



Best Minds AssociatesSM
Focused Thinking for Life

Creators of:

MIND FOCUSED COACHINGSM

&

MindfulChoiceSM

Destination - Awareness - Choice



MindfulChoice4U

A free guide to MindfulChoiceTM
for Everyday Users

MindfulChoiceTM is an evident-based,
expert system that is the heart
of Mind Focused Coaching

By Dr. Robert W. Lebovits, Ph.D. & Dr. Gerard S. Meyer, Ph.D.



MindFulChoice4U

A Guide to MindFulChoice™ for Everyday Users

We offer on our Website www.mindfocusedcoaching.com a free Online Mind Focused Assessment and Initial no Fee Consultation, that will immediately tell you how you can benefit from MFC, and allow us to customize your training. The following Free Online Mind Focused Post Assessment will compare your scoring before and after, and will immediately show you several visual comparisons of all the positive changes you achieved.

All videos, animations, and scientific articles are available on our Website in MFC on-line library.

Disclaimer

Mind Focus Coaching has been shown to be remarkably effective in achieving change in behavior, particularly in conjunction with mental health treatment. However, we do not treat psychopathology. We only address our clients' functionality. If a condition persists, we recommend consulting with a licensed mental health professional. MFC should not be used as a substitute for mental health services.

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MindFulChoice4U

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Introduction

About This Book

This book is an adaptation of the MindFulChoice™ manual “What Is MindFulChoice™!”. It is intended for people who are not psychologists or mental health professionals, and who are interested in learning about MindFulChoice™ and using it in their own lives. A more technical document containing similar information is available from **Best Minds Associates**.

What is MindFulChoice™!

MindFulChoice™ is a new psychological approach that focuses on how people make decisions. It can be used as a way to prepare a person for therapy, a therapy method, or even as a self-help method. Rather than trying to understand or solve the patient’s underlying issues, a MindFulChoice™ therapist focuses on helping the patient to get back to their normal level of function.

In MindFulChoice™, the focus of therapy is not “Why” but “What?”—rather than ask why a patient is engaging in counterproductive or harmful behavior, a MindFulChoice™ therapist would simply ask what the behavior was and then focus on finding strategies to change or stop that behavior. As the name suggests, the strategy that MindFulChoice™ offers a patient is one that deals with how they make choices. In the paradigm of MindFulChoice™, the moments person takes to make a decision are vital to their behavior.

This introduction will give you a brief overview of the MindFulChoice™ approach and the model that underlies it, which will be discussed at greater length later on.

The MindFulChoice™ Four Stages Approach

In the first stage, “Recognition,” the person must work to identify a choice with an important outcome, one that will have a very different outcome depending on what the patient chooses. Once they have identified a choice like that, they also need to look for similar choices in their past that can be compared to the choice they’re looking at now. In this step, they must prepare for their decision by carefully paying attention to every factor involved in the process and avoiding impulsive, split-second decisions—in other words, they must avoid inattention and impulsivity.

In the second stage, “Awareness,” the person must be “mindful”—not in the Buddhist or New Age senses, but in the sense of “paying attention.” They must examine themselves, and figure out what resources they have available to them in terms of dealing with the problem. They also need to pay attention to the choice, and all aspects of all of its potential consequences.

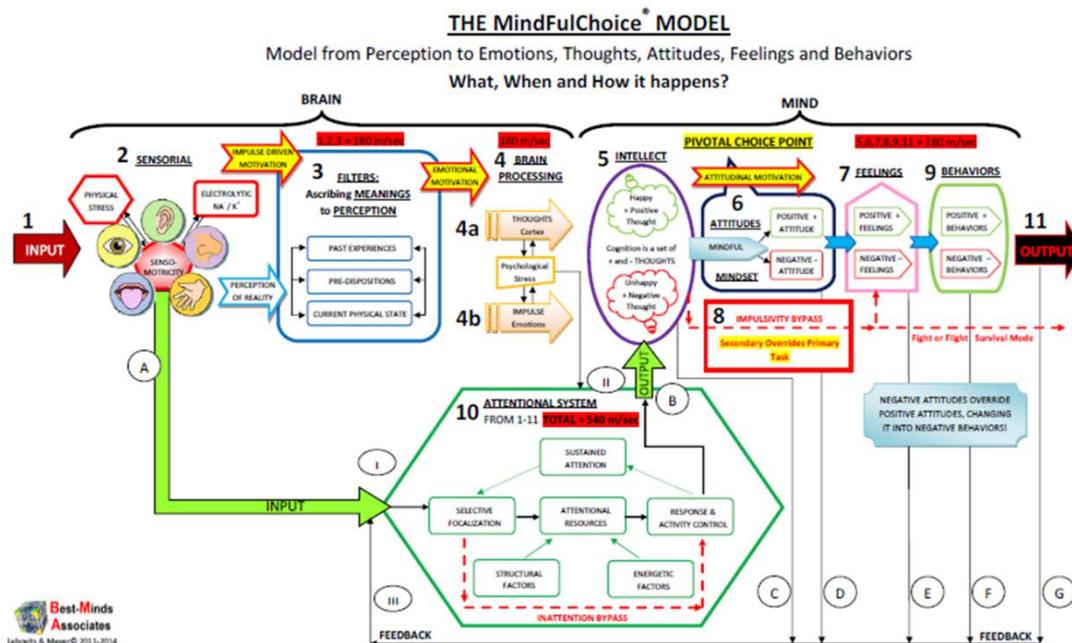
The third stage, “Choice,” is exactly what it sounds like. MindFulChoice™, in its conception of how choices are best made, borrows concepts from academia and software engineering. The concept borrowed from academia is backwards design, which is essentially “beginning with the end in mind”—figuring out what your ultimate goal is first and then making plans and decisions that will get you to it. MindFulChoice™ also uses research from the software engineering field as a way of understanding how the brain processes information and makes decisions. Based on this research, MindFulChoice™ incorporates two concepts, heuristics and binary choices to simplify decision-making. Heuristics are “mental shortcuts” or “rules of thumb” that focus on one aspect of a complex problem and can help speed and simplify the process of choosing. Binary choices are choices with two options, and people using MindFulChoice™ are encouraged to approach their decisions as choices of this kind. By using these techniques, while taking time to consider the information gathered in the second step, the person using MindFulChoice™ can make a better decision.

The final stage is “Self-Assessment,” which involves evaluation the decision made. The person using MindFulChoice™ must look at how well they adhered to the MindFulChoice™ process and note where they might be able to improve. This is more useful than evaluating the actual outcome of the decision, because poor decisions do occasionally turn out well, but a good decision-making process is more reliable in the long run. For example, even a financial advisor who gives advice by flipping to random pages of finance books he’s never read will occasionally give good advice, but most people would agree that they’d prefer to work with a well-trained, experienced financial advisor.

MindFulChoice™ - 540 milliseconds Model of Decision-Making

The above process is based on MindFulChoice™ model of how a person makes decisions, based on the research that helped its creators create MindFulChoice™. Whether the person is using MindFulChoice™ methods in making a decision or not, they will go through this the steps of this model.

If a person is confronted with a decision—say, whether or not to slow down at a yellow light—they go through all of these steps, and can easily encounter either pitfall. The first few steps are unconscious processes: perceiving the world around you, interpreting its meaning, and attaching emotions and meaning to what you see. In the example of choosing whether to slow down at a yellow light, most people automatically keep their eyes open while driving, so when you see a bright, yellow light hanging from a wire across the street, you identify it as a traffic signal that means “you’ll need to stop soon” and get frustrated, all without thinking. Then, the mind, the part of the brain that is responsible for conscious processes, gets involved.



The first thing the mind brings into play is the intellect. In the example, you might consider potential negative outcomes of trying to rush through the yellow light or potential positive outcomes of waiting. Attitudes form the next step of the process, and play their own role in the final decision made. Your attitude toward authority, how much you value safety and your comfort level with driving are some attitudes that would affect you in this stage of the example. In MindFulChoice™, this is called a Pivotal Choice Point because whether your attitudes are positive or negative usually affects how the whole decision plays out. The next step is feelings, which are basically the conscious form of the emotions your brain produced earlier. Unlike emotions, you choose to experience feelings. In the yellow light example, you might decide to feel frustrated, or dismiss the brief

emotion of frustration after it shows up. Like attention, this stage is considered a Pivotal Choice Point, and for much the same reasons.

Choosing negative emotions or attitudes often leads to bad results; however, the two biggest pitfalls in this process are impulsivity and inattention. Inattention involves neglecting factors in the environment that are relevant to the decision. In the yellow light scenario, you might neglect to check if any cars on the cross street are already pulling out, or not notice a police cruiser parked nearby. Impulsivity comes into the process in the later half, and makes a person skip steps, not fully consider their options, and make a hasty decision. In extreme cases, a fight-or-flight-or-freeze reaction to something that a person fears might cause this kind of reaction as well. In the yellow light scenario, you could show impulsivity by deciding intellectually that you're in a rush, without thinking about your attitudes toward safety or the rules, or by simply panicking and then pressing down on the gas without considering your options at all. In MindFulChoice™, these two issues are also called the “impulsivity bypass” and the “inattention bypass” because both make you skip steps of the above process.

In the paradigm of MindFulChoice™, all problems in thinking or behavior are, at their root, the result of one of these problems. So, the creators of MindFulChoice™ created the Four-Step Process described above, as a way of helping people to avoid the inattention and impulsivity bypasses. By learning and memorizing this process, a person can make a habit out of making well-thought-out decisions.

Chapter 1: The New Approach of MindFulChoice™

Psychological Approaches through History

In each era of history, psychology has taken cues from the social values of the time. Nineteenth century psychology was all about looking for direction from a higher authority. People went to psychoanalysts and got knowledge from them about how to live a healthy life. Nineteenth century psychoanalysts promised to tell their clients, “This is what it means,” and “This is what you need to do!”

In the twentieth century, the focus of therapy shifted to self-exploration and experience. However, people were still looking for authority figures to lead them. Clients in the twentieth century would go to therapists with questions like, “Why am I thinking/feeling/doing this?” and “Why is this so?” In the twenty-first century, psychology has come to be about self-awareness and empowerment for self-achievement. Instead of just following authority figures, people are looking for the most effective ways to direct their own lives. In line with this philosophy, MindFulChoice™ focuses on solutions instead of dwelling on problems, and empowers clients.

What Distinguishes MindFulChoice™ from Other Methods

When you use MindFulChoice™, you focus on *what* happened, rather than *why* it happened. This will be discussed in more detail later on, but the basic logic behind it is this: asking “What?” gives you solid data, while “Why?” gives you only subjective judgements. By asking “What?” you get information about the impact of the problem that can help you generate possible solutions.

MindFulChoice™ is not meant to treat underlying causes; it’s just focused on changing behavior. But, it can help you expand your perspective and perceive the world more fully so that you can look at yourself and what you do in new ways, and even see possibilities you may not have seen before. MindFulChoice™ is a method for making changes, overcoming resistance, and living in a mindful way, by using the 3-T rule: “Think Things Through” for a quarter of a second before reacting. Research shows that impulsivity and inattention are at the root of most problems in people’s lives. MindFulChoice™ is designed to help you minimize the impact they have on your decisions and behavior. So, MindFulChoice™ can help you avoid many of those problems, including uncontrolled anger, mishandled relationship problems, procrastination, forgetfulness, excessive risk-taking and poor time management.

