

Folio Town Hall with Dave Mochel

Trusting Your Wise Self:
Reflecting Kindly & Honestly on
What's Working & What Isn't

May 20, 2020



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- Start with a grounding exercise
 - See Dave's website for downloadable guided meditations
 - It's really important, from a physiological perspective, to do a grounding exercise before any sort of reflection — we'll explore this in more depth later.
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A hearty mindset

Discomfort is inevitable

Struggle is added

Love is available

- Self improvement without self compassion is not great; how do we do this in a way that helps us and isn't brutal?
- This also has implications for how you, as school leaders, work with your teams
- There is a lot of pressure from the "Industrial happiness complex" that says if we're doing "it" (life) right, we should always feel good and happy - this is not realistic
- Instead, I encourage you to embrace a hearty mindset which means that you understand that:
 - Discomfort is inevitable and is baked into being human; discomfort also exists as information and therefore by avoiding discomfort we may be missing out on experiences
 - Struggle is different than the discomfort; struggle is all the secondary energy and once that energy goes into struggle, it is no longer available for purpose; we need to learn how to refocus our struggle into purpose
 - Love is available all the time; love requires for us to be loving
 - By practicing love, practicing compassion we are then able to experience and access those emotions; you can cultivate these internal practices

Hearty Practice

Mindfulness

Accepting awareness returning

Unstruggling

Open up, breathe low and slow
“Of course”

Trusting your wise self

Get quiet >> Self evaluate >> Send wisdom

Supportive communication

“Everyone struggles” >> Be with >> Listen >>
Support

- For the brain, everything is practice, your brain captures everything; while you sleep, your brain rewires and you will be more skilled at whatever you did today - whether it's a good thing or bad thing - your brain doesn't distinguish
- While Mindfulness has been marketed as a way “to feel better”, true mindfulness practice means that you encounter whatever you're encountering with acceptance and allow those things to run our course
- When you are engaged in struggle, try instead the techniques of opening up, breathing low and slow, and with compassion (“of course”)
 - Trusting your wise self
 - Supportive communication

Trusting your wise self

Open up and quiet down

Anchor in what matters

Be kind and honest

Send wise reminders

- Open up and quiet down
- The research is very clear: our nervous system is focused on survival which is not helpful for our growth and learning system
- Anchor is what matters most
- Be kind and honest
- Send wise reminders

**To thrive & grow, humans
need to feel that we are safe,
we belong and we matter**

We can cultivate this for ourselves and we
can communicate this to others through
our actions.

What is most important?

What do you want to have at the center of your life?

What kinds of relationships do you want to have?

How do you want to experience the world?

To what are you most deeply committed?

How do you want to help others?

What do you want to achieve?

What is most fulfilling?

What are you grateful for?

What needs to change?

- Anchoring in what matters - we need to connect with what's most important: what are we trying to accomplish? what's at the center of our lives?
- We need to really make sure that we're clear before we start self-reflection - I sit each night with a journal and start with what's most important to me
- Next, we need to ask ourselves honestly and kindly: what's working? For you as a school leader, you might ask: "What have we done as a community that's worked?" Make a list of those things.
- "What's not working?"
- "What would it be helpful or useful to keep in mind?"

Kind & Honest Self Evaluation

What's working?
What works?

What's not working?
What doesn't work?

What is really helpful/useful/
important to keep in mind?

- We spend a lot of time fighting against what's happened and how it's "not fair"; but instead, we need to realize that it IS happening, that it's life, and our experience (and our practice and learning)

Effective wisdom Present and practical

“When you start with exercise,
your day is better”

“Hug Marn”

“When you are feeling aimless,
make a to-do list”

“Take a walk or do some
housework”

- Write these reminders to ourselves - trust your wise self
- When you start with exercise, focus on really practical things that you know help your team function better
- When you're struggling, go back and look at the wisdom: what did we know is true and helpful when we were in a quieter and wiser place?
- While this may seem simple, it's actually really helpful and helps us get off of autopilot
- We need to be really thoughtful right now: we've moved online, in such a short amount of time AND we're now about to go into a new school year when people were willing to do things before because we were in crisis mode, but moving forward, those same things won't fly; we need to learn from our past experiences

**TRUST
YOUR
WISE
SELF**

Questions from the Audience

The “trust your wise self” notes resonate with me. It seems like a good way to enrich and absorb positive experiences. Is a reflection like this a good way to start end of year reflection with faculty?

Dave: Yes, absolutely; It's really important for us to make EOYR “heady” but also need to remember that we process things with our entire body

Questions like “What’s working? What’s not working? What do we need to keep in mind?” are great reflection questions. And then be sure to think about how we will keep those things in mind, front and center.

