

# Don't Sleepwalk Through Your Days: Stay Present in the Moment

Perspective on People:

By Karen Friedman

**I**t was early January and everyone in my family was sick. It was that awful coughing, sneezing, wheezing respiratory wipe you out type sick. In my case, it seemed all I could do was sleep. No matter how much sleep I got, I needed more. I would sleep twelve hours and then need to take a nap.

I started to worry about myself, but everyone around me kept telling me to listen to my body. It had been an emotional and stressful time as my father had just died. My mother was staying with us. People were constantly in the house paying their condolences and there were a lot of details to attend to.

I decided to heed the advice and give myself a break. So, I slept and slept and slept some more. I felt a little better, but the fatigue hung on. I told myself it would just take time.

Fast forward to about ten days later. My husband and I were invited to a surprise birthday party for a close friend. I still wasn't feeling well but didn't want to miss it. I said we would just stay for a little while and I would take a couple of Tylenol before we left. As I was about to pop the pills into my mouth, I burst out laughing and said to my husband "I am such an idiot".

Without knowing it, I had been taking Tylenol PM on and off all day every day for about ten days. Thinking it was regular Tylenol, I would simply open the bottle without looking at it and pop the medicine in my mouth.

It made me wonder, like absent-mindedly reaching for Tylenol, how often do we just go through the motions without really paying attention? Our children might chatter on about something that happened at school, but we don't really hear them. You're on the phone with a friend, but don't remember what they said because you were cooking dinner or checking tomorrow's weather forecast.

Blame it on multi-tasking, technology or having a long to-do list that challenges our concentration. According to a Harvard University study, it's a serious problem. The study says almost half of our waking hours are spent not living in the moment. Maybe, it's not that big of a deal. After all, we all get distracted without grave consequences. But, what if I had fallen asleep at the wheel? What if paying attention to a conversation could have shed light on a serious problem that might have been prevented?

That's why I now think of the PM in Tylenol as an acronym for 'present moment'. How can we be more present, so we stay more emotionally connected to others and fully appreciate the now?

Perhaps the best lessons can be learned from mindfulness such as yoga and meditation where you focus on your senses, so you are physically, spiritually and mentally connected to the moment. While we can't always drop everything to practice mindfulness, there are a few things we can do to become more present.



**Karen Friedman** is an executive communication coach, speaker and Chief Improvement Officer at Karen Friedman Enterprises. Her techniques to help business professionals become more powerful persuasive communicators have been applied on four continents. She is the author of the best-selling book *Shut Up and Say Something: Business Communication Strategies to Overcome Challenges and Influence Listeners* and *Ordinary People: Extraordinary Lessons-Leadership Insights From Everyday Encounters*. Also a syndicated columnist for the Philadelphia Business Journal and adjunct faculty at Smith College's executive education program for women, Friedman is an award-winning former television news reporter and winner of Enterprising Women's prestigious Woman of the Year award.

[www.KarenFriedman.com](http://www.KarenFriedman.com)

Start with your phone. Studies say even if you turn it to silent and place it face down, it is still difficult to resist the urge to check it. If you want to be fully present with family or friends, you might want to consider putting it where you can't see it, so you don't use it.

Single Task. How often do you eat while answering e-mails or run the treadmill while reviewing an important presentation you're delivering at work later that day? I do it all the time and should stop. If we focus on one task at a time, we will begin enjoying what we're doing that much more.

Do nothing. When you're working, raising a family and trying to juggle it all, it seems as if there are not enough hours in the day, so doing nothing does not seem like an option. Yet, if you take a few minutes out of your day to sit down, be silent and focus on your breathing, you will teach yourself how to slow down and savor the moment.

Take a walk. Sometimes a change of scenery is the best medicine you can ask for. A brief break such as enjoying nature can rejuvenate you.

Mind the music. Turn on your favorite music and close your eyes. Even immersing yourself in one song can ease tension and help you relax.

You don't have to be a mindfulness expert to apply these present moment tips. Think about things you like to do and focus on that one thing when you're doing it. It might be playing tennis, reading a great book, watching a movie, writing an article or eating a hot fudge sundae. When you're doing it, you're not thinking about being present. You just are.

Thanks to my Tylenol PM experience, I am trying to be more mindful of slowing down and not just going through the motions. For starters, I marked that bottle with big black letters that say PM, so I don't make the same mistake again. Sleeping through a week of my life reminded me that when we don't work at being present, we may inadvertently slumber some of life's important moments.

**Karen Friedman** is a business communication coach, speaker and chief improvement officer at Karen Friedman Enterprises ([www.karenfriedman.com](http://www.karenfriedman.com)). She is the author of "Shut Up and Say Something" and "Ordinary People: Extraordinary Lessons".