



The Mindful School Leader: Practices to Transform Your Leadership and School

By Valerie Brown, Kirsten Olson



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Big results come from small steps.

Written with school leaders in mind, this inspirational yet practical handbook teaches you how to add mindfulness into your day, bit by bit, whether you are sitting in your office or walking down the hall. With mindfulness, you will get better at managing meetings, responding creatively to complex situations, and achieving resilience—you will become a more effective leader and a more positive force for your staff and students. Features include:

- Real-life profiles of mindful school leaders
- Practice exercises to try right away
- Guidance so you know if you are “doing it right”
- Hard-to-find resources, including mindfulness apps

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Editorial Review

Review

"The art of being a mindful leader requires just one thing, and that is cultivating the art of living mindfully. Truly being there for ourselves is the best way to bring positive change to our family, our colleagues, and our students - the future of our planet. I am convinced that happy teachers will change the world. This book offers simple practices for nourishing mindful leaders."

---Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monk, poet, peace activist

"An important support for school leaders, this book is comprehensive, and well thought out. The personal stories within are compelling and encouraging. The Mindful School Leader is a tremendous asset to leaders worldwide to foster greater understanding and compassion within themselves and within schools."

Sharon Salzberg, Co-Founder Insight Meditation Society and Author of *Lovingkindness and Real Happiness?*

"This inspiring book makes a strong case for school leaders to include mindfulness in their personal and professional lives. Based on solid research and enhanced by compelling examples of real people, it shows how school leaders can feel more grounded, connected, clear and focused. Mindfulness makes leaders more effective with relatively little effort, but be advised that the benefits can be contagious, transforming your school from the inside out." (Christopher Germer, Clinical Instructor)

"A 'must-get' book for school leaders looking for help to handle the daunting stress of their work. Brimming with hope and practical advice, this inspiring book combines fascinating portraits of real leaders with down-to-earth mindfulness practices that work. Brown and Olson—longtime practitioners of mindfulness, seasoned coaches and wise observers of the education scene—offer balm for the soul of school leaders who today are giving their all to realize their dreams." (Jerome T. Murphy, Howe Research Professor of Education & Dean Emeritus)

"Masterfully practical, rich with wisdom and the heartfelt experiences of scholars and leaders in the field, this is the handbook to keep at your side if you wish to become more evolved, insightful, nimble and better prepared, in general, to address the challenges of teaching and leading." (Dianne E Horgan, Associate Director)

"This book is a must read for all school leaders. Given the high stakes testing environment and shrinking budgets of schools today, educators are under more stress than ever. This book will help school leaders find the equanimity needed to lead with calm, clarity, and effectiveness in the midst of the storm."

(Kristin Neff, Associate Professor)

"In The Mindful School Leader, Brown and Olson offer with remarkable clarity and depth a thorough introduction to the practice of meditation, the science behind its benefits, and many firsthand accounts of lives and work situations transformed through this practice. Although this book was written for those in leadership roles in education, it will be inspiring for anyone interested in understanding their own minds and finding more ease in life and work." (Joseph Goldstein, Co-Founder)

"Leadership of any sort is demanding work, and nowhere more so than in our schools. What do school leaders need if they are to lead well? Technical knowledge and skill, of course. But equally critical to good leadership is a capacity for 'mindfulness' which helps leaders see more clearly what's going on around and within them so they can navigate complex terrain without getting lost. This important book—beautifully written, illustrated with case studies, and full of practical guidance—can help school leaders find their bearings in ways that allow them to serve the urgent needs of teachers, students and the larger society." (Parker J. Palmer, Author of "Healing the Heart of Democracy," "The Courage to Teach," "A Hidden Wholeness" and "Let Your Life Speak")

"Well-researched and beautifully documented, The Mindful School Leader is a wonderful addition to the growing literature on mindfulness practices applied to the many sectors of modern societies. This book is unique in its many vignettes relating the personal stories of education leaders from around the world who talk about their experience with mindfulness. The authors also provide simple meditations that can be used even during busy workdays. This book will appeal to leaders in education and other fields who are interested in mindfulness but may not know where to start or how it can be applied to their lives." (Gaelle Desbordes, Instructor, Harvard Medical School)

"When school leaders are stressed, their tensions radiate to their staff. When teachers are stressed, their students reap the turbulent ripples. When students' brains are stressed, optimal learning is unlikely. This book offers inspirational and practical advice to school leaders for calming their waters and spawning ripples of clarity and serenity throughout the school pond." (Jay McTighe, Co-author, The Understanding by Design® series)

"An important support for school leaders, this book is comprehensive, and well thought out. The personal stories within are compelling and encouraging. The Mindful School Leader is a tremendous asset to leaders worldwide to foster greater understanding and compassion within themselves and within schools." (Sharon Salzberg, Co-Founder Insight Meditation Society)

