

Ep #6: Slow Is the New Fast



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Diana Murphy

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Welcome to *Empowered Wellness for Leaders*, a podcast that teaches CEOs, entrepreneurs and sales leaders how to deal with the unique challenges of balancing a high-stress career, family, AND their own health. Here's your host, Certified Executive Wellness Coach, Diana Murphy.

I hope you're starting out your week in epic fashion. It feels like spring here in Atlanta. I spent my entire Saturday outdoors at Piedmont Park, along with everybody else that lives in Atlanta, and we watched the Olympics all evening on my porch with all the windows and doors open. It was just amazing. It literally was a breath of fresh air.

Now, you may not be in as good a weather space as Atlanta, but I hope you got some great time to relax and get restored this weekend, and I want to share with you a book and a concept that literally has changed my life. As I started my new coaching practice, I was spending most of every work hour distracted, agitated, nervous and anxious, most of the time.

I always felt pressured to do more, get more done, and I never felt like it was fast enough; not fun. And certainly, I realized later, not very productive. That's when the book, *The Practicing Mind* by Thomas Sterner, was assigned as a required reading for my coaching school mastermind.

I dug right in and I couldn't believe how his concepts really spoke to what was going on for me. I finally found a way to relieve my busy fast brain in my very big desire to succeed and to succeed fast. I know it's pretty counterintuitive, but it's all about slowing down, enjoying the process of getting to a goal versus striving and pushing towards it.

The author, again, Thomas Sterner, shares with us how we can stay in practicing mode; staying in the moment without an expectation to get where we want to go. Yes, what I found and what he really speaks to here is slow is the new fast. Our brains and our bodies operate so much better when we slow down. When we slow down those busy brains and all those thoughts

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that come our way and focus on what is right in front of us, versus living in fast forward; always thinking about the goal.

It's present mind. It's staying in present mode. These concepts I'm sharing today apply to business and personal activities; whether your goal is to run a new level of miles, to lose a certain amount of weight, to hit a sales goal, to pass an important certification in your business, or to complete a really large project for your company.

And what I've really loved is this has really helped me to stay present in my relationships and enjoy time off. Learning to be in Practicing Mind can help you not only get there faster, but give you a lot more joy along the way. And that, my friends, is the gift.

I know for me, I was on the road to burnout. Not because I was working too hard – I was really loving it – but because I was creating so much misery for myself along the way; seriously. You know, I know you've seen this example, and I hope this helps you to see it really clearly. This is what we might call beginners luck.

When we're in Practicing Mind, we have no expectation because we're trying something new. Let me get really clear here. Alright, you've gone bowling before. I'm going to take bowling out with a group as an example. There's usually someone in the group that has never bowled and they've been willing to come along because you're all going out to do something fun.

So this person, you give them a few tips, they get their bowling shoes on, you help fit them with the ball and they have a pretty decent game that first game. Well fast forward to game three when they start trying harder, they want to achieve that same score, actually beat it, and they choke.

They've moved from Practicing Mind, having no expectation because they were very new at something, to by game three they're already trying to be the winner, you know, do the best. This is focusing on the results rather than focusing on the present moment experience that helps us to get to those results.

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This is all about no expectation as you're beginning something, and it's usually a time when we are able to immerse in a new activity. It's actually pleasurable. I know, if you're anything like me, you did this in school. You might have loved learning, loved digging into the concepts; maybe some subjects more than others.

And I know, I really did this in high school. I really loved school. I was such a geek, but by high school, I was always worried about the grade and I was starting to rush through the concepts, not enjoying the path at all and always looking for that A. Does that happen to you?

Perhaps it was more in a favorite sport when you were younger or learning to play an instrument. When you first started, you had no expectation. It was really quite fun. But the minute that you see that you're this far from the end or you've heard someone that's fabulous at it and then realize you have a long way to go, you've just moved yourself right out of Practicing Mind.

Well there's really good news. You can access this Practicing Mind feeling anytime you want. I really call it my zone. I sink into present moment. I get very focused on the details and even the environment around me. I'll take a deep breath and just, "What am I paying attention to now?"

It might be the person across from me in a conversation. It might even be the TV, really listening and enjoying the show instead of trying to do three things at once, but it does take some practice.

