



## Participant's Workbook and Journal



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**Pam Marcheski**  
Executive and Organizational Leadership Coach Owner / Principal

cell: 916-626-2419  
[www.intentact.com](http://www.intentact.com)  
[pam@intentact.com](mailto:pam@intentact.com)





# INTRODUCTION

mPEAK (Mindful Performance Enhancement, Awareness & Knowledge) is an intensive course in mindfulness training for those who seek a more balanced way to achieve their goals, both personal and professional, as well as attain new levels of performance and success. This cutting-edge training program is built around the latest brain research related to peak performance, resilience, focus, and “flow”. The mPEAK program enhances the human capacity of mindfulness through established and empirically supported practices and exercises. Mindfulness is effective precisely because it is a way of being and relating to all aspects of life, rather than a specific technique or tool for a particular goal. As with physical training, this brain-training program is based on the understanding that optimal outcomes occur most often when participants continue to engage in the practices and exercises on a daily basis as a part of their training regimen. The foundation of this program is drawn from the highly respected and empirically-supported Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD. Additionally, the program incorporates specific practices and exercises formulated to correspond to recent neuroscientific findings, competitive advances, and related research regarding optimal performance.



# HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook is a companion to the mPEAK 3-day intensive or 8-week course. It organizes the informational material about mindfulness and performance into one resource to streamline the didactic portions of mPEAK. In the pages provided, you can also record insights and reflections on the various experiences you'll have along this journey. Your time in the mPEAK course will be distributed over the following categories:

**Formal Mindfulness Meditation Practices** Meditation is a specific period of practice often done in stillness and silence. Meditation training re-wires the brain through neuroplasticity to increase your capacity for presence, discernment and flow in your life, work and sport. The formal practices introduced in mPEAK are: The Body Scan, Awareness of Breath, Mental Noting, Mindful Movement and Self-Compassion.

**Experiential Exercises** These exercises are like a mirror to more clearly see the way you relate to various aspects of performance. By observing your own conditioned thoughts, habits and identities in the face of these challenges, you recognize what is serving your performance and what might be holding you back.

**Didactic Topics** Each section of this course offers just enough science and information to help you build a conceptual framework around mindfulness and ideally inspire you to practice. The emphasis of mPEAK is less on learning about mindfulness and more on actually being mindful.



**Journal Exercises** The workbook provides dedicated pages to reflect on your past experiences with various performance related topics. Journaling itself can be a mindfulness practice of observing and recording thoughts and feelings onto paper.

**Dyads/ Triads** Sharing your experience is an important part of deepening your awareness of yourself in relation to others. You are encouraged to connect with authenticity and vulnerability with as many other participants as possible. Participants often say they learn as much from the others sharing as from the course content.

**Group Coaching and Discussion** After each experiential exercise or formal practice, an invitation is offered for discussion and coaching around challenges or insights that may have come up. Coaching is a process of inquiry intended to deepen self-awareness and personalize strategies to integrate mindfulness into areas of life and performance. Even though only a few participants are coached after each activity, everyone can benefit from these interactions.

**Operationalized Mindfulness Practices** Sometimes referred to as “Informal Mindfulness Practices”, these are short, on the spot practices intended to integrate mindfulness into everyday life and performance activities. These are offered as home practices at the end of each section.





## PRIMING FOR FLOW

Flow is the highly sought after state of optimal performance that has a high likelihood of producing extremely effective results while being equally intrinsically rewarding. In this section you'll gain a better understanding of the nature of thoughts and mind wandering and how mindfulness can anchor your attention more firmly into the present moment. We'll then connect the dots between how your focused attention and the embodiment of the foundational attitudes of mPEAK can increase your likelihood of "getting in the zone".



# TOPIC: MODES OF MIND

First, we'll highlight the distinction between intentional thoughts, unintentional thoughts and mind wandering. Here we will briefly review the science on mind wandering and the "default mode network" and how it relates to being present, getting out of your own way and priming for flow states.