To understand MindFulChoice™ fully, you have to be open-minded about the new ways of thinking and new ideas that make up this process. Part of that is putting aside some of your preconceptions about the meanings of the words in its name. The name “MindFulChoice™” is a combination of the words “mindful” and “choice.” The word “mindful” can be a source of confusion, because people confuse it with “mindfulness.” But “mindful” and “mindfulness” are two completely different things.

The Difference between Being Mindful and Mindfulness

“Mindfulness” is an Eastern concept, and a noun. It is a mental state that you achieve by focusing on your mental awareness and on the present, while accepting your feelings and thoughts. You could also think of it as a state of being. It has become very popular in the last twenty-five years, to the point that both mindfulness-based stress-reduction programs and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy now exist. But while mindfulness is a desirable state to achieve, it has nothing to do with MindFulChoice™.

“Mindful,” however, is an adjective. Being mindful is being aware, attentive and careful. As defined by MindFulChoice™, being mindful is an active process in which you are aware of everything in a situation that is relevant, so that you can consciously focus on the most important matter at hand. When you are being mindful, you focus on your own body and mind, the time and place you are in, yourself as well as others, the options you have and the consequences that you could face if you choose them. Meanwhile, you sort the parts of the situation that are urgent from those that are only important. Accordingly, this is the definition of “mindful” used in MindFulChoice™, which is about being “tuned in” and both viewing the whole of your experience and moving in whatever direction you choose.

The Three Core Components of MindFulChoice™

Three Core Components of MindFulChoice™ allow a person to achieve lasting life changes. The first is evaluating each situation and its parameters so that you can be aware of all options. The second is avoiding behavioral reflexes, mindless habits, hasty responses and disruptive emotions. The third is choosing the most appropriate response.

Once you’ve learned the MindFulChoice™ method, it can help you improve in many areas of your life. It’s a good way to learn how to control anger, frustration, and other strong emotional reactions.

It can teach you how to instead stay calm under stress, as well as how to forgive people and move on from conflicts or harm done to you. Through MindFulChoice™, you can build your self-confidence, your resilience, and your perseverance under challenging circumstances. You can become familiar with your own strengths and weaknesses, and improve your ability to take calculated risks. Finally, by learning more about yourself and what motivates you through MindFulChoice™, you can improve your ability to interact with others.

Concepts Related to MindFulChoice™: Positive Psychology, Impulsivity, Inattention, and Heuristics

This highlights one of the more unique elements of MindFulChoice™—it is based in positive psychology. Positive psychology is psychology that is meant to improve the lives of people who are healthy. It's very different from a lot of traditional psychology methods, which were first built around fixing psychological problems. Because these methods were originally invented to be used with complicated issues, you might not find them ideal for making smaller changes to your everyday life that could nonetheless improve it. But while MindFulChoice™ can definitely be useful to people who have existing psychological problems, it can also be used by a mentally healthy person who wants to live a better life, to change a certain pesky behavior or pick up a desired habit. The method wasn't created with only people who had serious problems in mind.

In talking about MindFulChoice™, it's important to discuss what gets in its way. Human errors during ordinary decision-making are similar to certain behaviors of people with ADHD—specifically, impulsivity and inattention. You could say that people with ADHD do what they do because they were born that way. The rest of us choose to be impulsive or inattentive. Impulsivity and inattention are the main cause of errors in decision-making and are the biggest reason that people end up in unwanted or bad life situations. But by helping people avoid impulsivity and inattention, MindFulChoice™ can also help think clearly and act appropriately.

Another useful concept that's related to MindFulChoice™ is heuristics. Heuristics are simple, efficient rules that people often use to judge situations or make decisions. They are mental shortcuts that make decisions easier. Rules of thumb, educated guesses, intuition and common sense are all types of heuristics. Usually, heuristics focus attention on one aspect of a complex problem while ignoring other aspects of it, so, they can't be used by themselves. However, as part of a larger decision-making process, such as MindFulChoice™, they can simplify things greatly.

Chapter 2: The MindFulChoice™ Process

A. The Three Axes of MindFulChoice™

MindFulChoice™ is based on three main axes. Each axis involves a choice between two options. The first is “Destination vs. Journey,” the second is “What vs. Why” and the third is “Primary vs. Secondary.” Through this chapter, you’ll learn about these paradigms and why they are so important to MindFulChoice™.

- **Destination vs. Journey**

The “Destination vs. Journey” axis is based on the idea that in order to achieve change, you must know where you are going. The destination is important, because the destination determines what happens on the journey. MindFulChoice™ focuses on the destination because there are many ways to get to the same place. While understanding how to do something is good, that is only one step on the journey. Insight alone does not create change. Change requires action. To achieve change and live a truly different life from the one you’re living right now, you have to choose a goal and figure out a way to achieve it. You can still achieve a goal whether it’s easy or not, and whether it goes quickly or not. Change is worth pursuing even when it isn’t quick or easy. To achieve your goals, you have to work past those elements in order to reach them.

Because of the importance of the destination, MindFulChoice™ employs a method called backward design. Backward design is an idea from academia that is used to design lesson plans. It’s basically the idea that, when planning, you should start by figuring out what your goals are. Once you’ve done that, you can create the rest of the plan. By using this method, you can create a plan that is a “road map” which will get you to your selected destination. When you use backward design, you focus on the goal first, not on the methods or any other aspect of planning. When this method is used in MindFulChoice™, you can think of it as focusing on the destination, rather than the journey.

- “What?” vs. “Why?”

<p>Why</p> <p>Suggests questions focused on intangibles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Intentions? 2. Purpose? 3. Motivation? <p>Answers depend on bias and subjective judgments.</p> <p>WHY = Problem-preservation + blame-game</p>	<p>What</p> <p>Data-based process focused on facts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identifiable. 2. Quantifiable. 3. Precise. 4. Directly related to subject at hand.  <p>WHAT = Creative problem-solving</p>
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Another axis of MindFulChoice™, is the “What?” vs. “Why?” paradigm. This paradigm encourages you to ask “What happened?” rather than “Why did it happen?” in new situations. For example, when a young child is asked “Why did you hit your brother?”, they will likely answer, “I don’t know,” but if you ask them, “What did you do?”, you will at least get an answer—“I hit my brother”—and you may even get a short explanation of why they did it in the bargain. As adults, we aren’t much different than the child who says, “I hit my brother because he was annoying me.” We still respond better to the question “What?” than the question “Why?” and MindFulChoice™ takes advantage of that reality.

- **Primary vs. Secondary**

The “Primary vs. Secondary” axis has to do with how you approach tasks. Whenever you do anything, you choose one task to be more important, or primary, and another to be less important, or secondary. The primary task gets more attention, more quickly than the secondary task. Because of this, true multitasking doesn’t exist. We always prioritize one task over another, at least slightly, and so we are always a bit more focused on one of our tasks than the other. Under normal circumstances, if you’re like most people, you can probably still take care of both tasks, even if you are focusing slightly more on one than the other. The problems start when you get stressed or distracted. In those situations, your secondary tasks can sometimes override your primary task, especially if you aren’t consciously aware of which task is which. MindFulChoice™ teaches you to be aware of your primary and secondary tasks, so that you can avoid confusing them under stressful circumstances.

B. The Six Facets of the Best Possible Condition for Using MindFulChoice™

Though it is extremely useful when you are under stress, MindFulChoice™ is best performed when you are in the best possible mental condition. There are six facets to that “best possible condition” that allow you to use MindFulChoice™ to its fullest extent. Knowing yourself is the first facet. You can only begin to understand yourself if you know how your mind and body interact. That includes how you breathe, how likely you are to be stressed when confronted with various things, as well as an accurate concept of your own strengths and weaknesses. It’s also important that you have an understanding of the way that your mental processes and perception are structured. You need to know how you pay attention, how you think, how you learn, and how you process your experiences. MindFulChoice™ gives you a structure that makes sense for organizing your understanding of what we might call your “personal processing algorithm”—that is, how you see the world. This understanding includes how elements like your comfort zone, anxiety, your mood, procrastination, reality bias, and various temporary or long-term impairments affect how you process information.

The second facet is objective observation and awareness of the environment. In order to achieve your goals, you need to be tuned in to the world around you. Using mindful techniques and “soft skills” education, MindFulChoice™ trains you to be more aware of the resources you have available. These resources include your relationships to others, your ability to communicate and manage time and your ability to adapt to new situations.

The third facet is seeing choice in our interactions with the world. When trying to overcome negative, self-defeating behavior, it is critical to try to find choices in places where you did not previously see them. People often fail to think broadly, and that limits them to familiar and habitual actions. The MindFulChoice™ Process makes you aware of new paradigms and Pivotal Choice Points, and offers a more creative process that can lead to new and better solutions to both new and old problems.

The fourth facet involves finding a clear, purposeful mindset for choice. When you expand the range of choices you are looking at, you give yourself more of an ability to choose those options, which gives you a better chance to achieve your goals. Every choice gives you a new set of options to choose from. The MindFulChoice™ Process is focused on helping you regulate your thoughts, impulses and behaviors, which in turn helps you create the reality you want.

The fifth facet involves being aware of how you create our own reality. Over time, you are presented with choices that you have to make decisions about. And, with each decision, you create branches in a decision tree, which create your unique, personal reality. Ultimately, your choices are determined by your needs, thoughts, attitudes and emotions. Your personal reality represents the priorities and values you've set for your own happiness in life. But, as your priorities and values change, so do your choices and your reality. The MindFulChoice™ Process focuses on questions like “What? Where? When?” and “How?” and encourages you to examine the choices you've made so you can find potential in your future.

Asking “What?” makes it easier for you to notice, and then fix, your impulsive and dysfunctional thoughts and reactions. As is discussed elsewhere in this book, this is *much* more effective than asking “Why?” or looking for the reasons behind a behavior. MindFulChoice™ also gives you specific techniques for avoiding Tunnel Vision Effect. When you're aware of how you create your own reality, you are aware of how your attitudes, emotions, needs, and desires for self-gratification affect you.

The sixth facet is constantly learning and retooling. The MindFulChoice™ Process is easy to make accessible to everyone. It's an exciting self-help method that involves life-long learning—and it will take you as far as you want it to.

C. The MindFulChoice™ Four-Stage Approach

MindFulChoice™ is a series of steps that involve mindful thinking, identifying two options to decide between, deciding on the best option and then evaluating the choice. It also involves the careful use of heuristics in order to make quick, effective decisions.

The MindFulChoice™ process is fast, once you've repeated it enough to have it memorized. It's like the old joke: “How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice, practice.” You need to practice MindFulChoice™ in order to be able to use it quickly and easily in your everyday life. Once you do, it will only take a quarter of a second for you to evaluate your situation and make a mindful decision based on it.

- **Stage 1: Recognition**

MindFulChoice™ starts with Recognition, which has two parts. The first part is recognizing the thing happening in your environment, whether pleasant or unpleasant, which requires your

attention. The important part is that it must be something that demands to be addressed, and something that could have different consequences depending on how you react to it. This is what you will be making your choice about. The second part is comparing this situation to past situations to past situations. This gives you the opportunity to find patterns, and possibly predict the way this situation is going to go.

To be effective in the Recognition step, you need to avoid impulsivity and to be fully attentive. You have to be alert, ready to confront any circumstance, and able to block out all sorts of interference. Sometimes, interference is just external distractions, and you just need to take care not to let the situation “drop off of your radar” when you encounter another problem to pay attention to. However, interference can also come in the form of internal qualities that affect how you see the situation and might affect the way you go through the Four-Step Process. No matter what kind of interference you have to deal with, you have to always keep a clear focus on the situation at hand.

