

Opportunity in the Gap

The Covid-19 pandemic has created a pause in our lives or a “Gap” between what was familiar and some unknown future state. Many of us have a sense of anxiousness or unease about what life will look like once society starts to open back up. It feels like so much has changed. Will my work be the same after this crisis? When will we be able to get together and do in-person team building? Will my employer shift work policy and let me continue to work from home? The present moment is uncomfortable for many of us. As humans, we like to have a sense of control and an orthodox mindset about our lives. I find it interesting to hear how people are using this time in the gap. Spending more time with family, starting a new workout routine, or even trying meditation for the first time are some of the things people are doing differently.

Getting accustomed to being in the moment and allowing yourself to feel and experience your current emotions, vulnerabilities, and unease is one of the most significant gifts that we have been given during this time. Our most uncomfortable moments and emotions can act as support for increasing awareness and personal growth. To stay present is to allow ourselves to live in our unease. Learning to stay provides a pause in which we can become more curious and friendly toward ourselves. Staying tuned in to our internal self-talk and tone will serve as transportation to deeper fulfillment and joy in life. The work of staying present is courageous and is one of the hallmarks of resiliency.

How do you train your mind to stay present?

Mindfulness and meditation involve sitting with your thoughts and observing without judging. I like to suggest the type of meditation that does not transcend current circumstances or mindsets but instead allows you to live with them. Being present is challenging and takes bravery. Reflection and meditation do not always lead to relaxation. Most of my clients who start a consistent practice tell me how difficult it is to sit with their thoughts and not push them away with busyness or rumination. However, it is one of the best ways to build your self-awareness and strength to live in the moment. The art of training your mind during meditation or when you are alone can give you the power to hold difficult emotions and energies that you may not have been able to manage in the past. The process curates the strength to forge a closer relationship with yourself and with others ultimately.

Emotions in raw form are pure energy. Some of the energy is uncomfortable for us, and some of it feels good. Nervous energy can sometimes be the most powerful in mind training. Cycles of rumination and energy build-up can cause us to create some crazy outlets to self-medicate. One outlet that has been important to me is my regular gym routine. I have noticed that without my gym outlet; I have been forced to sit with negative energy much longer than I ever have before. However, as uncomfortable, as the last two months have been, I have started to

get to know myself at a new level. I would like to propose a quick and dirty five-step guide to taking advantage of any gap you may find yourself in. Consider each step or pick a level that resonates and work it into your daily life. My approach to development usually seeks to preserve as much energy as possible. See if you can work something new into an existing routine. It is not about “setting aside time” but instead building muscles in awareness, observation, and self-compassion.

Jen Rich’s 5 Step Gap Plan

You can use these steps during any gap, life transition, or pause between what you considered normal and some unknown future state.

1. Life Values Inventory - What are your top life values, and have these values changed at all during the pandemic? What is your ideal future vision of yourself? How do you aspire to improve or emerge from the gap?
2. Reflection Time – Build in daily meditation or reflection time and take short reflection notes. I like to use a dated audio recording diary rather than writing things down. Give your brain a rest. You may have thoughts. Allow the thoughts to surface and go without judgment but with observation. If it helps, make notes to yourself about the frequency and variety of thoughts.
3. Observe and make note of any storylines or recurring emotions that emerge as themes for you. A storyline (or back-story) example could be “I seem never to get what I was promised,” or “Unprepared people make me angry.” Storylines often include some form of self-victimization or judgment about others. How critical are you? What is the tone of your inner dialog? How frequent does this story come to mind? Challenge yourself to observe without self-criticism. If you do notice self-criticism, try not to add more for having it.
4. Tracking Present Moments – Take note of when you catch yourself living in the present. You will know it because you seem to lose yourself in an experience. Indicators of being present include reduced anxiety about the future, lack of guilt about the past, and rumination free living. What led to you allowing yourself to stay? What did you say and feel during the experience? Did anything interrupt you or prevent you from staying in the present? What can help you achieve that kind of focused mindfulness again?
5. Experimentation and Having Fun – Build in creativity and fun, it is crucial to a healthy mindset. Without having fun and play, we can become burned out and stagnant with our thoughts. Having fun is not a luxury and should not be last on your list of priorities. Playing as an adult is vital to your well-being, personal development, and relationships. For fun, I have taken on several home improvement projects in my new 1860 Victorian home experimenting with design and mechanical workings of a completely different era.



Building your awareness, resiliency, and creating new mindsets is not about following a checklist of tasks or creating more to-dos for yourself. Slowing down to grow is a difficult concept for us type A's to accept. As humans, we have built deep neuropathways in our brains that, at one point, served a purpose in our lives. Periodically some of these pathways need to be upgraded and reset. This is not a once and done process and self-criticism rarely makes it easier to accomplish. Be courageous enough to shine the light of awareness, it is the first and most crucial step to creating a new mindset pathway. Being aware can build wisdom that often will work to shift your mindset naturally with less direct effort.

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