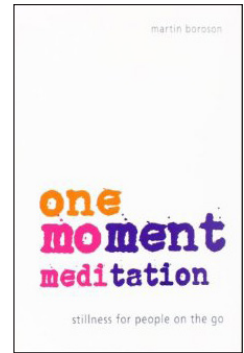


# 10 Reasons to Invest in the Moment

by Mobius Transformational Leadership Faculty Member, Martin Boroson



## Mindfulness is certainly having its day.

Once considered a fringe pursuit, the practice of mindfulness is suddenly at the center of corporate life, valued by highly successful companies for health promotion, workforce training, and leadership development.

Although mindfulness is often positioned as a tool for stress reduction or relaxation, its core principle – being present in the moment – is about something far greater than slowing down or calming down: it is about waking up.

For several years, I have been advocating this dynamic understanding of being present in the moment, focusing on the benefits of this for leaders, as well as developing applications for strategy, innovation, and organizational change.

But to grasp the potential of a moment, we need to start with what a moment really is.

Although we tend to think of a moment as being just a few seconds, and therefore rather negligible, the word “moment” comes from the Latin word meaning “a particle sufficient to tip the scales.” A moment was a very small weight that *literally* shifted the balance.

This means that right there in the definition of *moment* is a sense of dynamic potential – no doubt why the word moment gives us the words *momentous* and *momentum*. This certainly suggests that a *moment* is far from trivial: one moment can change everything.

When you are feeling stressed, of course, being present in the moment can certainly help you calm down and get a grip. This is a great place to start. But being present in the moment can also inspire you creatively. It can energize you. It can be exhilarating.

This is why investing in the moment could be the best investment you will ever make. What I mean by “investing in the moment” is simply this: choosing to see this moment, right now, as a real resource, as something not to be missed. And learning how to manifest its potential.

In this article, I will outline some of the benefits of this investment for leaders. And although these benefits improve with practice, and benefit from training, they are also immediate: they begin the moment you stop skating over the surface of life and take a deep dive into what is here for you, right now.

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“The word ‘moment’ comes from the Latin word meaning ‘a particle sufficient to tip the scales.’”

*Investing in the moment can help you:*

## 1. GET REAL

Being at the top doesn't necessarily mean you know what's going on.

Indeed, as leaders become more successful, they can become isolated and even develop a skewed sense of reality. They can lose touch with what's happening in the real world, and become distanced from people who could give them honest feedback.

Many leaders don't even know what is going on inside themselves. And some leaders don't even know *how* to know.

Consider the typical leadership personality: confident, strong-willed, externally focused, action-oriented, analytic, and future-directed. Such leaders can lack the very first skill of self-awareness – the ability to do a simple reality-check about themselves: *how am I feeling, right now?*

This deficit in emotional intelligence can lead to critical instabilities down the line.

This is why, if you really want to be a better leader, the first step may well be to stop. You need to take a moment.

Think of this as a “power pause” – an essential act of maintenance, even repair – in which to audit your environment and, even more important, audit yourself.

In other words, simply take a moment to ask: what is really going on?

## 2. CREATE CALM

Chronic stress can diminish your ability to think clearly and respond appropriately. It can also lead to serious health problems.

For organizations, stress can be pervasive, even systemic, causing not just illness but lost time, high turnover, bad judgment, poor performance, wasted effort, unnecessary work, safety errors, bad customer relations, and general hopelessness.

Leaders carry a particular responsibility for systemic stress, for as a leader, *it's you who sets the tone*. Indeed, the stress that is created, perpetuated, and distributed by just one leader can adversely affect entire teams, organizations, and communities.

One of the most effective ways to get a grip on stress quickly is simply by paying close attention to what is

actually happening now. Here is just one reason why this works: when your mind is fully focused in *this* moment, you are immediately freed from worrying about *that* moment. You are dealing with just what is real right now.

Once you have developed this ability – to pivot your mind from stress to calm in just a moment – you can manage even the most stressful situations in ways that are a lot less stressful. You may even develop the kind of calm, alert presence that is able to transform situations of even extreme stress into quite startling opportunities.

## 3. CULTIVATE PRESENCE

Some leaders just seem to have it – a sense of being comfortable in their skin, an air of quiet confidence. This winning personality trait is often called *presence*. Through presence, a leader can effortlessly foster a culture of loyalty, trust, spirited work, and high performance.

Presence, however, is not really something you can learn. Nor is it something that rubs off on you magically from someone else. Indeed, the more you chase after someone else's leadership presence, the more you become, well, a follower.

Authentic presence springs from within. And all you have to do, if you want to start cultivating presence now, is this: Be more present. Simply tune into what is really true for you, right now.

As you choose to be more present, what emerges is presence. *Your* presence. For as you acknowledge, accept, and embody your truth, you bring forth your true being with honesty and integrity. Moment by moment, there is simply more of you here.

In my opinion, the world desperately needs more of this – by which I mean more of you. For in each moment you choose to live from the presence that is uniquely yours, you not only manifest the life you really want, you make the contribution that only you can make.