- **Stage 2: Awareness**

After you recognize the situation, the next step is Awareness. In this step, you think mindfully about the situation, the choices you can make, and the consequences those choices could have. Basically, you determine what paths you’ll go down if you make different choices about the situation. This step requires you to analyze all of the data you’ve gathered about the situation, so you know as much about it as you can.

If you do find a problem or a risk, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is the threat real?
2. Is the threat imminent?
3. Can I avoid it?
4. Is it coming my way, or am I going toward it?
5. How soon is it happening?
6. How close, physically, will I be when the problem occurs?
7. If I have to act, what options are available to me?
8. What parts of the problem can I do something about?
9. What parts can’t I affect?
10. What consequences is it likely to have?
11. How damaging will it be for me?

12. How damaging will it be for others?
13. What is my mental state at the moment?

MindFulChoice™ focuses on knowing when and how to respond to what's happening, instead of focusing on potential consequences. If you concentrate on how to respond in the present, you end up with choices, ranked from best to worst. If you concentrate on consequences, you end up with Tunnel Vision Effect and panic. In MindFulChoice™, looking at the future is about taking an unbiased, speculative look at possible options, in order to prepare yourself to take the best possible course of action.

In every circumstance, knowing yourself is part of awareness. You have to appreciate your own traits and have an accurate picture of your own cognitive and physical capabilities in order to be really aware.

MindFulChoice™ is distinctive because it teaches users how to control their urge to react impulsively with a fight-or-flight-or-freeze response. Instead, it shows you how to wait to react until the next step, when you're prepared to make a thoughtful choice. Otherwise, when faced with something you see as a threat, you could end up making an impulsive decision and choosing something that creates a bigger problem than the original threat.

By using MindFulChoice™, you can focus your attention on a situation and then keep it there. You can examine every aspect of that situation, look at all of the good and bad options you have, and pick the best choice for getting the outcome you want. MindFulChoice™ is about answering the question "What?" rather than "Why?" and this focus allows you, the user, to be aware of what is actually happening, without interference from external distractions, or your own emotions. This helps you to create a frame of mind that can accurately judge all of your options before making decisions about where or how to act. Basically, the MindFulChoice™ process creates an attitude that promotes choosing mindfully.

- **Stage 3: Choice**

The third step of MindFulChoice™ is Choice. The paradigm of MindFulChoice™ allows users to avoid common pitfalls when making decisions, by guiding them to consider every possible course of action and its potential short- and long-term consequences.

When making a MindFulChoice™ decision, you should always be judging binary choices. As discussed in the introduction, binary just means “two,” so binary choices are choices that have two options. You should never let biases, a negative outlook, impulsivity, or inattention convince you that you only have one option. You can’t let anything push you into simply reacting and skipping the first two steps of the process.

Another concept that came up in the introduction is backward design—“beginning with the end in mind,” if you will. When using backward design, before you make a choice, you first decide your goal. You can then test your choices by how close they can get you toward your goal. When you have to make a choice, MindFulChoice™ also encourages you to value reason over emotion, rather than simply pursuing immediately rewarding feelings. This creates an attitude that lets you make the best possible choices and get positive results.

To sum things up, MindFulChoice™ is a learned discipline that teaches you to avoid hasty responses by being attentive to all factors involved in every situation. MindFulChoice™ can protect you from making biased, and dysfunctional decisions. By choosing to use it, you choose not to rely on automatic reflexes and mindless habits in your decision-making, and you gain a tool that helps you field intrusive emotions in a constructive way when making decisions.

- **Stage 4: Self-Assessment**

Self-Assessment isn’t evaluating how good the results of your choice were. When you make any individual choice, many elements come into play. You predict the outcome of a choice based on the kind of circumstances you think you’ll be making it in. But in the real world, unexpected things happen that don’t necessarily have anything to do with how good your choice was, and still affect its outcome just the same. For example, you might make a decision to start paying for a high-quality company healthcare plan without knowing that you’re going to be let go before you can use it, or take a convenient shortcut only to find out that there’s just been an accident on that road and it’s caused a traffic jam. Were the decisions you made in those cases bad decisions? Maybe, if you’re judging by the outcomes. But not if you’re judging by the process you used to make them.

The process of making the decision is what is judged in the “Self-Assessment” step of MindFulChoice™. This method is a better way of judging decisions, because it’s consistent, and

because decisions made through a good process have a better probability, in the long term, of turning out well.

You can think of it through this example, of two financial advisors. One has twenty years of experience, good training, and an excellent track record, but this year, he's had a lot of poor outcomes. The other financial advisor, on the other hand, has been successful this year—but his “method” is throwing darts at a book of financial information. Which financial advisor would you prefer? You'd want the first one, the one who has the better process, because they will be more reliable long-term.

This is why Self-Assessment focuses on process rather than outcome. By figuring out how well the process worked, you can increase your chances of making good choices in the future. These are the questions to ask:

- Did I follow the process?
- Did I do it in a way that makes sense?
- Am I heading toward my goals?

Self-Assessment allows you to figure out whether you've been acting according to MindFulChoice™. It's a systematic procedure in which you rate your own use of the MindFulChoice™ method. Assessing your use of MindFulChoice™ is important because it gives you an idea of how you can improve your performance and attitude in the future. MindFulChoice™ Self-Assessment is not meant to be a way for you to criticize or blame yourself. Instead, you should use it as a chance to visualize the whole MindFulChoice™ cycle, and to find places where you can improve how you use it.

A sample self-assessment checklist:

Did I....

1. Recall the MindFulChoice™ four-stages?
2. Consider similar past experiences?
3. Recognize all parameters of the situation?
4. Pay full attention to the situation?
5. Control any physical responses I may have had?
6. Evaluate my mental and physical abilities at that moment?

7. Acknowledge my traits, preferences and inclinations?
8. Make sure this is not “personal” to me—i.e., remove bias?
9. Consider the binary alternative?
10. Create the frame of mind to assess all my options before making a choice?
11. Give myself time to choose before reacting too quickly?
12. Proceed to choice and action rather than procrastinating?
13. Determine the destination that I am trying to reach?
14. Prioritize the primary instead of the secondary goals?
15. Assess importance and urgency?
16. Avoid making my intellectual process of decision making emotional?
17. Picture the likely consequences of my choice?
18. Create a positive attitude for getting the best outcomes?
19. Avoid dropping an important element off my radar screen?

The Four Step Process gives you a framework for making mindful choices, but it isn’t enough on its own. To effectively use it, you need the other principles and paradigms that MindFulChoice™ offers in order to help you make sound decisions. One you need to be particularly aware of is the difference between primary and secondary tasks.

D. Tunnel Vision Effect (TVE)

MindFulChoice™ teaches a person to differentiate between primary and secondary tasks. Different situations can be complex and confusing, however, so it can help to practice and even to do trial-run-throughs of these sorts of situations. It’s good to be familiar with how you react in a crisis, and to be well-practiced in MindFulChoice™ so that your reaction incorporates MindFulChoice™ elements.

One of the reasons that the “Primary vs. Secondary” paradigm is so important is what happens when you get it wrong. Sometimes, your secondary task is fear, and when it overrides your primary task, that’s a fight-or-flight-or-freeze reaction, which you might be more familiar with as a “fight-or-flight reaction.” However, while in a situation when you’re extremely frightened, you are just as likely to freeze up completely as to fight back or run, so this name is more accurate.

When this reaction is triggered, it distracts you from whatever primary task you had been focusing on before it occurred.

When you can't avert it, fight-or-flight-or-freeze can result in something called the Tunnel Vision Effect, or TVE. It's just what it sounds like—your vision narrows into a circular, tunnel-like field. Stress, fear, fatigue, anxiety, physical overload, and mental overload are also capable of causing Tunnel Vision Effect. So can impulsiveness, inattention, and obsession. Multitasking can interfere with your ability to think and to perceive the world around you correctly, and can eventually lead to Tunnel Vision Effect as well.

Noise is another potential cause of Tunnel Vision Effect. Noise, in this case, doesn't just refer to what you hear, but to all of the extra information in your environment that might be distracting you. A good example of noise is everything other than Waldo in a *Where's Waldo* book. All of the extra characters and buildings in the picture are created to be visual noise that makes the task of picking Waldo out harder. In essence, Tunnel Vision Effect is what happens when you're overwhelmed. When it's not noticed, it leads to preventable accidents and mistakes.

The MindFulChoice™ approach teaches people to think about identifiable, quantifiable, precise factors related to what they are interested in or worried about. It is a data-based process that analyses facts rather than asking “Why?” and discussing motivations, which can lead to bias and subjective judgements. Through MindFulChoice™, you acquire the skills and attitude needed to control and choose between your feelings and behaviors. By instead asking “What?” and finding out the impact of the problem, a person using MindFulChoice™ can come up with solutions, without fixating on causes or responsibility. Looking carefully at the answers to every “What?” asked is a strong basis for creative problem-solving. It also keeps you from getting stuck in the same dilemma over and over again. And asking “What?” can't be taken as an accusation or a judgement in the same way that asking “Why?” might be.

Chapter 3: The MindFulChoice™ Decision-Making Model

How the MindFulChoice™ Decision-Making Model Works

The MindFulChoice™ model, as laid out in the diagram, shows the process that people use to turn their perceptions of their environment into behavior. It's designed to show both how the decision-

making process works when everything goes right—and the different ways in which it can go wrong. One of the things that makes it unique is the idea of “Pivotal Choice Points” where the process can either continue in the correct direction or be derailed entirely. It’s a visual representation of the process that you need to make changes in if you want to make changes in your own life.

This model is person-centered, and involves both the internal processes and the interactions in social and physical environments that shape your decisions. It shows a step-by-step process, from perceptions to thoughts, attitudes, concepts, attitudes, emotions and behaviors. It also includes both factors that improve a person’s ability to make decisions and ones that take away from their ability to do that.

This means that the MindFulChoice™ model of decision-making doesn’t just involve the brain. Instead, it acknowledges the very real part that the body plays in the way we function. By incorporating every element of how we respond, it makes the options for responding differently more obvious. It also shows how we move from perceiving reality to behaving in a certain way in response. The model starts when we take in information through the senses, and follows the process through emotion, to the creation of attitude. Attitude is something that MindFulChoice™ draws out in great detail, and it is what will ultimately determine feeling and behavior.

The MindFulChoice™ Model has eleven steps. It might appear complex or difficult to navigate at first. However, once you understand how it works, the steps become obvious and even intuitive. They guide you through how we move from sensory input through the steps that determine behavior.

The model works from left to right, and the steps are in the order that they happen. However, since the ideal version of this process employs backwards design, the steps cannot be fully and successfully realized before determining individual goals. The first four steps of the process take place in the brain and are affected by one’s current state, including thoughts, stress, emotions, physical wellbeing, past experiences, and predispositions. The mind completes the process in the later steps.

What Makes This Model Unique?

Three aspects of the way that the model depicts the process are particularly remarkable. First, by including “Attitude” as Step 6, MindFulChoice™ is taking an innovative step that other cognitive models have not yet taken. Second, the steps involving the mind—including “Intellect,” “Behavior” and all steps in between—are shown as working in a feedback loop that is constantly shaping your actions. Finally, it depicts the length of this entire process—only 540 milliseconds.

