Introducing…Your Mind

Meaning-Making Machine, Judge & Time Machine

**Tools:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Poker Chips |
| Sound | Scent |
| Paper | Post-Its |
| Pens | Poster Paper for Wall |

**Instructions:**

**Facilitator:**

* We are about to examine your mind and the role it evolved to play in your life.
* Your mind did not evolve to keep you happy. It evolved to keep you alive.
* Your mind uses a very complicated feedback loop to shape and choose every thought you think, emotion you feel, action you take, and word you speak. Your mind is a beautiful, **meaning-making machine** with many moving parts.
* I could just stand here and explain today’s concepts to you, but your mind might wander off. Instead, I will teach this lesson in the form of an activity that I hope will make the concepts more engaging, real, usable and easy to remember.
* To begin, we will establish some ground rules.
  + If, at any time, you feel the need to step away from the room for whatever kind of self-care you need – please do so quickly and quietly.
  + In the event that you are taking a time-out, please give me the “thumbs up” sign as you leave the room – to signal that you are all right. If you do not give that signal, I will know that you are struggling, and will send someone to check on you if you do not return within 8 minutes.
  + We provided Post-it notes for you to write down any responses/thoughts you would like to share with the group. We will be putting our Post-it notes on the poster papers and then put the posters on the wall – for all to consider.
  + We provided paper for you to write down any responses/thoughts you would rather not share with others, but want to remember for yourself.
  + We will be engaging our senses during this exercise. We will turn the lights down/up; introduce scent, sound and texture - as well as ask you to be aware of your internal sensations.
  + At some points in this exercise, you will be asked to close your eyes in order to fully tune-in to the sensory input under consideration. No one will touch you while your eyes are closed. No Additional people will enter this room during the time when your eyes are closed.
  + If you do not feel comfortable closing your eyes, you will not be penalized. I would offer that instead, you might at least try lowering your lids as much as you feel comfortable, or simply looking down at your lap to minimize the visual input you have to deal with at that time.
  + Please observe your own reactions to this lesson without judgment.
  + Please afford your classmates the same courtesy.
  + Are there any other rules you would like to add, before we begin?
* **Pregame warmup.** 
  + Take a good look at me.
  + Do I remind you of anyone you have ever known before?
  + What about what you think of me, right off the cuff – based on the information you have now. My looks, my clothes, my voice, my posture, whatever you notice.
  + Go ahead and judge me.
  + Do you think you will like me as you continue to get to know me? What kind of person do you anticipate I will be?
  + What will your experiences in working in a training, led by me, be like?
  + What about how you expect to feel about working in a program led by me?
  + Am I a good person/safe, a bad person/danger, or neutral –unknown?
  + What will today be like for you…since I am here? What about the upcoming weeks? Will I be a good trainer? Will I know what I am talking about? The opposite?
  + Make a note of your judgments/thoughts/predictions. Make a note of the emotions you feel because of these judgments, thoughts, and predictions.