"This is a book with deep wisdom on every page. While it draws its examples and targets its practical recommendations to educators, there is so much here of benefit to people in all manner of pursuits, pedagogical or otherwise. For me, this profoundly necessary book serves as a guide to being human in a world that seems determined to sap the humanity from us. And imagine the impact on our future that a more present and aware population of educators will make. Pay attention to this book, and it will teach you how to truly pay attention." (Steve Heller, Program Director, Leadership Coaching Certificate Program Georgetown University Institute for Transformational Leadership)

"How can K-12 schools possibly thrive today without wholehearted leadership? With The Mindful School Leader, Brown and Olson offer a sourcebook for bringing the age-old wisdom of mindfulness to current school leaders with compelling stories of people at work, current research, and simple, specific practices to apply. This book delivers an essential resource to the courageous school leader." (Terry Chadsey, Executive Director, Center for Courage & Renewal)

"The art of being a mindful leader requires just one thing, and that is cultivating the art of living mindfully. Truly being there for ourselves is the best way to bring positive change to our family, our colleagues, and our students - the future of our planet. I am convinced that happy teachers will change the world. This book offers simple practices for nourishing mindful leaders." (Thich Nhat Hanh, Monk, Poet, Peace Activist)

"Leaders looking to reach higher or who feel like they are drowning amidst conflicting responsibilities often feel like they have no time to grab a ladder or a lifeline, even though they know those tools would help them achieve their goals. This book is both ladder and lifeline, and I would encourage all leaders to take the time to reach for it."

(James E. Ryan, Dean of the Faculty of Education, Charles William Eliot Professor)

"Finally, after serving for fourteen years as a school leader and reading everything I could find, this is the book that I've been searching for. By deftly weaving together mindfulness theory, poignant personal portraits, and imminently practical advice regarding specific methods, the authors provide the antidote to the frenetic and oppressive toxins of contemporary education; they remind us that we should stop 'Racing to the Top' and take the time instead to plumb the depths of our own hearts and souls. This is a book that will join a select few on my shelf, as one I know I will return to again and again." (Paul Freedman, Founding Director)

"Fireflies, cursing, conflict, and clarity - The Mindful School Leader stitches honest stories from everyday school leaders with practical guides and the most up to date research on mindfulness. I saw much of my own struggles and learning in its pages, and I suspect many educational leader will find resonance and helpful guidance for the ongoing challenges of growing our own souls and skills."

(Scott Nine, former Director of the Institute for Democratic Education in America)

"It's hard to imagine school leaders surviving (or thriving!) in today's often stressful teaching and learning environment without a process of regular self-reflection and other mindfulness practices. The Mindful School Leader offers an important set of practices and exercises that should be added to your personal/professional toolbox immediately, used regularly and shared with colleagues and friends."

(S. Kwesi Rollins, Director of Leadership Programs)

"Leaders and changemakers actively transforming the educational system to reflect the values of justice and equity frequently suffer from frustration, a sense of overwhelm, and burnout. These leaders need practical ideas and stories that nurture the self-compassion and mindfulness that can help them, their colleagues, and their students work in community to meet the challenges of education today. In this book, Kirsten Olson and Valerie Brown have provided just that."

(Dana Bennis, Co-Founder and Chief Learning Officer)

"In June of 2013, as I was leaving Baltimore City Public Schools, I wrote a letter to all students in which I paraphrased Tolstoy's beautiful parable, 'The Three Questions:' Now was the most important time, because it was the only time when we have power. The person with you was the most important person, because you didn't know if you would ever have the chance to be true to that person. And the most important thing was to do good in the moment, because that was our fundamental purpose in life. This immensely wonderful book, full of practical lessons and next steps, as well as of stories by practitioners in the field, kept reminding me of the lessons in that parable, and why I had chosen them as my final words to my students – leadership, like all life, demands mindfulness, not only for the sake of ourselves as individuals, but in order to be true to the purpose of making life better for those we work with and those we lead. I recommend it enthusiastically for those seeking to lead in our increasingly difficult school and community settings." (Andres A. Alonso, former Superintendent of Baltimore City Public Schools and Deputy Chancellor of New York City Public Schools, Currently Professor of Practice, Harvard Graduate School of Education)

"Courageous, visionary, caring leadership is crucial to building and sustaining positive learning environments in schools. Such leaders recognize that to promote optimal social-emotional and academic learning, collaboration is essential, and ongoing. Given the unrelenting, complex demands of our education

system, The Mindful School Leader is an indispensable resource for all who exercise leadership in schools. From school leaders with formal authority (e.g. principals) to pre-service teachers, this book presents compelling evidence, and specific practices (e.g. Mindfulness Practice Aids) that can help all educators to both develop resilience and cultivate optimal learning in schools."

