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Mapping Mindfulness in Digital Culture with Contemplative Leadership

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Mapping Mindfulness in Digital Culture
with Contemplative Leadership

Digital Mindfulness is an emerging field of inquiry and practice into the integration of technology and contemplative practices.

1. An emerging field of inquiry and practice of investigating the intersection of mindfulness with our digital culture.

2. An understanding that living in a fast-paced, highly connected digital society has powerful impacts on human development, interactions, and individual well-being and that promoting mindful behavior in these digital spheres can have positive affects on the health and well-being of both individuals and the societies that we live in.

3. Individuals self-define and establish their own process of becoming digital stewards so that they can co-exist with technology for well being.
**MAP Mindfulness** is an organization founded by Sherri Henderson and Erin Sheehan, recent Lesley University alumni from the Master of Arts in Mindfulness Studies program. They created MAP to serve two main purposes:

1. **Create and Support a Professional Community:** to curate a dynamic online community for mindfulness professionals to engage in dialogue and collaborative efforts in the emerging field of mindfulness. This group would bring an emphasis on research, ethical standards, and authentic practice.

2. **Explore Digital Mindfulness and Provide Instruction:** Their graduate work investigated the intersection of the growing mindfulness momentum with individuals in a strong digital culture. A culture reliant on technology and digital communications creates changes in the way that society engages with their experience in the world with themselves and with others. Examining themes of awareness, presence, pause, and ethics in digital behaviors and interactions can help an individual increase their understanding of self and shape their identity. Bringing a contemplative practice to digital habits allows an individual to lead their experience and not be automatically driven by other social norms or even by the way in which the devices work. At the same time, individuals can also become mindful digital stewards to others with their practice. Parents can act as stewards to their children in bringing digital mindfulness to youth.
**Digital Mindfulness** encourages us to **slow down** and **pause** long enough to assess our relationship with technology.

Asking vital questions about how different tools, devices, and technologies make us feel can bring **awareness** and **insight** into our daily life.

This **honest inquiry** can bring us more **balance** and overall **well being** as we set **intentions** instead of being led on autopilot by habits.

Being mindful of our relationship with digital devices and practicing new behaviors helps to **reshape conversations** in our homes, schools, and communities about what it means to be a **digital citizen** in today's rapidly changing technological world and why that is **vitally important**.
Why is Digital Mindfulness Practice Important?

The habits we build around smartphones are so strong because they involve our body's reward system — the same system that makes sweet food or smoking so addictive, University of Massachusetts Medical School Centre for Mindfulness's Dr. Judson Brewer said.

Dr. Brewer has used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and other techniques to look at the brain's processes when it comes to craving and addiction.

When we experience a trigger (such as hunger) this results in a behavior (such as eating). This, in turn, releases a chemical in the brain called dopamine, which creates a temporary feeling of pleasure.

When it comes to our smartphones, the trigger in the reward system could be stress.

If we get stressed out, and then we go and distract ourselves by surfing the internet on our phone or checking our Facebook feed, that temporary distraction gives that same type of temporary reward," Dr. Brewer said.

He said the dopamine reward is "intermittent" because we never know when the next Facebook "like", email, text message or phone call is going to arrive.

That means we anticipate more and get a bigger hit when we are finally rewarded for our constant phone checking.

"If we knew that we were going to get an email every 30 seconds, then our brain is going to start expecting that, and it's not going to get the big dopamine hit," Dr. Brewer said.
Digital Mindfulness to Leadership

One of the aims of digital mindfulness is to engage the individual in contemplative leadership towards social change.

A culture reliant on technology and digital communications creates changes in the way that society engages with their experience in the world with themselves and with others. Examining themes of awareness, presence, pause, and ethics in digital behaviors and interactions can help an individual increases their understanding of self and shape their identity.

Bringing a contemplative practice to digital habits allows an individual to lead their experience and not be automatically driven by other social norms or even by the way in which the devices work.

"Mindfulness can revitalize our workplace and cultivate mindful leaders who could accept the invitation to become fully human, and in turn lend a hand to a world in need of help. " David Levy, *Mindful Tech.*
Digital leadership & Ethics for Parents

Individuals can also become mindful digital stewards to others with their practice. Parents can act as stewards to their children in bringing digital mindfulness to youth.

- Brain development, from early childhood and into early adulthood, is imperative for health and well-being. Healthy attachment and social development are vulnerable to a variety of influences.

- The rapid growth in technology usage requires a growing need to find understanding, awareness and developmentally appropriate ways to support child and adolescent in growth and well-being.

- Digital mindfulness encourages slowing down and creates the opportunity for deeper reflection. It also understands the role of parents, the family, and technology in the 21st Century.
Stay Connected

Please feel free to contact Erin Sheehan and Sherri Henderson with any questions on our current projects delivering *Digital Mindfulness* programs to youth and adult. You can also join our newsletter for ongoing news, resources, and future podcasts – link on the website.


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