**Step 1 – Awareness of Breath**

* + **First, make a note of what is on your mind right now.**
* Please take a deep breath in, through your nose, slowly – while I count to four.
* Hold that breath in while I count to four.
* Now exhale, slowly and completely (empty your lungs, while I count to four.
* Hold your lungs empty while I count to four.
* Repeat 4 times.
* **Take 2 minutes to write down anything you notice about how it felt to breathe this way. Write one thing per post-it. Put the post-its on the poster paper in the center of your table.**
* **Step 2 – Awareness of Environment**
  + Please look around you. Look for and note 5 things you can see.
  + Pay attention to your body. Note 4 things you can feel.
  + Please listen carefully. Note 3 things you can hear.
  + Tune in to your sense of smell. Note 2 things you can smell.
  + Tune into your sense of taste. Note 1 thing you can taste.
* **Step 3 – Focus on Movement vs Stillness**
  + Please take two poker chips from the center of the table and place them on your thighs. You will be leaving them there until I ask you to remove them. Please do your best not to let them fall.
  + Please take two additional poker chips from the basket and hold one in each palm – hands open, palms up. You will be leaving them there until I ask you to remove them. Please do your best not to let them fall.
  + Notice the way your legs, arms, hands, and back feel, while trying to stay as still as possible. Is this easy? Difficult? Do you notice any tension in your muscles? Which ones? Is it easier to keep the chips in your hands balanced or the ones on your legs? Now that you cannot move, do you notice a stronger urge to move? What about the sensation known as itch? Do you notice an itch anywhere now that you can’t scratch?
  + It is okay to put the chips back now.
  + Make some notes about that experience.
* **Step 4 – Focus on your Internal and External Environment**
  + Time to close our eyes. Let us dim the lights.
  + Please gently close your eyes, as far as you are willing/able. If you are not willing/able to close them at all, please look down at your lap, to minimize visual distractions.
  + First, please tune into your body. I would like for you to scan your body, beginning at the top of your head. See if you can notice any (pain, pressure, discomfort, itching, numbness, tingling… in your head? Scan lower – pay attention to your neck and shoulders. Now your back and ribs. Now your stomach/abdomen.
  + Now focus outside your body. Can you notice the: Temperature of the room? Sounds around you? Scents in the air?
  + Back inside. What sensations are you able to pick up in your hips, backside, thighs, calves, feet?
  + Back outside. Notice the feeling of the chair against your body. The table against your hands/arms. The floor against your feet. Push your feet down into the floor. Feel the pressure.
  + Make notes of the experience.
* **Step 5 – Return to baseline.** 
  + Let’s box breath again 2 times. Ready? Inhale 4, hold 4, exhale 4, hold 4.
  + Roll your head. Clockwise. Counterclockwise. Again.
  + Lights up.
  + Make a note of what is on your mind right now.
  + Welcome to the moment!
* **Step 6 - Debrief** 
  + How do you feel right now?
  + What was that experience like for you?
  + Put your poster papers on the wall.
* Right now, you should be fully grounded in this moment – in this room. Mindfulness is about paying attention, on purpose, in this moment, to the information coming to you through your senses (outside of you), your body (inside of you) and your mind. Mindfulness is the practice of maintaining awareness of this information – nonjudgmentally.
* We spend too much time using our minds to time travel. We travel to the past, putting our attention on what went wrong/what could have been/what should have been/what should or shouldn’t have happened.
* We remember who wronged us, how we failed, and what has hurt.
* Spending time here, reviewing these memories - serves an important purpose – learning from experience. We need to learn what happened that hurt and how it happened so that we can avoid it happening again. – That is survival.
* We also need to be careful of the meaning we assign to these failures and hurts – evaluating them and ourselves nonjudgmentally – so that we can recall an accurate lesson/rule/strategy for moving forward. (Barbeque mishap example)
* Continuing to replay these memories after learning is… futile. It creates suffering.
* This is a recipe for ***depression***.
* We also tend to time-travel to the future, putting our attention on all the things that **might** go wrong/ what we **might** lose/ who **might** hurt us/ how we **might** fail. Doing this serves a purpose. Predicting what **might** go wrong allows us to **plan** for how to **avoid** that pain.
* Once we have a plan, continuing to visit the future and imagine these things happening is futile. It creates suffering. This is a recipe for ***anxiety.***
* The fact is that the past is over. We cannot go back and change it. We can only learn from it and make adjustments to how we respond to life NOW – so we don’t repeat those pain points.
* Rumination and Worry *feel like* action. We feel like we are doing something about a problem, when we actually are not. Fear/anxiety are adaptive, though uncomfortable, emotions. They ask us to deal with/avoid a stimulus. Worry is neither. Worry is thinking without doing. “What if…?” “That means I would be….” Type of thinking does not make a plan.
* The fact is that the future is not here yet. We cannot skip ahead to the future by worrying about it. We can only consider our options, any threats (based on the information we have now) and make plans for how to avoid problems. Once we do that, we can adjust our behaviors and choices NOW – in this moment – so that our paths lead us to better outcomes.
* NOW, this moment, is all we actually have. Focusing fully in the present moment allows us to notice information and opportunities available now that – if we take full advantage of them – can help us to achieve the goals we desire and avoid repetition of past errors.
* **Break – time to get up, move around, look at other groups’ posters, chat with each other, get refreshments, and use the loo. See you in 10 minutes.**