

# MindfulDevMag

Mindfulness for Developers

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## GETTING STARTED

[mindfulDevMag.com](http://mindfulDevMag.com)

**Mindfulness helps me to gain clarity  
and reshape myself to become a  
better version of me.**

Jens – MindfulDevMag

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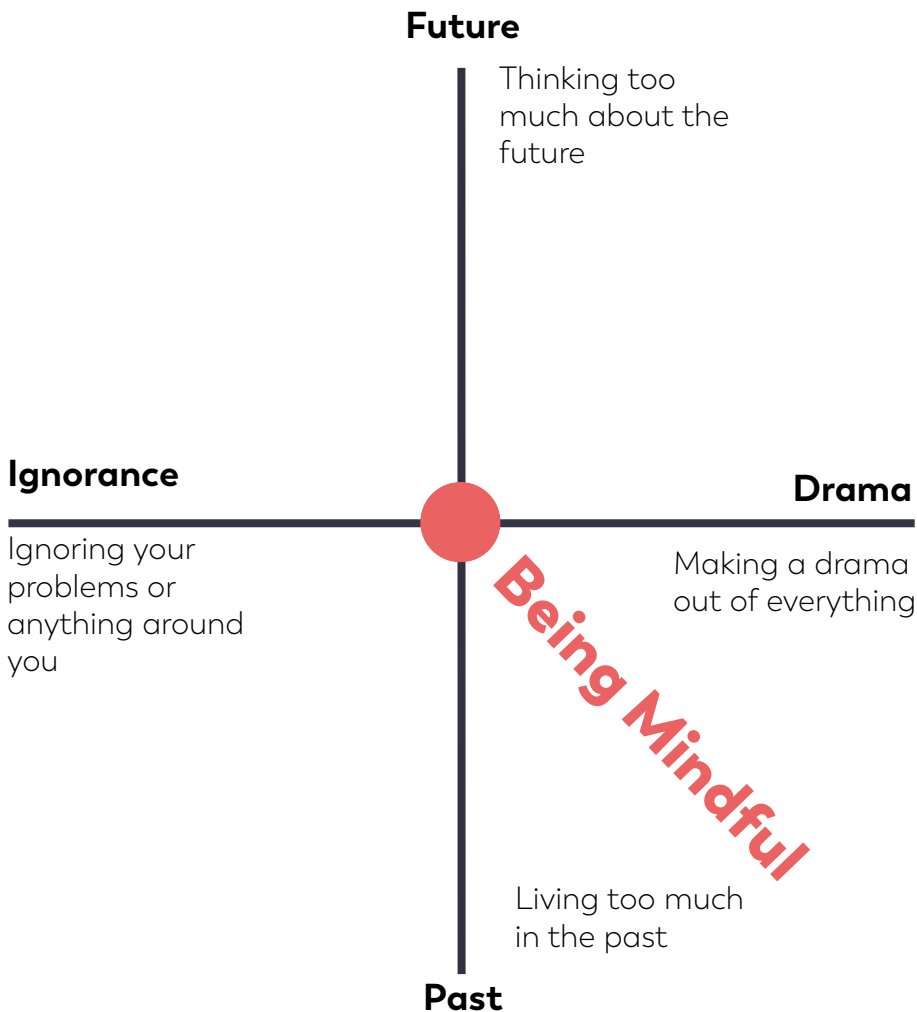
# What is Mindfulness?

**Mindfulness is the ability to be fully present in the moment, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not thinking about our past or future, and not overly influenced by what's going on around us.**

Today's mindfulness originates from ancient Buddhist practice. It's essentially a training element for reaching enlightenment in Buddhism. In Buddhism, one gets reborn as long as you reach enlightenment aka nirvana at some point. Practicing mindfulness helped to become aware of yourself and your surroundings, and how you react to those, so you can live a right-ful life in the sense of those teachings. In 1970s Jon Kabat-Zinn was introduced to

Buddhist meditations and experienced the benefits firsthand. He went on investigating it further and eventually entered the concepts to the Western world in the form of his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). MBSR is an 8-week training to reduce stress and anxiety and is nowadays widely researched.

