

Staying in the Moment: The Importance of Being Fully Present

Perspective on People:
By Karen Friedman

The two women sat on opposite sides of the playground. The first woman was engrossed in an animated phone conversation, occasionally looking up and waving to her toddler when he slid down the sliding board yelling “Mommy look at me!”

The second woman was furiously tapping her iPhone unaware that her dog who had gotten tangled around the sign that read *please clean up after your dog* was doing his business right in front of it.

To me these women were strangers I had passed but noticed on a morning walk. Yet, I thought about them as I sat high in the Comcast Center seats at the University of Maryland’s business school graduation where my first born son would receive his diploma.

How many times had I done the same thing? Paid more attention to my phone calls or to do list than my kids running happily around the yard. Focused on my emails while my rambunctious shepherd begged for attention.

That lovable dog is now gone. At almost 13, she died the morning of my son’s graduation. I wish I could have her back. My little boy isn’t sliding down sliding boards anymore. He’s shaving and driving

and entering the work force this summer. I sometimes long to walk him to the bus stop like I used to do only this time I’d savor every moment instead of hurriedly pushing him along so I could get on with my day.

But as we all know, it doesn’t work that way. We lead busy lives and as the saying goes, often fail to stop and smell the roses. So I challenge each and every one of us to do better at work, at home and at play.

Savor the Moment

Practice being in the moment. Perhaps that’s shutting off your phone, computer, television or radio. Focus on your thoughts or whatever it is you’re doing even if it’s something as mundane as emptying the dishwasher. Instead of thinking about where you have to go or what you have to do, just enjoy being fully present.

Embrace the Challenge

View challenges as opportunities. When we see past the hurdles and visualize opportunities, we can change outcomes. Speaking and responding positively when times are tough can give us a greater sense of control and alter the perceptions of others.



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Be Aware of Your Responses

Pay attention to your body language, tone and the way you respond to questions or suggestions. Realize that in addition to what you are saying, the real message may be conveyed by what your nonverbal language

is suggesting. Communication is a two way street. Create an environment where people feel safe to share their opinions even if you don't agree.

Be Fully Engaged

We do a lot of work in the area of leadership and executive presence. People always ask, "How can I get it?" While learning to develop presence and hone skills can take time, the best advice I can share is if you want to have presence, then be fully present. Give whoever is speaking your full undivided attention so they feel valued, appreciated and most importantly, heard.

As I sat in the stadium with my family waiting to hear my son's name called among 770 business school graduates, I started to zone out. When they hit number 610 and his name had still not been called, I was getting fidgety and impatient. Then it occurred to me, isn't this similar to the woman on the playground half-heartedly paying attention to her child who will only be a child for a moment? Or perhaps it's like the woman who barely noticed her puppy and didn't stop to realize the dog would be gone in a dozen or so years, perhaps less.

So I looked up and focused. Really focused so I could stay in the moment. And when my boy's name was called, I heard it loud and clear. What a rush! It reminded me of the song the band played at my senior prom by Loggins and Messina called "We May Never Pass This Way Again." No, we won't. But this time, I was fully present when we did.