(Deborah Donahue-Keegan, Co-Founder and Lead Organizer, Massachusetts Consortium for Social-Emotional learning in Teacher Education and Lecturer, Tufts University)

"Well-researched, lively, scientific, and heart-full, this book will not only help, but will truly inspire school leaders feeling besieged by overwhelming numbers of priorities to respond mindfully, being the best they can be for themselves and others. This book offers leaders the chance to re-find themselves by learning and practicing mindfulness, in the midst of the always-plenty demands on their time and their lives. Being a compelling leader of any school requires mindfulness, and this book makes the case for that in genuine, hopeful, pragmatic ways. Each day is new...you can start right now!"

(Chris Wahl, Founder of the Georgetown Leadership Coaching program and Principal of the Miro Group)

"The Mindful School Leader is a compelling invitation to school leaders everywhere to invest themselves in the practice of mindfulness. The many demands vying for the time and energy of educational leaders can often cause disconnects between the individual and the inner self, with family and with colleagues. This book brings attention to these issues and offers a roadmap to taking personal control of a busy life. It offers strategies and practices for educators to regain control of their time and relationships."

(Bill Oldread and Dick Krajczar, Directors)

"In the test, test, test world of education everyone needs a pause to rejuvenate, reenergize and raise creativity. Brown and Olson have written a book that will inspire school leaders and leaders in every walk of life to seek mindfulness for the sake of their life and those they lead. The beauty of this book is the inclusion of mindful practices that help leaders build the muscle necessary to embody mindful leadership. We can't think our way to better leadership, we must practice!"

(Roselyn Kay, Cohort Co-Director, Georgetown Leadership Coaching Program)

"Not only does the typical school leader ricochet from one issue to the next, many administrators also carry a harness of skepticism toward the untried. In The Mindful School Leader: Practices To Transform Your Life and School, Brown and Olson offer practical, useful steps for both the full converts and the reluctant mindfulness neophytes whether they are based in a national or an international school environment. Even for those only willing or able to spare minutes a day, simple and meaningful ideas are offered to reduce the stress that can engulf school life."

(Linda M. Duevel, President)

"In school environments where thick tension and palpable stress levels are all too common thanks to the pressures of high-stakes accountability, administrators struggle daily to navigate challenging terrain. This practical and hope-filled book by Kirsten Olson and Valerie Brown guides school leaders on a path toward transforming their practice in meaningful, mindful ways--and, in so doing, transforming their schools. The message here is simple yet powerful: To promote equitable and lasting change in America's classrooms, we have to begin within."

(Gregory Michie, Author of Holler If You Hear Me: The Education of a Teacher and His Students)

"If education is the key to making positive change in the world, then schools must be real communities that educate in every dimension of the human condition for the betterment of self and the world. How can such places exist and succeed without enlightened leaders? This question has never been more critical than today,

when the world exacts such demands of both the institutions we call schools and those who seek to lead them. As the founder and head of a small Montessori school for the past 35 years, I have endeavored to create a school community that meets the deep needs of the individuals we serve so that they can grow and thrive in every aspect of their being in order to contribute to the world in positive and productive ways. Such work is deeply meaningful, but also exacting and often exhausting, as the authors of this insightful book, Valerie Brown and Kristen Olson, know only too well.

I so wish this book had been available when I first began my own journey into this exciting but often daunting territory. As the master of mindfulness Thich Nhat Hanh says in his endorsement of the book, “The art of being a mindful leader requires just one thing, and that is cultivating the art of living mindfully.” This book provides a guide to such a practice whether you are just beginning or have been practicing meditation and mindfulness for years.

Although the book is focused on school leaders and educators, its solid research and beautifully practical exercises, specific meditations, and personal stories from educators around the world will be useful to anyone who seeks to find a more balanced way of being in the world. Friends in particular will easily connect with the meditation exercises and find even deeper ways to expand their own practiced use of silence and inner reflection. The ancient art of mindful living converges seamlessly with the Quaker way and provides another dimension to those seeking a profound and perhaps more disciplined practice.

The authors, themselves practitioners with connections to other well-known leaders in the field and consultants to educators for many years, offer a thoughtful and well-researched rationale for becoming a practitioner of mindfulness in every aspect of being. They take the reader through a series of practical and easy exercises that meet the needs of busy people. From 30-second meditations, to longer and more sustained practices, to practical tips for making the connections and learning to simply be in the moment by “Stopping, Pausing, and Observing,” the authors lay out a practical guide for implementing this way of being that can truly transform lives and institutions.

Although this ancient practice was less well known to those of us in the Western culture, it has more recently become extremely appealing to our own hectic society as we hurry through each day, often at a frenetic pace that causes undue and unhealthy levels of stress. As the authors indicate so wisely, “This practice and the breathing practice are perhaps the most essential building blocks of any mindfulness practice and are so common you can download apps for them into your smart phone to tell you when, throughout the day, to practice them.” Throughout the book many other resources are cited through various websites and downloadable apps that make it all the more accessible.