In general mindfulness meditation can help you to handle stress much better, re-



duce anxiety, calm down and to get clarity about yourself and your life.

One problem of the human mind is that it always thinks. There's almost no moment without a thought in our mind. Most often, these thoughts are either about some unfortunate events from our past or worries about the future, turning small events into drama due to the endless worry loop. And then, out of the blue, back home af-

ter a hard working day, you yell at your significant other or your kids for nothing. They haven't done anything; it is just your mind which is still glued to the situation hours ago. Even you physically moved, your mind is still back in the situation.

Mindfulness is a way to conquer your mind back and live a fulfilling life.

# How Mindfulness Could Help in Software Development

I've been on training for mindful coaching recently, and almost a day in, I started wondering on how to apply what I learned to coding. How could a team benefit from combining the two concepts? How could mindful coding help to ease the pains of building software?

For those new to the topic, mindfulness is a concept that teaches our mind to be in the present, in whatever we do right at that moment. Not thinking about the future, the laundry we have to do, neither dwelling in past mistakes we did.

It's also about not judging. Not judging others, not judging ourselves. Not feeling controlled by our feelings and learned actions on a subconscious level.

Sounds easy?

It is not. It is harder than you might think. Nonetheless, it's worth it.

Now, let's explore my thoughts on how to combine that with software development.

## # You are not your code

Code reviews can be significant. If you are open and willing to learn. On both sides. Reviewer and reviewee. However, they can turn ugly pretty quickly, if you believe someone judging your code is judging you.

We are sometimes too close to our own work that we can not distinguish between critic on our work and critic on us. We take it personally. And when we do, we react in defense and might bark back or do other shit.

One thing that mindfulness can teach us in this situation is not to take that personally. We are not our code. The code is something we produced. It might be right, it might be wrong. It depends on who's reading it and their definitions of good/bad. However, one thing is for sure, we are not the code.

If we can overcome that feeling of personal judgment, we might learn much more in those reviews. Besides they might go much more enjoyable.

## # Others are not their code

It is essentially the same thing, just the other way around. We are judging now. We judge the code. We judge the dev who wrote it. "That stupid morons can't code" – ever thought something like that?

Don't do that. Maybe your fellow dev had a bad day, was on a tight deadline or whatever. It's even worse if you continue to judge devs because you read some shitting code of them ten years ago. If you don't think your code a year ago was shit, you don't make progress.

Anyways, judging brings just tension to a team and eventually will destroy any team spirit.

## # Flow

Working in the flow is excellent. Fulfilling.

And pretty much impossible in a working environment because co-workers don't respect it. If we would be living mindful in the present, we'd notice what's around us. We would see if we can ask Bob a question or if he so deep into work and leave him

alone. Waiting for a better time.

We would notice that our own behavior disturbs our co-workers. Talking loud on the phone and holding meetings at a desk and freaking out the others in the room.

Most of the time, people don't do that on intention. They are not aware that they do that at all. So focussed doing their little task, that they ignore everything around.

When we are aware of what is happening in our environment, and we interact with it, we can adjust our behavior and be more respectful.

## # You are not a rockstar

I am not sure if it is actually part of mindfulness or just happens to be close. Yet, this being in the presence and not judging has much to do with taking our ego out of it.

I can not be in the presence, listening to someone and trying not to judge, while being focussed on my ego. It does not work for me. As soon as I start judging, I am not listening anymore. My mind is gone. I am gone and thus not mindful anymore.

The further I go down this path, the more I learn that my ego is in my way. Yep, it is everywhere. Yours too.

My code is not the best in the world. Or better than the code my teammates wrote. I am not a rockstar coder, guru or whatever. Neither are you.

Accepting limitations and reducing our ego, makes us humble. A humble mind is open, willing to learn. Learn from our mis-

takes and learn from others. It doesn't judge — not us, not others. It knows its limits.

Imagine working in a team using mindful principles. What would it look like?

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**Meditation can help us embrace our worries, our fear, our anger; and that is very healing. We let our own natural capacity of healing do the work.**

Thich Nhat Hanh – Buddhist monk



# Basic Meditation to Get You Started

## Focus on your breath

1

Find a quiet place.  
Sit on a chair, feet  
on the ground,  
back straight.



