

Getting Grounded in Your Work Day: 5 Senses in 5 Minutes

A 5 minute mindfulness exercise for relaxation and stress relief.

Published on June 20, 2011 by Brad Waters in Design Your Path

How is your work week starting out? Is it a hectic Monday or are you easing into it? Here is a quick mindfulness exercise that is helpful for "grounding" yourself during crazy days.

Do you know what it's like to feel grounded? Or, perhaps I should ask, do you know what it's like to not feel grounded? It's that feeling of being overwhelm when you have trouble concentrating and can't fathom how you're going to get everything completed. Imagine being caught in a current of water where no matter how hard you swim, you just can't reach solid ground. In fact, fighting the current just wears you out and gets you pulled further into the torrent.

A grounding exercise, like this 5-minute mindfulness, can slow your breathing, slow your heart-rate, and stop overwhelm in its tracks. It's not going to solve all your problems but you'll probably feel better equipped to deal with them. Five minutes is all you need (you can even set the timer on your cell phone) to engage your senses and get a foothold on your day.

1. **Relax:** Sit in a comfortable upright position with your feet planted flat on the ground. Rest your hands on your thighs or on your desk.

2. **Breathe:** Just breathe. Refreshing, comfortable and even breaths. Don't worry about technique, just allow relaxing breaths to enter deeply and exhale fully.

3. **Engage:** It's time to engage each of your 5 senses, one at a time, for one minute each. You can keep a clock handy or just estimate. The point here is to focus on the present moment and how each sense is being activated in that moment. You might start like this:

Hearing: Begin to relax by just noticing all of the sounds around you. Give yourself permission to suspend your judgment of the sounds. They are not good or bad, they just are. Are you now hearing more than you were before you started? Subtle sounds may have previously gone unnoticed. Can you hear them now? Remember your steady breaths while you are listening.

Smell: Now shift your concentration to noticing the smells of your environment. Is somebody cooking lunch in your building? Can you detect the electronics smell of your computer or fresh air coming in through your window? Try closing your eyes so you can focus on the subtlest of scents.

Sight: If you closed your eyes a moment ago, open them to notice the colors, shapes and textures of your surroundings. If you really look, just about everything has color variation and texture that may have gone unnoticed. How many shades of blue or red? Any color missing?

Taste: You can do this one regardless of whether or not you have food to put in your mouth. If you have a snack go ahead and take a small bite, noticing all of the flavors and textures that arise. If you don't have food, just notice your tongue in your mouth, your saliva, and your breath as you exhale. Most of us have tastes in our mouth at all times. Run your tongue over your teeth and cheeks- what do you notice? Keep breathing, one more minute.

Touch: Last one. Where did you place your hands when you first started this exercise? Notice the sensation of where your hands meet something solid like the fabric of your clothes or the surface of your desk. Notice the pressure between your feet and the floor. Try feeling the textures that you noticed by sight a moment ago. To fully ground yourself in the room and bring the exercise to a close, feel several objects on your desk and perhaps even stand up from your chair to bring energy and sensation to all parts of your body.

Time is up. Even when there are distractions during this 5 minute exercise, you can gently bring yourself back to your senses. No need to get frustrated when that happens, because a distraction is just another engagement of a particular sense. Incorporate it into the exercise.

How do you feel now? Are you back in the moment and back in your body? Compare how you feel now with how you felt 5 minutes ago- what has changed? Try this exercise next time you're feeling trapped in the current of the day.