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A Mindful Journey

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Abstract This final chapter reemphasizes the importance of remaining mindful of your mental models, as you can easily slide into negative thought patterns, influenced by circumstances, practices, or people who surround you. We will look into the importance of mindfulness for our mental models, sharing a piece of advice on leadershifting, and explain the acronym COURAGE in light of the GAIN model.

The Impact of Altruism: A Story

Jim had been a high performing loner for most of his life. The people he worked with admired his work, and one day the company president asked Jim to take on the position of manager in the production department.

Jim reluctantly accepted, as he was aware that he would now have to shift his behavior from doing everything for his own progress to motivating and pulling along an entire department.

Because Jim did not like losing, he made sure his department excelled. He did everything he could to catapult even the weakest co-worker ahead, much to the pleasure of upper administration.

As Jim neared retirement, he requested a return to a less responsible position, and now it was the president's turn to reluctantly agree. During his last years on the job, Jim was allowed to re-engage in his self-uplifting performance, but something had changed: Jim found out that shifting to an altruistic approach during his management years had rubbed off positively on his psyche, and he kept assisting others toward betterment till the end.



With mindfulness, you can establish yourself in the present in order to touch the wonders of life that are available in that moment.¹

~Thich Nhat Hanh

Confronting our Biases

Where is the truth? That virtuous friend:
 Impartial reality without a smudge?
 It lives outside our biased mind
 And is, regrettably, hard to find
 In the mental rubble through which we judge

Our biases are alive and well
 Fueling our views and emotions
 Culture, religion, family and peers
 They instilled in us the joys and fears
 That now influence many of our notions

Being aware of this human shortfall
 Is dreadful, but also enlightening
 As it motivates our brains
 To transcend their constraints
 And embrace what once seemed frightening

It's been too long now, that we indulged
 In thoughts of inferior versus supreme
 Judging on accents, sex, skin-colors
 Age, skills, or assumed wealth in dollars
 It's time to release that obsolete dream

¹ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/thich_nhat_hanh_591335

Becoming mindful of our biases
Is liberating and drives spiritual rebirth
None of us stands beneath or above
The ability to embrace and love
All that lives with us on Mother Earth

~Joan Marques

Mental Models: The Good and Bad

We all have mental models. They are the shortcuts our mind has created to make quick decisions, based on past impressions. Mental models can come out handy in multiple settings, such as when you need to select a product or service or when you need to practice a concept. Mental models are the foundations to how you see the world and react to the things that happen around you.² And because they are shortcuts based on past impressions, you can surmise that mental models should be assessed and updated at times, but truth is that we rarely do so. The main reason for that is that we're often not even aware that we have mental models. We build them instinctively and stick to them from there on. It's only when someone points them out, like on this page, that you may start realizing how dependent your daily practices, actions, and reactions are on your mental models.

The good part of mental models is that they accelerate your decision-making processes. It would be rather time consuming if you'd have to engage in deep contemplation every time you needed to make a quick decision on a recurring matter at work, in the supermarket, or in your interactions with friends. And, admitted, some mental models don't need revising, because they don't harm your progress or influence the wellbeing of others.

The bad part of mental models is that some of them do influence our perceptions. This is when they become implicit biases.³ In those cases, your mental models can affect the selections you make in hiring people, and if you're not open to diversity, for instance, a mental model can limit your selection of co-workers to people who look, walk, talk, and think just like you. As you can gather, that is not a good development in work environments where the intention is to be creative and innovative. A homogeneous team tends to think along the same lines, which may on one hand be time efficient, but on the other hand negatively affects out of the box thinking and acting.

² Clear, J. (2018). Mental Models: Learn How to Think Better and Gain a Mental Edge. *JamesClear.com*. Retrieved from <https://jamesclear.com/mental-models#:~:text=The%20phrase%20%E2%80%9Cmental%20model%E2%80%9D%20is,understand%20how%20the%20economy%20works>

³ Clark, B. G., & Underwood, O. D. (2019). Mitigating implicit bias as a leader. *JOM*, 71(7), 2152–2155.