### **Intentional Thinking**

Intentional thinking is a process of actively directing thoughts toward a productive outcome. This is thinking on purpose at a time when it's appropriate to be thinking with an awareness that you are indeed thinking. High level thinking such as reasoning, discerning, planning, remembering, problem solving and visualizing are important to your career and your life but NOT what we're engaged in during meditation. Meditation is a period of time where you make a disciplined commitment to not intentionally thinking about anything. It's often helpful to remind yourself that there is nothing you need to accomplish or solve during your meditation practice. During the meditation you give yourself permission to simply be. Nothing more. Despite this vow, "unintentional thoughts" will continuously arise, involuntarily.

### **Unintentional Thinking**

Unintentional thinking is the noticing of thoughts that you did not mean or choose to have. In the Awareness of Breath Meditation you will be instructed to focus on the sensations of breath in the body to the exclusion of everything else. The directions are simple, but not easy. Similar to sounds in the environment, thoughts will naturally arise on their own, change and pass away in awareness whether you want them to or not. These thoughts may come in the form of images, an inner voice, and words on a screen, a cloud of information, an intuition or a mental imprint. Your thoughts might be clear or blurry. You may have space between thoughts or they could be bumper to bumper like cars on the freeway. Thoughts may be about your day or even about your meditation. It's quite normal to have thoughts about thoughts. But thoughts could also be completely random. We don't know exactly where thoughts come from and it's not your job to figure any of this out during the meditation. The practice is to simply observe thoughts and let them pass like clouds floating through the big, blue sky.



### **Mind Wandering**

Mind wandering is the experience of being lost or caught up in thoughts. This is thinking when you don't even know that you're thinking. Mind wandering is only seen once you've "awaken" or "come too" on the tail end of what can feel like a trance. By the time the mind wandering is noticed, you're already back in the present moment again. In this moment you may wonder how long you've zoned out and where you even went. But this is not important to figure out. The moment you catch the mind wandering in meditation, you just return your attention to the sensations of breathing once again. You may have to do this more often than you'd prefer. It can be helpful to know that each time you're able to seize the mind wandering and return to the breath, you're strengthening your capacity for presence and decreasing the activity in the area of the brain responsible for mind wandering called the default mode network.

The default mode network which is made up of the Posterior Cingulate Cortex and the Medial Prefrontal Cortex is most commonly shown to be active when a person is not focused on the outside world and the brain is at wakeful rest, such as fantasizing, worrying or ruminating. The default mode network is also active when you're caught up in a "performance story" or when you're thinking about others, remembering the past, and planning for the future -basically, whenever you're not present. Research has revealed that there is a correlation between a more active default mode network with greater levels of anxiety and depression.

Harvard scientists Killingsworth and Gilbert did a study on mind wandering in everyday life. They used "experience sampling method" which in this case was an app that alerted a large sample of participants randomly and prompted them to track their current activity, mood and presence. The conclusion was that 47% of the time our minds are wandering rather than being present to what is happening in the moment. Another conclusion was that "The wandering mind is an unhappy mind". Even when the mind is wandering someplace pleasant, statistically, you're not as happy as being engaged with what you're doing in the moment -even if what you're doing isn't necessarily pleasant.



# JOURNAL:

*Under what conditions does your mind wander the most?*

*What is the cost of mind wandering to your performance?*

*What is the cost of mind wandering to other areas of life?*





## TOPIC: MINDFUL MIND WANDERING

While fantasizing about your next vacation during a big presentation will never be good for performance, Positive Constructive Daydreaming (PCD), a more mindful form of mind wandering can actually help you solve problems, access creativity and focus when you need to. Because of our brains evolutionarily inherited “negativity bias” (more on this in section 7), the mind is more likely to wander someplace nonconstructive. But with mindfulness, you can observe your mind wandering and intentionally shift it away from worry and towards creative problem solving, visualizing and planning. This practice has also been called “Blue Sky Thinking” which is an “open-ended, divergent brainstorming without the constraints of judgment”.

Mindful Mind Wandering is less focused than intentional thinking but still done intentionally - meaning your mind is wandering but you know your mind is wandering and choose to keep tracking it while it wanders. If focused attention is analogous to having your dog on a short leash, mindful mind wandering is having your dog at the park off leash but in eyesight most of the time.

