

# Why 'Flying By the Seat of Your Pants' is Not the Best Version of You

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"Let's just throw it against the wall and see what sticks." "I'm just winging it here." "I feel like I'm really flying by the seat of my pants." You may have heard (or even said) statements like these before in your work life. Comments like these indicate a lack of insight, feeling unprepared, rushed, and/or not in control. These are also statements that do not build confidence if they come from leaders in your organization. On the one hand, declarations like these show honesty and transparency, which is a good leadership trait. On the other hand, a leader who lacks insight, hasn't adequately prepared, is rushing, or feels out of control is a leader who is on the verge of making mistakes.

A number of years ago, my wife and I went out to dinner with some good friends and returned to my house to play some board games. When we arrived at my house, I noticed my friend do something very irregular. He put his to-go box in my refrigerator and put his car keys on top of it. Curious, I asked why he had done that. Experience had taught him that if he put his leftovers in a friend's fridge, he wouldn't remember it at the end of the night. He would, however, remember where he put his keys when he found his pocket empty at the end of the evening. The genius is in the simplicity, and I have adopted the practice for myself. My friend recognized a 'mindfulness gap' and addressed it in an innovative way.

We all have mindfulness gaps, but we're not all so innovative at solving them. We've probably all seen the viral video of someone on their phone (oblivious to their surroundings) fall into the huge, conspicuous fountain. These sorts of 'mindfulness gaps' are harmless and amusing. Some can be very dangerous, like distracted driving (texting is a common distraction). 'Mindfulness gaps' can also wreak havoc in organizations. People can get busy and forget to respond to emails – important, time-sensitive emails. Things can move so quickly that someone can miss the fact that they have allowed themselves to get double booked – with two important clients. A person can have full knowledge that the big conference is coming up and have forgotten that it was their responsibility to schedule the speaker. These could all be one-off examples, but people can become so busy that this becomes part of their style, which can severely limit their effectiveness as a leader. Here are three ways to reclaim mindfulness and ensure that you aren't your own worst enemy as a leader:

1. **Slow down:** Often, our mindfulness failures occur simply because we are too busy. There is too much going on for us to process things effectively. We end up doing things on 'autopilot' and not even integrating what we're doing into memory. If you keep having to say, "Can someone call my phone? I can't remember where I put it," you probably need to slow down. Take a few minutes to breathe deeply at certain times of the day. Take short breaks to stretch your legs and clear your mind. Take a vacation – and unplug. Use to a few minutes each day to reflect on what you've got coming and/or how things went. Take a step back and look at patterns in your day that you can't see while you're in the press of the moment. Allow your mind to catch up with what you're doing, and you'll be much more effective.
2. **Get regular feedback:** By definition, if we're not being mindful, we're not going to generally be aware of it – unless we fall into a fountain as a result. In fact, it's often negative consequences that bring our 'mindfulness gaps' into the open. Socrates said, "An unexamined life is not worth living." If you're not very good at examining yourself, the next best thing is to find out what your gaps are from others before they result in negative consequences. Build regular feedback (both formal and informal) into your routine.
3. **Understand your limitations (and create workarounds):** To become more mindful, it's necessary to understand your gaps and limitations, but that's not where you should stop. We need to take concrete steps to close those gaps. That's why I was so impressed with my friend's solution to forgetting leftovers. Write yourself post-it notes, add things in to your calendar as reminders, use innovative apps or software, or, better yet, educate yourself on mindfulness.

Mindfulness does not have a long history of being associated with good leadership. However, mindfulness is making inroads into the research and practice of leadership, making a huge impact on how we conceptualize successful leaders. If you'd like to learn more about the application of mindfulness in the business setting, check out one of the upcoming (and free) Mindfulness in Business Webcast Series: <http://mindfulbusinessconference.com/industry-news/mindfulness-business-webcast-series/> or attending the upcoming The Mindful Business Conference: <http://mindfulbusinessconference.com>. I'm looking forward to attending the conference to improve my own application of mindfulness at work. I'm interested in hearing your creative techniques for improving mindfulness. Please let us know on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), and share this post with others who might find it helpful.