I want to share with you an absolutely amazing example that really got my attention. Thomas Sterner tells a story about focusing on the American Olympic Archery Team and how they were focusing on the Japanese team because they were just so dang good. They were beating them at everything.

And if you know any Olympic sport – and we're in the season of finishing up the Olympics now – you'll know that a percentage of a centimeter would be the difference between a gold medal and perhaps a bronze, or not even

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medaling at all. So these archers are focused on a very, very tight process and being perfect at it, right.

So the Japanese team was painstakingly focused on the process; lifting up the arrow, pulling back the string. Again, I'm not using the correct terminology. I'm not an archer, but you get my point, right? Every facet of the process was their focus. Then, when they realized that the arrow did not go in the direction they wanted, they knew they needed to correct something in the actions.

So they went back, realized they needed to drop a shoulder, relax, move a hand differently, focus their eyes on the target in a really relaxed calm way. Boom, then they hit the target. The Americans, however, were always focused on the target. Every action was immediately looking at what happened on that bullseye.

Do you see the difference? There was a reason they weren't able to observe without judgment and be able to correct things in that moment. And this is a pattern that Thomas Sterner talks about in his book. Do the action; stay immersed in that action, then observe. Observe any negative thoughts that come up; just observe them. But observe what works to get you towards that goal and do more of that; maybe adjust.

Do, observe, correct – it's so different than, "Did I make it? Did I get the A?" But it really, really is helpful. I'm going to give you more examples so I can really clarify this, and I hope it's gotten your attention. When we disrupt and take our eye off the actions that get us to the end result and we start focusing on how close we are to the goal, immediately a lot of negative thoughts can come up and we absolutely ruin the moment.

Wouldn't you love to have more fun getting there? We're absolutely creating unnecessary suffering. And we can train our brain to slow down, to master a skill, love the process and focus on practice in the moment, no matter what you're working on.

I share Practicing Mind with most of my clients and most of them are halfway done with the book in the first week. They were starving for relief of

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the stress of trying to lose weight while they work hard in their businesses. And the concept of slowing down and staying present was a powerful tool in their journey to lose weight for good.

If you're highly driven, you love moving at a fast pace, like me, this might be the key to help your brain to calm down so you can be creative and present; in your conversations, present in your writing, while you're creating presentations, and even your relationships at work and at home.

I'm going to illustrate by using a couple of familiar – at least to me – examples. Losing weight and hitting sales goals, and I have a bonus example for you at the end. Losing weight is a beautiful example of how this concept works and whether you've ever had this experience or not yourself, I bet you've watched someone close to you in your life.

If you haven't been on a diet before, you've watched someone that has painfully gone through this process. Alright, you decide to set a weight goal. And most times, this is often our high school weight or the lowest weight we've ever been. That alone is overwhelming, but that, my friends, is a topic for another day.

You set off on a path to that diet plan, or however you've decided to approach it; you work out really hard. You're actually doing things you don't love. Not my gig, right? You watch the scales, sometimes daily. And the number goes up, you freak out. With high frustration, you want to give up.

Number goes down, you celebrate, you're ecstatic. "Oh, this isn't so hard..." And you ease up. This is focusing so much on the result and bringing so much judgment to it that it sabotages your efforts and your motivation. And notice also that the reason that the number going up creates such a trigger is because of all those negative thoughts that come in... "I'll never lose weight. See, you shouldn't have had that donut. You're not working out nearly as much as you should. You might as well just give up."

They come pouring in when we realize this big gap between where we are and that target goal. This is exhausting and it's why most of us are failing at

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losing weight permanently or big goals that we set in our lives. We're not staying in the moment long enough to learn what works for us and have not calmed down enough to enjoy the process.

And believe me; I really believe that losing weight can be enjoyable when we slow down in this way, for sure. That's why intuitive eating and moving your body in a way that you love can work so powerfully. It's falling in love with the activities that contribute to weight loss, because we are literally practicing and then learning to stay in present mind without judgment. And this stops overreaction to the scale.

I love this quote; "When you're not attached to the goal, your mind slows down because you're not bringing bad emotions into the process. Now, it is totally natural for us to experience those triggers or stress moments when we're working hard on something.

