Hadley

Hadley Presents: Mindfulness

Presented by Debbie Worman

August 26, 2019

Ricky: Welcome to Hadley Presents. I'm your host, Ricky Enger, inviting you to sit back, relax, and enjoy a conversation with the experts. In this episode, we discuss the benefits of mindfulness for those with vision loss. And our guest, our mindfulness expert, Tiffany Guske, interviewed by Hadley learning expert, Debbie Worman. Welcome to the show, both of you.

Debbie: Thanks Ricky.

Tiffany: Good morning.

Ricky: Yay. I'm so happy to have you guys, and I am super excited about this particular topic. I'm really looking forward to focusing and learning about mindfulness. But before we focus on figuring out what mindfulness is, I want to learn a little about you guys. Let's start with you, Debbie. Tell us a little about yourself.

Debbie: Well, believe it or not, I've been at Hadley for over 30 years now. I've taught many courses during that time and been able to interact with a lot of learners. I've taught effective listening, personality psychology, and many of the English skills courses. Currently I'm involved with writing the new Hadley 2.0 workshops, I'm leading discussion groups, and I enjoy being part of these Hadley podcasts.

Ricky: Good deal. So Tiffany, tell us a bit about you.

Tiffany: My name is Tiffany Guske and I have immense passion for mindfulness that really has come out of my own experiences. So sometimes people will ask, "How did you get interested in this?" And for me, it really was my own personal journey that got me interested. And just managing my own personal challenges and anxiety, stressful schedule. Different things going on in life really lead to reasons why you want to manage that anxiety a little differently. So for me, finding ways to insert that into my work wherever I might be able to is really what I look forward to each day.

Ricky: Excellent. So I'm going to sit back and relax and enjoy this conversation with the experts. And I may or may not interject throughout this, but I'd like to put this in Debbie's capable hands because I know she's got a lot of great questions. So off to you, Debbie.

Debbie: Thank you, Ricky. Like Tiffany, I sure do have a passion for mindfulness. I was first introduced to it in 2008 during an especially difficult time in my life. And I have kind of been a closeted mindfulness practitioner ever since. So I'm not new to the practice of mindfulness.

So Tiffany, as I’m thinking about this, I talk about mindfulness with my friends and they're like, "Oh Debbie, what actually is mindfulness? I hear so much about it. It's just like a fad. It's everywhere. It's on the internet, it's on Facebook. Is this something new that's here today and gone tomorrow and how can I practice mindfulness? I don't have time for meditation. And personally I can't do those yoga poses. My body doesn't move like that anymore." So can you tell us what actually is mindfulness?

Tiffany: Yeah, that's great Debbie. That is funny because I think that there are a lot of preconceived ideas of what mindfulness is or isn't, and you definitely practice mindfulness in yoga, but like I was saying before you, you can practice mindfulness anywhere. And so the simplest version that I have when I'm talking to somebody about what is mindfulness is, it's a definition by Jon Kabat-Zinn, and he is kind of the father of mindfulness and bringing it into everyday living and into the United States. And the way that he defines it is mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way. So you're deciding how you're going to pay attention. You're doing it on purpose, which means that you've decided to do it. So you've decided that you want to pay attention to this and you're doing it in the present moment. That's really what it's all about.

Now, a little more advanced way to look at that is, he also says, "Without judgment." So you're not judging the moment, how you're doing it, when you're doing it, why you're doing it. But for me it really is the first three. So it's paying attention in a particular way, on purpose and in the present moment. And I think the idea of this fad, it's really become more popular partially because I think our world has gotten more and more stressful, more and more intense. And people have been looking for ways to bring themselves back, to get grounded, to manage their stress better, to be more relaxed, to be able to move through their day with more ease. And I believe that's why it's become more popular or faddish, but it's been around for a very long time. So you can treat it as a fad I think if you want to, but my approach is more, "How do I make it part of my lifestyle?"

