

10 WAYS TO STAY

MINDFUL IN A SOCIAL LIFE



We typically spend more time each day taking care of our hair than we do taking care of our brains, even though only one of those things is really essential to helping us function. And I like having nice hair, but it still gives me pause every time I think about that. Then I'll read an article about how Social Media is literally changing our brains by reforming our neural pathways (yes, your brain really does change based on your behavior), and it hits me again how vital it is that we start to make conscious choices about our media usage. The suggestions below are all short (not a single two-hour meditation on the list) and adding just one of them into each day can help you to significantly shift the energetic baggage that you carry with you through your week.

1) Start Your Day with Consciousness (3 minutes)

The first 3 minutes of your day are when you are at your most suggestible, so it's a very good idea to be intentional about what you consume in that time.

Instead of grabbing your phone and immediately checking email or scrolling Facebook, shut off your alarm, take a few breaths and allow yourself to wake up with intention. Think about the positives of the day ahead, about what you want to accomplish and, more importantly, about how you want to feel about your day. If you want to take this a step further, spend a few minutes now writing down how you would like to start each day. Then, work on adding in one of the things from your list every day for a week so you can get a feel for how it shifts your perspective on the rest of your day.

2) Get an Alarm Clock (2 minutes on Amazon)

If your alarm is on your phone and the phone is next to your bed, this means it's the very first thing you interact with each day. If you're having a really hard time starting your morning without checking Instagram, an old-school alarm clock can create an easy boundary between sleep and social.

3) Check your comparison queen or king (10 seconds)

Social Media has essentially provided each of us with our own individual PR firm. We can promote whatever is going on in our lives with about the same authenticity as any political candidate or megabrand. Keep that in mind as you read status updates or check out pics. You're seeing a specially curated snapshot of their lives, not the whole thing. It can help to assign a brand to the people who post the shiniest life updates (i.e. TripAdvisor for the "My life is only about amazing travel" friend or Gerber to the "my child is so perfect" buddy. Thinking of it as a brand campaign, instead of an actual life that can be realistically compared to yours can help you shut down your comparison tendencies before they take you on the downward spiral. Which is why it's also extremely important to...

4) Communicate in real life (5 minutes)

It's easy to get in the habit of thinking we're "up-to-date" with our closest friends because we've read their latest status or exchanged a few quick messages via text. Call or schedule face-to-face time with them and talk about your real lives. The parts that aren't so "status-worthy". Catching up may take more than 5 minutes but scheduling a time to talk shouldn't.

5) It's OK to Unfollow or Even Defriend (gasp)! (5 seconds)

If there's someone in your feed who routinely makes you feel like crap or if their every status update just pisses you off, UNFOLLOW THEM. The universe and I have agreed that you have full permission to do this. We checked, there is no rule that says you have to consume someone else's perspective to the detriment of your own mental state. If this is a person that doesn't have any impact on your real life, then unfriend them as well.

6) Honor Your Personal Time (10 minutes)

Drawing healthy boundaries with our media devices is essential to allowing ourselves to connect with our own thoughts and perspectives. Consider for a moment that we take in up to 30,000 messages a day from outside sources. Comparatively, how much time do you spend checking in with your own thoughts, feelings and opinions? You might know what everyone else thinks of your new promotion (like, like, like, awesome, good for you), but how are you feeling about it (excited, scared, intimidated, elated, or unenthused)?

7) Acknowledge Avoidance (5 minutes)

Social Media, email, audiobooks, music, video, are all available to us at the touch of a button, meaning we can keep our brains busy processing stimulation while we actively avoid a problem that needs solving or an emotion that needs addressing. When you feel yourself step up your electronic engagement beyond its normal levels, this is usually a signal that you're avoiding something in your life. It might be a person, it might be a problem or it might be an idea that's making you uncomfortable. When this happens, find some space for silence (tv free, music free, people free and phone free) to listen to yourself. You might find the answer to a problem you've been wanting to solve in that space.

8) Ask yourself, is this a status update or a journal entry? (3 minutes)

Have you noticed that you feel the need to post more when you're going through a stressful period? That urge to share our feelings can be rooted in our desire for acceptance from others, in our need for their approval. So if you're feeling the urge to (over) share, take a few minutes and write it out in private first. This may allow you to assess whether this is something you're ready to share, or if a smaller audience might be more appropriate (smaller might even mean figuring out what YOU think of it, before you ask everyone else to weigh in).

9) Create Some Space Between Social & Sleep (10 minutes to 2 hours)

Set an end time each day to stop checking email and social media (anyone else have a late night Pinterest habit??). Especially if your job is focused on social, having even a 15 minute window between your last status scroll and crawling into bed can give you a bit of the space you need to start the slide into relaxation and sleep mode. Experts recommend 2 hours of pre-sleep freedom from the blue screen, but if that causes you more stress than solace, find a time frame that works for you.

10) End Your Day with Compassion (5 minutes)

Spend a few minutes each night, checking in with your current physical, mental and emotional state. This doesn't need to be long or complicated. Simply touch base to see if you're carrying a bunch of stress in your shoulders or if there's a conversation from earlier that keeps rerunning in your head. Notice if you're feeling up or down or exhausted or buzzed. Take a moment to ask yourself what you need, just as you would with a good friend. Spending just a little time each day valuing ourselves can create a more stable foundation for our lives. This foundation, based in compassionate care, allows us to create a life that feels good to us each and every day.