

# Mindfulness 101: The Present-Moment Pivot

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## Summary

- This month's column looks at a simple adjustment you can make during the day to help you establish greater present-moment awareness.
- The Present-Moment Pivot (PMP) involves slowing your pace and coming to a stop at a location that you pass most days.
- The elements in your midst—sights, sounds, aromas, the feel of the air—will become your mindfulness cues.
- Given how frequently our minds wander and we get offtrack and become agitated, it can be helpful to mentally pivot toward what matters most.



One of the reasons we practice mindfulness is so that we might become more alert and emotionally steady as our life unfolds, especially amid challenging moments—in court, with clients, at home, and when receiving and responding to the news of the day. In this month's column, we'll look at a simple adjustment you can make during the day to help you establish greater present-moment awareness. I call it the Present-Moment Pivot, or PMP. You can think of it as a moment of mindfulness, akin to pressing a mental reset button.

## Present-Moment Pivots

A Present-Moment Pivot (PMP) is an intentional shift toward one's present-moment experience. Given how frequently our minds wander and we get offtrack and become agitated, it can be helpful to mentally pivot toward what matters most.

Back in 2007, after offering a “Mindfulness, Balance, and the Lawyer's Brain” workshop in Miami, I began periodically texting participants during the day with a phrase such as “Breathe.” It served as a mindfulness cue, an opportunity to step out of automatic pilot and to notice assumptions, judgments, ruminating, and catastrophizing that might be arising. It also served as a reminder to take a few slower, deeper breaths to center oneself and as an antidote to the shallow breathing that is all too common in a life in the law.

A handful of years later, I began sharing a practice called the “SoBe Mindful Stop”<sup>1</sup> as a self-directed means of waking up out of automatic pilot, taking a few conscious breaths, and seeing things a little more clearly. Rather than depend on an external source, like me, to provide the cue, one finds the cues in the elements of nature: the trees, wind, and sun.

The practice is a simple one: from time to time, when you're outdoors walking and notice any of these elements of nature, stop or slow down your pace for a few moments and turn your attention to your body (tree), take a slower breath (wind), and look around and see the world anew (sun).

Both of the examples above fall into the category of a PMP. So, too, do many other short, informal practices that offer a brief respite amid the busyness of our lives. Many spiritual and secular traditions, for example, draw on the sound of a bell to occasion an intentional shift to pause, gather one's attention, observe whatever is arising, or engage in a deliberate period of reflection.

With the above as predicate, below is an actionable (and in my experience of many years, an easy) way to integrate a PMP into your day.

The key is selecting your Present-Moment Pivot *Point*.

## The Present-Moment Pivot Point

Mindfulness practice is not a panacea. But the stronger our mindfulness (e.g., steadier focus/less distracted, enhanced awareness/less distractible), the more likely we are to notice when we are lost in thought and caught in agitated emotions. Armed with this self-awareness, we are better able to return attention to the task at hand and regulate our emotions. Such moments can occur anytime and anywhere.

One way to become more mindful more of the time is by practicing mindfulness on a regular basis. You can reverse engineer these mindful moments by selecting a location that you pass most days. It can be a spot a few feet or blocks outside your home or office. If possible, select a location outdoors where it would likely be pleasant to pause for a few moments.

## Practicing the PMP

The PMP practice involves slowing your pace and coming to a stop at least once a day when you reach the PMP Point. The mere act of pausing for a few moments—on purpose—can be of benefit and help develop your capacity to insert a pause—or wedge of awareness—at critical moments of the day. As author Jon Kabat-Zinn points out, mindfulness is “the awareness that emerges through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment.”<sup>2</sup>

After coming to a stop, take a slower, deeper breath (this helps establish a calmer state), look around, and notice the world with fresh eyes! Rather than being lost in thought or trying to fix something or figure anything out, you’re simply taking a moment to refresh, recharge, and reboot your operating system.

## PMP Tips

At such moments, you will more fully engage in your present-moment experience, even if for but a few seconds. At first, you may forget to stop, so put a sticky note reminder in your car or on your door. In time, it will become second nature. The elements in your midst—sights, sounds, aromas, the feel of the air—will become your mindfulness cues. Before long, you may find these short periods to be moments of refuge. When you pick up

your pace, though nothing has changed, something seems to be different: relaxed, clearer, a little more vivid.

## PMP and Mindfulness Practice

You can think of the PMP as a very short mindfulness practice. I invite you to select your PMP Point and give it a try for a little while—even if you just come to a stop for a split second and then pick up your pace (or merely slow down your pace, as you may feel a little self-conscious at first). In my next column, I'll build on this practice with a variety of practical and accessible ways to practice. My guess is that you'll come up with some of your own along the way.

### Endnotes

1. SCOTT L. ROGERS, *THE ELEMENTS OF MINDFULNESS* (2017).
2. Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Context: Past, Present, and Future*, 10 *CLINICAL PSYCH. SCI. & PRAC.*, 144, 145 (2003).

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