### Informal Practices

**Recovery:** Attention can fatigue so taking a few unstructured mindful mind-wandering breaks can help restore your mind during a long day of focused activity. These sessions don't necessarily yield insight but can leave you feeling refreshed and ready to get back to business. Find a special spot - a bench with a view of nature or under a tree outside your office would be ideal but this will work even in your car. The instructions are easy: give yourself permission to just sit and do nothing. Let your mind zone out and wander wherever it wants but if you notice it getting caught up in something that doesn't feel good, come back to your breathing and repeat.

**Insight:** You can also practice approaching a mindful mind wandering period with a purpose by reflecting on a situation you want clarity around and then choosing to “sit with it” with it until an insight or new perspective arises. This can also be done to process a past event or plan for an upcoming project. During this practice you're not trying to figure anything out or solve a problem in a traditional sense. You're simply stating a topic and opening up with curiosity and non-attachment while applying only a gentle effort to keep the stream of consciousness moving in a constructive direction.



# EXERCISE: SITTING POSTURE USING A CUSHION

Meditation can be done in any posture, with or without the use of props like a meditation cushion, know as a “zafu”. You will have the opportunity to experiment with several meditation postures and choose which one works best for your body.

Here are a few tips on how to work with posture during meditation:



- Sit up with a straight spine but keep a soft front as to embody both alertness and relaxation.
- If you choose a cushion, having your knees slope downward from your hips will create more stability and less tension.
- If you are feeling overwhelm or anxiety, it's ok to lie down when meditating. If you're feeling sleepy or exhausted, it would be best to sit up or even stand.
- The intention is to be still during meditation but this doesn't mean you're not allowed to move. If you need to move, make a mindful choice to do so and then pay attention to the sensations of movement.
- If pain persists while meditating on a cushion, try sitting up against a wall or use a chair.

*What did you notice about each meditation posture you tried on?*

*What impact did posture have on your mind state?*



## EXERCISE: AWARENESS OF BREATH

The intention of this formal mindfulness meditation practice is to deepen your capacity for focused attention and concentration on a single object, the breath. Awareness of Breath (AOB) will cultivate interoceptive awareness of the subtle sensations of breathing but you'll also be invited to count breaths as a way of using a "mental label". Ultimately this practice will establish the breath as an anchor to the present moment, a reset for moments of distraction and a safe refuge during times of distress.

*Where was the breath most easily accessible in the body?*

*What did you notice around the breath counting practice?*

*What was your experience with moments of presence and moments of mind wandering?*



# TOPIC: PRIMING FOR FLOW

Flow, also known as “being in the zone”, is a sought after but elusive mental state of high performance characterized by full immersion in a feeling of energized focus and full involvement and enjoyment in the process of the activity. In essence, flow is a complete absorption in what one does, and a results in a temporary loss in one’s sense of self, space and time. Flow can also be experienced in its less intense “micro-flow” moments during ordinary events throughout your week.

Being mindful and being in flow are not the same experiences. Mindfulness is a “primer” for flow and increases your likelihood of entering the state. There is a Zen saying, “Enlightenment is an accident and meditation makes you accident prone.” With the simple intention, you can choose to be mindful right now but you cannot choose to be in flow. There is no “on switch” for flow and it’s often said that the more you try to get it, the more obscure it becomes. Ironically, too much effort is a hindrance to flow. It’s like trying to fall asleep—you can prime yourself for sleep by playing some music and turning the lights down, but if you keep trying to nod off, it just won’t happen. At some point, you have to trust and let go.



# JOURNAL: FINDING YOUR RECIPE FOR FLOW

Write about three different experiences you've had of "being in the zone".

- For each, write about what the experience was like both your mind and body.
- What were the internal and external conditions that lead to flow? (Internal: focused, motivated, passionate, confident etc.) (External: risky, fun, engaging, outdoors etc.)
- Circle the themes or consistent conditions that influenced your ability to achieve the flow state.

Experience 1

Experience 2

Experience 3



# TOPIC: DELIBERATE VS. SPONTANEOUS MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is often thought of as “responding rather than reacting” in the moment of difficulty. It’s frequently synonymous with the ability to pause and consider the multiple factors from the context of the situation to your internal thoughts and feelings. The practice is then to choose the appropriate response given your new and expanded awareness. This expression of mindfulness is useful when in the middle of a tricky conversation, making a difficult choice, feeling a painful emotion or managing an addictive habit. But these elongated, deliberate pauses won’t be as effective while dribbling a basketball around defenders or taking enemy fire on the battlefield.