The authors describe in great detail the science of mindfulness and the ways that leaders of any kind can cultivate contemplative mind states and learn to speak, listen, walk, eat, breathe, and become aware more mindfully. A whole chapter is devoted to mindfulness and emotional intelligence, which outlines the principles and practices that are designed to develop self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, and deep empathy and compassion for self and others. This cultivation can transform leaders’ lives and the institutions they aid in significant ways. There are many inspirational stories and case studies woven throughout the book that offer encouragement and authenticity to anyone who has wanted to begin this work but wondered where and how to begin or how to apply such principles to the rigors of everyday life.

Educators from around the world describe their own transformation and the effect it had on the institutions they served and those with whom they came into contact each and every day. This important book will become a real aid to school leaders everywhere and add significantly to the growing literature on how to apply mindfulness to both our work and personal lives.”

(Claire Salkowski November 2015 Friends Journal)

From the Author

Here are more great reviews:

"This is a book with deep wisdom on every page. While it draws its examples and targets its practical recommendations to educators, there is so much here of benefit to people in all manner of pursuits, pedagogical or otherwise. For me, this profoundly necessary book serves as a guide to being human in a world that seems determined to sap the humanity from us. And imagine the impact on our future that a more present and aware population of educators will make. Pay attention to this book, and it will teach you how to truly pay attention."

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Terry Chadsey, Executive Director, Center for Courage & Renewal

About the Author

Valerie Brown, J.D., M.A., ACC has practiced mindfulness in the Plum Village tradition since 1995 and was ordained in the Tiep Hien Order by Thich Nhat Hanh in 2003. She is a consultant, leadership coach, and Principal of Lead Smart Coaching, LLC, (leadsmartcoaching.com), specializing in leadership and mindfulness training for educators and others. As a lawyer, lobbyist, and mediator, her expertise is in working with educational organizations and non-profits seeking societal transformation and conflict resolution. She blends career paths to bridge disciplines, focusing on mindfulness and leadership. Valerie is passionate about powerful transformation through mindful awareness, and designs and creates environments that promote greater trust, authenticity and integrity among people.

Valerie has completed several national level trainings that support her study, practice and teaching of mindfulness. These include the Center for Courage & Renewal with educator Parker J. Palmer, the Center for Transformational Leadership at Georgetown University, and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society, completing the Practicum in 2007, and the Teacher Development Intensive in 2013. Understanding the body-mind connection, Valerie is a certified Kundalini yoga teacher, completed in 2000, with more than 500 hours of training

She lives in the funky artists village of New Hope, PA about midway between Manhattan and Philadelphia. She believes carousel rides and vanilla ice cream are essential for a free society!

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Anthony Powell:

Book is to be different per grade. Book for children until eventually adult are different content. As you may know that book is very important usually. The book The Mindful School Leader: Practices to Transform Your Leadership and School was making you to know about other understanding and of course you can take more information. It is extremely advantages for you. The book The Mindful School Leader: Practices to Transform Your Leadership and School is not only giving you considerably more new information but also to become your friend when you experience bored. You can spend your spend time to read your book. Try to make relationship with the book The Mindful School Leader: Practices to Transform Your Leadership and School. You never really feel lose out for everything in the event you read some books.

Donna Wood:

Now a day people that Living in the era exactly where everything reachable by connect with the internet and the resources inside it can be true or not demand people to be aware of each info they get. How individuals to be smart in receiving any information nowadays? Of course the answer then is reading a book. Reading a book can help men and women out of this uncertainty Information mainly this The Mindful School Leader: Practices to Transform Your Leadership and School book because book offers you rich facts and knowledge. Of course the data in this book hundred % guarantees there is no doubt in it as you know.

Jim Moffett:

The knowledge that you get from The Mindful School Leader: Practices to Transform Your Leadership and School may be the more deep you excavating the information that hide in the words the more you get thinking about reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to know but The Mindful School Leader: Practices to Transform Your Leadership and School giving you buzz feeling of reading. The author conveys their point in specific way that can be understood by simply anyone who read the item because the author of this reserve is well-known enough. That book also makes your current vocabulary increase well. Therefore it is easy to understand then can go to you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We recommend you for having this particular The Mindful School Leader: Practices to Transform Your Leadership and School instantly.

Frank Monroe:

Information is provisions for individuals to get better life, information currently can get by anyone on everywhere. The information can be a expertise or any news even a concern. What people must be consider any time those information which is inside former life are challenging to be find than now is taking seriously which one would work to believe or which one the actual resource are convinced. If you find the unstable resource then you obtain it as your main information there will be huge disadvantage for you. All those possibilities will not happen within you if you take The Mindful School Leader: Practices to Transform Your Leadership and School as the daily resource information.

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