The Difference between the Brain and the Mind

In order to understand this the MindFulChoice™ model, you should first understand the difference between the brain and the mind. In our culture, we often use those terms interchangeably, even though they don’t mean the same thing. The brain is a physical organ where thinking takes place. It controls movement and biological functions, and it takes care of many of them, like breathing, automatically. The mind, on the other hand, is basically your consciousness. It’s the sum of all the thoughts, perceptions, attitudes, motivations, reasoning, and other conscious functions that occur in the brain. The mind is also what gives us the ability to use logic and analyze problems. This distinction is relevant to MindFulChoice™ because, while the brain is physical, and the parts of the decision-making process that happen in it are unconscious and automatic, the parts that happens in the mind are conscious and can be changed. The parts of the process that happen in the mind have an element of choice, in other words.

The 11 Steps of the MindFulChoice™ Decision-Making Model

The first step of the MindFulChoice™ process is externally supplied input—that is, information from the world around you. Any information that you could take in through your senses would fall into this category. The second step is your senses receiving that information. Your brain receives information through sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. That information is turned into nerve signals and sent to the brain for the third step.

In the third step, the brain applies filters to the information. Like the filters on your camera alter a picture’s appearance, the filters you apply to information alter the way you perceive it. The filters your brain applies to information add meaning to it. Some of those filters include your past experiences, your predispositions, and your physical state—all of them can cause you to think about

information a bit differently. This step is hard-wired into your brain—you can't stop yourself from doing it. It also happens unbelievably quickly, in about 180 milliseconds. That's about how long it takes a person to recognize someone's face.

The fourth step, brain processing, occurs just as quickly. This step is when the emotional-motivational process happens. The emotional-motivational process is when your brain combines experiences and predispositions with stress, thoughts and impulses, to create emotions. Remember, emotions are not the same as feelings; they are unconscious, and created in the brain, while feelings are conscious and created in the mind.

After this, the process moves into the mind in the fifth step. This step, the intellect, can involve either positive or negative thoughts, and the thoughts involved in this step will impact the rest of the process. Impulsiveness can take over during this step, in a process called the “impulsivity bypass,” because it causes the mind to bypass other steps of the process—this will be discussed in more detail later on. The sixth step is attitude, and it gives the cognitive process motivation. This step is considered a “Pivotal Choice Point” where one can choose to be positive or negative.

Feelings are the seventh step. As stated earlier, feelings are separate from emotions—they are created consciously and in the mind, not automatically in the brain. The feelings involved in this step are a result of what happened in the last six steps. Feelings are also strongly affected by impulsivity, which is what happens when the Pivotal Choice Point is bypassed.

Step eight is the impulsivity bypass itself. Unlike the other steps, this is not necessary to the process, and your goal should be to avoid it if you can. But it's a step of its own because it can occur at this point, and if it does, the whole process is disrupted. The impulsivity bypass causes secondary tasks to override primary ones, and activate the fight-or-flight-or-freeze mode in a decision-maker. A large part of MindFulChoice™ is making sure that this doesn't happen.

Step nine is behavior—the outcome of all the other steps. It can take a lot of different forms—behavior, after all, can take the form of speech or actions. Whether the behavior is positive or negative is determined by previous steps.

Step ten is actually a process of its own—the attentional system, which is a cyclic system that can be activated at any point during steps 5 through 9. The diagram shows it in a compressed form—the full version has twenty steps. This system determines how much attention you give to any given stimulus in your environment. Inattention can disrupt this system by causing you to focus on the wrong things or in the wrong way.

These steps form a complete model of the process that your brain goes through whenever you make a decision. As stated earlier, it is an incredibly rapid process, and one that you go through many times every day.

The Three Levels of Mental Processing

Most of us think and have feelings without conscious awareness of how the mind controls those functions. MindFulChoice™ trains you to make those processes conscious. Part of this is being aware of the three different levels of mental processing that are involved in making a decision.

Level 1 is the longest cycle, lasting hours, days, months, and even years. The in-depth processing that you do during Level 1 is based on the knowledge and experience you've gained through your life. So, the results of Level 1 processing vary depending on how wide and deep your education, experience and understanding are. You use Level 1 processing when on a road trip: making preparations, learning a new language for when you need to cross a border, selecting a route, checking the car, buying gas and food, reserving a hotel, and doing other things you need to do to be ready for the trip. Level 1 processing is sturdy and less likely to be affected by your emotions or your physical state than other levels. Being prepared is the best way to deal with any problems you face in Level 1 processing.

Level 2 processing is measured in minutes and does not involve in-depth thinking. Instead, it involves sensory-motor and physical coordination. Level 2 processing produces the best results for people who have extensive, thorough training in how to do something within a time limit. You use Level 2 processing in situations like driving in the city and parking a car.

Level 3 processing is the fastest, and lasts a maximum of a few seconds. It is very reactive, and so it can go wrong quickly. You use Level 3 processing when you interact with people every day, and

when you're in driving situations that require fast reactions, such as when you're driving fast, changing lanes quickly or approaching an unexpected stop. If you are prepared to make calm, considered Level 3 decisions, you will be able to deal with problems more easily. Level 3 processing requires perfect synch with Levels 1 and 2, and emotional and physical factors can easily interfere with that. Small physical problems, like toothaches, headaches, disrupted sleep, drowsiness or the effects of substances that can physically affect you like medications and alcohol can interfere heavily with Level 3 processing. Inattention, impulsivity, and any psychological disorders you might have can also interfere. Errors in Level 1 or 2 processing can usually be fixed without major consequences, but Level 3 errors often have serious results. MindFulChoice™ is designed to improve all three levels of processing, but the improvements are easiest to notice at Level 3, where peak performance, speed and precision are extremely important.

More about Feelings and Emotions

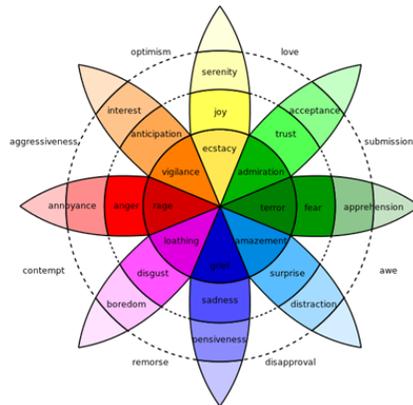
In the MindFulChoice™ model of decision-making, information transitions from the brain to the mind, so perceptions become thoughts and emotions become feelings. However, because MindFulChoice™ is focused on changing how people think, you might assume that feelings and emotions don't have any role in the process. That couldn't be further from the truth.

The ability to have a range of emotions is one of the abilities that are fundamental to the way humans process the world. Humans are a combination of their predispositions and experiences, and one of the most important predispositions humans have is our variety of emotions. There is a theory in psychology, called Discrete Emotion Theory, which states that humans have an innate set of basic emotions. Different theories disagree on how many, but most put the number between six and ten, and all agree that the basic emotions are recognized across all cultures. They are hardwired into human brains. Psychologists call them “discrete,” which means “distinct from one another,” because they can be distinguished by facial expressions and they are biologically determined, not something we choose.

The difference between emotions and feelings is very important. Emotions are psychologically hardwired responses and are connected to our nervous system. They have survival value. And they are the source of our “first thought.” The first thought is our reflexive reaction to something, our default position.

In MindFulChoice™, you accept the first thought but do not focus on it. Instead, you should focus on the second thought. The second thought asks, “Is this really what is going on, or is this biased thinking that has nothing to do with the situation causing this thought and this emotion?” You can’t alter your first thought, since it comes from hardwired emotional systems, but your second thought is something you come up with consciously. You can shape your thoughts and feelings by making choices about your second thought.

Feelings are produced in the mind, but they come from the emotions that the brain produces. Your brain makes judgements about the information that your senses give it, and you end up assigning a certain meaning to that information. Feelings are also influenced by your past experiences and your biases. Emotions are static, but feelings are easily changed.



This wheel is based on a theory of emotion with eight different emotions. As the emotions move farther from the center, they are more defined by thoughts and experiences. The inner circle is our emotions, the hardwired responses our brain produces automatically. Every other part of the wheel is feelings, and those can be changed. It is up to you to determine how much they affect your behavior. You can decide how much you want your feelings to affect your actions. You can choose to let reason determine your actions instead, so that you can better work toward your goals.

Chapter 4: More about Choices

Everything is a Choice

Choices are a vital part of MindFulChoice™. Choice Theory, developed by Dr. William Glasser and his colleagues, is among the theories that has shaped MindFulChoice™ approach to choice.

According to Dr. Glasser, “For all practical purposes we choose everything we do, including the misery we feel.”

Everything that a person encounters is a choice, but sometimes, they are not aware that they are making choices. Also, they might not always realize the options they have. For example, if you drive through the same intersection every day, you might not even think about it as a choice. But, in reality, you make the choice to drive straight through, and ignore the options of turning left and right. MindFulChoice™ focuses on the dynamics of choices and what they mean.

Choosing means selecting our own reality. We have to realize that we are constantly choosing things, and that those constant choices affect whether we succeed or not in the future.

Some Tools for Choosing with MindFulChoice™

MindFulChoice™ is, essentially, a process for making decisions. It is binary—it asks you to reduce choices to two options and choose between them—and uses heuristics, or simple rules of thumb, to make decisions. It is governed by a system with a specific order based on the importance of each step.

MindFulChoice™ uses principles borrowed from software engineering and cybernetics and applies them to how the brain works. It uses those principles to explain aspects of brain activity including how information is processed and the speed at which the brain works.

Part of this process is the use of heuristics, the simple rules of thumb discussed earlier in the book. They work really well under most circumstances, but they can also lead to choices that go against logic or ignore probability. They might even cause a person to act against their own preferences or interests. Mistakes like these are called “cognitive biases.”

Normalcy Bias

One common cognitive bias is the “normalcy bias.” This is, basically, the mistaken belief that things will not change, especially not for the worse—essentially, that everything will remain “normal.”

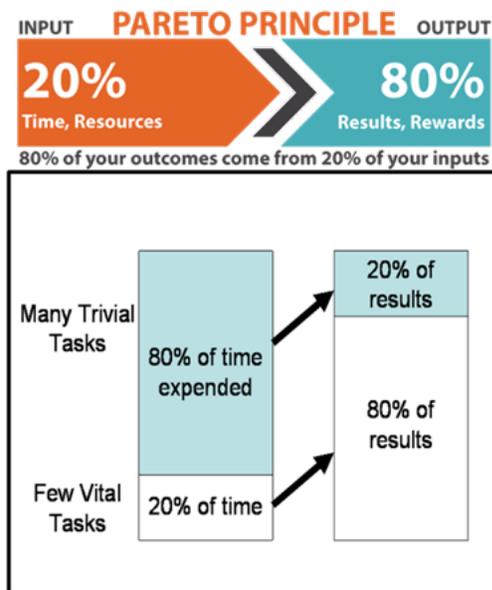
People tend to fall into this kind of mindset when there’s an impending disaster: they believe that the disaster won’t occur, and that if it does, it won’t be as bad as it’s predicted to be. People with a normalcy bias assume that because a particular disaster has never before occurred, it never will.

Anyone who lives in a city or town built near a fault line, especially an inactive one, relies on the

normalcy bias for their sense of safety—their belief that because no earthquakes have happened yet none will allows them to feel safe.

