

Baby Boomer Lecture Series

“Six Steps to Living in the Moment”

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Outwardly, I appear to be an organized person. I’m a conscientious and successful student. I keep my planner up-to-date. I show up for my appointments on time, if not early.

As a naturally “with-it” type, I suppose I assumed when I began meditating regularly that my thoughts would be as orderly as my desktop, that emptying my mind would be as simple as sorting through an outdated folder. In reality, it was ferociously difficult to quiet the constant stream of thoughts, plans, images, judgments, and story lines most of us don’t even realize are playing in our heads. Allowing oneself to simply exist, to fully experience a moment, is a difficult but worthwhile undertaking; here are “Six Steps to Living in the Moment” from an article by Jay Dixit in the November/December issue of *Psychology Today* (read the full article, “The Art of Now: Six Steps to Living in the Moment” [here](#)):

“1. To improve your performance, stop thinking about it (unselfconsciousness).”

If you can’t stop thinking about what a terrible dancer you are or how boring your speech is, you’re wasting valuable energy by making yourself anxious. I don’t know about you, but I’d much rather watch an enthusiastic dancer make a few mistakes than a technically perfect dancer who seems on the verge of tears.

“2. To avoid worrying about the future, focus on the present (savoring).”

As Dixit puts it, “We sip coffee and think, *This is not as good as what I had last week*. We eat a cookie and think, *I hope I don’t run out of cookies*.” Where is the enjoyment there?

“3. If you want a future with your significant other, inhabit the present (breathe).”

Mindfulness makes people less aggressive and more aware of their feelings, as well as their interactions with other people. Focusing on the present frees one up to respond “thoughtfully rather than automatically”.

“4. To make the most of time, lose track of it (flow).”

Have you ever sat down, started in on a task, and become so fully absorbed in what you were doing that hours passed without your notice? Most people have attained this state, which psychologists call “flow,” at one point or another while doing something they find engaging and enjoyable. Dixit describes it as such:

As your attentional focus narrows, self-consciousness evaporates. You feel as if your awareness merges with the action you’re performing. You feel a sense of personal mastery over the situation, and the activity is so intrinsically rewarding that although the task is difficult, action feels effortless.

Prepared by Patrick H. Davis, MSW for the express use by participants of Baby Boomer Lecture S
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“5. If something is bothering you, move toward it rather than away from it (acceptance).”

It’s human nature to avoid unpleasant situations. However, I like Buddhist nun [Pema Chödrön](#)’s thoughts on the subject in her book *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*:

“...feelings like disappointment, embarrassment, irritation, resentment, anger, jealousy, and fear, instead of being bad news, are actually very clear moments that teach us where it is that we’re holding back. They teach us to perk up and lean in when we feel we’d rather collapse and back away. They’re like messengers that show us, with terrifying clarity, exactly where we’re stuck. This very moment is the perfect teacher, and, lucky for us, it’s with us wherever we are.”

“6. Know that you don’t know (engagement).”

If we know everything already, if our days are routine and predictable, where is the excitement in that? Why bother being curious about anything? As Pema Chödrön so elegantly puts it in “When Things Fall Apart”: “We long to have some reliable, comfortable ground under our feet, but we’ve tried a thousand ways to hide and a thousand ways to tie up all the loose ends, and the ground just keeps moving under us.” Embrace the unexpected in the here and now of your day. It’s what sets it apart from all the other days before it.

If you’re still wondering why you should bother with any of this, consider the following benefits of living in the present (from the *Psychology Today* article):

Cultivating a nonjudgmental awareness of the present bestows a host of benefits. Mindfulness reduces stress, boosts immune functioning, reduces chronic pain, lowers blood pressure, and helps patients cope with cancer. By alleviating stress, spending a few minutes a day actively focusing on living in the moment reduces the risk of heart disease. Mindfulness may even slow the progression of HIV.

Mindful people are happier, more exuberant, more empathetic, and more secure. They have higher self-esteem and are more accepting of their own weaknesses. Anchoring awareness in the here and now reduces the kinds of impulsivity and reactivity that underlie depression, binge eating, and attention problems. Mindful people can hear negative feedback without feeling threatened. They fight less with their romantic partners and are more accommodating and less defensive. As a result, mindful couples have more satisfying relationships.

So, what are you waiting for? Focus on what you’re doing right now. Even if you’re eating a cookie, and you’re about to run out of them. You can worry about buying more later, after you’ve taken the time to savor this one.