Human beings are interesting in many ways, and one of them is that we gravitate toward people that resemble us in the ways that matter to us. These ways could be but are not limited to looks, habits, culture, education, religious conviction, generation, ethnicity, gender, or any other orientation. So, mental models are not perfect, even though we use them all the time.

Now that you are aware of the fact that you operate with mental models, you can start examining them on a regular basis, and adjust them by implementing structures to minimize their damaging effects, for instance, by enriching your decision-making team with diverse members or by removing personal details from documents if you need to evaluate applicants.

Mental Models and Mindfulness

There is a clear link between successfully applying your mental models and practicing mindfulness. By being mindful, you maintain awareness of the need that things change, and that you should respect the evolving nature of everything, including your perspectives on things and people, your work environments, and the way things are done today.

There is so much changing around us all the time. I have heard even young people expressing their amazement about the pace in which new social media channels, opportunities and trends emerge, and how quickly old patterns get obsolete. Imagine what it must be like for the older ones among us!

Throughout this morass of evolutions, we must nurture our mindfulness, otherwise we can get lost, and fall prey to mindlessly following trends and patterns that are not in tune with our current focus or purpose. The practical suggestions I offered in Chap. 8, such as meditating, yoga, taking long walks, journaling, and more, are also great avenues to keep your mindfulness intact.

Engaging in mindfulness practices increases your mental flexibility and self-awareness, while it will also enable you to be a better leader when situations are complicated.⁴ Mindfulness practices are of high value in leading organizations and can cultivate three meta competencies: (1) Metacognition, which helps you to retain calmness to oversee situations in ambiguous situations, thus make more rational decisions; (2) Acceptance, which enables you to see things as they are, and not tainted by judgmental notions, and (3) Curiosity, which is the healthy input to infuse our awareness in the moment and stay alert.⁵

⁴Chacksfield, E. (2017). DEVELOPING A RESILIENT MINDSET. *Training Journal*, 23–26.

⁵Reiz and Chalkson (2016). How to Bring Mindfulness to Your Company. *Harvard Business Review*.

Point to Ponder

Reflect on some of your mental models.

List some that you consider helpful in your day-to-day life. How are they helpful?

List at least one that you are not so proud of. How do you plan to work on correcting this mental model?

Making a Difference by Practicing Mindfulness: Chade-Meng Tan

Chade-Meng Tan may have held the most unique job-title when he worked as employee no. 107 at Google: “*Jolly Good Fellow (Which Nobody Can Deny)*.” Tan started as an engineer at Google, and eventually shifted from Engineering to People Operations. His job description was, “Enlighten minds, open hearts, create world peace”.⁶ In this position, Tan developed mindfulness training courses based on the notion that happiness is a state of mind. The training courses were meant to help his fellow Googlers find inner peace and clear their minds to manage stress and negativity. He wrote a best-selling book in 2014, *Search Inside Yourself*, named after his groundbreaking mindfulness-based emotional intelligence course at Google with the same title.

As a Googler, Tan traveled the world to speak about mindfulness at conferences and seminars. He retired from Google at age 45, as he decided to enlarge his horizons and work more actively toward his goal of helping establish world peace. During the past decade, Tan wrote two more books, “*Joy on Demand*” (2017), and “*Buddhism for All*” (2023).

On his website, Tan describes himself as an award-winning engineer, a two times New York Times bestselling author, a movie producer, and a philanthropist whose work has received eight nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Reading about this man is refreshing because you find out that he has a great sense of humor. One of his statements on his website accompanying him in lotus position is: “Joy is when you’re in deep sit.” Tan’s sense of humor radiates throughout his website. He created a bio page in line with the requirements of the modern western world. He has a tiny two-sentence version, a 200+ words version, and a full version.

