

MODULE 4 ACTIVITY

Mindful Chore

This practice is adapted from a core exercise detailed in Gardner and Moore's 2007 book, "The Psychology of Enhancing Human Performance: The Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) Approach."¹ In this book, Gardner and Moore detail their success working with high-profile athletes on stress management, improving performance, and maintaining their health despite rigorous training demands and high-stress performance requirements.

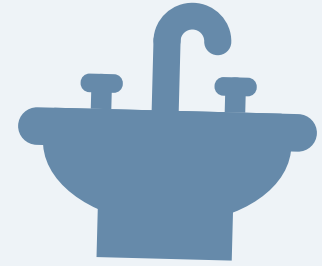
Most people experience periods of elevated stress over the course of their careers. In addition to straining your emotional and physical health, stress can deplete you at times when you most need a boost and negatively impact your ability to perform.

Use this practice for a more active application of mindfulness. It is good practice to become proficient in dropping into a mindful state when in the middle of an action that too requires attention.

To Begin:

Go to your sink and clear out a space for you to wash a dish. Grab a dish, either clean or dirty, and ideally a plate or something with a lot of surface area.

Run the water gently (we will be running water for a while and want to be conservative) and at a comfortable but still warm temperature. Put soap on the dish and grab a rag or simply use your hand. You need to be able to feel the plate.



¹ Gardner, F. L., & Moore, Z. E. (2007). The psychology of enhancing human performance: The mindfulness-acceptance-commitment (MAC) approach. Springer Publishing Company.

Start washing the plate. As you do, try to focus on what you feel: the warmth of the water, the feeling of the soap, the feeling of the plate and all its bumps and crevices. Continue washing the same dish, using the same gentle motions, for 7 minutes.

During the 7 minutes, you will notice thoughts coming into your mind. You might be questioning why you are doing this. You might be wondering if your hands will turn wrinkly from all the water. You might even notice the water isn't as warm as you'd like, or it is too warm. Whatever thoughts emerge into your mind, simply notice them and let them drift by. Gently bring your attention back to the act of washing the dish.

You might start getting bored. If so, recognize that you are bored and then bring your attention back to washing. You may even want to quit. But you can easily wash a dish for 7 minutes. It is not physically demanding. It is simply a challenge because our brains are constantly producing thoughts and reasons to not do things. Stick to the activity for 7 minutes.

Once you are finished, reflect on the following points:

1. What was the content of your thoughts like? Did you swing back and forth between boredom, irritation, curiosity, and even stress about past or present thoughts? What does that tell you about the nature of the mind?
2. In the moments when you brought your attention gently back to the activity, what did you notice about your attention and emotional experience in that moment?
3. Did you find yourself naturally gravitating to using the values response from Module 3 in this activity? If not, how might providing a value strengthen the intentionality of this activity when you begin wondering, "Why in the world am I washing this same dish for this long?"

After reflecting on this activity, practice it again except replace it with another mundane chore. Do you need to vacuum? Try vacuuming the same spot for several minutes. Do you need to put laundry away? Try folding and unfolding the same shirt over and over for several minutes. Each time reflect on your experience and notice what your mind and emotional responses are. And yet, you are still able to persevere and complete the activity. Notice if your stress and frustration with repeating the same activity dissipates as you get better with mindfulness.

To finish, expand this practice to any activity. If you have to go grocery shopping after work and you feel tired, practice it mindfully. Planning on going for a run? Practice mindfulness while running. Going into a work call? Practice mindfulness while you do so and reflect on how it changes your relationship with that moment.

Tip: Combine this practice with values affirmation and committed action to notice how these two practices—values-aligned behavior and mindfulness—support each other and your well-being.
