

## Effectiveness as a Teacher

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*Your effectiveness as a teacher has a direct correlation with the depth of your own personal practice* -Jeremy Hunter

Many years ago I was sitting on a mountain in South Africa. It was a warm summer day in Cape Town and I was soaking in the sun on a perch overlooking the magnificent Camps Bay. I was nearing the end of a consulting project in the region and had been mulling over my next steps of a while. I resolved that day I was going to decide what I wanted to do next with my life. No small resolution, but it was time.

I asked myself three questions: "What do I enjoy doing? What am I good at? What makes a difference in the world?" In response to all three questions one word emerged: "teaching". I received fulfillment from helping others learn, perceived I was pretty good at, and felt a quality teacher could make a tremendous difference. Plus, both my parents were teachers so I had some ancestral momentum.

Check.

## Waking up I smile

a brand new day is before me...

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Okay, so what would I teach? The most meaningful thing I had been taught was mindfulness: learning how to be more fully awake to the experience of life as it was unfolding moment by moment.

Decision made; I would teach mindfulness.

Now the question was "Where do I begin?"

A few months after my cliff-side epiphany I found myself having lunch in Los Angeles with Jeremy Hunter, a meditation teacher and college professor who lived for 17 years with a potentially terminal illness and lives to tell the tale. In the course of our conversation, I asked him about how one goes about teaching mindfulness, and he dropped this:

*Your effectiveness as a teacher has a direct correlation with the depth of your own personal practice.*

It went off like a bomb; the impact resonated and my future direction became clear: The way out was to go in.

Soon-after that conversation I found myself on a [Mindfulness Tour of universities](#) and then at [Plum Village](#) Monastery for the winter, the home of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. I was taking a leave of absence from my career as a corporate consultant, and at the end of the winter was faced with a decision: go back to management consulting or resign to face the great unknown. I recalled Jeremy's transmission and knew that if I truly wanted to teach I needed to keep training.

I had entered the monastery with the attitude that I was there to build bridges, and while that was (and still is) a noble aspiration, I realized that first there was some necessary foundational work to engage with...suffering that had been unattended to amidst the initial rush of wanting to save the world. Jon Kabat-Zinn gets at this by recommending that for the first five years that you meditate to not really tell anybody; every time you want to talk about your meditation just sit and meditate. Otherwise before long you'll be telling everyone about how great this whole meditation thing is, and all your energy will start going into PR. Before you know it you'll be too busy to meditate.

A few months residing at a practice center was enough to show me I needed at least three years of concentrated practice before even considering branching out to offer practice to others.

So I resolved to spend the next phase of my life residing at mindfulness practice centers, which, in practical terms, meant explaining to my parents why I was giving up a prestigious career to volunteer at some monastery in the woods. Fortunately they understood...kind of.

Now three years later, as I venture into the waters of facilitating and teaching, I continue coming back to this transmission whenever I am considering my readiness to teach. As a teacher I aim to have full integrity, which to me means only teaching from my own direct experience, and not relying too much on things I've read, heard others say, or just thought about.

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While I know the path is long and that I still have a ways to go, I take refuge in the commitment I've made to live each day as if it really mattered, as if the quality of my life depended on it...because, in reality, it does.