

Being vs. Doing

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NMAIMH competencies addressed:

Reflection

- Contemplation
 - Self-awareness
 - Professional/personal development
 - Emotional response
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Many years ago I attended a workshop at the Kiva Auditorium in Albuquerque conducted by John Bradshaw. He was the counselor and author who had a PBS series titled *BRADSHAW ON; THE FAMILY* and who introduced many of us to the concept of co-dependency. It is said that we often walk away with maybe one or two key concepts when we participate in a workshop or training. One thing I do remember John Bradshaw saying that has stuck with me to this day, is that in our present day society “we are not human *beings*, we are human *doings*.” So much of who we are and how we spend our time involves *doing*. In our fast-paced society we rarely stop. (*John Bradshaw, 2020*)

The idea of “just being” seems foreign to us. Even in our downtime we are usually *doing* something like reading, watching TV, or interacting on social media. In our culture doing nothing is associated with being a loafer, being lazy, or being, shall I dare to say it, “unproductive.” Although we have probably influenced a good portion of the Globe with our aversion to stopping, there are still some cultures that value, and even have a name for, time when they do not do anything. The Dutch word for this is *Niksen*. “Niksen is the Dutch term for carving out time to do absolutely nothing every so often.” And part of this nothing is to actively shut off your thoughts and worries. It is about just experiencing the world in the moment, without criticizing oneself for doing so. (*Wong, 2019*)

In our work as home visitors and supervisors we support mindfulness practices that encourage us to pause (“do nothing”) and turn off our thoughts as a way to become centered, and as a form of ongoing self-care. These practices often involve clearing our minds and either focusing on breathing or connecting to our senses. In his book *Neuro Dharma*, author and psychologist Rick Hanson talks about two areas of the brain: one focuses on “doing” and the other focuses on “being.” The Midline Cortical Networks is the “doing” part of the brain which includes our experience of imagining the future or ruminating about the past. Hanson talks about the *mental time travel* we engage in within this area of the brain, which can elicit emotions, such as when we imagine a difficult conversation we need to have. (*Hanson, 2020, pp.124-132*)

Now contrast the Midline Cortical Networks with the Lateral Cortical Networks. This area of the brain is associated with “being.” When we practice being in the moment, disengaging from *mental time travel*, and move away from evaluating or judging, our

Lateral Cortical Networks experience things more holistically, and with that comes a quieter mind and an increased experience of tranquility. (Hanson, 2020, pp.124-132)

The good news is that these two areas of the mind are reciprocally inhibitive. That is, when you are in one part of the mind, you cannot also be in the other. So, engaging in activities that bring you into your “being brain” lock out the more stimulating “doing brain.” A focus on sensory experiences is one way to shift into our more tranquil “being brain.” This is one reason that focusing on the sensation of breathing brings you into the moment (and away from mental time travel) and can bring about a sense of calm or centeredness. (Hanson, 2020, pp.124-132) Another mindfulness activity that incorporates the senses, and brings you into your “being brain”, goes like this:

As a way on centering yourself in the present moment, begin by noticing five things that you see in your environment. Next, attend to four things that you can hear. From there, notice three things you can feel. Then two things you can smell, and lastly, one thing you can taste.

Focusing on sensory experiences will shift you into your “being brain” and out of your more active “doing brain.”

There are many other ways we can focus on slowing down and carving out more time to *just be*. But like so many other self-care practices, it’s important to be purposeful in incorporating these efforts throughout our day, monitoring our stress level, and applying appropriate self-care remedies when needed. Including the occasional Nixsen break!

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection...

- What are some mindfulness practices that help you become present and in the moment?
- Under what conditions are you more likely to worry about the future or ruminate about things that happened in the past?
- What changes can you make to help slow down and find opportunities to *just be*?

References/Additional Resources

About John Bradshaw — John Bradshaw. (n.d.). John Bradshaw.

<https://www.johnbradshaw.com/about-john-bradshaw>

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Hanson, R. (2020). *Neurodharma: New science, ancient wisdom, and seven practices of the highest happiness.* Harmony.