

Waking up I smile

a brand new day is before me...

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Integrating Head & Heart Part I

Categories : [General](#)

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Date : April 4, 2012



I was asked to write an extended article about the [Wake Up](#) tour for the [Mindfulness Bell](#) magazine...what began as a simple reflection grew into a story of how I found my way from the corporate world to the mindfulness realm. This article was also published in the [Shambhala SunSpace](#)

Integrating Head & Heart Part I

A year ago I was sitting at a cafe in Ann Arbor, enjoying breakfast with a beloved professor from university. When I was in school he taught a course entitled Psychology of Consciousness, which was one my first introductions to mindfulness practice. *Peace Is Every Step* happened to be required reading, and after I finished the course I wondered why this material wasn't taught in every classroom.

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That day, I had gone to the professor seeking guidance. For a few years I had been working internationally in the business world as a management consultant. During this time I developed a skill set for turning high-level strategy into tactical recommendations, and for the cultural sensitivity necessary to bring messages to diverse audiences. While I enjoyed the problem-solving nature of my work, I felt I should be serving a different clientele; it was people, not just corporations, I wanted to help grow. I had been maintaining my spiritual practice and also knew there was a growing interest in mindfulness in major U.S. institutions, especially in the field of education.

I knew I wanted to make a change but I didn't know where to start.

My professor stated that there seemed to be a growing number of educators and researchers interested in creating mindfulness programs. While there was no shortage of enthusiasm, perhaps they could use support in managing the various threads of actually implementing these new models of learning. He asked: *Instead of abandoning my business training, could I somehow integrate head and heart by leveraging my consulting skills to support the realms of mindfulness and education?*

I had no idea. But it seemed like the right question to ask. As with all great teachers, he merely pointed the way...and I took it upon myself to forge ahead into the unknown.

Leap of Faith

A few months later I decided to take a leap of faith by embarking on a six-month leave of absence from my corporate post. I had two stated intentions: 1) immerse myself in mindfulness practice, and 2) learn how I might support its growth in the US. My first stop was a weeklong retreat at Deer Park monastery in California. I figured it would be an opportunity for immersion. Little did I know what else was in store.

On encouragement from a friend, towards the end of the retreat I worked up the courage to ask a monastic if I may be of service. I explained my background and that I could offer my support as a volunteer for the next few months, thinking they may have a side-project that could use some admin help. Much to my surprise, his eyes opened wide: "Ah ha! The universe is aligning!" He told me there were a couple of education initiatives that were searching for support from someone with a business/organizational skill set. Now it was my eyes that opened wide.

Entering the River

The next month, a week before the tour, I arrived at [Blue Cliff monastery](#) in New York. The monastics and I were unsure how I was going to help, but in that not-knowing was a freedom to respond appropriately to whatever situation arose.

A majority of the work had already been completed by the time I arrived, and we were in the final stages of preparation for the tour. Entering any project mid-stream can feel overwhelming; ideally, you are there from the beginning. In most cases, however, you don't have that luxury.

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More importantly, it just isn't necessary. Asking questions, listening deeply, and being patient are all it takes to be able to contribute.

My intention going in was to try and be 'ridiculously helpful'. I began by asking one of the main organizers: "Is there anything you need help with?" When his to-do list was shorter, I went to the other organizers and asked them the same question. Then I began asking a different question: "This looks like it could use help; do you want me to work on it?" Over time, this evolved into: "I went ahead and took care of this. Let me know what you think."

This approach created conditions for me to take on operational items such as supporting the website and managing the email list, as well as strategic areas such as overseeing social media presence and helping to allocate the advertising budget. My responsibilities grew organically, and were nurtured in a supportive and collegiate environment with the backdrop of a serene monastery. Not a bad way to work!

A week later the team at Blue Cliff set out on the road to begin the tour.

[Continued in Part II](#)