And so as I mentioned before, it really was about how do I go through my life with more peace, more ease, more joyfully? How do I make that happen? And the way that I found to do it was to be present because my mind is always taking off and building stories and causing me worry, which the fact of the matter is that also creates all kinds of chemical reactions in my body that aren't helpful. Kind of like a fight or flight syndrome that's happening. And so now I have not used up those chemicals and they've come into my body. So those are reasons why I think someone might want to look into this, that doesn't really have anything to do with the fad, and it can certainly help your health, it can help you manage your day-to-day life and schedule better. It can bring you into the moment so that you can have more pleasure out of life, and you can do it at any time. You can certainly do meditation and you can do yoga and if that works for people, I think that's fantastic. But for people who are just starting, and myself even, I wouldn't consider myself a beginner at all, but I really do try and find the moments of the day to be able to do it.

So for example, just before we were going to be doing our recording today, I was rushing about, I'd had some things happen that were unexpected, and the timing wasn't exactly great. But what I wanted to be able to do was just before I got on the phone with you guys, is to say, "Okay, let's come back into this moment. It doesn't matter what has just happened, what's going to happen, let's just come into this moment, get grounded, get centered. Use this time, this very moment to do that so that I can be focused and with you guys when we're doing our podcast." And so that's kind of the everyday piece of it.

Debbie: Well, great. I'm glad that you explained that because once I think people hear the benefits of mindfulness, they will begin to incorporate it into their everyday living. For me, it's simply just a way of being. It's a way of being where I am present and fully engaged in whatever I'm doing. And so whether it's doing the dishes, for me, there's a difference between doing the dishes to get them done and then really doing the dishes. So I am engaged with doing the dishes. I mindfully do the dishes, I enjoy the warm water, the soapy suds. And so whenever there's a family gathering, I am the dishwasher, even though they may have a dishwasher in the house, I'm like, "I'll do the dishes." What I want to clarify for your definition is that it is really being present and fully engaged, aware of thoughts and emotions with really not getting caught up in them. Is that correct?

Tiffany: Yeah, definitely. I think a lot of it has to do with those stories that we tell ourselves. So you can stand and do the dishes and experience things with your five senses, right? So you're explaining the suds, the warmth of the water, there's your touch, there's your sight, there's probably a smell that goes with the dish soap potentially. Maybe with the kitchen that's happening, there's a sound that happens there. Any of your five senses is a great way to bring yourself into the moment. And when I heard you describing doing the dishes, that's what you were doing. You weren't thinking about what you had to do next, or what the conversation was at the dinner table, or what do I need to be focused on for the rest of the afternoon or the evening. You were really immersing yourself in that. And the five senses is really the easiest way to try and do that so that you don't overthink it and you aren't focused on those emotions or those stories that your brain is telling you.

Debbie: So you mentioned senses. I think that really ties into the next question I want to ask you and it's really specific to our listeners. How might a mindfulness approach benefit someone with a visual loss, especially those new to vision loss, who are adjusting to that? How do you think the mindfulness approach can benefit someone?

Tiffany: So from my perspective, and the whole idea of going through a health struggle, I think it's stressful for everyone. There's elements of anxiety. You're not sure what to expect, you don't know how things are going to be tomorrow or the next day. You're feeling likely a sense of loss, fear. All of those emotions certainly get you very worked up. And the idea of the mindfulness coming into that moment, appreciating where you are, having that experience is helpful because it's keeping your brain from worrying. Worry is really something that... The idea that our brain is making up stories about things that aren't going to happen is kind of how I see worry. So if we really thought about all the places our brain went in a day and how many of those stories actually came true, they're probably not that many. We have a tendency to really build on that. So being able to say, "Okay, this is the situation that I'm in." How might I experience what I have here now versus worrying about what's going to happen can really help control that anxiety.

Now it's my understanding through some conversations that you and I have had that becoming that sense of vision loss, that one of the biggest challenges is your orientation mobility and being able to sort of move through the world in a different way because you've lost some of your sight. If you think about mindfulness, much of it starts with being able to just ground yourself and take a deep breath. And when I think about when I need a sense of balance, when I'm moving, when I'm walking, if I'm holding my breath, I'm really going to have some trouble standing, moving because your body is so tensed up, it's really not moving with the flow. Having that breathing coming in and out can really ground your body. It relaxes your body and it's going to allow you to have better control over where your body is in space as you're trying to move forward. So from my perspective, I would think that that might be something that could be helpful for people as they're trying to learn how to move through the world as their vision is declining. What would your opinion be on that, Debbie? What do you think?