## 4. PAY ATTENTION

We seem to be suffering an epidemic of distractedness. And the consequences are serious.

Distraction causes accidents, injuries, unnecessary work, diminished creativity, poor performance, reduced output, and critical accidents, not to mention ethical lapses and PR disasters.

Consider, too, the demoralizing effect of working

with people who are distracted. Think of those meetings that are so unproductive, so long, and so unsatisfying, simply because people are only paying *partial* attention. Think of those conversations you have in which no one is really listening.

Investing in the moment can help.

Paying attention to what is happening in the moment helps you avoid mistakes and accidents. It helps you think better, listen better, articulate better, and get things done more efficiently.

In addition, each time you bring your mind to what is happening in this moment, you are building your attention muscles. You are becoming focus fit. You are becoming *someone who pays attention*.

As your ability to pay attention gets stronger, you may find also that something quite remarkable starts to happen: your attention enhances whatever you are working on.

Yes, attention is such a powerful tool that, when you are finally able to devote your full attention – heart and mind, body and soul – to a situation, the situation itself begins to change, almost magically. It is this kind of attention, I believe, that is deployed so effectively by the most visionary leaders.

As a leader, of course, you have an additional opportunity. You have the ability and resources to promote attention skills in your team, to create systems that maximize attention, and to build a workplace that truly values attention. Imagine what you could achieve if your whole organization were just 10% more attentive.

The first move, however, is always right now. Go get your distracted mind, and start focusing on what you want to focus on in *this* moment.

## 5. STAY CURRENT

We can get terribly comfortable with our old conclusions.

Those conclusions then become assumptions about the present and even filters on the future. Over time, they block our ability to even notice what is really happening.

If you want to seize the moment, however, first you have to see the moment.

Having an out-of-date mindset has tripped up many a leader. It has also tripped up many large, successful companies – so invested in their big old boats, steaming toward their pre-programmed destinations, that they no longer notice which way the wind is blowing.

But think of the great politician or the inspired viral marketing campaign: What they each do so well is tap the *zeitgeist*. This doesn't mean that you, as a leader, have to be faddish or ruled by the mob. You can still articulate a better way. You can still inspire people about your bigger vision. But if you want to be effective, you certainly need your finger on the pulse of the present.

Fortunately, getting started with this is really simple: pay close attention to this moment, right now. This will momentarily liberate you. You will be liberated from your assumptions and expectations, and will be, simply, aware. Each time you do this, moment by moment, you are learning to let go of *then* and see what is *now*.

## 6. BE RESILIENT

With the speed of life accelerating, and disruption becoming the norm, it's no wonder that resilience has become such a hot topic in leadership development.

Although everyone faces change, and everyone experiences setbacks, what distinguishes great leaders is their skill at bouncing back and, more to the point, bouncing back better.

When talking about resilience, it is helpful to consider two types – each demanding a different kind of investment in the moment.

The first kind of resilience is required in fast-paced situations, such as ball games, battlefields, and trading floors, where you need to make in-the-moment decisions. This demands a combination of hyper-focus, peripheral awareness, and instant reaction time. There is some evidence that meditation training can help with this – it improves your ability to sort stimuli efficiently and also reduce reaction time.

The other kind of resilience, however, is required when you experience a major life setback – such as when you experience an illness, divorce, or bereavement, or you suffer a career crisis, hostile takeover, or economic crash. Situations like these require *not* that you react quickly but that you not react quickly. Situations like these require that you have the wisdom to respond appropriately.

In such situations, there is huge benefit in knowing how to pause. In this pause, let yourself fully experience what happened. Notice how it really feels, right now, and don't pretend it doesn't hurt. Then, take stock of what really has changed. And consider how *you* have changed. Do you really want to go back to the old situation?

Is it even possible? Might this new situation present a radically new opportunity? And is there a possibility that this setback could actually help you grow?

After all, you want to be an authentic leader, not a robotic one.

What both types of resilience have in common is this: Whether you are reacting quickly or taking your time, each moment that you encounter is brand new – it has truly never happened before. And the past does not have to be a dark shadow on your present: each moment offers you a fresh start.

## 7. FIND SOLUTIONS

Too often, we try to solve problems by reshuffling what we already know.

Here's a better approach: Shift your focus from the problem that you think is *out there* to what's going on *in here*, in your own mind. Any problem can be considered just a symptom of a mindset that has outlived its usefulness.

In other words, instead of beating your head against the same old door, do something – anything – to change your point of view. And then see what life looks like through a whole new window.

The practice of investing in the moment helps with this immeasurably. Each time you face a problem, simply take a moment to consciously clear your mind and release what you already know. This enables you to look at the problem with fresh eyes, see what is really happening, and find a way to unstick what is stuck.

The more you practice this maneuver, the better you become at deploying it quickly and powerfully. And then, rather than being someone who had a new idea once, or gets a new idea sometimes, you can be a leader who has new ideas all the time.

