



In The Spotlight

By Debbie L. Sklar

Take The Next Step: Mindfulness in Action

Mindfulness, the ability to live in the moment to find peace and harmony in life, is being practiced everywhere — in homes and in businesses throughout the world — yet a next step is needed to make a real impact on how we live our lives, says Dr. Noelle Nelson, author of the new book *Happy Healthy...Dead: Why What You Think You Know About Aging Is Wrong and How To Get It Right* (MindLab Publishing).

“You know how wonderful you feel being mindful, living in the present moment— like actually tasting your food rather than inhaling it? It brings you greater peace and enjoyment, not to mention the terrific perks in terms of cardiovascular health and overall well-being,” Nelson says. “But then, life hits you, with all its messy, raw and often irritating and annoying realities. You’re quickly back to square one.”

Nelson suggests that we can reap the benefits of mindfulness as we go about our daily routines even as life consistently throws us curve balls. “We just have to become a ‘go-the-extra-miler’ or GEM,” Nelson says. “When you’re a GEM, you apply mindfulness to your actions throughout the day with intention and attention.”



Dr. Noelle Nelson

“It’s easy to be mindful, present and generous of intent, in the privacy of your thoughts,” Nelson says. “It’s a whole other ball game to do it in the testing ground of reality. Yet isn’t that where true enlightenment happens? It’s when you unexpectedly find yourself behaving as your best self in challenging circumstances.”

As an example, Nelson says she was at a busy restaurant with friends one evening when she couldn’t help noticing that the entire wait staff actually seemed to be enjoying their work and were invested in their customers having a good experience. “They took the time in a very hectic setting to ensure we had a great evening,” Nelson says. “I came away from

the restaurant knowing two things—I’d go back there again and I wanted to be just like them—a GEM.”

Her night out showed her, in real terms, how mindfulness in action makes an impact. “It takes no more time to seat a patron with a smile as without one,” Nelson says. “It takes no more time to offer a glass of water with a smile as without. It takes but a nanosecond for a server to stop by a table and ask, with a smile, if all is well. But it does take a clear and specific intention, in this case wanting guests to have a positive experience of their evening, and give attention to what might contribute to that experience. That’s going the extra mile.”

While the benefits to others are obvious, the benefits to the giver are far greater. “Mindfulness in action raises your self-esteem as you express your best self. It puts you on a more optimistic track,” Nelson says. “All of which support your

physical, emotional and mental health and happiness. In fact, just taking the moment to smile can make a big difference to your physical well being.”

Here is more about Dr. Noelle Nelson

Q: Why did you write this book?

A: It all started with an encounter with a young man on an airplane. It was obvious that his opinion was that anyone older than him was ignorant, uninformed and not worth his time. It occurred to me that as a society we are much like that young man. We think of older adults as being uninformed, slow, in poor health and having a host of all sorts of negative attributes. I was sure that this way of thinking was not correct. I began to do some investigating and research and I found study after study that debunked the aging myth.

Q: Who is the audience? Is it just for those who qualify for senior citizen discounts?

A: I believe longevity is a young person’s game. The sooner we realize how we think and feel about ourselves and the world, the sooner we can set the tone for how we live our life when we’re older. The more we find appreciation in life, the healthier our immune system, cardio vascular system and brain becomes.

Q: As you researched the lives of happy healthy folks in their 80s, 90s and beyond, what are the four qualities that you found matter most to achieving a long and happy life?

A: Appreciation is number one. Living an appreciative life means you value that which has positive meaning for you in your life. It’s the one trait you can actively undertake to achieve. You choose to appreciate. It doesn’t come by accident. Appreciation then kicks starts gratitude, which leads to happiness. And you can’t help but being optimistic if you’re happy. These four traits are what repeatedly and significantly show up in research as the keys to a long happy healthy life.

Q: Why is appreciation so important?

A: You can’t be truly happy without appreciation. Thankfully, you can take it upon yourself to deliberately value and appreciate what brings joy in your life. You don’t have to wait for something good to happen to you — you can choose to deliberately value the beauty of a sunrise, the smile of a child, the taste of your morning coffee. Appreciation for the ordinary experiences of life is the single most common trait in centenarians in all countries and in all cultures — not diet, not lifestyle. Appreciation is

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