If there is a high degree of proficiency in what you’re engaged with, mindfulness can also be used to trust your well-trained, automatic responses rather than needing to pause and over think them. Depending on the circumstances, mindfulness can be used to enhance your access to either “deliberate” or “spontaneous” responses. To understand their difference, imagine a conversation where you’re giving difficult feedback to an employee compared to a long overdue conversation with a good friend over coffee. One is slow and careful and the other is free and playful. Deliberate mindfulness takes a cautious weighing of factors before choosing. Spontaneous mindfulness is about dropping the inner editor and trusting whatever comes out of your mouth! The same event may even offer opportunities to practice both. A boxer will let go and flow with a spontaneous flurry of punch combinations during the round but during the one minute rest between rounds can mindfully pause, assess and re-center.



## EXERCISE: WORD ASSOCIATION GAME

This is an Improv Comedy word association exercise that serves as a great tool for making mental connections and swiftly bridging one idea to the next. This practice will allow you to observe your ability to think quickly and trust the first thing that pops in your head. The key here is to remain focused and open so you can spontaneously respond before you have time to over-think and get stuck in your head. When you're able to do this, the feeling of playfulness and flow is easily accessible. In contrast, you might also observe how mind wandering, perfectionism, distraction and the fear of judgment can slow you down and stop you from feeling flow.



## Priming For Flow

### JOURNAL:

*What observations did you make during this exercise? Did you feel flow?*

*What got in your way of flow?*

*How did you use mindfulness during this exercise?*

*What can this exercise teach you about priming for flow in your own areas of performance?*





## TOPIC: INTERNAL FLOW TRIGGERS

All of the foundational attitudes of mPEAK can be considered a doorway into flow. The first 5 however are the ones that offer the most direct access.

**Open:** This is the foundational attitude of opening up to insights, inspiration and creativity from beyond the intellect. When you're in flow, rather than exerting effort to solve a problem with your mind, you're channeling a deeper wisdom that emerges spontaneously when you can get out of your own way and trust the process. "Out of my own way?" The you that is in your way is experienced as the "story" or voice of your inner narrator we explored in module 3. Even if the performance story is positive, listening to this sports announcer in your head calling the shots while you're performing will separate you from the direct experience of what's happening. With openness you can experience your actions and awareness merge, resulting in a better performance that your "narrative self" could have created.

**Courage:** What does it take to be fully present to fear and choose to move forward regardless? Courage. An environment that is novel, risky and complex has been identified as the external conditions most conducive to the flow experience. Imagine how you've felt when you first arrived in a foreign country full of exotic foods, new smells, sounds, a language you can't understand and unpredictable transportation. The risk, novelty and complexity can pull you into the present moment without much effort. Many high performers love the intensity of competition, constant deadlines and demands for innovation --always at their edge. With the foundational attitude of courage you'll be more likely to take risks or venture away from the known into more novel opportunities. Rather than play simple, courage will have you say yes to a higher level of complexity.

**Non-Attachment:** A cyclist who took mPEAK once said that his personal best race occurred while ascending a mountain whose top was enshrouded with clouds. When you can let go of striving for a future outcome and immerse yourself fully in the now, you're increasing your odds of slipping into flow. Flow researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi coined the term, "autotelic personality", or one who does things for their own sake, rather than in order to achieve some later external goal (more on this is section 8). When you let go of getting the bonus, winning the race or retiring by forty-five, you can more fully appreciate and enjoy the process of performing.



## Priming For Flow

**Balanced Effort:** Without mindfulness, a lifestyle of constantly being “on”, stretching your edges and taking big risks can quickly turn from flow to overwhelm. The flow conditions are a delicate balance. Too little risk and complexity and you’re bored and uninspired. Too much and you’re vulnerable to anxiety and burnout.

Another flow condition is when the level of challenge you’re up against is equal to or just a little higher than your level of competence and skill.

Mindfulness builds the capacity to check in and take stock of your internal resources from moment to moment so you can apply the appropriate amount of effort. With this awareness you’ll know when to step on the gas and when you need to pump the breaks. Mindfulness is also bringing awareness to your habits around taking on more and more responsibility and obligation. With this awareness, you may set new boundaries to protect your energy so you have access to the effort and energy you need.