⁶Bio. (29 March 2021). *Chade Meng*. Retrieved from <https://chademeng.com/about/bio/>

Among his many rewarding activities, Tan delivered a TED talk on compassion at the United Nations and spoke at the White House about the development of kindness. He has a wall filled with pictures he took with prominent people, including presidents, business moguls, celebrities, and even the Dalai Lama. His personal motto is, “Life is too important to be taken seriously”.⁷

Aside from all the uplifting experiences, Tan’s story reveals that in everyone’s life there are dark moments that can cause a person to seriously question themselves. In 2018 he had to step down from his position as chair of the *Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute* (SIYLI), which promotes mindfulness and emotional intelligence. He did so at the board’s request after a third-party investigation into an unspecified behavior in the past, that was referred to as “inappropriate behavior”.⁸ Upon stepping down, Tan expressed his regret for having contributed to the suffering of others in the past, and commented that he would deeply reflect on that, but no further explanations were given, neither by Tan, not by members of the organization from which he stepped down.

In more recent days, Tan seems to have regained his sparkling, humorous way. Perhaps he never lost it. He continues to speak on global forums, and his most recent book was received well.

Among Tan’s wise pieces of advice is a 5-minute self-leadership exercise, which he recommends to everyone. He states,

Whenever I have a fight with my wife or a co-worker, I go to another room to calm down and after a few minutes of calming down, I do this exercise: I visualize the other person in the next room and remind myself that this person is just like me, wants to be free from suffering just like me, wants to be happy just like me, and so on. And then I wish that person wellness, happiness, and freedom from suffering.

*After just a few minutes of doing this, I feel much better about myself, about the other person, and about the whole situation. A large part of my anger dissipates immediately.*⁹

⁷ Profile: Chade-Meng Tan (2024). Greater Good Magazine. Retrieved from https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/profile/chade_meng_tan

⁸ Eaton, J. (August 21 2018). Google’s former mindfulness guru steps down from nonprofit over ‘inappropriate behavior’. *Think Progress*. Retrieved from <https://archive.thinkprogress.org/googles-former-mindfulness-guru-steps-down-from-nonprofit-over-inappropriate-behavior-2e7bb2a8e6c3/>

⁹ Lebowitz, S. and Shibu, S. (Nov 26, 2019). A former Google engineer uses a 5-minute practice to defuse conflicts at home and at work. Here’s how to use it at the Thanksgiving table. *Business Insider*. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/chade-meng-tan-how-to-practice-loving-kindness-2017-6>

Point to Ponder

Read or listen to some more information about Chade-Meng Tan. What positive message can you take away from this person's story? Any words of caution you would like to share about Tan's story?

Balancing Left and Right Brain

One of the fortunate developments about living in today's day and age is that we witness a positive trend in enhanced awareness among society members from various walks of life. While our entire education system is still very much focused on developing our left-brain hemisphere, we now discover that there is gradually some more acknowledgment for our right-brain hemisphere. Our right hemisphere is the one that processes our thoughts in a holistic way, while the left hemisphere works more in a logical and methodical manner. You could compare these two hemispheres with two sets of computer hardware that use completely different operating systems.¹⁰

In the past decades we have witnessed and collectively endured some mind-boggling challenges, not limited to the great recession, a wide range of various social justice-based movements, climate hazards and health scares. All these challenges may have felt as bad developments at first, but over time we have also learned to see their benefits for our collective advancement. This is mindfulness in action. And we know by now that the advantages and advancements of mindfulness are extensive.

When we work with others, we may consider ways to help elevate our right-brain hemisphere with some nice exercise that most people enjoy. Some of these are:

- Guided meditation: A popular topic in this book, indeed. But there is a reason for that. Meditation is increasingly becoming a known practice in universities and workplaces throughout the world. And the practice can be kept short enough to avoid restlessness amongst the participants.¹¹

¹⁰Alder, H. (1994). The technology of creativity. *Management Decision*, 32(4), 23–29.