## 8. SEE OPPORTUNITY

Too often, we assume that only geniuses can innovate. Or we assume that a great new idea will arrive with a thunderous AHA, so there's no chance we'll miss it.

A great new idea, however, rarely presents itself with a fanfare. Rather, it appears first as a tiny fragment, faint whisper, or tender shoot.

Imagine the writer who sits in a café with an open notebook, staring into space, waiting for inspiration. He is holding space for a new idea to land. Or imagine the

**“Any problem can be considered just a symptom of a mindset that has outlived its usefulness.”**

inventor tinkering in her garage until, one day, something starts to click and whirr. She is allowing possibilities to appear.

These innovators trust that even a small idea can have enormous potential. And they know how to keep their minds open to what is emerging in the moment.

If you really want to innovate, you have to develop the capacity to notice all the subtle prompts that appear throughout the day, those small ideas that might just tip the scales. Approach each moment with an attitude of curiosity, and make sure you are awake to what could be emerging for you right now.

Don't forget, too, that being an innovative leader doesn't mean that you have to have all the ideas. Rather, consider it your job to create the conditions for innovation. Build an environment where everyone on your team is awake to the opportunity that is always budding now.

## 9. DEVELOP POSSIBILITIES

Once a new idea is conceived, you still have to develop its potential. In other words, you have to play with possibilities.

In a state of play, with all judgment suspended, you are free and spontaneous. You simply notice and elaborate what is arising in the moment. Like a child playing with blocks, you stack things in different ways and let yourself be surprised and delighted by what results. Like a jazz musician, you improvise.

The Zen Buddhist tradition calls this state of mind a “beginner's mind” – a state of openness, curiosity, and willingness to be surprised. Alas, many leaders, fearing loss of control, will resist this mindset. Or they just habitually rush right past this stage. Barely is a new idea conceived when they deliver judgment on it.

Some of the most egregious offenders in this regard are, of course, “experts.” Armed with reams of conclusions, all based on the past, they are so sure they “know what” that

they shut down every playful “what if.”

Sadly, this attitude shuts down the possibility being offered in the moment. It simply kills new life. It destroys – even prevents – innovation.

To my mind, the really valuable experts are those who are smart and humble enough to suspend their expertise. They welcome the new information and new possibilities that arise in the moment.

As a leader your greatest contribution might simply be this: to create and defend the conditions that give rise to this mindset of possibility, ensuring that everyone on your team has the time, space, safety, and encouragement to play.

## 10. UNLEASH MOMENTUM

So, what is really standing in your way?

Many of the obstacles to change we experience are all in the mind: insecurity, bias, stubbornness, and doubt – not to mention those out-of-date lessons we carry from the past or those fears we project into the future.

In organizational life, of course, obstacles can be even more challenging, for they are systemic. Certain characteristics of most organizations – excessive workload, inflexible rules, crowded calendars, fixed agendas, complicated procedures, and rigid plans – stop people from moving freely or responding in the moment. All of this is death to momentum. People get discouraged. New ideas don’t stand a chance.

To make matters worse, many leaders attempt to drive change just by making a plan and then pushing. But if the obstacles to change in a system are entrenched, that push won’t make much progress.

As a leader, you might use your time more efficiently, and much more wisely, by focusing on creating the *conditions* for momentum. Start by unsticking what’s stuck. Liberate people and ideas so they can begin to move freely. Make sure that everyone on your team – those people you have chosen and trained, those people you trust – actually have the freedom to respond in the moment.

In my experience, when large systems move toward this kind of “in the moment” behavior – flexible, dynamic, and responsive – then everyone benefits. I have seen this kind of transition release extraordinary enthusiasm and creativity in even the most dispirited staff. And the key

principle is simply to liberate each person’s ability to be in the moment. You might even succeed in creating an “in the moment” organization.

### Everything starts here.

It may seem at times that advocates of mindfulness, myself included, are selling some kind of snake oil. How can something as simple as presence in the moment have so many benefits?

Perhaps this is because, to quote the Zen teacher Dainin Katagiri, *each moment is the universe*. Or, in other words: there is nothing we really have but this moment. Wherever you go, you will always be here, and the time will always be now. Despite this self-evident truth, we spend much of our time imagining scenarios that have nothing to do with now, haunted by fading memories of the past and fantasies about the unknowable future.

This puts us at a serious disadvantage. For when we are distracted from this moment, or act in ignorance of this moment, or try to flee from this moment, we are just running from reality. It is as if we are manically adding stories to a house that has no foundation.

As soon as you invest in this moment, however, something remarkable starts to happen, because you are no longer running away. Allowing yourself to land in this moment fully, you are aligning yourself with what is true. You are choosing to be real.

In this becoming real, you discover, paradoxically, that everything is possible. You are fully yourself and also free of self. You are totally grounded and yet exquisitely inspired. You are at peace with what is and also wide open to what could be.

Indeed, when you are present in this moment, you are ready for anything. ■



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