Debbie: I think that's a great insight because orientation mobility is really focusing where you are and where you want to go and moving safely and effectively through the environment. And I think the use of mindfulness really helps people focus on your surroundings. One of my favorite captions from a book, it's by a Buddhist monk called Thich Nhat Hanh. And his book, *Peace Is Every Step*. He's talking about walking. So I'm thinking of a visually impaired person walking through their environment, with their sighted guide or with a guide dog or with a cane. But he's saying, "Be aware of the contact of your feet and the earth." And what I especially love, he says, "Walk as if your feet are kissing the earth."

Tiffany: Yes, I've heard that, Debbie. Yep, I've read that.

Debbie: So for the visually impaired person, it's really being aware of the surroundings, "What textures are my feet encountering? Is it the carpet in the house? Is it the hardwood floor? Outside, is it asphalt? Is it grass? What am I in contact with?" Most of us are so in a hurry to get from here to there and everywhere, we don't pay attention to that. And for a person with a visual impairment, orientation mobility skills are very important, and I kind of see mindfulness going hand in hand with that.

Tiffany: I totally agree, Debbie. When I was thinking about how the idea of mindfulness could really benefit folks that are having that vision loss, there's gotta be a turning up of some of your senses because you have one that's declining. And being able to do that as you're walking, as you're moving is so critically important, as you said, for safety. And so when you are doing something like say for example you're using pair of scissors or knife, you increased your awareness, you're really more focused on it because you don't want to hurt yourself because you're dealing with something that's a little more dangerous.

And I would think that in walking, that's the idea. Is, "How do I stay safe?" Well, I stay safe by really concentrating on what my body is doing and how it's doing it. And as you said, there's such beauty in movement, there's such beauty in being able to move our bodies. And you kind of gain an appreciation for that just going through that exercise saying, "Wow, think about all the things that my body is doing in unison just because I'm sort of asking it to and becoming very present with it." So I think there's a strong appreciation and gratitude that can go with that hand in hand when you bring your awareness and your focus to it as well.

Debbie: Truly the practice of mindfulness really helps with enhancing senses, whether it be hearing, whether you're in tune to just noises in your apartment or home. The hum of the refrigerator, when the furnace kicks on, the cat purring in the other room as mine is doing now. What are the smells in your environment? You talked about your body's position and movement, the textures you're feeling. So all of those are so important for someone with visual impairment. You know when someone is diagnosed with vision loss, the other senses don't immediately kick in. They don't become super, they don't have super hearing. That all has to be enhanced, and mindfulness is a really good practice to help that happen. Won't you say?

Tiffany: Yes, absolutely. And there are short meditation exercises, again, that I'll do with people in workshops and many of my workshops are quite short. They might only be an hour or two. So we try and tap into different ways to use each of those senses to enhance them. And so another exercise that we might do is sitting, taking deep breaths, becoming aware of the breath, maybe three, four or five of those, and then tuning into your environment. So like you were saying, it's what's happening in the space that you're in. So even here now, I can hear what's happening, I can hear some buzz from some lights on my desk, I can hear the traffic outside, I can hear... I've got some workers outside actually that are helping paint my house today. I can hear that. So there's different levels of sound that you can really tap into and all of that... Say for example, I was working on my computer or I was reading or something, I wouldn't be aware of any of those likely unless they became an annoyance to me. But when you really tap into the levels of sound, it's kind of fascinating and you might be surprised.

Now if we go back to that idea of safety and security for people, if you are trying to move from your living room to your kitchen and you can hear that refrigerator, you're going to know how close you are, how far away you are because you're going to become attuned. And there's great value in that. If there's somebody at the door, there's a lot of different things here that I think can help. And so from my perspective, I do think that enhancing the senses through that practice has really just a good value in creating more safety, more security, less anxiety. And I think really just a competency and a proficiency that helps people as they're struggling with the vision loss to feel like, "I've got this. I actually have some other ways that my body is going to help support me, that's going to help me feel safe in this world, and I'm using them. I'm working with them, I'm training them, I'm getting them to this place where I feel a good sense of proficiency." And I think the mindfulness practice can definitely be added to helping nurture that and help it along.