When a person is affected by the normalcy bias, they have difficulty reacting to new experiences. They see warnings and signs of trouble in the most optimistic way possible. Any aspects of the warnings that are ambiguous are taken to mean that the situation isn't really that bad.

The 80/20 Pareto Principle



Cognitive biases can distort our perception of reality but there are some principles that we can rely on. One of these is the 80/20 Pareto principle, which states that 80 percent of what you accomplish results from about 20 percent of your effort. The principle was developed by Joseph M. Juran, who named it after Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto. Pareto who observed in 1906 that 80 percent of the land in his country was owned by 20 percent of the population, and that 80 percent of the peas in his garden came from 20 percent of his pea plants. Juran, a business management consultant, extended the concept to his field and found that 80

percent of problems in businesses were caused by 20 percent of flaws.

Put simply, the 80/20 principle means that in any situation, a few factors (20 percent) are important, and most (80 percent) are unimportant. For managers, this means that 20 percent of the work—usually the first 10 percent and the last 10 percent—consumes 80 percent of the time and resources. You can apply this principle to almost anything, including science, management, and the physical world in general.

This explains the general tendency we have to repeat the same things, in the same ways, to get the same bad results while using the same system. If we think of the brain as our hardware and the mind as our software, we need to accept that we need an upgrade in order to “think outside the box.”

The 80/20 Pareto principle should remind you to focus 80 percent of your time and energy on the 20% of your work that is really important. Don't just “work smart,” but rather work smart while focusing on the right things.

The 80/20 principle can be applied in many areas. For example, in the area of business, 80 percent of both profits and complaints come from 20 percent of customers. Additionally, 80 percent of sales involve only 20 percent of products, and are made by 20 percent of your sales staff. Similarly, you get 80 percent of your profits from 20 percent of your sales.

In the computer science field, the principle can be applied to optimization efforts. For example, Microsoft found that when they fixed the top 20 percent of reported bugs, it eliminated 80 percent of errors. In occupational health and safety, it can be used to show that 20 percent of hazards cause 80 percent of injuries. On the other hand, fixing a randomly selected 80 percent of hazards will likely only prevent 20 percent of the injuries that would've otherwise occurred.

A lot of the research behind MindFulChoice™ comes from work with people who have ADHD, and, accordingly, the 80/20 Pareto principle can be extremely helpful to that population. According to this principle, 80 percent of your productivity comes from 20 percent of your effort at work. For people with ADHD, for whom focusing is extremely difficult, knowing this can be invaluable. It seems counterintuitive—we should get as much out of our efforts as we put in. And it seems nonsensical to think that one could accomplish more by working for a shorter period of time. However, the truth is that when we work an eight-hour day, we often do not spend all eight hours concentrating on our task. But imagine if you spent just 96 minutes—20 percent of your workday—absolutely focused on your main task for the day.

Try it! Set a timer for yourself, and, at the beginning of your work day, spend 96 minutes on your most important task. Avoid distractions like emails, meetings, returning phone calls, or other daily tasks—just focus on that one project, exclusively. Most MindFulChoice™ clients are amazed at what they get accomplished.

This method is effective for people with ADHD for two reasons. First, it keeps you from being distracted by things that interrupt their work. Second, it lets people with ADHD take advantage of their ability to hyper-focus, and to be extremely creative. Hyper-focusing is the

tendency to become extremely absorbed in tasks that are interesting and enjoyable. Though people with ADHD may have difficulty with focusing, organizing, and doing certain everyday things, they are often good at focusing on things that really interest them.

MindFulChoice™ and Time

Time is a primary ingredient of MindFulChoice™. That means that while you can think about multiple things, you can only think about one of them at a time. In time, there is a sequence. Choices have a sequence too. This sequence—the order in which everything happens—is very important.

You can think about making a successful choice as being preparing mayonnaise. If you've ever tried to make it, you know that the ingredients are very simple—what's important is the order. If you mix everything in the right order, you need a total of six ingredients, a fork and a bowl to make something tasty that you could put on a sandwich. If you get the order wrong—you could use an expensive electric mixer and still never produce anything worth eating.

Time, however, is also an important component of MindFulChoice™ because you need to use it in a time-effective manner. When you use it effectively, instead of procrastinating, you achieve your goals more effectively. However, if you procrastinate, you only put pressure on yourself, which has a tendency to decrease the quality of your decisions. Doing things “right here, right now,” is an important part of the MindFulChoice™ method too.

The Six Thinking Hats Approach

Along with sequential thinking, MindFulChoice™ also incorporates parallel thinking. The best example of a parallel thinking method is Edward De Bono's Six Thinking Hats method, which MindFulChoice™ incorporates.

You may have already encountered the Six Thinking Hats in your education or your professional life. Each hat is a different color and symbolizes a different way of thinking about a problem, and when you metaphorically “wear” each hat, you focus only on that aspect.

A person “wearing” the white hat, for example, focuses on facts and acts as a neutral party. The person in the red hat, by contrast, is encouraged to talk about their intuition and their feelings, without trying to back anything up with facts. While wearing the black hat, a person acts as the voice of caution, pointing out flaws and potential challenges through generally playing “devil's

advocate.” The yellow hat, on the other hand, gives the person a chance to speculate about possible positive outcomes and advantages. A person wearing the green hat is responsible for trying to move things forward and be creative. Finally, in the role of blue hat, a person oversees, organizes, supervises, and summarizes what the other hats accomplish.

This technique lets you bring healthy emotions, doubts, creativity, and other helpful elements into otherwise purely logical, fact-based decisions. It can function differently in different environments and with different teams—some groups may find it easiest to assign each member a specific hat for the duration of a task or decision, while another group may allow members to constantly switch “hats” and mindsets as they please. Still other groups may mix these approaches, assigning certain hats to certain members while the other members share the remaining hats. In any of these cases, teams may find certain hats more useful than others, or more relevant to specific situations than others. Plans developed with this method tend to stand up better to reality. Using the Six Thinking Hats can help you find problems with a plan before you put it into action. If you’re involved in a business, they’re also very useful for avoiding public relations mishaps.

Each hat represents a specific thought pathway. Most people, when thinking about something, get caught up in “single-channel thinking”—they focus exclusively and narrowly on the problem at hand. Using the Six Thinking Hats, in order, they can look at the problem from multiple perspectives and find the best perspective to view it from.

The version of the Six Thinking Hats used in MindFulChoice™ is slightly modified, so that it offers a more logical and complete approach to solving problems. MindFulChoice™ can result in integrative thinking—thinking that combines multiple types of thought, multiple “hats,” if you will, and results in a full spread of choices.

Using MindFulChoice™ To See All of Your Options

A choice with one option is not a choice. A good choice should never be made because of habit, bias, impulsivity, inattention, or pessimism. We call the choices that result from that kind of thinking “error-prone.” Error-prone choices are made without recognition or awareness of the factors at stake, and they often result from generally flawed thinking. Choices are meant to move you forward toward a goal, but error-prone choices only slow you down.

So, MindFulChoice™ trains people to see two choices at a time. Every choice offers two new choices. The next choice doesn't exist until the last has been made, and the last choice can never be undone—but it can always be corrected. MindFulChoice™ involves correcting your choices by thinking about the way you made them.

Similarly, when talking about the future, one important difference that you have to recognize is the difference between a plan and a prediction. A prediction is based on the past, developed based on information about what's already occurred. But plans are exclusively about the future, completely focused on what will happen. MindFulChoice™ helps clients recognize that predictions are not useful, and that plans are needed to achieve goals. Choosing either option over the other changes our reality.

Chapter 5: How to Use MindFulChoice™

“Let It Go”

The goal of all treatments like this can be summed up in three words: “Let it go.” You’re working with MindFulChoice™ to learn how to let things go and move on from them. You can call it “resolving,” or “acceptance,” but it’s the same basic concept. Ultimately, you’re trying to change, and that involves giving up your attachment to your old behavior.

But just knowing that you *should* let something go isn’t enough to get you to actually do it—not in most cases, at least. Change requires action—though, in this case, changing your thoughts counts as an action. Once you change your thoughts, you can change your feelings, and then, ultimately, your behavior. “Letting go” means trying to think about what happened in the past in a different way than you were before. It’s an encouragement to live in the present, which is what MindFulChoice™ is meant to help you to do.

MindFulChoice™ as a Holistic Approach

MindFulChoice™ is a holistic approach—it acknowledges the part that both the mind and the body have in how you react to things. It’s hard to make a judgement about which is most important, because they are so deeply linked. For example, if you experience mental stress, you often become exhausted—but if you become physically tired, the quality of your thinking may be affected. You have to take care of yourself both mentally and physically to function at your highest level.

Work-life balance is a good example of how these factors can cause complicated situations. When you come to work, your boss expects you to be healthy enough to do your job—but how you eat, drink, and sleep outside of your job will affect your health while there. In the same way, the way your work day goes will affect your free time afterward. That, in turn, might affect the quality of your work the next day.

Ultimately, you’re dealing with both your ability to perform, and your ability to recover from the damage that you’ve done to your body in the past. You also have to deal with stress, which affects both abilities. The easiest way to make MindFulChoice™ work for you is to look for where you’re doing well in life, and then find principles from those areas that you can expand to other areas.

Learning MindFulChoice™

MindFulChoice™ is easy to learn, for one simple reason. It doesn't try to teach you new behaviors—it just teaches you to apply behaviors you already have to new areas of your life where they will be more useful. If you want to make better choices in your personal life, the MindFulChoice™ approach to that problem would be to find an area of your life where you *do* make good choices so that you can transfer those strategies from one area to the other. You, like most people, are already effective, successful, and engaged in good decision-making practices in some area of your life. MindFulChoice™ is designed to help you expand those skills to other areas, particularly those areas where you feel you most need them.

Chapter 6: MindFulChoice™ Coaching Philosophy

When clients come to MindFulChoice, they share one thing in common—they have tried other approaches to solve their situation with little or no success. Many have felt trapped by their continuing predicament. Our innovative methods have helped them break free and overcome the cycle of failure and defeat in their lives, so they can achieve their goals and move forward.

In order to solve a dilemma, the first step is to help clients clarify and pinpoint their destination – the place in their life they would be but for the impediment blocking their way. Once that is known, the focus becomes learning to pay closer attention to what is happening within, right here and right now. What is the thinking process they use and the feelings that arise in confronting the events of daily living. Their self-awareness opens the door to becoming the master of one’s thoughts and feelings. They are now in the right frame of mind to make wiser choices. MFC supplies them with proven techniques and strategies to use, so when they are faced with conflict, they avoid falling into the same rut with the same undesirable results.

MFC is an evidence-based, expert system that is the heart of Mind Focused Coaching & Therapy. For example, one effective method we use is visualization. We teach our clients to mentally visualize a simple binary tree of decision. Step-by-step, it lays out our sequential choices over time and gives us advance notice of where we are headed – for whatever situation we might confront.

Our online course, and the companion book **“What is MindFulChoice™!”** showcase sixteen different scenarios from real cases involving family issues, procrastination, impulse management, and professional development.

Each scenario is formatted the following way:

1. Presenting Problem

2. Background Information

3. MindFulChoice Assessment

4. MindFulChoice Tools

- **Paradigm:** Culled from the list of MFC Paradigms, they are our innovative shifts in thinking to describe situations and how to remedy the dysfunction.

- **Remediating Principle:** Of the list of MFC's BMA to Z Guiding Principles – They are our descriptions of active changes in attitude and behavior to go beyond self-defeating habits.

