



So Many Self-Help Books – So Little Change

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I spent a couple of hours recently with a client for whom basically everything has gone wrong over the last couple of years – marriage in a mess, business heading down the tubes, in the middle of a couple of court actions, finances shot – and, seemingly no way out.

However, the very first thing we discussed was not the way out, but how he'd got himself into the mess in the first place – particularly as he already had a strong grasp of how we use our minds to create the lives we want. Surely, this was not the life he wanted.

I will not go into the private details of a client's life here – suffice it to say that he had walked himself in to most of his problems with his eyes wide open. He had made elementary errors of judgement in buying his current business, he had trusted people who the evidence before his very eyes would shout "don't trust this guy", he had made investments that promised returns that were "too good to be true" (generally those kind of returns are!) and almost lost everything he had invested.

During the course of our conversation, I pointed out to him that the knowledge and understanding he has (of how one can harness their mental energy to create the life they want) is like a lethal weapon if placed in the wrong hands. Adolf Hitler knew what kind of life he wanted and went about creating it with all the single-mindedness of an exceptionally successful person, but few would agree that what he created was ideal for either himself or those whose lives he touched!! I pointed out to my client that intellectually understanding how your mind and the world works is not good enough – you need to experience it firsthand. In fact, an intellectual understanding, without the experiential, is a disaster waiting to happen.

Why? Because you start seeing opportunities that aren't there, you start pandering to your own greed for a life of success that's measured on other people's terms. You start leaping mindlessly into outrageous situations because you think (intellectually) that you're being mindful. You cannot see the wood for the trees.

I always explain to my clients that they need to be extraordinarily careful what they wish for. I always propose a framework for their goals and dreams that suggests that they should seek happiness in their work, work which is well paid, work that positively touches the lives of others. They should seek wonderful personal relationships, a happy personal life, lots of time spent doing what really turns them on and that they should be at peace with themselves.

And, yet, here was a client, far from unique, who had shot straight out into the fast lane towards greed – thinking that he understood how his mind works, but not actually putting it into practice. He told me that he brushed his teeth and ate his breakfast mindfully each morning. But we all know people who go to Church on Sunday and go out and trample over people’s lives on Monday. Any idiot can eat a bowl of breakfast cereal mindfully. Not every idiot can sit through a business meeting or key investment consultation without their mind straying into distraction and, too often, greed.

As I said to my client, how come the “self-help” or “personal development” sectors of the publishing industry are the fastest growing? How come every book shop’s shelves groan with tons of “popular psychology” and “mind-body-spirit” books? And how come the world seems to be in a bigger mess than ever?

Have large numbers of people intellectually understood how one can create the “life of your dreams”, but not actually put mindfulness – the only key to effortless living – into daily practice? Have people missed the point that a “work/life balanced” inner happiness concept of success is what is best for all of us – and, in the process, mistaken, like “normal people”, material gain for success? Does the evidence of what has happened in the world’s banking sector, investment markets and even residential property markets provide evidence that greed is misconstrued as success?

Of course, we shouldn’t be surprised that, as the only species on the planet that’s obsessed with money, even the “self-help industry’s” definition of success often puts money first. Books like “The Secret” encourage you to write yourself a cheque from “The Bank of the Universe” for some outrageous amount and stick it on your refrigerator. One of that book’s contributors, sells fake \$1m bills on his website. Google “Personal Development” and you’ll find that most sites results talk about trebling your income or financial freedom.

They’re all way off the mark – and so are you if you think that happiness and success come from some intellectual understanding of how the world works mixed with a pinch of financial greed. No wonder we have all those self-help books and the world is in a bigger mess than ever! No wonder people have confused success and money.

We need to practice mindfulness throughout the course of our everyday lives – starting with a few minutes meditation each morning – but then ensuring that we carry that clarity of mind into our daily relationships, our place of work, our family and friends, our work, rest and play. We need to set aside our base obsession with money and having enough of it (whatever that means!) – we need to take stock of what’s really important to us and focus our minds, mindfully, on just that.

Then, maybe then, people will start practicing and experiencing mindfulness – rather than intellectually understanding it. When that happens, it will make a world of difference.

Willie’s work in the area of [self-improvement](#) and [meditation](#) has been described as “life-changing” and “phenomenal” by clients from every walk of life. His acclaimed two-day personal development workshop is now available online at [Gurdy.Net](#).