

# Mind Fitness Frontier

## PRESENCE OF MIND

*By Joel & Michelle Levey*



Can you imagine how different your life would be if you understood and mastered your mind?

Have you ever wondered what the true power and potentials of your mind is and how to develop that?

If such mastery and mystery are of interest to you, then the next frontier of your personal and professional development may be mind-fitness training.

*"To know how to wonder and question  
is the first step of the mind  
toward discovery."  
Louis Pasteur*



Quietly in dozens of the world's most respected and advanced laboratories, universities, military academies, sports arenas, and high-tech workplaces a revolution in mind-science research and training is emerging. Inspired by the rapidly expanding body of empirical evidence from breakthroughs in the neuro-sciences, cognitive sciences, and advanced human performance training, there is growing confirmation that the treasury of mind-fitness disciplines can dramatically improve the workings of our brains, our health, and the quality of our lives, work, and world.

*"Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better in the sphere of our being as humans, and the catastrophe towards which this world is headed - be it ecological, social, demographic or a general breakdown of civilization - will be unavoidable. . . The salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness and in human responsibility."*

*Vaclav Havel, President of Czech Republic  
in his address to the U.S. Congress*

### *Extraordinary Potentials*

These complex and turbulent times stretch us all to increase

our capacity to live and work within an environment of escalating intensity and uncertainty



while maintaining optimum health, well-being, and success, building our change resilience, and deepening our wisdom. Evidence from recent studies in brain research shows that by understanding and refining our minds we enhance the functioning of our brains, our physical health, relationships, and the wisdom we bring to our work in the world.

We have been fortunate to live and work on the "mind fitness frontier" for the past 35 years, studying closely with many of the most respected and revered researchers and teachers of our times, and integrating our insights into our work in medicine, business, sports, education, military, cognitive and contemplative mind-science.

This is the first of a series of articles (initially prepared for Washington Athletic Club) that we are inspired to offer inviting you to join us in this exploration of our highest individual and collective human potentials.

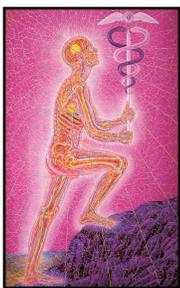
*Joel & Michelle Levey*

## The Mind Fitness Revolution

This mind-fitness revolution couldn't be coming at a better time. Faced with the escalating rates of change, complexity, and intensity of our modern world, each of us is challenged to learn ways to maintain our health, increase our resilience, and stay more deeply committed and connected to what is most essential in our lives. In a single busy day we are deluged by more information, change, and important decisions than our grandparents may have faced in years of their lives. Is it any wonder that so many people feel overwhelmed, unsure of themselves and anxious about their ability to maintain their health, well-being, and success in the future?

In essence, the mind-fitness disciplines help us expand our capacity to embrace this increasing complexity and intensity of our lives with a sense of deeper peace, power, compassion, wisdom, and confidence. They enable us to refine our mental power, develop the coherence and connectivity of our brains, recognize and transform limiting habits, deepen our empathy and compassion, and expand our insight into the dynamic web of interconnections that weaves the fabric of our lives and world.

Mental training and development increases our change resilience and enhances our capacity to rest, relax, sleep, heal, and realize our wholeness. These diverse and powerful disciplines are integral and applicable to every moment and circumstance of our lives—be it working intensely with other people, the demands of competitive sports, facing complex challenges in our life-work, or the quieter moments of deep reflection, analysis, or listening deeply to our loved ones, or to ourselves.



While our physical development may well have its upper limits, it is likely that the capacity for mind development is limitless. Can you imagine the depths of wisdom, peace, power, compassion, emotional intelligence, intuition, and creative potentials that are available to you—and to us all—if we were to apply ourselves to realizing them? Can you imagine how different our world would be if more of us were to take the mind-fitness disciplines to heart? Can you imagine what it will take to expand this mind-fitness revolution in our lives, communities, and world?

### If you look to lead....

"We don't understand the operations of our minds and hence don't operate them very well."

Charles Tart



"The greatest thing, then, in all education, is to make the nervous system our ally, instead of our enemy..."

The greatest revolution in our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives."

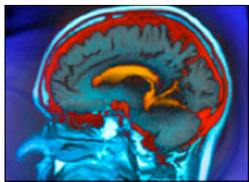
William James



"Here is the very heart and soul of the matter. If you look to lead, invest at least 50% of your time (attention) managing yourself ~ your ethics, character, principle, purpose, motivation, and conduct. Invest at least 20% managing those with authority over you, and 15% managing your peers. Use the remainder to induce those you "work for" to understand and practice the theory... Lead yourself, lead your superiors, lead your peers, and free your people to do the same. All else is trivial."