5. MindFulChoice Intervention

6. Results

7. Comparison to Other Methods

In the final week of **Mind Focused Coaching**, the clients are asked to solve one or two scenarios that are relevant to their challenging past issues (we only give them points 1-2-3- and they need to tell us in #4 what paradigm(s) and Principle(s) they would use to help the person herein described. Then we offer them our own #4 solution, and 5-6-7, to help them have a more analytic and pro-active vision to eventually help others (helping others is a great way for improving yourself).

The mental health professionals we train need to do the same, but with all scenarios as part of their training, in order to graduate from the MFC course, and become **Mind Focused Certified**.

Chapter 7: Case Studies in MindFulChoice™

To facilitate understanding the MFC method for all Mind Focused Coaching Online Programs, in a separate Appendix of our book “**What Is MindfulChoice™!**”, we have put together Sixteen Real Cases Scenarios with MFC Paradigms and Principles. Each different scenario explains in depth a real case involving many personal and family issues, procrastination, impulse management, and professional development.

To help you grasp the MFC method, below is the example of Brandon’s scenario from a real case relating to procrastination:

Brandon—A Case of Procrastination

1. Presenting Problem

Brandon is a young man in his mid-twenties who was self-referred for an assessment and subsequent coaching due to struggles keeping up with his college studies. Immediately after high school, Brandon chose to leave academics and enter the workforce. He pursued a number of rather low-skill jobs including food service and construction. About two years later, Brandon opted to return to school and follow a STEM studies track. Despite his aptitude for the material he found himself having difficulty completing assignments and studying for exams in a timely fashion.

Rather than risk being put on academic probation, Brandon decided to explore the nature of his problem and learn how he could achieve his future career goals. In addition to a pattern of procrastination, Brandon also experienced considerable self-criticism and disappointment over his behavior. It made no sense to him as to why he didn’t simply get work done. In previous employment situations he was a conscientious worker, though he was somewhat uneven in his attention to punctuality.

2. Background Information

Brandon grew up in a close, large intact family with many siblings. Both of his parents were described as hard working individuals though his family was not particularly affluent. Neither his father nor mother had acquired college degrees, nor was it common for his siblings to go off to college. As a child, family life was somewhat chaotic and Brandon had recollections of chores that never quite got done and his parents being upset because the house was frequently very messy. Because there was so much to take care of, Brandon was often given the responsibility of looking

after younger siblings or managing household duties. Not surprisingly, as he got older, Brandon often complained about being told to do more than his fair share, and he would sometimes try to avoid especially objectionable jobs.

School was a mixed bag for Brandon. Socially, he was generally well-liked and had many friends. Scholastically, his performance was below his potential. This was noted even before high school, and Brandon acknowledged he was driven by the interest of the moment. If a subject appealed to him, he would work at it. If he found it boring he would be half-hearted in his investment. Interestingly, in the working environment Brandon had been more reliable in performing his job responsibilities, though not always punctually. While Brandon reported few if any arguments with parents about his academic performance, he admitted that they were concerned about his future direction. They were very pleased with his choice to go to college but fearful of his execution. However, he assured them he would do all that was necessary to succeed.

His first semester went reasonably well. But, from the start of the second semester Brandon began displaying the same problem of not getting all his work done on time that he had shown years ago. He acknowledged feeling despair and being disappointed in himself. However, rather than remaining passive and letting his future goals slip away, Brandon decided to be proactive and seek some direction to move forward in his life.

3. MindFulChoice™ Assessment

Brandon completed the MFC Initial Screening and his profile indicated a moderate degree of inattention. He identified himself as often bored and frequently being restless, looking for something beyond his current situation. In addition, Brandon acknowledged that at times he will resist having to be the “responsible one” in favor of diversions that are self-gratifying. While he would never engage in serious risk-taking that could lead to harm, he might not pay attention to possible future consequences of his actions. In many ways, Brandon’s presentation was not very different from many young men of his generation, still looking for an anchor and purpose in their lives.

I asked Brandon to describe to me what would happen when he was given a course assignment to complete outside of class. He described having an initial reaction of problem-solving – trying to organize the work in a coherent fashion and plotting out the steps to get it done. It would give him a good feeling to determine how the task could be accomplished. However, after this response

Brandon would pull back and distract himself with another activity that was more appealing. He would continue to “find” diversions until the deadline was very near and then cram his efforts to complete the assignments as best he might. Brandon admitted that he had never really developed any sensible study skills to help him keep his focus on the objective at hand. Nor did he have much self-confidence in his capacity to succeed.

In order to assess Brandon’s focusing capability, I initiated a regimen of study parameters that would organize his time efficiently to see if he could in fact use structure to overcome his procrastination. He would keep a daily log of the work to do, the time each task would require, when in the day he would attend to each task, what percentage of the task he set out to finish, and an end-of-the-day review of his performance. Brandon was agreeable and thought this structure could help him stay on track. For the first two weeks Brandon reported success in getting work done. He was mostly compliant with the regimen and more work was being completed. After three weeks Brandon announced that he had slacked off and was not adhering to his study format. He explained that he was again finding diversions and losing attention to his objectives. I began to review how he could regain his focus when he said to me, *“I know. We talked about this before,”* I immediately asked Brandon to explain that remark. What exactly had he been thinking right before he said those words. He shrugged and said there was no particular thought behind them. I suggested to Brandon that in fact there was a very powerful thought in his mind. I shared with him my association to his comment: At the moment that we began to reassert how he could be successful again his instantaneous reaction was to think, *“What’s the point? I’ll really never be able to get it right”*.

After a moment, Brandon acknowledged that he had been thinking along those lines. I offered Brandon a theory to illuminate the essential impediment to overcoming his procrastination. His thought process had a built-in bias. As soon as he envisioned success in his activities, there would reflexively be a contrary thought telling him he cannot succeed, so he might as well give up. It was this thinking *pattern* of failure-linked-to-goal-attainment that perpetuated his ineffective behavior by initiating self-doubt and helplessness. To avoid the discomfort from those thoughts, he would engage in soothing behavior for as long as he could. We discussed the impact on his life of this thought pattern and how it fueled his inattention and avoidance of self-improvement. Brandon agreed to engage in remediation with me to change his *way* of thinking and acquire the tools he could use to keep from being distracted by dysfunctional thoughts and feelings.

4. MindFulChoice Tools

A) Paradigms:

How we think not What we think— Mind Focused Coaching involves more than finding the negative thoughts that can interfere with our functioning. It is a *metacognitive* method that highlights not the content of people’s thoughts, but rather the way people think. There are many different patterns to how we think; they are not equally appropriate for every situation. MFC illuminates the patterns we use and when, so as to find the optimal thought process for any given situation.

Primacy of Executive Function - When people are faced with stressful situations we impulsively fight, flight, or freeze. We usually think this only happens in a life-threatening circumstance, but it occurs in every stressful situation. While it is natural and helpful to us in some situations, it is important for us to realize that this response pattern is *hardwired* and can be influential in every aspect of our lives. In many cases, it does more harm than good. When something like self-doubt activates the fight/flight/freeze response, the avoidance of discomfort takes precedence over reason and curtails the ability to effectively manage a stressful challenge. Mind Focused Coaching is predicated on the idea that the mind’s executive function can identify and contain the impulsive urge that blocks us from acting in our best interest.

In this moment there is only ONE choice - A common pitfall in the process of change is looking too far down the line and making forecasts about your ability to move in one direction or another. Mind Focused Coaching promotes the idea that at any given moment in time, you only need to consider one choice, and no forecasting or predictions are of value. Brandon’s procrastination was fueled by his focus on his vision of the future and that produced discomfort and avoidance. Learning that no future choice or outcome exists until THIS choice is made can keep attention directed to the task at hand and forestall anxiety and disappointment.

B) Remediating Principles:

C— Instead of worrying about what might happen, focus on what is there right now!: Brandon presented himself having a problem with putting things off and not getting work done. The actual problem was his cognitive bias that caused him to project negatively into the future rather than maintain his attention on the task at hand, generating anxiety and avoidance. By replacing

his inattentional autopilot with intentional focus, MFC helped Brandon keep his goals in sight, addressing only the work priority in the moment.

J – We are bound by the limits we assume for ourselves: People set a lot of limits for themselves. However, setting limits for yourself makes the decision for you that you won't be able to do something. It's like choosing to only swim in the shallow end of a pool. When we believe negative things about ourselves, or assume that we can't do things, we keep ourselves from achieving everything we could. Brandon's bias imposed a limit on his potential for success. By recognizing that we are not "born losers" – we are "born *choosers*" – Brandon could expand his self-assessment and recognize the unused potential within him.

X— We construct our own reality: Every choice we make involves following one choice and excluding the other since all choices are binary. Every choice includes one option and excludes the other. So, by including and excluding options we are constructing the reality we live in. One's past does not have to determine one's future. Brandon had constructed a reality in which failing was an inevitability. With the tools he acquired from MFC he could appreciate the power of the present to make a different set of choices with a different outcome.

5. Mind Focused Intervention

Brandon was caught in a loop of unused potential because of cognitive bias, self-doubt, and reluctance to accept mature responsibility that expressed itself in procrastination and impaired motivation. His past experiences of resentment over having to sacrifice his needs in favor of his parents' needs only exacerbated his perception that life was never going to go his way, so why bother trying. With MFC Brandon was able to understand the bias in his perceptions and thinking style and consider the validity of his self-doubt. By expanding the limits of his possibilities, Brandon redefined his personal destination and diminished his fear of responsibility.

He found out how he could be happy in his life without the past intruding on the present. Brandon saw genuine choices he had not fully considered before, which increased his motivation to disengage the procrastination. He began to see avoiding work completion not as a refuge from discomfort, but as an impediment to a better life. The structure that he needed to achieve did not come easily as it was contrary to his automatic behavior. Nevertheless, his new perceptions and way of thinking made it easier to resist immediate gratification in favor of long-range advancement.

6. Results

Brandon's results were not without setbacks. Learning to live a Mind Focused life requires time and commitment. Even so, he persevered and his school performance improved as the semester went on. During the course of our work together Brandon reassessed his future goals and chose a career path that suited his people interests more than engineering. He has developed an interest in entrepreneurial pursuits and is devoting his energies to building his own business in personal services. At our last contact Brandon acknowledged that he puts off fewer tasks than in the past.

7. Comparison to Other Methods

Mind Focused Coaching utilizes a metacognitive approach to remediate errors in execution that are due to impulsivity and inattention. Brandon's procrastination resulted both from responding to the fight/flight/freeze impulse and his inattention to the cognitive bias that dominated his thoughts. With the assistance of the MFC tools derived from the principles of Positive Psychology, he was able to be "present" in his thoughts and actions and not driven by the past.

Other methods might have focused on negative thoughts or on his anxiety and why he felt it in certain situations that involved responsibility. Other methods may have uncovered some ambivalence over unmet needs from childhood that perpetuated resentment and self-defeat. However, they would not have taught him how he could overcome the urge to repeat the past and wait for something to make things right. With MFC Brandon took charge of his life and redefined himself and his way of managing inattention and impulsivity.

Chapter 8: MindFulChoice™ Seminars and Training

Today MindFulChoice™ is being used by psychologists in United States, South America, Central America, and Israel.

This present document is an informational overview only. The MindFulChoice™ team continues to teach seminars around the country.