**Focus:** Present moment attention is a main feature of both mindfulness and flow. Focus is a sustained engagement in the present moment with a particular task or on a chosen object for an extended duration of time. This factor over all others is the most strongly correlated with flow in the research. Meditation strengthens your frontal cortex so you can notice the subtle impulse to check your phone, make a snack or multi-task. And with this awareness, you can choose to re-focus again and again away from distraction and toward what you need to do. Any performance event can be a roller coaster of thoughts, emotions, distractions and opportunities. Self-regulation of attention keeps you tuned into the most relevant data and able to let the rest fall away.



# TOPIC: PLAYFULNESS AS A PRIMER FOR FLOW

*We don't stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing.*

-George Bernard Shaw

If there were an additional Foundational Attitude that would be conducive to flow it would be playfulness. Play is intrinsically rewarding. When people engage in play it's done for its own sake, or "for the fun of the game" rather than for an outcome such as money, pride or fame. This attitude is often lost when "serious professionals" start making a living for what was once a passion. But playfulness, like all foundational attitudes of the mindful performer can be regained through intentional practice.

"Playfulness can be defined as an internal predisposition characterized by creativity, curiosity, pleasure, sense of humor, and spontaneity. This attitude extends to all life situations and modifies how adults perceive, evaluate, and approach situations. Playfulness enables adults to distance themselves from others, from situations, and from conventions to approach situations with an open mind to find original solutions to problems, to confront difficulties, and to accept failure."

Psychologists have identified different categories of playfulness, some being more aligned with peak performance than others. Fooling around may lead to distraction where approaching life as a type of game may offer a lighthearted perspective on serious or boring matters. "Gamifying" is the practice of turning monotonous tasks into something interesting by infusing it with creative rewards, competition and fun.



## JOURNAL: PLAYFULNESS

*What is the role of play at this phase of your life?*

*What are your preconceived notions around being playful?*

*If you were going to experiment with an attitude of playfulness in your area of performance, how would you do it?*



JOURNAL:

## MOUNTAIN VISUALIZATION

*What did your first and second mountain peak represent to you?*

*What is motivating you on this journey?*

*What parts of the path did you most enjoy?*

*How did you work with difficulties or obstacles along the way?*

*What was it like to stand at the top?*

*What other insights about yourself did you get from this exercise, if any?*



# TOPIC: THE SHADOW OF FLOW (CONT)

**Flow can be addictive:** Flow inducing activities like golf or video games can become addictive, so much so that life without them can feel static, boring and meaningless.

**Flow can take priority:** Flow can lead to losing a larger perspective. A workaholic manager may lose himself in flow at work until late at night, forgetting other commitments, self-care, or saying goodnight to the children.

**Flow can be a “gateway drug”:** Flow is exhilarating and releases many of the same chemicals as drugs and alcohol. Known as “adrenaline junkies”, athletes, actors and rock stars (and everyday folks) turn to drugs and risky behavior in attempt to recreate the same intense stimulation in their “normal lives” as they get professionally.

**Addiction to flow enhancing drugs:** Many coders and Silicone Valley CEO’s are known to have addiction to Ritalin, Modafinil and other “Smart Drugs” to help them get into the flow state. While they might be effective, they potentially come at a cost.

**Flow hangover:** Retired CEO’s, off-season athletes and military personnel who are between deployments can feel depressed when they’re unable to experience the flow they did before.

All states of mind are impermanent -moments of flow come and go. With acceptance of this truth and awareness of these risks, the mindful performer can more easily navigate the potential shadows of flow.

## JOURNAL:

*Reflect on how the pursuit of flow in your life may have inadvertently decreased performance and increase suffering?*



# EXERCISE: MICROFLOW CALENDAR

Not all moments of flow need to be gold medal winning performances or deep immersion experiences. A micro flow moment may be and time you feel able to let go effort and trust your competence during an activity. This week, use this form to track your micro-flow moments.

	Describe Your MicroFlow Experience.	What internal conditions contributed to finding flow?	What external conditions contributed to finding flow?	What was the impact on your performance?
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				