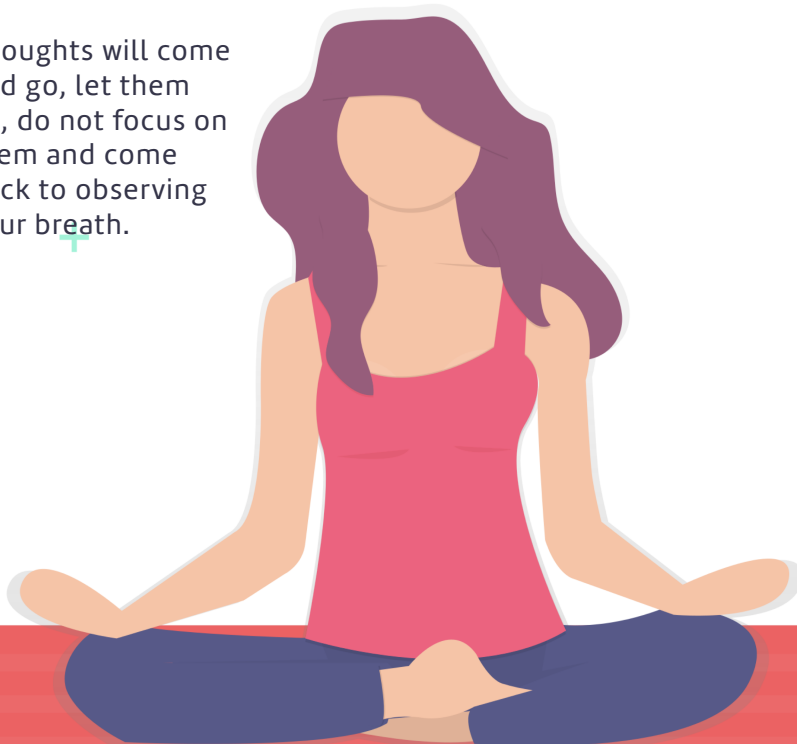
Rest your hands on  
your legs.

2

Close your eyes and  
focus on your breath.  
Feel the air stream-  
ing through your  
nose into your lungs.  
Where else in your  
body do you feel the  
air?

3

Thoughts will come  
and go, let them  
be, do not focus on  
them and come  
back to observing  
your breath.



# How to Relax for Developers

Sitting all day in front of a screen, iterating over thinking, typing out code and debugging it, is tough. This alone will exhaust you sooner than later. Now add those meetings and even office politics, and you will be brain dead at the end of a working day.

We all know it won't even last 8 hour days. Usually, around 6 hours in you are done for the day. Time to go home and relax.

But we all know too, we have to stick around for two more hours. Maybe even get out late, stuck in the traffic jam, honk at the morons who can't drive, are angry about the morons at work, you know the drill.

You come home, tired from work, stressed out from all those stupid morons, your

brain is still thinking about that damn bug you can't fix, and now it is family and hobby time. But you so damn tired and filled up, that it is no fun. You drag along, trying to not snap at your kids or significant other, feel too tired to do any sports or activities, regret it, get bad about regretting it and starting the self-doubt-cycle. Finally falling asleep and the next day it starts all over again.

Groundhog day.

Sound familiar?

It does for me. I've been there a couple of times. If you don't watch out for yourself, you might end up with a burnout. You don't want that.

Luckily, we can reduce the stress and

create a better balance for ourselves. If we know how and have a manual, which is needed in today's world.

## # Sense of stress?

Stress is an essential factor in our lives. It made our ancestors survive for thousands of years. If we are stressed, our body and mind go into the alarm state. Something is endangering us, and we need to be ready to handle it. Either fight or run away, hide or whatever.

When the danger is gone, we switch from the alarm state to the relaxed state. Our body and mind do now prepare for shaking off the stress and start healing and adapting.

It is not always life-threatening. An average fight with our significant others is enough. When you start fighting, your body, precisely your nervous system, will switch into the alarm state. Our heart starts pounding faster, we breathe faster, adrenaline rises, our body heats up, we focus on the opponent, the rest begins to blend out, our muscles get ready, and now we can bark back, slam the doors, throw the plates or whatever.

