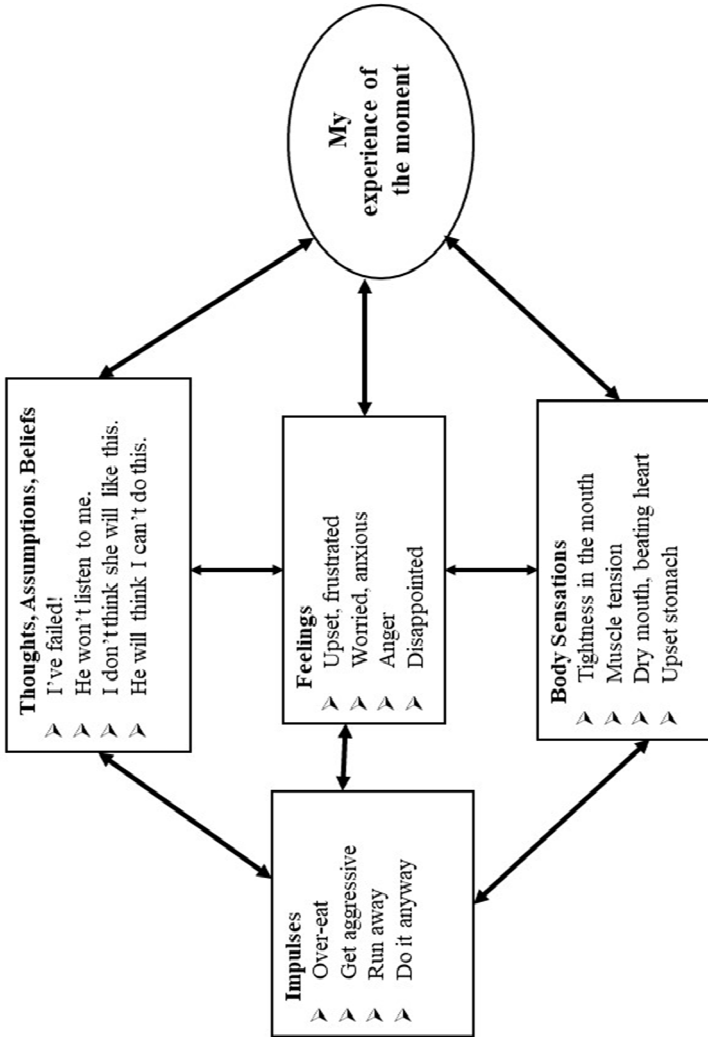


Figure 1-1: Components of a Negative Reaction

As this diagram shows, our thoughts influence our feelings and our feelings are experienced as body sensations. Impulses are spontaneous desires that arise from the unconscious and

pull us to do something before we have thought about it. Our thinking, assumptions and beliefs sometimes control our impulses, “*Don’t have that dessert, you will gain weight*” or justifies an impulse, “*I deserve to have that chocolate, I’ve been working hard.*” Our body sensations can influence our feelings, impulses and thoughts just as our feelings can change our thoughts, impulses and body sensations.

To get an idea of how penetrating and powerful the interrelatedness of these elements is, let’s look at one research study that showed how these elements affect each other. Participants were asked to watch cartoons with a pencil between their lips mimicking a scowl while others were asked to hold a pencil between their teeth and mimic a smile. The results were remarkable; those who were forced to smile found the cartoons significantly funnier than those compelled to frown.⁴ While the result may seem a bit strange, it shows that the act of smiling can make you happier and demonstrates that sensations in the body can influence feelings and thoughts. As we all know, when we see someone smiling we smile back because it is infectious. Smiling, even when its forced, makes you happy and when you smile at someone else, they smile back.

To be mindful requires an open mind, so we can experience things as they really are, rather than through the attitudes and judgments, likes and dislikes we’ve learned from our parents, friends, school and the society we grew up in.

Mindfulness is like emotional intelligence since it involves a clear awareness of one’s own and other people’s feelings. If you have emotional intelligence you have skills in four areas: awareness of your own emotions, an ability to manage your emotions appropriately, an awareness of other people’s emotions and an ability to influence their emotional responses. Mindfulness builds emotional intelligence since it increases your awareness of yourself and others and increases your

ability to respond appropriately in the moment. Mindfulness observes what is taking place without bias and acts on what is needed in the moment.

Individuals differ in their willingness and skill to be aware and attentive to what is occurring in the present. Awareness of the moment can be sharpened or dulled by a variety of factors (e.g. the external environment, past experience, distractions, personality traits, food, drink, exercise, health).