Again, no judgment for the judgments, right, or the negative thoughts – those scale moments or those oh my goodness moments, it's already March and I haven't closed enough business moments. We all have them. But what I encourage you to do here is to observe those thoughts and expect them. This is, again, a concept that the author shares in the book. Do, observe, correct – the Japanese team was fabulous at it, right. They would do the action, stay in the moment, observe what worked and correct. Again, without judgment and using the goal as a rudder, not the focus of our energy and activity, we watch what works, we adjust or correct along the way.

Let me use another example that might resonate with you as well; setting a new sales goal or revenue goal in your business, any new project, something that's big. At the beginning, you're so motivated. It can be so much fun. You know, as salespeople or business owners, you're all pumped up about the possibilities of what can be created with a new program or accomplished in a new year. We enjoy engaging in clients and prospects, but uh-oh – it's the end of the month and we realize we've only had two new clients and our goal is 30. How are we going to get there? And all those unwelcome thoughts come up in our brain.

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Remember, they're just thoughts. you can choose to believe them or not, but they are normally triggered in these moments by looking and judging the end result only and how far we are from them. Oh, I hear them in my head; do you? "Oh no, I'll never get there. I'm going to run out of money before I finish this quarter. I'll never win that trip. My manager will never keep me on if I don't bring in new business."

I've heard them all. Again, another quote, "If we are only focused on the outcome or the results, we rob ourselves of the joy of working towards the goal and are swayed by the results along the way." It steals our joy, people, and it's something that we can learn to really correct by pulling ourselves back into present mind.

Again, back to the sales example, if we focus only on closed deals and not those beautiful steps that it takes to get there, we are creating discouragement, fear and frustration. And believe me, I know you've felt those. Even if you aren't in sales, you've felt those on the receiving end.

Again, when we conduct our cold calls or we connect with potential customers, we bring those ugly emotions into the conversation. What if we focused on every person as if they were the only person in the room and really listened?

If you have what they need, you might even be able to serve them in that moment and show them that you are for them. But if you're only focused on selling them something and closing that deal, you'll never hear what they need and never be able to truly serve them or even realize that they might in fact not be a good client for you; you're just trying to close that deal. That's why it feels so awful to both parties.

We all know this, but sometimes it's hard to calm down. We need a way to do it and this is absolutely it. Observe those negative emotions, take a deep breath, sink into the present moment so much that all you're hearing is the words of the other person. You're asking really good questions and calming down; staying present with that person.

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Both of these examples can show you how it can affect anything. This can be for managers where they need to have a difficult conversation. And if they simply focus on the person at hand, have a few questions out in front of them and not worry about how it's going to go, they'll be really surprised because when we take out our nervousness and our expectations about how something could go, those really tough conversations can be absolutely magic.

When we let our focus move to just the results, again, we bring frustration anxiety and panic into the moment. When we move slower, we can listen and be more creative. When you immerse in an activity – and this is another quote, I love it – “When you immerse into an activity, you actually escape from the pressures. This is choosing stress-free, calm, insightful and creative and losing the sense of time.” Those aren't direct quotes, but those are such beautiful – is it really possible that we can escape from the pressures of our business? Absolutely, I want to give you hope there.

The author shares a beautiful step-wise path to help you engage in these concepts of present moment thinking. But I'm telling you, slowing down and dropping judgment, for me, was almost all I needed to start putting this concept into place.

In the show notes, I'm going to attach a worksheet that gives you great questions that I'm going to coach you through this process and more steps that the author shares in his book. He shares the Four S's, simplifying things, breaking things down. So if you'd like to dig in more, this is an absolutely perfect resource for you. And you can find that at dianamurphycoaching.com/6, because we're on episode six.

It seems unbelievable, but the author shares his own trials with this concept and he was even surprised with the results. I just love this. The author himself is a musician, so he used Practicing Mind when he was practicing a new instrument. But he's also a very gifted piano technician. He tunes pianos for star performers. I mean, this is someone that if he does not tune the piano well, literally it could ruin the performance.

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So although his job itself was very tedious and repetitive, it brought a very healthy dose of stress. Also, in his industry, his workload was two and a half times what was considered normal in the trade. So as an example, in his book, he shows a particularly packed day in his schedule and decided to apply that slow staying in the moment thinking; only focusing on each tool and instrument as he went through his day.