Debbie: Now that we've talked about what is mindfulness and how it could benefit someone with vision loss, could you tell us how we might begin a practice of mindfulness and perhaps you could take us through a little exercise.

Tiffany: Sure, absolutely. I'd love to, Debbie.

Let's take just a minute right now. So you've heard me say quite a few times here as we've been talking about just doing some deep breathing. And it really is a simple thing, but it's one of those things that if you don't tell yourself to do it, you don't. And it's funny, when I do big conferences, when I'm onstage, I can get people to put their things down and take a deep breath. Usually audiences are pretty obedient, but we'll start by just grounding ourselves. And it's funny how when somebody says to you, "Okay, we're just going to take a few deep breaths." In your mind, you're like, "Oh, that sounds really pleasant. Why wasn't I doing that before?" And then you do it and it's quite pleasant. It's not a chore. It's actually something that feels good.

I would like to just go through an exercise. It's just going to take us a minute, but to just do a little bit of deep breathing so we can feel what that feels like to become a little bit more grounded and clear, even while we're listening to a podcast and a conversation that's got a lot of animation and a lot of interesting information, how we might become grounded.

So what I'm going to have you do is if you're in the car, I don't recommend that you shut your eyes if you're listening to the podcast in a car. But if you are somewhere where you're sitting in a chair, or even if you're standing, if you can sit down, I think it's better, but to just sit down, get your feet flat on the floor, gets your bum into the seat and just sit up as straight as you can. So really just giving yourself lots of room there to do the deep breathing. And what we're going to do is we're just going to take three deep breaths and I'll walk you through it. What we want to do is take a long inhale and a long exhale. If you're looking or thinking about your body and what should it be doing. Your chest shouldn't be rising. You really want your belly, and some people call this belly breathing, where your diaphragm is pushing down, so it's opening your lungs up so your belly kind of gets pushed out when you do that. And that really allows that breathing to happen. So let's just go ahead and do that.

Again, get yourself just situated in your chair and if you're comfortable with it, either close your eyes or maybe just put your eyes down and focus on something that's a little bit lower. And we're just going to take our first deep breath, deep breath in and out. Deep breath in and out. Deep breath in and out. And then I would say just open up your eyes, move a little bit. And then the question I would have for you, Debbie, is how do you feel now versus before we just did those few deep breaths?

Debbie: I feel so relaxed. I love breathing exercises. They're so simple and what helps me is it really anchors my mind. And until you try it, you don't know that it works. But it does work. And again, Tiffany, it's not about right getting in the car or finding a ride to the gym. These are simple exercises, breathing exercises that you can do at any time during the day. So what are some of your suggestions for incorporating mindfulness into daily routines?

Tiffany: You've got the key right there, Debbie. It's the daily routines. So what are you already doing that you can bring that mindfulness in? Actually, I've got some good tips on my website for that, that don't feel like, "I'm having to set a time to go meditate." Or you're saying, "I'm not going to a gym." It's really like, "Where are the moments during my day that I can start to become mindful?" You can do it while you're brushing your teeth. You can do it when you're sitting down to have your first drink of the day. So maybe it's a cup of tea or a cup of coffee, and really just experiencing that.

I tell a lot of folks that for me, I'm an espresso drinker. I just like a little bit of espresso in the morning, but for me the experience of creating that espresso and having all of my senses take place there with it is how I start that idea of mindfulness every day. I'm walking up, I'm seeing my espresso machine, I'm pressing the button, I'm hearing the grinding of the beans. I'm then smelling the scent, I'm seeing the liquid come out, I'm able to pick it up and feel the warmth. I have the sense once again as it comes next to my nose. And as you know there's not a lot to an espresso, but for me just that moment is a way that I say, "Okay, I've woken up, I'm in my day now, how do I become present in it?" And it's one of the first ways that I do it and I think people being able to find those individual moments is what matters.

Another easy thing that I do is I transition from different things in my day. I will do things like the breathing exercise that we just did to be able to bring myself into this moment. So if I'm switching from one task to another, I might just stop and take a deep breath. That might happen in my kitchen. It might happen in my office. It might happen as I've rushed into a store and I've gotten into my car and I'm going to drive and I say, "Wait, you need to get yourself more grounded."