I see decisions being made that do not have ‘safety, belonging, mattering’ as a priority. How do I approach senior leadership on these matters which does not seem subordinate? Or insubordinate?

Dave: Important to remember that if you enter into a conversation with your senior leadership team in a way that doesn’t allow them to feel safe, etc - they won’t hear you as well either

Give them an “out” and opportunity to address your concerns; remember that we accomplish very little through argument and that instead it’s really through connection that we have influence

How do we engage with the things you’re bringing up with individuals who’ve been engrained with harmful habits that have been exacerbated by the current situation?

Dave: We will always go back to our defaults when we are stressed, so the questions becomes “how do we practice more when we’re feeling safe so that we establish those behaviors as our default?”

Remember: the number one person that we need to know has our back is us; we need to know that we won’t beat ourselves up, that “I am safe with me”, then we’re not spending our time looking for that in others

“Deflecting praise” - we do this because we don’t believe it; instead we can meet criticism and praise with “thank you and I appreciate that suggestion”

Your opening statement really resonated with me. Can you speak more about how to be compassionate with ourselves and avoid bullying in our quest for self-improvement? I also see this with the students I work with.

Dave: Take a look at Point to Kristin Neff’s work on Self-Compassion and Self Compassion for Educators

Until we are able to meet ourselves with a sense of kindness and connection and sense that we matter, it’s very difficult to meet others with compassion

Love Brene Brown’s phrase: we need to have a “strong back and soft front”

“Of course” is a great response and helps us be kind to ourselves;

Remember that when behavior change is hard, we don’t have to start creating our strategies for being more effective from a deficit perspective

What kind of practice would you suggest for teachers who do *not* feel safe, or that we matter, or whose administrators do not invite feedback, let alone resistance?

Dave: Find someone who you really trust, from whom you can get some wise counsel, rather than just venting, and with whom you can go through the process of what’s working and what’s not working

Any good resources for opening up and quieting down that someone not trained in mindfulness can deliver easily to a faculty group?

Dave: Yes! Our body posture says so much - "middle school dance posture"; Gratitude, share moment when they were at their best; in place of a breathing exercise, you can try having folks rest fingertip to fingertip and then focus on that
Apps like Headspace, Calm, and Insight Timer are great

Do you have any advice on supporting a parent, student, staff or faculty member who is afraid to return to campus due to fear of virus spread within the community?

Dave: First and foremost, acknowledge their feelings - "I understand that you would be afraid."

Also realize that some people aren't going to be accept the level of risk associated with returning to campus - and that that is legitimate and ok

I have been working with getting mindfulness / a grounded practice a part of what we do at my school...Any thoughts as to how to build this kind of practice in an educational institution? The resistance is more to do with faculty not feeling comfortable leading students in a grounding practice rather than outright hostility!

Dave: Whenever I hear this sort of response I always ask: "Do you think it would be useful to use your attention more effectively? To be accepting of discomfort rather than deflecting it?"

People see and understand these benefits of mindfulness; challenge is that these benefits have been overshadowed/tainted by the "popular" messaging around mindfulness as being about models in yoga pants. e

We also have this inflation of how hard/what a big deal mindfulness is - we can stress instead that mindfulness is about starting to find a way to be more present and mindful NOT striving for enlightenment (at least not right away)

It seems like this summer it will be important for all of us to develop good habits. Has anyone thought of having this be a focus of faculty for this summer?

Dave: I would caution you to be careful not to assume that everyone has gotten more free time from this experience; while It has been a very important part of my time in quarantine to really focus on the anxiety etc - not everyone has had the time to do this; I also want to be sensitive to the fact that lots of teachers are already being asked to do a lot of PD this summer
There are a lot of great resources out there (Daring Classrooms, Project Wayfinder) - it's a matter of prioritizing this work and then making a plan to use the new strategies

Any suggestions for wrapping up this year on a high note?

Dave: two thoughts come to mind: **1)** "be very good enough" because oftentimes this is where we should be **2)** Teachers should know that students say that their family and their teachers are the people who have made the biggest difference for them during this pandemic - the efforts that you've made really made a difference for a ton of students - you were the anchor that gave them something to work toward, the purpose, and something to look forward into a very difficult time

Any advice about how to give faculty and staff well deserved time away from their work after a challenging spring while also helping position them for all kinds of scenarios for the Fall?

Dave: have heard from one school that they are doing a week of "forced vacation" - no email, no work for a week; communicate with sincerity that what the school needs from faculty and staff right now is for people to recharge and take care of themselves

"The silence between the notes is just as important for the music."

Reminder for our Resident HR professional: " If someone comes to you with personal concerns about returning to work, you can best support them by involving your human resources department. The regs around accommodations and paid leave are complicated and YOU need support to help your employee figure out what is best for them."