

# Clarity

**LAST MONTH IN THIS COLUMN, WE MET JOANNE,** a call center manager promoted to regional VP.

As many of us do, Joanne celebrated her mastery of multitasking. She assumed that her ability to keep her mental activity high throughout the entire day was a good thing.

In reality, despite her best intentions, busy-mindedness kept Joanne at the surface of issues—like an insect skittering across a pond—rarely probing the deeper questions that might have led to better ways of doing the job in the first place. Her racing thoughts never let her stop to rest, much less see something through to completion.

Joanne began to see busy-mindedness as an energy-draining habit with inherent dangers. She realized that in higher states of mind we all have unfettered access to wisdom, common sense, and creativity. Insights, intuition, and perspectives flow as easily as breathing in and out. All the relevant experience that we have acquired is readily accessible; so, too, is the universal intelligence that lies just beyond the frontier of what each of us already knows on the conscious level. Once we become aware of this dynamic, new possibilities seem obvious.

Among the hallmarks of the requisite higher states of mind are profound feelings, such as gratitude, compassion, and joy. To save herself from burnout, Joanne “tuned” her internal sensors to notice and cultivate such feelings. She changed her behavior patterns to make it easier to sustain higher states of mind. Soon she reaped the benefit of mental well-being: clarity.

Before, Joanne’s thinking had been jumbled—thoughts came so fast that she couldn’t keep up. As she guided her

mind toward tranquility, Joanne found it easier and easier to focus her attention, like a spotlight, on whatever needed to be resolved. Extraneous thoughts occasionally flitted across her mind. She learned not to pay much attention to them, so they quickly passed. More and more, she could hold her mind in a certain direction—toward an important issue or even a trivial matter, such as lost car keys. An insight would be revealed, and in that instant she would know exactly what to do—or where her keys were hiding.



To act with clarity means *not* acting on the urge to kick into effort or control. The more effort and control we try to exert, the more we limit the number of possibilities available to us; it’s like a trick knot that gets tighter the harder we pull against it or quicksand that sucks us in deeper the more we struggle.

If we are frantic, other people react with agitation. They are unable to connect to us. Even worse, we can’t connect to our innate creativity, inventiveness, or originality while in this mood. We cut ourselves off from the possibility of a latent solution emerging.

Betsy used to see the power of clarity at work in sailboat races. Some skippers are quiet and contained; others scream and yell. Yelling usually means that things are going wrong; people are looking for whom to blame, or they’re challenging decisions and criticizing performance. The yelling skipper has lost his bearings. His agitation intensifies feelings of insecurity among his crew. They are no longer sure where they’re headed or how they will get there. This can make them clumsier and more prone to mistakes, leading to more problems—and more reasons to yell. More often than not, the shouting skipper loses to

the composed captain.

Clarity is a state of profound but effortless concentration—of being completely aware of ourselves and connected with others and then being able to perform something familiar with ingenuity, verve, and spontaneity. It is the power of presence that allows leaders to fulfill their fundamental responsibility: sustaining an environment in which people feel confident enough to do their best.

Everyone knows this feeling. Perhaps you find it when showering, driving the car, praying, playing with your children or your pet, or perhaps when you wake up and walk outside. Warmth flows through your body; you feel relaxed yet attentive. As these feelings become more positive or elevated, your entire mental framework shifts. Fresh ideas emerge without effort; they simply pop into your head. Problems that seemed overwhelming in a lesser state of mind suddenly seem like nothing at all.

Joanne found that by making the mental space to quiet her own thinking, she actually multiplied her management energy. She got better results with far less effort.

Working with other people also profoundly changed. The more present Joanne became, the more engaged and clear-minded her direct reports became. Within six months, her “magic” rubbed off on others—a natural consequence as her leadership evoked calm feelings among her staff. More and more people discovered the ability to focus their thinking and found the insights necessary for ever-improving results.

Joanne found herself saying less and less as the staff solved more and more of the issues themselves. Many tasks that she used to take on were accomplished by others or, in fact,

simply disappeared because they didn’t need to be done after all.

Not having to deal with everyone’s mental chatter, the team could find a creative solution quickly—and put it into action smoothly—when a real opportunity arose or a big decision needed to be made.

### Deepening energy’s wellspring

Joanne had tapped into the mental capacity that emanates from the life force, which makes virtually any dream possible while making day-to-day living an easy joy. Leaders who count on this wellspring see that it helps them discharge their work responsibilities with supreme effectiveness without imposing stress or strain on others.

We tap into this power by paying attention to the quality of our thinking. But the process of mental awakening is one that presents new challenges. As old habits die, deeper questions surface:

- What selfish desires separate me from myself and others?
- Do I harbor any ill will toward others?
- Am I being compassionate to those I care about?
- What is the meaning of my life?

These questions aren’t easy—each person who decides to respond to them must find his or her own answers. The process takes some measure of perseverance. Willpower is necessary because changing long-standing habits takes practice. It’s not enough to simply wish your mental state were more elevated. As we saw in last month’s column, Joanne, having tasted the “quiet-minded experience” and finding her common sense, learned that she had to make changes in her daily routines to help her stay mentally bal-

anced. Of course, when Joanne started to feel wonderful and work much more easily, she got a nice incentive to stick with this path.

Along with needing willpower and commitment, operating consistently from a high-minded state requires the good sense to recognize when our thinking has slipped off center. Inevitably, we fall off the beam from time to time. We are only human after all. Thoughts come too fast for us to be able to stop them, much less deflect them before we experience them as reality.

We may become conscious of busy thoughts only as they appear as uncomfortable *feelings*. Finding ourselves reacting negatively—saying harsh words, feeling pressure—is the signal that we’ve lost our mental goodwill and, therefore, our open channel to the source of energy.

We also know, however, that regardless how poor our state of mind is, no thought can exert negative energy unless we pay attention or dwell on it. Pretty soon our thinking clears up, and we regain our mental equilibrium. Our mood lifts, and we notice that even small actions provide true satisfaction. Answers emerge, and we find deep contentment and inner peace.

That’s the secret Joanne learned over the course of those months as she was changing. For her, managing will never be the same old uncomfortable task it once was. ■

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