Dee Hock,  
Founder of VISA Card

## Refining Our Minds, Rewiring Our Brains: Compelling Research



Researchers have recently discovered that the right-to-left activation of the prefrontal lobe areas of the brain offers an indicator of our emotional set point, and a barometer of the moods we are likely to feel day to day. Individuals prone to “distressing emotions”—such as depression or anxiety disorders—show greater activation of the right middle prefrontal area of the brain. This activation is also associated with the “hyper-vigilance” so typical of people under stress.

In contrast, individuals prone toward greater happiness, joy, alertness, enthusiasm, and high energy show greater activation of their left middle prefrontal gyrus—the locus for positive emotions.

In a study published in the *Journal of Psychosomatic Medicine* (65-564-570, 2003), workers in a high-pressure biotech business who complained of feeling highly stressed in their work were taught “mindfulness” – a powerful attention mastery discipline that cultivates the quality of mindful presence in

attending to the ever-changing flow of experience. The results of this mind-fitness training were dramatic!

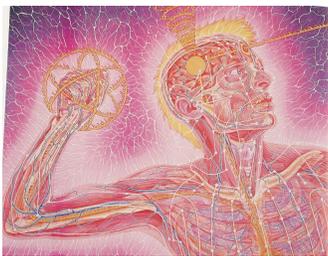
After just 8 weeks of mindfulness practice fMRI scans of the subjects’ brains showed that on average the left-right brain-emotions ratios of the subjects shifted leftward, toward the positive zone. Simultaneously, the workers’ moods improved and they reported feeling more engaged in their work, more energized and less anxious.

The results of this and other studies indicate that the brain’s set point for emotional functioning can shift with mind-fitness training. Brain changes consistent with more effective handling of negative emotions under stress were measurable for at least four months after the program and people were self-motivated to continue their mindfulness practice.

Another vital benefit for the workers was that their mindfulness practice improved the robustness of their immune systems, as gauged by the amount of flu antibodies in their blood after receiving a flu shot. Subjects trained in mindfulness showed significantly less severe symptoms than untrained individuals, and those who showed the greatest positive shifts in brain balance showed the strongest immune resilience.

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## Neuroplasticity: Discipline Improves Brain Function & Performance



A growing body of evidence for the “neuroplasticity” of the brain has demonstrated that the more total hours of practice a champion in a mindbody discipline has performed, the more pronounced are the measurable changes on their brain, mind, body, and performance. Studies of champion performers in a range of abilities—from chess masters and concert violinists to Olympic athletes and adept meditators—demonstrate profound changes in the pertinent muscle fibers and cognitive abilities that set those at the top of a discipline apart from all others.

The more total hours of disciplined practice the champions have done, the more pronounced the changes in suppleness, connectivity, and coherence of their brain function. Similar effects from practice occurs in mind fitness and meditation training which can be viewed from the perspective of cognitive science, as the systematic effort to retrain and master attention, develop greater coherence of intention, engage in more complex thinking, and live with greater ethical and emotional intelligence and discipline.

Each discipline has its own unique signature of effects. You can have confidence that when you apply yourself to mind-fitness training, the structure and functioning of your brain, mind, and body are being enhanced and empowered by your practice.

## Mindful Presence & The Mastery of Attention

The mind-fitness discipline of Mindfulness is essentially “The Practice of Presence.” Mindfulness wakes you up and offers an alternative to living mindlessly “on automatic” and allowing habit energy and reactivity to run your life. Being mindfully present enables you to focus your attention, open your mind, show-up for your life, recognize options, make wiser choices, and gain insight by attending to the ever-changing flow of life experience

To understand the value of mindfulness, pause for a moment and imagine holding in one hand all the moments of your life when you are fully present, *mindful*, and vividly awake to what is going on within and around you. In your other hand, envision holding all the moments of your life where you are *mindlessly* going through the moves, letting habit run your life. Now compare the relative balance between your two hands. When people are honest with themselves, most admit they are only mindful five to ten percent of the time. By extrapolation, this means that if you live to be one hundred years old you will have

only been mindfully present for five or ten years of your whole life. If you have a child that is ten years old, you would have missed as much as nine years of their life.

While such reflections are humbling, taken to heart, this mental simulation may help you appreciate the vital importance of mindfulness and the promise of the mind-fitness disciplines to reclaiming your life from mindless inattention.

“If you continue in the direction you are going  
you will eventually get there.”  
A Chinese proverb

### The Practice of Mindfulness



Look out through your eyes right now and, noticing the words on this page, recognize that you are “seeing.” Feel the contact of the book in your hands, noticing its texture, weight and form, and know you are “touching.” Watching the thoughts floating in your mind, wondering what will come next, know that you are “thinking.” This lucid presence of mind that simply, effortlessly, notices what is true for you in the moment is called “mindfulness.” This dynamic state of mindful attention is a deep, direct awareness of the present moment.