There are states of mind that restrict our ability to be mindful. Being preoccupied with concerns or worries detracts from the experience of what is occurring at that moment. Mindfulness is also limited when a person behaves habitually or compulsively without being aware of his behavior. Finally, mindfulness is diminished when a person becomes defensive or refuses to admit what they really think or feel.

The early stages of developing mindfulness involve an intention. By intention, it means that a person has to intend to switch their state of mind from the ordinary way of thinking, judging and being concerned about one's self to an awareness of the sensations happening in the moment. We put aside our interest in our self and give our attention and awareness to the other people and things in the moment.

In every situation, we have a powerful, subtle lens through which we see and interpret things in our environment. We read information in the news and think how it relates to us. A friend tells us a problem they are having, and we want to tell them about our similar experience. We see a woman and judge whether we like or don't like her mannerisms or clothes. We walk through a shopping center and only see the signs that are of interest to us: "*Do I need a new wallet?*" "*I like that jacket*" "*Should I get something to eat?*" It is so engrained and normal, we can hardly imagine being in a state different from this.

Mindfulness is a very different state since it doesn't have these types of judgments and evaluations. You walk through

the shopping center being aware of the colors and movements around you and your thoughts in response them but don't get caught up in judgments that lead to worry, anxiety and fear. We still make decisions and choices, but they are not based on imagined negative consequences or unnecessary concerns.

Mindflow is the next step beyond mindfulness. It is 'Mindfulness 4.0' or 'Mindfulness Plus', since mindflow builds on ideas described by people such as Eckhart Tolle in *The Power of Now*, B Alan Wallace's *The Attention Revolution*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow*, Thich Nhat Hahn's *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, and Alan Watts' *Book: The Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*. These authors have made significant contributions to our understanding of the value of mindfulness. Mindflow integrates and extends their insights and practices of mindfulness and flow with new ideas and techniques.

When you ask someone "*What would you do if you won Lotto?*" the answer is often: "*I would quit my job tomorrow, do nothing, go travelling*" or, "*I don't know!*" They are saying they would do something that isn't work. And yet when you meet very wealthy or retired people, they are often doing work of some type: helping the poor, renovating their house, organizing an art exhibition or volunteering in a hospital.

All of these are forms of work. Mindflow adds a new perspective to the value and importance of work and shows that flow at work increases satisfaction and performance for individuals and teams.

Why learn about mindflow?

The ideas and techniques of mindflow open up a new world. They provide specific and valuable insights and skills into your way of thinking and being and how to be better for you and your loved ones. These include:

Learn precise, techniques of mindfulness and flow

When a person is new to the practice of mindfulness, encouragement to be in the present moment can feel like instructions telling you to look at the back of your eyeballs. The phrases “Be in the moment” and “Go with the flow” are used often but many people don’t know what to actually do to get to *here* and *now*.

Before you can be here and now, you have to know where here and now are. So the first part of this book describes where *here* is and what *now* is like. It also helps you to recognize when you are not *here* and *now*. This includes our mental self-talk, the tensions we carry, the times we are distracted and many more instances when we can see that we are not in the present moment. You will be taught an awareness exercise that is the foundation of mindfulness practice. Many other techniques and practices are also provided to bring you into the present moment and build on and deepen this awareness exercise.

The information provided is based on over 30 years of being a student myself, practicing and carrying out these exercises. My teachers were wise men and women in the Advaita Vedanta and Zen traditions as well as the psychological sciences. The techniques described in this book are based on ancient practices combined with modern techniques from the psychology and psychotherapeutic professions. I have taught these techniques to over a thousand people and their feedback has confirmed that these practices are effective and worthwhile, and in many cases, life-changing.

I have picked a variety of mindfulness techniques that work for a wide range of people including frontline staff, senior citizens, students, men, women, CEOs, and managers around the world from a range of countries and cultural backgrounds. People who have benefited from these techniques have included police officers, engineers, lawyers, psychologists, accountants, tradesmen, emergency service professionals, elite

athletes, teachers, sales representatives, coaches, and people in many other occupations. The instructions for the exercises in this book are precise yet simple. They all have the same focus of teaching you how to be in the moment and experience flow.

Experience mindfulness in flow

Combining the practices of mindfulness with the experience of flow will take you to a new state of awareness where extraordinary things happen. The terms *mindfulness* and *flow* are increasingly used and there is confusion about the similarities and differences between the two. While there are similarities, there are important differences that affect the way we experience each of these and their different outcomes.

The ideas and practical techniques described combine into a comprehensive, coherent approach to mindfulness, meditation and flow that create the experience of mindflow.