Learn how MindFulChoice™ can be put into practice through MindFulChoice™ Training.

MindFulChoice™ education and training are available through:

- Group seminars
- Face-to-face individual sessions
- On-line with GoToMeeting, or Skype

Mind Focused Coaching™ Training Programs:

1. Mind Focused Coaching™ Online Six Weeks Self Training Computer Based Training (CBT)
2. Mind Focused Coaching™ Online Six Weeks Self Training CBT with Weekly One on One Supervision
3. Mind Focused Coaching™ Online Six Weeks One on One Weekly Personal Trainer
4. Mind Focused Coaching™ Trainer Certification
5. Mind Focused Coaching™ Therapist Certification

Appendix 1: The Sixteen Paradigms of MindFulChoice™

1. How we think, not just what we think

The emphasis in MindFulChoice™ is on how the brain and mind process information and make choices. The process, not the outcome, is the most important part. MindFulChoice™ provides people with an understanding of how that process works, and how they can use their knowledge of how it works to their advantage. Your opinion of this situation in this moment probably won't be very useful to solving the problem, but knowing *how* you came to have that opinion will help you solve this problem and others in the future.

2. “What is going on?” not “Why is it happening?”

In every situation, it is more useful to focus on what is wrong, and to try to fix it, than it is to try to figure out why it is happening. Explanations don't fix the problem; they don't even deal with the present. They're about the past—““Why is it happening” is similar to asking “What happened back then that led to this?” But the question “What is going on?” is a question about the present. It focuses you on the choices and problems you are facing in the moment instead of distracting you with background information that isn't immediately relevant.

3. Awareness of constantly choosing

Everyone makes choices every second of the day. Right now, you are choosing to read this sentence. When you eat your next meal, you will make the choice to eat certain foods—and at the same time, choose not to eat others. Every day is full of dozens of choices. And you can't fully appreciate how important MindFulChoice™ is until you are aware of all of them. Only then will you be able to use MindFulChoice™ methods and principles to their fullest extent.

4. Our choices create our own reality

You can think of your decisions as creating a path that you follow. Every choice you make creates a two-way split, and you can only take one branch. By choosing one path, you reject another. To bring this metaphor back to reality, the choices you make determine the way our life is. You make decisions about both tangible things, like where you want to live and who you want to be around, and intangible things, like what you believe the world is like and what your values are.

5. Destination vs. Journey

In MindFulChoice™, the destination is more important than the journey. What that means is that the most important thing that you need to know before you start any process is what you want the

result of it to be. You can go on a journey to the same destination by multiple routes, after all; you can even leave for the journey without being certain which route you will take. But if you go on a journey without a destination in mind, you won't get anywhere in particular. Every other process is the same way—you need a goal in mind before you start, or you won't accomplish anything.

6. Backward Design Model – Start with the Results

Backward design is the idea that the best way to plan something is to begin with your desired results in mind. It's an idea from academia that's been adopted by **MindFulChoice™** because it works for helping **MindFulChoice™** users reach their goals. By planning this way, you can be certain that your choices move you toward your goal. “By beginning with the end in mind,” you make your choices that much more effective and likely to succeed.

7. The Primary Vs. all Secondary

Humans are not built to multitask. At any given moment, one of the tasks they are performing is primary, and the rest of the tasks are secondary. However, Stress, fear, and other outside forces can cause them to mix up which tasks are primary and secondary. This can be very disruptive.

MindFulChoice™ users are trained to be aware of the difference between their primary and secondary tasks, and the ways in which stress and fear can interfere with their ability to distinguish the two.

8. Primacy of Executive Function – Reason over Impulses

Executive function is the set of mental processes that people go through to complete goal-directed tasks. Doing any task that involves planning and carrying out tasks, from making yourself dinner to finishing a large project, involves executive function. **MindFulChoice™** places a lot of importance on these processes, because they involve choice and are a basic part of everyday life. The **MindFulChoice™** value of reason over impulses is related to this, because reason is inherently related to choice and planning. When you let impulse interfere with either of these things, it can cause problems.

9. Brain-based emotions vs. thought-based feelings

In order to understand the way in which **MindFulChoice™** describes decision-making, you have to understand the difference between emotions and feelings. Emotions are automatic, hardwired

reactions that happen in the physical space of the brain. You can't control them, and they happen early in the choice process. Feelings occur later, and exist in the mind—the consciousness, that is. They are conscious results of emotions, thoughts, and other inputs, and you have the ability to change them. Emotions are uncontrolled responses to stimuli, but feelings are conscious and you can determine what they are. Understanding this distinction is necessary to understanding how MindFulChoice™ works.

10. The process of choice is always binary

Every choice can be reduced to a binary choice—“Either I do this thing, or I do not.” Rather than choosing which direction to go at an intersection, you choose to turn left or not, choose to go straight or not, and then choose to turn right or not. Even the most complex decision can be reduced to a series of binary choices. MindFulChoice™ encourages thinking about choices in this way because it makes them seem simpler and easier to deal with.

11. First thought vs. second thought

Your first thought is automatic, your second thought is not. Knowing this distinction is essential to using MindFulChoice™. You can't control your first thought, so you can't waste time trying to change it. You can control and change your second thought, and so you need to exercise that control.

12. Assess a thought by its impact not its content

MindFulChoice™ is ultimately about results. It's designed to help users identify and reach positive outcomes. So, the MindFulChoice™ way of evaluating thoughts should ultimately judge them on whether they contribute to reaching good outcomes, not on any other aspects they might have. It's important to evaluate a thought by its impact rather than making a hasty judgment.

13. In this moment there is *only* one choice

The binary system of choice only works if taken one choice at a time. Furthermore, MindFulChoice™ teaches that humans aren't really capable of multitasking. So, instead of trying to decide many things at once, remember that, in each moment, you have an opportunity to make one choice. You may be able to think about whether you want to eat a sandwich or not and whether you should send that email today or tomorrow at the same time--even if you're treating one decision as

the primary task, and the other as the secondary one—but you can't make both choices at once. Each decision will happen in a separate moment. So next time you face a situation full of decisions, remember—you can only make one decision at a time.

14. We are the sum of all our choices

Our choices don't just create our reality. They also create us. We choose what to believe about the world and how to respond to the beliefs that we have. Moreover, all the choices we have made up to this moment, from the smallest to the largest, are what make up our past. And while **MindFulChoice™** does not encourage dwelling on the past, it does acknowledge that the past influences the present. All of the choices we make—about who to spend time with, where to go, and what to do—are a part of who we are, and so are our choices about what to believe.

15. Right here, right now is the focus

MindFulChoice™ is concerned with the present. Dwelling on the past distracts from the choices you have right now. So does worrying or dreaming too much about the future. You can learn from the past, but it's not as important as the present, because the present is when you can change things. You need to think about the present because it's when you can do the most to change your own life.

16. The pivotal moment of choice is the attitude

In the **MindFulChoice™** process, the pivotal moment of choice is the moment that you choose what your attitude in making your decision will be. How you view the choice will affect what you choose, and so attitude is essential to the process. **MindFulChoice™** recognizes attitude as a factor that can shift the entire decision-making process. So, you have to be aware of your attitude when making a decision. And, because attitude is conscious, you can change it—and you may need to do so, on occasions when your attitude may sway you toward a decision that doesn't suit your goals.

Appendix 2: BMA to Z Guiding Principles

A) - Nothing is what it seems.

People have blind spots and often do not see the whole picture. For example, if you stand very close to an elephant's leg, you might mistake it for a gray tree trunk, but from farther away, you can easily recognize it for what it is: an elephant. When people focus solely on one aspect of a situation part, they are unable to view the full picture. What you choose to focus on will determine what you see and what you will react to or act upon. Furthermore, you may experience Tunnel Vision Effect (TVE), which will make it harder to “see” a problem clearly because your stress distorts your perspective, limiting it. Knowing that you can't always rely on your initial perceptions, it is important to pay attention, be objective and not set any limitations on the world you view.

B) - Everything is harder than it looks.

Be willing to focus on each step of a journey, as opposed to solely looking towards the finish. Often, the end goal overshadows the series of steps it takes to achieve that goal. It is important to give attention and time to the smaller goals and steps it takes in order to achieve the desired end result. For example, someone who wants to start a business may get caught up in their enthusiasm and think that it will be easy an effortless and easy journey. However, they then discover find out that they have to fill out tax forms, find start-up money, hire employees, and try to market their unknown company to a wary audience. People who assume doing something will be easy focus too much on the end-product often overlook all of the work that others put in to make what they do look appear effortless. This obsession with the end result is something that impulsive people, or people who ignore details, tend to do. Remember to focus ~~more~~ on the road in front of you, rather than just fixating on your end goal.

C) - Instead of worrying about things that might happen, focus on what is there right now!

Worrying about things that might not even happen is pointless. It creates anxiety, which can interfere with and compromise your quality of life. It can also create a self-fulfilling prophecy—because you've spent so much time obsessing about the possibility that you could, for example, make a certain mistake, you might actually make it. Here and now is more important, so it's more productive to focus on what's happening in the present and what you can do now rather than what may happen in the future.

D) - Don't look back, focus on now, then toward tomorrow

The past is the past. You can't change it, but you can change your present and future, as well as how you look at them. By dwelling on the difficult parts of the past, you can negatively affect or even compromise your present and future, forcing yourself to become suspended in time within that memory. However, if you focus on the present situation and your future goals, you can make good decisions in your present and in your future ~~to~~ that will benefit your present life as well as your potential future.

E) - Everything is connected to everything else.

Every event in our lives leads to the ones that come afterward. When you take steps in one direction, you lay the foundation for events and experiences to come. Each step you take was only possible because of all the other steps you took before. No step is completely independent in a process.

F) - Do not believe that if you think it, it is true.

Keep a Free and open mind.

Sometimes, people see only what they want to see, and create their own realities to avoid facing the truth. Choosing to become aware of this phenomenon in your life can play a critical role in your perspective on life events and the decisions you should make. Similarly, your past experiences and current feelings influence your thoughts. Be very attentive to this, as these factors can taint your view of a situation and lead ~~one~~ you to make poor decisions. In the 1600's, everyone but Galileo believed the world was flat, even though it was truly round. You probably have beliefs of your own that aren't true, and even the things you believe that are true right now might not be accurate later on. . Seek out many possibilities for explanations before drawing a conclusion, and be sure to not let preconceptions, resistance to new ideas or popular beliefs distort your perception of reality.

G) - Kobiyashi Maru – “In a situation in which the rules are designed for failure, change the rules.”

The name of this principle, Kobayashi Maru, is a reference to a test in the TV show Star Trek that Captain Kirk passes by following this guiding principle. Rules can be useful, but often, we create them for ourselves and then follow them so closely that we set ourselves up for failure.

But a rule that worked yesterday may need to be adapted for today's situation. You need to be adaptable. If you know that a rule that you have observed in the past will cause you to fail today, you shouldn't continue to follow it. Don't be afraid to change the rules in order to set yourself up for success.

H) - Always ask, “How did you do that?” instead of “What went wrong?” Learn from success rather than failure.

This principle comes from positive psychology—a way of practicing psychology that looks at what's “right with you,” rather than what's wrong with you. Asking “How did you do that?”, as MindFulChoice™ therapists do, gives the clients a chance to think about what they did well and how they might be able to do it again successfully. It creates an opportunity for more positive behavior. On the other hand, MindFulChoice™ co-creator Dr. Gérard Meyer's research shows that the only thing that people learn from doing something the wrong way is how to learn to fail again. You don't learn from failing, you learn from figuring out what you did right, how you did it, and how you can do it again.