Mindfulness is a presence of mind that we bring alive in our lives one moment at a time, right here and now. It brings clarity to our lives because the moment you realize that you have been mindlessly lost in your thoughts, you are awake again and back at the center of your life. Mindfulness allows you to recognize when you are losing your focus or balance, and helps you to refocus and rebalance yourself. Being your most natural capacity, mindfulness is the most essential mind fitness skill for from it flows all choice, wisdom, and effectiveness.

Mindfully follow the natural flow of your breath with effortless awareness, inhaling... and exhaling...with continuous awareness.

Resting in this natural flow of breath and awareness, blend your mindful presence with a gentle inner smile—which will reduce the tendency to try too hard or be too self-critical. When your attention wanders, simply notice the distraction and return your attention to the flow of your breath.

Then, as perceptions, sensations, thoughts, images, emotions, desires, or intentions arise mindfully notice how they too simply come and flow, without needing to get involved in them.

As a mind-fitness discipline, practice in this way for one to five minutes frequently throughout the day, and gradually build up to one to two sessions of fifteen to twenty minutes each day. Practicing like this, while sitting, walking, even talking, you can integrate mindful presence into every moment and activity of your life.

**Mind Fitness at Work**

"Nothing happens without personal transformation!"  
W. Edwards Deming



"And in all of my experience, I've never seen lasting solutions to problems, lasting happiness and success, that came from the outside in."  
Stephen Covey

"There is an important link between deep change at the personal level and deep change at the organizational level. To make deep personal change is to develop a new paradigm, a new self, one that is more effectively aligned with today's realities... This... journey requires that we leave our comfort zone and step outside our normal roles. In doing so, we learn the paradoxical lesson that we can change the world only by changing ourselves. This is not just a cute abstraction; it is an elusive key to effective performance in all aspects of life."  
Robert Quinn



"A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to project on other people his or her shadow or his or her light... A leader is a person who must take special responsibility for what's going on inside him or her self, inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good.

The problem is that people rise to leadership in our society by a tendency towards extroversion, which means a tendency to ignore what is going on inside themselves. Leaders rise to power in our society by operating very competently and effectively in the external world, sometimes at the cost of internal awareness.

I've looked at some training programs for leaders. I'm discouraged by how often they focus on the development of skills to manipulate the external world rather than the skills necessary to go inward and make the inner journey." Parker Palmer

"Personal mastery...means approaching one's life as a creative work, living life from a creative as opposed to reactive viewpoint... Personal mastery is not something you possess. It is a process. It is a lifelong discipline. People with a high level of personal mastery are acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, their growth areas. Paradoxical? Only for those who do not see that 'the journey is the is the reward.' Peter Senge



**"Sports Mind"**

In sports, Chicago Bulls Coach Phil Jackson— now of the Los Angeles Lakers—and author of Sacred Hoops, has integrated mindfulness as a key element of team training for many years. Olympic and professional athletes like US Gold Medalist speed skater Apolo Ohno, Olympic Gold archer Ed Eliason, RAAM tandem record holders Estelle Gray and Cheryl Merrick, and golf star Tiger Woods have all



relied upon mindfulness as an essential element in their training and success. In our own experience as high performance coaches, we have taught mindfulness and related mind-fitness practices to thousands of people in hundreds of organizations around the globe including World Bank, NASA, Intel, and our a once secret six month intensive Jedi Warrior Program for the U.S. Army Green Beret's.



The changes we have witnessed and measured have consistently affirmed the profoundly practical and long lasting benefits to the wellness, confidence, and performance of individuals, and to their relationships, teams and organizations.

**A Glimpse of the Levey's Life-Work:**



**Dr. Joel & Michelle Levey** have devoted their lives to exploring the frontiers of extraordinary human performance and their pioneering work spans many disciplines. They are co-founders of Seattle-based: [WisdomatWork.com](http://WisdomatWork.com); InnerWork Technologies, Inc.; The International Center for Corporate Culture & Organizational Health; and SportsMind, Inc.. Over the past 30 years their work in the world has lead them to work with leaders and teams in over 200 leading organizations around the globe including: NASA, SRI International, MIT, World Bank, Intel, Microsoft, Hewlett Packard, Qualcomm, Intuit, Phillips-ATL, Abbott Labs, Ciba-Geigy, Rhone-Poulenc Rorer, Johnson & Johnson, Gulf, Shell, Petro Canada, Imperial Oil; Washington Mutual Bank, Group Health Cooperative of Puget

Sound, Swedish Medical Center, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Weyerhaeuser, Menninger Foundation, Boeing, Seattle Center, Miraval Resort, and Five Mountains Foundation Hawai'i.