¹¹Marques, J. F., Dhiman, S., Holt, S., & Wood, A. (2023). Activating the right hemisphere in business minds. *Development and Learning in Organizations*, 37(5), 5–7

- Poetry: During a work retreat or on a Friday afternoon, it might be nice to spend an hour or so on poetry. You could attach poems from various poets and on various topics on the wall and inviting participants to first walk around and read them. After that, you invite them to go pick their favorite poem from the wall, read it out loud and reflect. You will find that this practice of sharing favorite poems creates a sense of connection and camaraderie.¹²
- Lollipop moments: This is inspired by Drew Dudley’s TEDx Talk,¹³ “Everyday Leadership,” in which he explains the phenomenon “Lollipop Moments” as sharing constructive comments that positively impact the lives of others. You can do a lollipop moment round by inviting members from your team to observe one another and write a positive note from the heart about each other. As the moderator, you can then collect all comments about each colleague and hand them those to take with them. Some people get so touched by the kind things colleagues write that they keep these notes forever.¹⁴

Point to Ponder

Do you consider yourself more a left brain or more a right brain person? Why?
 How is your left-brain hemisphere useful in your daily practices?
 How is your right-brain hemisphere useful in your daily practices?

Practicing Leadershift

If you perform in a leadership position, you will have found out that today’s workplaces are more complex than ever before. We see greater diversity and higher levels of collective intelligence amongst our internal and external stakeholders, and stress levels are high causing the levels of internal and external change to require more insight and flexibility than before. You will find that there is a challenge tied to every positive development. To give a few examples, (1) diversity in a team prompts expanded design thinking, fairness, and

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Dudley, D. (2010). Everyday leadership. *TEDx-Toronto, 2010*. Available at: www.ted.com/talks/drew_dudley_everyday_leadership

¹⁴ Marques, J. F., Dhiman, S., Holt, S., & Wood, A. (2023). Activating the right hemisphere in business minds. *Development and Learning in Organizations, 37*(5), 5–7.

stakeholder support, but it also necessitates greater conflict resolution skills and sensitivity to a wider range of cultural and traditional customs¹⁵; (2) increased collective intelligence within a team raises general insight, environmental awareness, and dealing with complexities,¹⁶ but it also requires more tolerance for being questioned and criticized about decisions; and (3) accelerated change reduces monotonous routines and organizational myopia and increases performance excellence, but it can be an energy drain and pose a threat to your leadership skills and values, which can lead to potential change fatigue and change resistance.¹⁷

Even though the above examples represent some important challenges you will have to deal with in leading others, they are primarily of an external nature. Your biggest challenge remains the internal one. Here's the challenge in a nutshell: when you strive for a leadership position, you do so with ambition as your foundational mindset; you consider yourself a visionary, and are led by your ego, which may have served you well till that point, because it enabled you to shift ahead when others gave up. Your ego was fueled by some admirable traits such as resilience, courage, perseverance, and confidence. These, and a number of other inborn qualities helped you make swift decisions and plow your way ahead.

Yet, once you have made it to the leadership ranks, there is a critical shift many people overlook, and that is the leadership shift. What this means, is that you will now have to change your driving motives from self-focused to team-focused. This shift from “me” to “we” can be difficult, especially if you have always lived and worked in an individually driven society.

Understanding the balance between the qualities that get you in the saddle and the ones that will make you do well is a critical piece of awareness in today's leadership. Once you have stepped into a leadership position, your mindset will need to move toward increased altruism, which means that you will have to place others' objectives before our own.¹⁸ Engaging in altruism means that you will care for the wellbeing and progress of your stakeholders

¹⁵Marques. J. (2008). Workplace diversity: Developing a win-win-win strategy. *Development and Learning in Organizations*. 22(5), 5–8.

¹⁶Bonabeau. E. (2009). Decisions 2.0: The power of collective intelligence. *MIT Sloan Management Review*. 50(2), 45–52.

¹⁷McMillan. K. & Perron. A. (2020). Ideological tensions amidst rapid and continuous organizational change in healthcare. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*. 33(6), 1029–1039.

