

# Mind Fitness Frontier

## PRESENCE OF MIND

*By Joel & Michelle Levey*

Can you imagine how different your life would be if you understood and had greater mastery of your mind?

Have you ever wondered what the true nature, power and potentials of your mind are and how to develop them?

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 neurosciences, social neurobiology, neuroeconomics, 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, resilience, 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, well-being, 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 decades, 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, higher education, military, cognitive and contemplative science arena.

We invite you to join us in this exploration of our highest individual and collective human potentials.

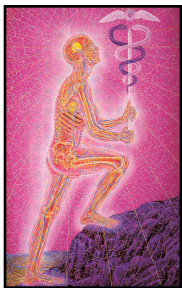
*Joel & Michelle Levey  
WisdomAtWork.com*

## 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

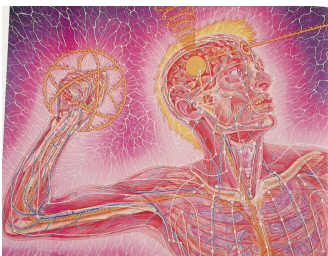
attending to the ever-changing flow of experience. The results of this mind-fitness training were dramatic!

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.

## 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. With practice you will come to realize that you can integrate mindful presence into every moment and activity of your life.

## Mind Fitness: Seven Essential Principles & Practices

### CLARITY OF INTENTION ~ LIVING, WORKING, & TRAINING “ON PURPOSE”

Clarifying your values, priorities, motivations, and intentions enables you to make wiser choices and to discover new pathways of freedom in your life. With increasing clarity of intention you will learn to live and work more “on purpose”:

- At the beginning of each day pause to clarify your intention and highest purpose.
- Clarify your intention at the beginning of each training session or new activity.
- Reflect on insights and lessons learned at the end of the session and the end of each day.
- Remember to integrate these practices of reflection & clarifying intent into your daily life-work & relationships.



### FOCUS & FLOW ~ CULTIVATING CONCENTRATION

Developing a greater sense of mental focus and flow will enable you to increase the mental clarity and stability you bring to your life-work. One simple practice is to synchronize your breath with simple phrases or word, such as: Focus....Flow... or Here... Now... or Receiving.... Radiating....

When your mind wanders, simply bring it back to the phrase you selected and re-focus your attention.

### EXECUTIVE PRESENCE ~ MINDFULNESS & THE MASTERY OF ATTENTION

The discipline of Mindfulness is “The Practice of Executive Presence.” Mindfulness wakes you up to your life and offers an alternative to living mindlessly and allowing habit energy and reactivity to run your life. Being mindfully present enables you to wake up and be truly present to what is really going on in your inner and outer worlds. This awareness awakens insight that opens new degrees of freedom, health, and performance in your life. Ground your mindfulness in the ever-changing flow of your breath, and in the flow of sensations and movements in your body. Building on this foundation, expand your sphere of mindful presence to include:

- Mindfulness of perceptions ~ attending to the flow of physical sensations, sights, sounds, etc.
- Mindfulness of emotions as they come and go...
- Mindfulness of the flow of thoughts and mental images...
- Mindfulness of “wants” or “desires” as they arise, abide, and pass through your mind...
- Mindfulness of intentions ~ the “about to” moments in your life...
- Mindfulness in action and in interaction/dialogue

## **DYNAMIC BALANCE & RESILIENCE: A “CHAORDIC WAY OF LIFE”**

Optimal health, performance, creativity, and resilience are found in the “chaordic zone” of dynamic balance where order and chaos meet. With this in mind, deepen the discipline of mindfully noticing which states of mind, behaviors, choices in foods/drinks, and life-patterns move you toward dynamic balance, and which ones move you away from dynamic balance in your life-work and relationships. Learning to live more in dynamic balance allows you to discover peace in the midst of turbulence, clarity in the midst of confusion, and freedom within constraints.

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## **DEEP REFLECTION ~ SOURCING WISDOM TO GUIDE YOUR LIFE-WORK**

As you become more present to the realities of your life, you will inevitably encounter a myriad of life challenges/opportunities. Make the mind-time to reflect deeply upon these circumstances, to apply your reasoning and source your intuitive wisdom for understanding the ripples of effect that you set in motion with every choice you make in your life, and the countless impacts that your choices make on your life and the lives of others.

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## **DEDICATION ~ CONTINUITY IS THE KEY**

True mastery of any discipline comes from repetition and daily practice. Dedication is staying true to your intentions over time, and discipline is the set of actions, behaviors, and personal practices that you cultivate over time to achieve that mastery. Research in neuroplasticity demonstrates that “what gets fired gets wired.” The neural circuits that you “fire” through your mental and physical activity will, over repeated activations, actually re-wire your nervous system in order to make those behaviors and patterns of attention more powerful and effective in your life-work.

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## **CREATIVE ALTRUISM**

A very highly leveraged mind fitness training strategy is to engage in these disciplines with the intention to be more effective in helping and inspiring others. When you re-remember that your Mind Fitness discipline and training is not just a selfish pursuit, your practice becomes a profound and inspiring developmental process that enables you to be of greater inspiration, help, support, and service to others. As you develop your capacity to understand more deeply and respond more effectively and compassionately to the complex circumstances of your life, work, and relationships, the choices you make and the actions you take will be more beneficial for yourself and for all whose lives you touch along the way.

## 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; The International Institute for Mindfulness, Meditation, and MindBody Medicine, and SportsMind, Inc.. Their far reaching work in the world has lead them to work with leaders and teams in over 200 leading organizations around the globe including: Google, NASA, World Bank, British Parliament, Intel, Microsoft, Clinton Global Initiative, Hewlett Packard, Honeywell, Qualcomm, Intuit, MIT, M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Philips, Abbott Labs, AT&T, The Pentagon, Surgeon General's Office, West Point Military Academy, U.S. Federal Court, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Weyerhaeuser, KPMG, and Boeing.

Joel & Michelle serve as clinical faculty at the University of Minnesota Medical School and at Bastyr University, 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 graduate faculty at Antioch University, Mahidol University (Thailand), the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Ahmedabad India, and 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 Texas Medical School, 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 Special Forces 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: *Wisdom at Work; A Treasury of Tools for Cultivating Clarity, Kindness, & Resilience*; [\*Living in Balance: A Mindful Guide for Thriving in a Complex World\*](#); *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: *The New Bottom Line*, *Learning Organizations*; *Voices on the Threshold of Tomorrow*; *Intuition at Work*; *Community Building in Business*; and *Rediscovering the Soul in Business*.

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 learning center 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. More info at: <http://WisdomAtWork.com>