He deliberately slowed every action down, again, focusing as he picked up a tool, slowing down as he focused on each note on a piano. Remember, there's a ton of keys on that piano. This is very repetitive. He deliberately slowed down every action and noticed that his brain was trying to freak out at first. "You're never going to get this done. You'll be late to every appointment." But he pulled himself back into present moment, took a breath and continued with his day.

Guess what, he finished every appointment earlier than scheduled, even had time for a leisurely lunch, which he normally did not. This convinced me to try it, and I have applied to almost everything I've done in my work. I realized that I was actually able to do this in some areas of my business but not others.

See if this is true for you. Are there some activities that just never stress you out; you get a lot done, you just love doing them? You can absolutely apply the mindset from those fun activities to the ones you're resisting.

When I get on the phone to coach someone, I am totally present with them. I love that part of my business, absolutely. I'm focused on them, I'm listening well, I stay in the flow of the conversation. And I've learned, because I've been coaching for a while now, that I'll always know what questions to ask. I might have a few planned ahead of time, but if I stay very focused on the client, I always know what to say and what questions to bring into the conversation.

Wow, once I realized this, I started accessing the same skills for any conversation. If you've met me, or even in some of my trainings, you know

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that I can get really pretty high energy. And it's not natural for me, in a social situation, to slow down and listen. This is a skill I'm working on.

I am wired and a little ADD, especially conversationally. So I have decided to apply this to my personal life. I just take a deep breath – I choose to be very present. I look at my surroundings and kind of sink back in. I look at the person in front of me. I might even connect with them; look at their eyes or look at their lips, really listen to what they're saying.

Oh, those conversations are so much more rewarding. It has really helped me to slow my ADD brain down in these situations. I was really in a lot of shame before. I knew I was interrupting people a lot and just not having a lot of fun conversations. And I used Practicing Mind in this moment and oh my goodness, it's changed everything for me.

I have a bonus challenge for you today. What if we used Practicing Mind, stayed in the present moment during really tough conversations? Think of someone that you don't want to bring a subject to – something that you want to talk about with them that is really difficult. You've already kind of written how the whole conversations going to go. You're scared about the results.

But this conversation does need to happen. Maybe you're a manager and it needs to happen; maybe it's a neighbor, maybe it's a spouse or a friend. What might happen in our work life, in our personal lives, if we could be really brave and have those conversations by slowing down, really listening, staying in that moment, not having any expectation about how it's going to go, listen before we speak, not worry about what to say but sink into the conversation?

Watch out, my friend. We might just change the world if we did that. I encourage you. And if you try this challenge, I want to hear from you. And that's Diana@dianamurphycoaching.com.

For some of you – know it's true for me, I have needed various methods to apply this in my life. So I want to leave you some suggestions; some actions you can take. You know, I'm all about changing our mindset, really

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looking at the ugly thinking that's creating stress. Certainly, those are really good tools here. But I know physically I've had to, kind of, take action to quiet my mind.

So think about trying a quiet yoga class. Download a meditation. Get a meditation app. In the morning, set a timer. When your brain is really busy and you have a lot to do, just set a timer; even just five minutes and let the thoughts flow. Keep a notepad nearby in case some things come up that you don't want to forget.

But what I've found when you do this, you don't forget. It's a way of your mind – to let it flow. It's a way that your mind really gets back to what it needs to. Or take a fresh-air walk without headphones and listen to everything around you. Even if you're in the city, city sounds can have a cacophony; it's beautiful in the background. Or a nature walk where you can listen to the birds, or even a quiet rain with an umbrella. Oh, these actions are beautiful ways to calm your mind. I hope you'll try some of them.

I've had a blast with this episode. And you might guess that, for me, podcasting is something new. This is episode six, and I'm really thankful that I had these tools, I was able to use and apply them in creating this episode. I hope you will remember to stay in Practicing Mind, not to have so many huge expectations on yourself and will just sink in and calm yourself down by staying in the present moment.

Try it. It takes some practice, but I can't wait to see what results you create. Okay, I'm not going to change the subject too abruptly, but guess what I'm bringing you next week – stress eating and drinking. Again, I've got your back on this one and I cannot wait to help you see this issue in a very, very new way.

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