¹⁸Singh. N. & Krishnan. V. R. (2008). Self-sacrifice and transformational leadership: Mediating role of altruism. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*. 29(3), 261–274.

without any benefits or accolades to you.¹⁹ Your sense of altruism becomes critical when the overall quality of your team is being assessed, and you, the leader, realize that your team is only as strong as its weakest link. Since replacing the weakest link is not as easy as it may sound, and not as morally responsible either, your best bet is to elevate the strength of your weakest link. That is not an easy feat either, but it is an admirable one.

The need for a leader to shift from ego-driven to altruistic behavior makes more sense in today's world than it has ever made before. Contemporary workers, while still in need of their monthly paycheck, seek—above anything else—intrinsic motivation in their work. They want to feel that what they do matters in the process of performing toward a common goal, and that they, too, improve through the progression of their labor.

So, with the above explained, it may be clear that you, as a leader, will have to ensure a proper balance in your mental and emotional approach toward leading others and your workplace toward ongoing growth. Yes, your qualities of resilience, courage, confidence, and perseverance will remain, but the aggressive edges of individualism will need to make place for a more collectivist mindset, wherein you, as the leader, will increasingly find yourself engaging in acts that benefit their followers rather than yourself.

Point to Ponder

Do you believe altruism is appropriate in work environments? Why or why not?

Which personal qualities have thus far been most beneficial for your progress in life?

Which qualities do you feel you need to work on? How do you plan to do that?

Keeping the Journey GAINful

Here are some final thoughts to help ensure your optimal benefit from the GAIN mindset in your life. Several of these thoughts have been presented throughout the book but placing them in this overview may serve as a reminder of their value and essence to your wellbeing and progress. I have also placed these essentials in an acronym, called COURAGE.

¹⁹ Rohman, F. Noermijati, N., Soelton, M. & MugioM. (2022). Model altruism in improving organizational performance in social welfare institutions ministry of social affairs of the republic of Indonesia. *Cogent Business & Management*. 9(1), 1–13.

– **Choice**

When things are becoming problematic, don't think you have no choices. Life always offers you choices. You may not like the options, but there are choices, and it will be up to you to think innovatively and define some choices others may not have considered. This points at the entrepreneurial spirit we all have when push comes to shove. It can help to grab a pencil and a piece of paper and write down all choice-options you can come up with in an ongoing situation, no matter how ridiculous they may sound. You may be on to discovering a gem.

– **Open-mindedness**

Keep your eyes and your mind wide open. Be cautious about the boundaries that you unwillingly erected, which can inhibit your progress in life. I mentioned these examples in Chap. 1: (1) Sleepwalking, which is the process of mindlessly following your routine without questioning what, how, and why you do what you do; (2) Comfort Zone Clinging, which is what we do when allow our insecurities and fears for the future stand in the way of our progress, and (3) Implicit Biases (the “bad part of mental models), which lead us to judge others based on a process of stereotyping, thus depriving ourselves and those around us from optimal progress.

– **Usefulness**

Nothing is wasted: a foundational perspective presented in this book. If you hear someone tell you that their visit somewhere, the class they took, the job they did, or the event they attended was a waste of time, you should realize how blind-sighted this person is. Nothing is wasted. Everything serves a purpose, even if you cannot connect the dots right away. This concept was presented in Chap. 4. I mentioned there that there is a good use for every experience in your life, even though it may take some time before the pieces of the puzzle fall together.

– **Reality-Check**

This is a call for making sure that your mental models are not limiting your progress, and that your reality remains void of limiting patterns. It also hints to the fact that no two realities are the same: each of us have our own way of looking at the world, influenced by our unique individual history and experience processing. If you realize this, you will respect other people's viewpoints better, even if those deviate from yours.

