

Embracing This Present Moment

Included in this packet is a page of quotes, you may choose to use these as part of the participant handouts, or as an ice breaker.

Ice breaker idea: Put each quote on a separate piece of paper and hang them around the room before the program begins. Have the participants find the quote they can relate to the most, and then allow time for them to tell the group why they chose the particular quote they did.

Items you will need ahead of time: Quotes on larger pieces of paper, if you choose to do the icebreaker activity, index cards for the goal setting portion of the presentation, and participant materials.

LEADER PRESENTATION:

Embracing what is and living with complete attention in the present moment

opens up all kinds of possibilities. It's no wonder that great achievers, philosophers, and spiritual teachers from all traditions have sung the praises of living in the joy of the timeless now. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, put it this way: "With the past, I have nothing to do; nor with the future. I live now." Emily Dickinson noted, "Forever is composed of nows." In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus encouraged his followers to give up needless worry about the future and, with faith, to live in all their natural glory as do "the birds in the air and the lilies of the field." He said to "take no thought for tomorrow" and to "put your hands to the plow without looking back," giving full attention, one day at a time, to the challenges and opportunities that arise. Similarly, Buddha asserted, "The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, not to worry about the future, not to anticipate troubles, but to live the present moment wisely and earnestly." Of course, the art of living in present time does not preclude skillfully visiting the past and future. Remembering important lessons from the past is vital; fond memories warm our hearts; and having an eye to the future is part of living wisely and giving birth to our dreams.

Life takes place only in the present moment. Unfortunately, most of us have a strong tendency to stray into the past or wander into the future. Often, our attention is only partially on the person we are communicating with or on the task at hand. In failing to be fully present, we miss much of life's richness and limit our effectiveness, our happiness, and our ability to give to others.

Leader Presentation

Bringing a dream to life is a journey. It begins and continues one step at a time. Think about all that you have learned from this lesson and how you might put it into practice. Then choose one small goal that you want to accomplish in the next few days. Move toward a new possibility that is really important to you—one that you are enthusiastic about and are confident you can achieve.

Class Participation (give participants index cards or paper to write on)

Take a card or a piece of paper and, at the top, write "A New Possibility." Under this heading, briefly state what you will do and by when. Sign this action plan and put it where you will see it often.

Tell a supportive friend or family member about your goal, and frequently visualize yourself following through. Be prepared just in case doubts or roadblocks crop up. Know that you can always draw upon faith, firm resolve, and creativity to overcome any obstacles that may arise. When you put the deepest desires of your heart into action, it naturally benefits others, either directly or indirectly. Have fun with your action plan; make a difference; inspire others. Dare to envision new possibilities, and then create your dreams one step at a time.

Summary

1. There are two aspects to embracing the present moment: 1) being fully aware and attentive to the here and now; and 2) completely accepting the moment-to-moment reality of what is.
2. When you are fully alive to the wonder and opportunity of each moment, anxiety dissipates, fresh possibilities arise, and a peaceful, fundamental happiness emerges.
3. As a general rule, the degree of fear we experience is an exact measurement of how far we have strayed from the present moment into regrets about the past or worries about the future.
4. When you do not accept what is in the moment, you are fighting reality—much like banging your head against a brick wall.
5. Learning to accept what is, instant by instant, will save you untold frustration, anger, and disappointment.
6. Accepting the moment-to-moment flow of what is gives you the freedom to focus all your energy on creatively making any positive changes that are needed, whether they are concrete changes in the world around you or personal attitudinal adjustments.

CALL YOUR SPIRIT BACK TO PRESENT TIME

Teacher and author Caroline Myss stresses the physical, mental, and spiritual benefits of living in present time. Dr. Myss explains that many of us have trouble doing this, however, because so much of our energy is locked up in the past or future. To help us understand how personal energy works, she uses the image of "energy bank accounts." Let's assume that at the beginning of each day you are given an allotment of personal energy to use in any way you decide. To simplify the math, as Dr. Myss does, let's pretend that on a particular day you start off with \$100 in your energy bank account. You can spend that \$100 of energy in any way you want. But things aren't as rosy as you might imagine. As soon as you wake up, you notice you're angry over what your boss said yesterday behind your back. And then there's the devastating breakup with your boyfriend that has left you feeling sad and lonely. So, right off the bat, you're spending \$35 dollars (35 percent) of your energy account brooding over these past events. Also weighing heavily on your mind is the big speech you're scheduled to give next week. "How will I get through this?" you say to yourself as your heart pounds and your palms perspire. Your off-and-on anxiety about this future event siphons away another \$25 (25 percent) from your bank account. This means that, even without additional regrets and worries, you have only 40 percent of your bank account left for dealing with the day's events. As Dr. Myss points out, the opportunity of a lifetime may come along today; however, to see it and successfully embrace it will take \$60 from your personal energy account, but, alas, you have only \$40 left in the bank! Admittedly, this is an oversimplified example, but you get the point. To function at your best, you need as much of your energy as possible in present time. Get in the habit of noticing where your attention is. ***If your spirit needlessly wanders into the future or gets stuck in a past event, call it back to present time!*** If you're like most of us, you may need to do this again and again each day.