Joel & Michelle have directed clinical programs (Biofeedback, Stress Management, Pain Management, Psychophysiological Therapy, Hospice Training) for Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound and Children's Medical Center in Seattle, lectured at dozens of Universities and medical schools, served as faculty at Antioch & Bastyr Universities, and the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Ahmedabad India, and as core faculty for the International Center for Organization Design and the World Business Academy. Their work in "complementary & alternative medicine" (CAM) and in "meditation & medicine" has inspired faculty and students at the University of Washington School of Medicine and School of Nursing, Bastyr University, Antioch University, Washburn University, University of Minn. Center for Spirituality & Healing, and American Medical Student Association.

The Leveys have coached a number of Olympic and World Class champions and designed & directed biocybernautic training for the US Army Green Berets' acclaimed "Ultimate Warrior Training Program", aka "Jedi Warrior." This six-month full-time training program was described by West Point leaders as, "The most exquisite orchestration of human technology that we have ever seen." Michael Murphy & George Leonard, founders of the Esalen Institute, praised this work, saying, "Jedi Warrior was the most extensive and advance leadership development program to be offered in modern times." The Institute of Noetic Sciences--for whom they have participated in numerous research colloquiums--honored them as leading contemporary "teachers of transformation" for their work in mind-fitness and extraordinary human performance.

The Leveys' published works have been translated into 9 languages and include: *Living in Balance: A Dynamic Approach for Creating Harmony & Wholeness in a Chaotic World*; *Wisdom at Work*; *A Treasury of Tools for Cultivating Clarity, Kindness, & Resilience*; *A Moment to Relax*; *The Fine Arts of Relaxation, Concentration, and Meditation: Ancient Skills for Modern Minds*; *Simple Meditation & Relaxation*; *Luminous Mind* and *Corporate Culture & Organizational Health: A Critical Analysis of How Workplace Culture Influences Business Success..* They have contributed chapters to many anthologies including: *Learning Organizations*; *Voices on the Threshold of Tomorrow*; *Intuition at Work*; *Community Building in Business*; *Rediscovering the Soul in Business*; and *The New Bottom Line*.

Joel & Michelle are active in interfaith community work with a diversity of leaders from various faith traditions and social justice movements, and are founders of the International Center for Contemplative Inquiry. The Dalai Lama has been an advisor and supporter on a number of the Leveys' projects and has encouraged them in their work and teachings saying, "You are presently engaged in work that has great prospects for bringing the inner sciences and technologies of human development and transformation to a very wide section of people who may not under ordinary circumstances come into contact with these teachings."

The Leveys have a base in Seattle as well as Hawaii where they steward The Kohala Sanctuary, a beautiful conference center and gathering place in the Aloha Spirit and organic permaculture farm in North Kohala on the northern tip of the Island of Hawai'i. They work with organizations and communities around the globe to inspire people to deepen the wisdom, wonder, compassion, resilience, and creativity they bring to life.

**Joel & Michelle Levey**

[Levey@WisdomAtWork.com](mailto:Levey@WisdomAtWork.com)

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

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

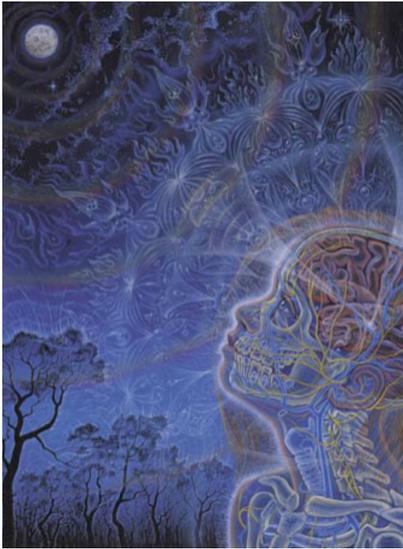
Seattle: 206-632-3551

Hawaii: 808-889-0056

More mind-fitness readings & resources from the Leveys are available at:

[WisdomatWork.com/mindfitness.html](http://WisdomatWork.com/mindfitness.html)

## Mind Fitness Reflections & Connections



"A human being is part of the whole called by us 'universe', a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

Albert Einstein

"Each of us possesses everything that is necessary to explore our deepest nature... No one else in all human kind can do it for us. The responsibility and opportunity for becoming aware of all that we most truly are and sharing it with others is ultimately our own." Roger Walsh

"There's an interesting transition that occurs naturally and spontaneously. We begin to find that, to the degree that there is bravery in ourselves--the willingness to look, to point directly at our own hearts--and to the degree that there is kindness toward ourselves, there is confidence that we can actually forget ourselves and open to the world."

Pema Chodron

"If a living system is suffering from ill health, the remedy is to connect it with more of itself."

Francisco Varella

"When we seek for connection, we restore the world to wholeness. Our seemingly separate lives become meaningful as we discover how truly necessary we are to each other."

Margaret Wheatley



"With an eye made quiet by the power of harmony and the deep power of joy we see into the heart of things."

William Wordsworth