– **Attitude**

In several chapters of this book, starting in Chap. 5, I mentioned Epictetus and Victor Frankl, who, even though they lived many centuries apart, shared the same valuable advice to their audience: everything can be taken away from you but your attitude. You decide how you look at the things

that emerge in your life, and then determine your response. Keep a positive mindset.

– **Genius**

There is a genius in each of us. The unfortunate truth is that we have been slapped a few times too often on our hands to “draw between the lines”, with which I mean to say: don’t dare to be original but follow the rules. Our society has become so rule-bound, that many of us have forgotten our unique insights and practices. Our inner genius may be subdued, but is still alive., It’s up to us if we want to revive it or not.

– **Education**

Keep on learning. You don’t have to embark on a long educational journey if that’s not your cup of tea, but keep on learning through the many avenues that we have at our disposal today: mass media, colleagues, friends, mentors, books, and our own previous mind.

Yes, it takes courage to see life as GAIN, but once you do, you’ll feel more fulfilled, content, and happy.

Chapter Highlights

- *Mental Models*: We all have mental models. They are the shortcuts our mind has created to make quick decisions, based on past impressions. Mental models are the foundations to how you see the world and react to the things that happen around you.
 - The good part of mental models is that they accelerate your decision-making processes.
 - The bad part of mental models is that some of them do influence your perceptions of people. This is when they become implicit biases.
- *Mental Models and Mindfulness*: By being mindful, you maintain awareness of the need that things change, and that you should respect the evolving nature of everything, including your perspectives on things and people, your work environments, and the way things are done today. Engaging in mindfulness practices increases your mental flexibility and self-awareness, while it will also enable you to be a better leader when situations are complicated.
- *Balancing Left and Right Brain*: Our right hemisphere processes our thoughts in a holistic way, while the left hemisphere works more in a logi-

cal and methodical manner. When we work with others, we may consider ways to help elevate our right-brain hemisphere with some nice exercise that most people enjoy. Some of these are:

- Guided meditation
 - Poetry
 - Lollipop moments
- *Practicing Leadership*: Understanding the balance between the qualities that get you in the leadership saddle and the ones that will make you do well while practicing leadership is a critical piece of awareness in today's leadership. Once you have stepped into a leadership position, your mindset will need to move toward increased altruism, which means that you will have to place others' objectives before our own. The need for a leader to shift from ego-driven to altruistic behavior makes more sense in today's world than it has ever made before.
- *Keeping the Journey GAINful*: Here are some final thoughts to help ensure your optimal benefit from the GAIN mindset in your life. I have also placed these essentials in an acronym, called COURAGE.
- *Choice*: Life always offers you choices. You may not like the options, but there are choices, and it will be up to you to think innovatively and define some choices others may not have considered.
 - *Open-mindedness*: Keep your eyes and your mind wide open. Be cautious about the boundaries that you unwillingly erected, which can inhibit your progress in life.
 - *Usefulness*: Nothing is wasted. Everything serves a purpose, even if you cannot connect the dots right away.
 - *Reality-Check*: Make sure that your mental models are not limiting your progress, and that your reality remains void of limiting patterns.
 - *Attitude*: Everything can be taken away from you but your attitude. You decide how you look at the things that emerge in your life, and then determine your response. Keep a positive mindset.
 - *Genius*: There is a genius in each of us. Unfortunately, our society has become so rule-bound, that many of us have forgotten our unique insights and practices. Our inner genius may be subdued, but is still alive., It's up to us if we want to revive it or not.
 - *Education*: Keep on learning through the many avenues that you have at your disposal: mass media, colleagues, friends, mentors, books, and your own previous mind.

Happiness is...

Doing what you love to do
Being where you want to be
Enjoying your life
And not wanting to change
A thing....

Smiling without a reason
Liking the current season
Listening to your heart
And cheerfully hearing
It sing....

Taking life the easy way
Treasuring it day by day
Being grateful for
What comes and goes
Without a cling...

Appreciating here and now
Knowing somehow, somehow,
Things are just good
Granting your mood
A jolly swing...

-Joan Marques