Debbie: I think one of the things I like to do is I'm on the computer a lot. Often one that the chime sounds that I have something coming into my inbox, I will just stop. Before I answer it, I'll stop and take a breath and just observe where I'm at and just get grounded before I proceed to answer the email. It just gives me a fresh way of looking at the email. And my cat, my cat Buick, he helps me practice mindfulness all the time. I mean, he will jump in my lap at any time during the day and says, "Pet me." And just petting him during the day and hearing his purrs and feeling him, it really is just a routine that we have, and he loves.

Tiffany: Animals are great for that actually, Debbie. That's a great call out. Because when we are with animals in that way, we are so automatically present and there's all kinds of unconditional love that's going with that, that I just think has just a beauty to it. But you really are, when you're petting your dog or your cat or maybe you have another animal, you're in that moment with them. You're not just in passing petting them. You're present with them, and I love the sound, the purr, that's great.

Debbie: It seems that we've covered a lot about mindfulness in just a short time, and I appreciate all your insights, and your encouragement for people. Just to remind people, the thing that I always remember when you hesitate to start a new practice or anything, you're always worried, "Am I doing this right? Am I doing it wrong?" I remember when I tried to take Tai Chi, oh my gosh, my body doesn't move that way and I was never doing it right.

The beauty of mindfulness is you can define it for yourself and there's no right or wrong way. The key is to be in tune with your breathing. So bring your mind and your breathing and everything in sync, isn't really that the basics of it?

Tiffany: That is definitely the basics of it and it's just paying attention to it. Because the good news is that our body is going to breathe, whether we focus on it or not, that's the good news. But if we can take advantage of that and really focus on it, it really becomes a foundation for mindfulness. It becomes a foundation for changing how our body is operating in its chemicals and stress and anxiety. You can't go wrong with it and there's no judgment. We talked about what the belly breathing was. As long as you're taking a deep breath and it feels good, that's what matters. It's putting yourself in that present moment with the breathing. There's no pressure. And as you said, there's really no right or wrong in my mind in how I approach mindfulness.

Debbie: Really fascinates me how this mindfulness practice connects with vision loss and how it can really help people deal with emotions and have some clarity. And not that you're ignoring feelings but you're not being overwhelmed with them. You really have a new way of being. So if people wanted to access your website, Tiffany, how can they find you?

Tiffany: So I am at www.tiffanyguske.com. And that is T-I-F-F-A-N-Y G- as in good, U-S-K-E. And there are a lot of resources out there including a quick start mindfulness guide that you can go in there and click in, give me your email address, and I will shoot it right out to you, which is a really good way to just get familiar and start with the everyday routine piece. It really gives you examples of how you can use that everyday routine to start a mindfulness practice that fits you and is very personalized to you. And the blog posts out there are great. I have a specific grouping of posts that are called Mindfulness Monday, and those are really just intended to be very short, quick hits of mindfulness that you can incorporate. So if people are curious, I think those are two really good resources to take a look at and see if mindfulness is something that's a good fit for them. It's easy to look at, to read, to consider and then incorporate into your everyday life as it suits you in a very customized and personal way.

Ricky: Absolutely. And I think this is a wonderful website. I've checked it out myself just kind of as preparation for the show and then I found myself looking a little deeper at it and going, "Wow, there really are a lot of interesting things here to read about, some of which are very short reads and some of which take a deeper look into things."

We also have some resources in our show notes, so you can check those out as well on the Hadley website. Debbie, for you, if people want to contact you or learn more about you or ask you questions, how can they contact you?

Debbie: Yes, contact me at Hadley at Worman, that's my last name, W-O-R-M-A-N@hadley.edu, and my extension is 6685.

Ricky: Fantastic. I want to thank you both so much for being here, and I'll say I feel very relaxed and clear-headed after this episode.

Tiffany: That's great.

Ricky: With a sudden craving for espresso and a purring cat too. Thank you again for joining us, we learned a lot and I want to thank the audience for joining us and listening.

Got something to say? Share your thoughts about this episode of Hadley Presents or make suggestions for future episodes. We'd love to hear from you. Send us an email at podcast@hadley.edu. That's P-O-D-C-A-S-T@hadley.edu, or leave us a message at (847) 784-2870. Thanks for listening.