I) - GREAT comes after GOOD, not by passing it by.

You can't skip intermediate steps without compromising the final results. You have to do something decently before you can do an outstanding job at it, just like a baby has to learn to crawl, and then walk, before he or she can learn to run. The process of gaining skills is important. Trying to jump ahead in the process is being impulsive.

J) - We are bound by the limits we assume for ourselves.

People set a lot of limits for themselves. However, setting limits for yourself makes the decision for you that you won't be able to do something. It's like choosing to only swim in the shallow end of a pool. When we believe negative things about ourselves, or assume that we can't do things, we keep ourselves from achieving everything we could. Setting limits on yourself isn't beneficial. Give yourself the opportunity to reach your full potential by not setting limits.

K) - TANSTAAFL – There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch. Everything is a trade-off.

This principle is connected to the principle of “Everything is related to everything else.” There is a price to everything—if you want something, you may have to give something else up. For example,

if you want to get married, you'll have to accept that you'll have less independence and won't be able to do whatever you want with your time and your money. So, when you make a decision, you have to look at all the potential consequences of the tradeoffs you're making.

Whenever you pay too much attention to something, you give up the chance to pay enough attention to other things in your environment. There is always a tradeoff.

L) - Every choice has an opposite. I can do THIS – or not.

A choice is always between at least two options—if you only see one possibility, it isn't a choice. If you aren't seeing two options, you're probably only seeing the problem and not the whole picture. You may be under stress and experiencing Tunnel Vision Effect.

M) - Every choice you make changes you. We are the sum total of our choices.

You need to see your life as a decision tree: every decision you make, and every branching path that you take as a result, influences you differently. Your personality and your life are the outcome of all the paths you've taken.

N) - You are either your greatest asset or your worst liability; it's your choice!

Emotions are the product of an automatic process in the brain, but your feelings come from your mind, and your behavior is your choice. You decide how you react to things. If you are positive, you make things better for yourself, as well as for those around you. If you are negative, impulsive, or inattentive, you become a liability to yourself.

O) - For any and every problem, the first step to a solution is ALWAYS the same: Stop what you're doing! It isn't working.

Swapping the Old for the New. Open yourself to new solutions, where/when old ones have failed to solve the problem.

The logic behind this principle is simple: if what you are doing was going to fix the problem, then the problem would already be fixed. If the problem still exists, then what you are doing isn't the whole solution. People initially tend to not realize they have a problem. When they do notice the problem, they fixate on it, or fall into Tunnel Vision Effect and start believing that things will improve tomorrow even if they don't change their behavior at all. You need to stop what you're doing and then decide on a new course of action in order to fix the problem and start on a new path, one that can only be better than where you were.

P) - The problem is NOT what people don't know. The problem is what they do "know"—that just ain't so!

It's good to be willing to admit to what you don't know. But the bigger problem is when you think you actually know something, but you don't. If you think you know that your house is sturdy and well-built, but you don't know that the walls are full of termites and utterly filled with holes, your assumptions could end up costing a lot. You need to examine your beliefs, because what you knew yesterday might not still be true today. If you make a decision based on a "fact" you think you know, then that decision will fail, because it was made without either good recognition or awareness.

Q) - When you DO know something is true and you choose to ignore it – you will mess up your life.

Acknowledging and accepting the reality of a situation in its entirety is vital to a smooth transition through that obstacle. It is important to identify what truths you know of a situation, even if they are ones you may not wish to bring to light. By laying out all of your facts out, you can choose an easier path to travel - utilizing the known facts as tools to get from one point to the next. For example, if you are a Jewish observant who keeps kosher, while on a trip it will be important to do prior research on kosher stores and restaurants in the area you will be traveling. If you fail to properly prepare yourself, by either doing research or bringing your own kosher food, you may create a stressful situation when it comes to meal time than was necessary. Take what you know- no matter how displeasing it is, and use it to make your life easier and happier.

R) - Don't bother with questions about what is not important now.

It is important to not become stuck reminiscing in the past when your attention and focus is needed to benefit your present and future life. Baggage from the past can narrow your ability to pay attention, cluttering your perception and skewing your view of the situation you are facing at this present moment. Be sure to not fall victim to normalcy bias- which is the assumption that if things were once a certain way, they will continue to be that way. For example, if you are accustomed to having a green light at an intersection on your commute to work, you may learn to assume that light is always green for you. However, if one day you are running late, and miss the green light, this could cause a problem when you arrive at the intersection and the situation has changed. It is important to learn to read each situation as its own so that you may make the appropriate decision for that

moment, and not crash at the intersection. It is equally important to not focus so much on the future that you miss out on details of the present. Learn to rank the value of certain tasks and thoughts, and address them accordingly.

S) - Think before you talk. Talk before further action.

Talking is an action in and of itself, and if you do it without thinking, you may make a mistake, and say something you don't mean or might come to regret. You need to watch your tone and body language as well. Speaking quickly is a sign of impulsivity, not of intelligence—you can choose not to answer a question, or to wait to answer until you know what you want to say. Ultimately, speaking impulsively is a sign of bigger problems than speaking inattentively is.

Once you've thought things through and spoken carefully, then you can act further.

T) - Don't get lost looking for other options when there is no plan B!

Be Realistic and Accepting of your situation. Once you have a solution that will work, don't keep searching for a "better" one- it may not exist.

In some situations, there is no plan B. If you know that there isn't one, and you keep looking and waiting for it anyway, you're ignoring the truth, procrastinating and being impulsive. While it is important to keep your mind open to new solutions, it is equally important to accept when a solution is the best answer and actually use it, without looking for another solution. Acting as if there's another option because you don't like the ones you have is a waste of valuable time. You have to play or not play with the cards you're dealt, instead of just hoping that a plan B or C will appear in the future. Otherwise, you'll just end up getting confused, hurt, and demoralized.

U) - Follow through with what you decide, and do not let your emotions decide for you!

Emotions can disrupt your attention, creating an inattention bypass which disrupts your decision-making process. Part of ADHD, a condition researched by the creators of MindFulChoice™, is emotionally impulsive decision-making. But people without ADHD also make emotionally impulsive decisions, and that is part of why MindFulChoice™ was created. Emotions have a place, but to make sound decisions, you need to push aside your emotions and decide what to do with your intellect. Then, you need to follow through on those decisions, without getting sidetracked or going back on your mindful choice.

V) - We teach others how to treat us.

If someone starts arguing with you and you argue back, you will mirror them and the two of you will end up fighting, instead of cooperating as you originally intended. You can provoke similar responses with uncooperative facial expressions. In these situations, impulsive behavior will cause problems, but binary decision-making, and following the MindFulChoice™ Four-Step Process improves your decisions. So while keeping your primary objective and your secondary objectives in mind, you can teach people that they can't force you to act the same way as they do. Remember that however you treat people will be reciprocated.

W) - Take nothing – and no one – for granted.

In many cultures, “Take nothing for granted,” means something more along the lines of, “be grateful for the good things you have in life,” but MindFulChoice™ asks you to think outside of the box. In the paradigm of MindFulChoice™, “take nothing for granted” is more about avoiding assumptions than gratefulness. You cannot assume that a person who always acts a certain way always will. The same is true for things—just because they used to be a certain way, you can't assume that they will remain that way now or in the future. To be prepared, you should always think carefully and examine and re-examine things closely. For example, you might be used to your car needing a certain distance to stop before a red light, but it will have a different stopping distance if there is bad weather, or if you have more people in the car, or if you're hauling heavy furniture or luggage. In the same way, your friend's personality might change if they suddenly became wealthy. You should even be prepared for changes in yourself and your personality that you don't expect. Making assumptions about anyone or anything by the way you are used to things being will lead to a biased judgment.

X) - We construct our own reality.

This principle is composed of all of the other principles. Everything in your life is your own construct, and if you believe things that aren't true—for example, if you have some of the mistaken beliefs discussed earlier in these principles—you'll have an altered view of reality. You may even end up constructing a reality where “the grass is greener on the other side”—everything in your life is awful, while someone else's life is perfect and everything is going their way. It's similar to how we don't see ourselves accurately in mirrors— how we perceive ourselves and how others see us are

often very different. Since people often don't think about how they think, they often construct their realities in flawed ways.

Y) - Our lifelong journey is to deal with the daily tests and stresses that life throws at us; our challenge in life is to deal victoriously.

Life is a journey. It's not an instant or a moment. It's a journey that has lots of stress— physical stress, social stress, emotional stress and mental stress. There are valleys and mountains. It's not necessary to think of it in that way every second of the day, but you should be able to look back at events and see them as part of your journey. Like the old saying says, "A long journey starts with a single step." Once we've taken that step, we can start facing the challenges of life. If life is a journey, it's also a challenge, because without challenges, people live as if they are sleepwalking or living in a cocoon. Challenges are opportunities. They give you the chance to make new friends and do new things, and in order to thrive, you need to deal with them victoriously.

Z) - Breathe well and often. It will protect you from the Tunnel Vision Effect and the danger of panic.

If stress causes you to experience the Tunnel Vision Effect, you may panic and find it difficult to even breathe, but if you breathe properly, you can calm yourself and avoid stress and the Tunnel Vision Effect. By avoiding stress and the Tunnel Vision Effect, you give yourself the chance to make optimal decisions.

Appendix 3: The Science of MindFulChoice™

MindFulChoice™ is based on research done with a \$12 million federal grant given to the Carnegie Mellon Driver Training and Safety Institute (DTSI). Some of the information used to develop MindFulChoice™ also came from using it in clinical therapy environments. Experts from various fields also contributed their knowledge to the final version of MindFulChoice™. The Carnegie Mellon DTSI was the site of the Attention and Impulsivity/Mind and Body Living Laboratory. Data gathered there and at the DTSI in general was used to develop the MindFulChoice™ method. The scientists there measured how stress affects decision-making and studied how people learn illogical thoughts and behaviors. They developed coping strategies that could be useful to people with specific problems, including ADHD. While developing simulation preparation and training for drivers, they collected data about how attention and Tunnel Vision Effect work in real time and also provided a useful service to clients. They came up with ways of circumventing Tunnel Vision Effect, overconfidence and fear. All of this work eventually contributed to the development of MindFulChoice™.

Fields that Contributed to MindFulChoice™
Physiology and Ergonomics
Biology and Biopsychology
Cognitive and Behavioral Psychology
Statistical Analysis and Forecasting
Modeling and Cybernetics
Software Engineering
Human Factors Real-Time Recording and Analysis
Brain Imaging and the Decision-Making Process
Driving Safety and Decision-Making under Stress
Man-Machine Interface and Simulation Training
Educational Science (Learning / Retention Curves)
Communication Science and Linguistics

MindFulChoice4U

A free guide to MindFulChoice™ for Everyday Users

This book is an adaptation of the MindFulChoice™ manual “What Is MindFulChoice™”. It is intended for people who are not psychologists or mental health professionals, and who are interested in learning about MindFulChoice™ and using it in their own lives. A more technical document containing similar information is available from Best Minds Associates.

MindFulChoice™ focuses on minimizing **impulsivity** and **inattention** in decision-making and behavior by utilizing a metacognitive approach based on clarity, awareness & resolve.



Best Minds AssociatesSM
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