We run on instincts now; our rational is blinded.

When the fight is over, our nervous system switched to the opposite direction. We can relax now. Thinking more clearly, breathing slows down, our heart rate goes down again. Everything is back to normal. Our body can regenerate now.

This is normal, and stress is not per se wrong. It is necessary for us to adapt. Stress helps us to get fitter, grow more muscles or code better.

It is also temporary. We have a stressful phase, and we have a relaxation phase immediately following a stress phase. We need that.

The problems come when our nervous system can't be in the relaxed state long enough. It is not meant to be in full-time stress.

## # Eustress vs. Distress?

Stress is not equalled stress. There is a kind which is toxic to us. It is called distress. It is stress that put pressure on us. And the opposite is Eustress, which is good stress. Things that put us to your limits but we don't feel sorry about.

Unfortunately, the same stress can be for one person Eustress and the other Distress, e.g., getting yelled at by your boss is for some distress and toxic, and for others not. It is not bothering them much.

Even a small amount of distress is not dangerous for us as long as we have relaxing-phases. If those are missing, our problems begin.

## # The Problems

Our problems with stress begin when we are always under stress, and our relaxation phases are so short or seldom, that our nervous system is not able to switch into the relaxation state.

If that happens, we get nervous, anxious, our mind is occupied with the burdening stuff, we can't think clearly anymore, and eventually, we break. Also, our immune system breaks, and we get more sick more often. It takes a toll on mind and body.

The end is a burnout.

You don't want that. Believe me. You don't want that.

## # How to Handle Stress?

Remember, stress is highly individual. And just like that, it is with handling stress. However, there are specific methods which do not work over a longer time, regardless of the person. So, let's start with how NOT to handle stress.

### ## How To NOT Handle Stress?

Many of the typical stress handling methods do not work over a more extended period. They are either wrong for the kind of stress we're confronted with or plainly do not work.

Watching TV, Netflix or Amazon Prime is one of those common advise, which just bluntly do not work. They don't relax you. Watching movies will not bring your nervous system into the relaxing state. It keeps you in the alarm state. Yeah, so-mehow our brain knows those things on the screen are not real. However, we still have many of the effects as when it would be right in front of you.

So, instead of relaxing, you stress yourself even more, which makes entering the relaxation phase pretty impossible.

Imagine your ancestor Grog barely escaping some predator, luckily having survived. And now in the evening, he watches a movie about predators... He sure will relax.

Same with taking a bath, reading and alike. When you are stressed out and pissed off your boss, how many baths do you think will help you with that? Zero. Zilch.

Grog would definitely do that. After hunting a mammoth down and fighting off an attack of rivaling tribe to secure the meat for his tribe, he will definitely take a bath. Every. Single. Time.

It is the wrong thing for that kind of stress. It is perfectly fine after a heavy workout though. But not when your body is in the alarm state.

And coding doesn't help with this stress too. Coding nights might be relaxing for you sometimes, but it's like taking baths, the wrong thing for that kind of stress.

### ## Best Way to Handle Stress

There's one thing, which really helps. It's free and straightforward.

Moving.

Yep, move our body. However, you like. Go for a walk, 10, 20 or 30 minutes a day. Or go running. Do Yoga, Qi Gong, Dance or whatever. Doesn't matter as long as your body moves.

It is not exercising. You don't want to get stronger, healthier or better at X. You want to relax, so merely move.

Outside.

If you can, in nature.

Nothing beats a beautiful walk along the river. Or in the woods. Or mountains. Whatever your location has to offer to you.

The only downside is that you often can't do shortly after a stressful event. Chances are you can't leave the building after problems at work. But there is an alternative

to walking.

Go to the next bathroom stall, close the door and start shaking your arms, legs and the whole body. Like you have some disgusting thing on you and want to get rid of it. That thing is the stress.

Cats do that too, just not in the bathroom stall. They are brave, but we are not, so go to the bathroom stall. Nobody sees you there, Nobody knows. And shake the fucking stress off.

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# LOGBOOK clarity

The journal that helps me to conquer my mind back one day at a time.



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