Experience the Integral Point where two become one

This book provides a unique way of looking at the present moment. While mindfulness is open awareness, the *integral point* is the focal point of the present moment where you and the world meet. The integral point is the point where you connect with another person or situation to fulfill the need of the moment. It is the very precise point that takes you into mindflow.

While spiritual teachers encourage meditation and mindfulness practices, they seldom describe how to participate in modern workplace activities that are complex, changing and require considerable skill. Discovering the integral point results in an extraordinary revolution in work efficiency, effectiveness and human wellbeing.

A simple but very powerful R A I R process is described that brings you into the flow through the integral point. I was taught

this practice over 35 years ago and use it extensively but have never seen it described anywhere. The integral point is also where teamwork occurs and the point where the organization's vision and objectives are achieved in practice.

The occurrence of *dark flow*, the experience of flow that is distorted and bent for the purposes of a person's ego, is described. When it occurs, and what can be done to modify its distorting effects on flow is explained. Dark flow explains a number of problems that occur in individuals, teams, workplaces and society.

Scientific Support

There is considerable scientific research that has explored mindfulness, meditation and flow. While scientific research is always a work in progress, it provides validation and clarification of what is beneficial and what isn't. These studies provide significant scientific evidence that the regular practice of mindfulness, meditation and flow techniques have many direct physiological and psychological benefits. The techniques, concepts and benefits covered in this book are supported by rigorous research.

Even if you have been exposed to mindfulness and meditation ideas and practices, you can find new ideas and practices to enhance your own personal, professional and spiritual development. Mindflow concepts and practices, especially being at the integral point, can provide insight to your life's work.

Waking Up, Showing Up and Growing Up

Ken Wilber in his book, *Integral Meditation*, describes three major pathways of human development: Waking Up, Growing Up and Showing Up.⁵ This book uses that framework to describe Waking Up as increasing your levels of mindfulness

and awareness. Showing Up means bringing mindfulness into flow in the activities in your life, interpersonal relationships and at work. Growing Up requires you to transform the way you see, manage and use your energy to develop through eight stages of self-identity.

Many people, especially children, experience blissful states of flow at some time. This experience may seem to occur randomly depending on the circumstance. This book shows that by becoming more aware and Waking Up through the levels of mindfulness, by Showing Up authentically in flow and by Growing Up through the stages of development, we will consistently experience flow and contribute our best to our families, relations, work and the world.

Part one, the process of *Waking Up*, is described in Chapters two, three, and four. Chapter two describes the benefits of mindfulness and its fundamental characteristics including types of self-talk. It describes how the busy monkey mind works, and provides reasons why being in the moment is important as the basis of mindflow. It teaches you awareness exercises that are the foundation for practical mindflow techniques covered in later chapters.

Chapter three describes Wilber's levels of Waking Up. It includes the components of mindfulness and provides descriptions and techniques for you to experience the levels of mindfulness from body awareness to a complete unity and oneness with the present. Chapter four describes meditation, which is the foundation of mindfulness and flow. You will learn several well established and researched meditation techniques. These meditation techniques build your skill in mindfulness and reconnect you with your natural self when the busy mind is silent. Meditation will strengthen your practice of mindfulness and provide you a deep stillness and quiet energy in flow experiences.

Part two, *Showing Up* describes flow and how to achieve flow in your relations, in personal activities and in your work. Chapter five defines and describes the characteristics of flow, research on flow and the conditions that bring about flow. You also learn the important similarities and differences between mindfulness and absorbed concentration. Chapter six describes the *integral point* and the R.A.I.R. process that brings you into mindflow. This four-step process is based on the teaching of G.I. Gurdjieff and, though simple, provides a clear path to experiencing flow. By practicing the R.A.I.R. process, you will enter the state of flow regularly.

Showing Up involves mindfulness in action. Chapters seven, eight and nine include many precise and simple techniques for you to practice in your personal life, in your relationships and at work. Practicing these techniques using the R.A.I.R. process will open new ways of being in these areas of your life.

Part three, *Growing Up* is described in Chapters ten and eleven. Chapter ten covers how energy and attention are related to flow at an individual, group and society level. The types of attention are described that inhibit flow and how to ensure energy is available. The four worlds of our reality are described. Alignment of these four worlds at the integral point helps to increase flow and performance. This chapter also describes eight zones of energy and stages of self-identity that we evolve through. In this chapter, you will be asked to examine various aspects of your inner and external life. You will also learn the characteristics and problems that occur in each stage and how to develop through them to an 'integral' way of being.

The final chapter, Chapter eleven, describes how your participation in flow connects you to the grand scheme of things, the Great Flow. It shows that being in the flow brings you to your own purpose or calling in life. You will learn that