LOVING WHAT IS

One of the basic causes of unhappiness is our refusal to accept the moment-to-moment reality of what is—what's happening right now. *At the root of our frustration is this: The way things are is different from what we want or expect, and we don't accept that fact.* It's sort of like getting mad every evening because the sun goes down. Not many of us would intentionally bang our heads against a brick wall. Yet, when we refuse to accept what is, we do just that—bang our heads against the brick wall of reality.

Accepting what is does not mean that things must stay the same. In fact, as you learn to accept the here and now, you keep within yourself all the energy that you used to waste in disappointment and frustration. This means you're in a *much* better position to change what you can.

MORE POISE, MORE FREEDOM

Remember, accepting what is doesn't necessarily mean you like what's happening. It doesn't turn you into a wimp, and it doesn't mean you won't do everything in your power to bring about positive changes. It just means you've decided to stop being yanked around every time things don't happen according to your preferences. It means you've decided to stop arguing with reality, and because of that, you are calmer, more alert, and more powerful. You have greater energy and presence to spend enjoying life or taking a stand for what you believe in. The more you accept what is, the more centered you will be in your life, and that's the best place of all to be.

1. GO OVER HANDOUT #1 WITH THE CLASS MEMBERS

2. DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- In your opinion, who does a better job of embracing the present moment—a typical 2-year-old child or the average adult? And why?
- What role, if any, do you think faith plays in living fully in the present moment?
- What does being keenly present in the moment have to do with an electrifying performance by a star basketball player, traffic accidents, and eating a meal?

Quotes for "Embracing this Present Moment"

It is only when we truly know and understand that we have a limited time on earth—and that we have no way of knowing when our time is up—that we will begin to live each day to the fullest, as if it was the only one we had. (Elisabeth Kubler Ross)

Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin. (Mother Teresa of Calcutta)

Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That is why it is called the Present. (Eleanor Roosevelt)

How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world. (Anne Frank)

Birds sing after a storm, why shouldn't we? (Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy)

The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, not to worry about the future, not to anticipate troubles, but to live the present moment wisely and earnestly. (The Buddha)

It's All Perfect

Let's assume there's a good reason for all that happens to you, that each event is designed to feed your growth and happiness, that everything is orchestrated for your highest good, that it's all perfect, and that it's the same for everyone else.

You might attribute this to the wondrous order of the universe or to the divine plan of a loving God. Either way, what if you decide to live your life from this point forward with the complete conviction that everything that happens to you—without exception—is absolutely perfect just as it is? Here are some of the benefits you might experience from seeing the world this way:

- ♥ You would no longer waste precious time and energy fighting the reality of what is.
- ♥ You would have far more energy available to make positive changes both within yourself and in the world at large. ♥ Undeterred by needless frustration, anger, and fear, you would see people and circumstances with more clarity and understanding. ♥ Accepting what is, you would live more fully and richly in the present moment. ♥ Freed from the weight of needless stress, your body and immune system would function with greater efficiency and strength. ♥ Your energies would be less scattered, leaving you peaceful and alert. ♥ You could engage people and events with deeper compassion, sensitivity, good humor, and creativity.
- ♥ You would find it much easier to concentrate pleasantly and wholeheartedly on the task at hand.
- ♥ If you are spiritually inclined, you could more easily attune to the Divine Presence.
- ♥ Knowing that everything is perfect just as it is, you would be far less apt to dwell on worries about the past or fears about the future. ♥ You also would be less prone to fear, anger, or depression over events in your life. ♥ You could better see that, as terrible as they are, conditions such as hatred, war, poverty, and young children dying of starvation or cancer may indeed be invitations for us to learn and share and take responsibility for creating a kinder, more loving world. ♥ With your increased energy and understanding, you would become a much wiser and stronger force for good in this world. ♥ Your composure, wisdom, and vitality would be a beautiful living example for your loved ones and for all who cross your path. ♥ You would more easily embrace the wonder and opportunity of each present moment. ♥ No matter what happens—whether pleasant or painful—you would greet each event with greater composure and understanding, saying from the depths of your heart, "Thank you. I will make the best of this opportunity."



You might not totally accept the belief that "It's All Perfect," but perhaps some aspects of this way of thinking will help you live with greater peace, creativity, and joy in the present moment.

Participant Handout #2

Program Summary

1. There are two aspects to embracing the present moment: 1) being fully aware and attentive to the here and now; and 2) completely accepting the moment-to-moment reality of what is.
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