



The Zen of Project Management

BY GEORGE PITAGORSKY, PMP

FOR PMI SAN DIEGO CHAPTER

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Instructor Introduction

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George Pitagorsky

Consultant, coach, CIO, Enterprise architect

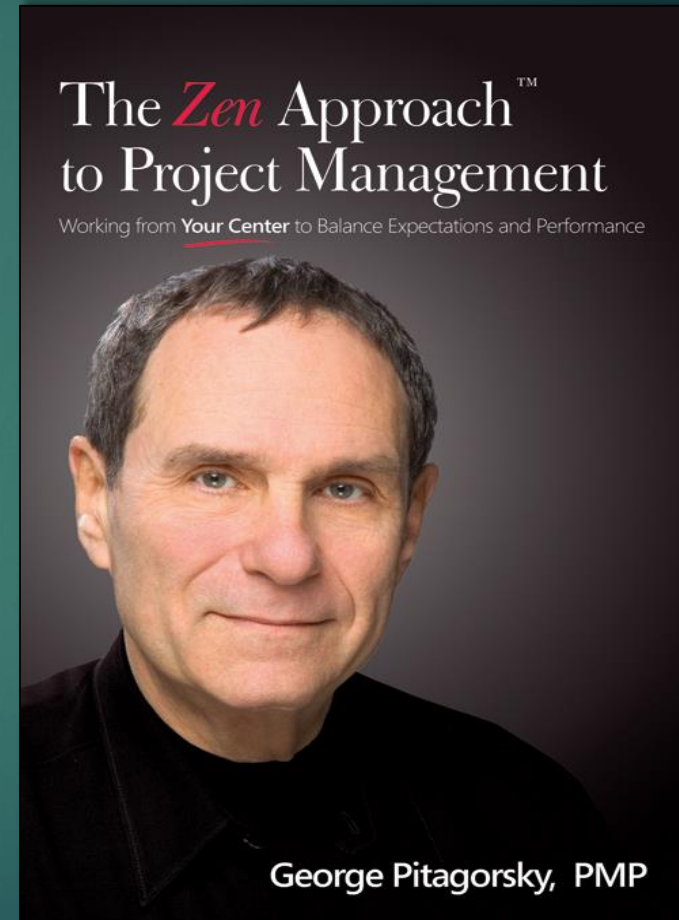
50+ years project, product and engagement management

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The Breakthrough Newsletter

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Who Are You and What do you Know?

- ☐ Name
- ☐ Background – education and experience
- ☐ Do you meditate?
- ☐ Why have you come?

Housekeeping Items

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- ▶ Breaks
- ▶ Restrooms
- ▶ Emergency and safety
- ▶ Lunch
- ▶ Cell phones
- ▶ E-mail
- ▶ Participation



Session Goal and Objectives

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The session is designed to promote optimal performance

- ▶ using exercises and guided dialogue
- ▶ To home in on how best to approach your Project Manager role
- ▶ To be as successful as you can be – to perform optimally
- ▶ You will take away:
 - ▶ Meditation technique
 - ▶ A perspective that you can apply to your work
 - ▶ To avoid and relieve unnecessary stress and
 - ▶ make the best of the stress that is inevitable



Set Your Goals

Until total enlightenment we are goal oriented

- ▶ To become unconditionally happy:
an expression of clarity and compassion
- ▶ On a more mundane level:
How would you like things to be?
 - ▶ The look and feel of your organization and its projects
 - ▶ Performance
 - ▶ Relationships
 - ▶ Your sense of happiness and fulfillment

Our Strategy

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Use exercises and guided dialogue to home in on how best to approach the PM role, to be as successful as you can be – to perform optimally.

- ▶ What is Zen and why care about it?
- ▶ Optimal Performance
- ▶ PM as a Zen art
- ▶ Mindfulness and Meditation
- ▶ Open-mindedness
- ▶ Application in PM.



The Nature of Mind



Mindfulness:

Purposeful, Objective Awareness

Mindfulness Meditation in Action :

Make everything you do a mindfulness exercise

Take a moment (15 seconds or so) to relax – comfortably erect

Sense your body and your breath

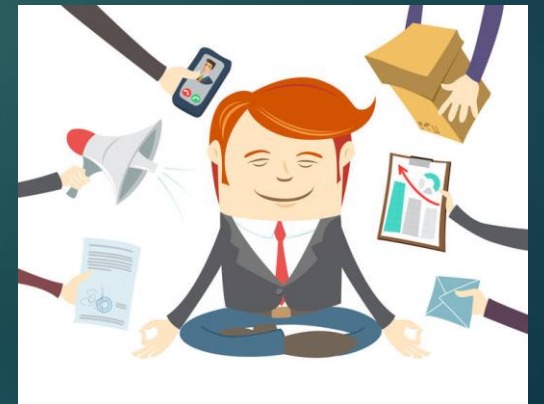
Become aware of everything that is happening in and around you – sights, sounds or smells, your feelings, your thoughts

Engage in whatever it is that you are doing

If you become distracted – unconsciously reacting or lost in thought

As soon as you realize it, bring your attention back to the breath.

Continue



Activity Recap: Cultivating Concentration, Calm, and Alert Mindfulness

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- ▶ Do it for the rest of this session
- ▶ Mindfulness in action
 - ▶ At your desk
 - ▶ In a meeting
 - ▶ Commuting
 - ▶ Walking



Discussion:

What Are Your Expectations?

Mindfully Aware, let's address the following questions:

- ▶ What would you like to get out of this session?
- ▶ What are the issues that make it difficult to do your job?

Zen and the Zen PM

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Definition of The Zen Project Manager

"The Zen PM is one who is mindfully aware of their personal reactions, situations they are present within, and the resources with which they associate" - Karina S.



zen

One way to think of zen is this: a total state of focus that incorporates a total togetherness of body and mind. Zen is a way of being. It also is a state of mind. Zen involves dropping illusion and seeing things without distortion created by your own thoughts.

zen

adjective US /zen/ slang
feeling peaceful and relaxed

zen

adjective UK /zen/ US /zen/ informal
relaxed and not worrying about things that
you cannot change



Forget Zen

ZEN IS NOT SOME KIND OF EXCITEMENT, BUT CONCENTRATION ON OUR
USUAL EVERYDAY ROUTINE.

SHUNRYU SUZUKI

No Zen

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This session is **not about Zen,**
It is about

- ▶ how you think
- ▶ Your attitude, beliefs and mental models
- ▶ The way you understand your world and
- ▶ How you feel and act –
your work, relationships, behavior, and performance

An Open Formless Way

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- ▶ No one right way
- ▶ Not founded on belief or exclusivity
- ▶ Derived from and compatible with:
 - ▶ Systems thinking
 - ▶ Western psychology and philosophy
 - ▶ Yoga
 - ▶ Taoism
 - ▶ Zen
 - ▶ Science
 - ▶ Essential world perennial wisdom teachings

Mindfully Aware

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Knowing what is going on

- ▶ Observing everything as it comes
- ▶ Purposefully
- ▶ Objectively
- ▶ Without attachment
- ▶ While actively involved & Performing optimally



A photograph of a Zen garden. The foreground shows smooth, dark stones arranged on a bed of white sand that has been raked into fine, wavy lines. The background is a soft-focus view of more stones and sand.

**Cutting through your
conditioning to experience
things as they
are**

**Clarity and
Compassion**



Conditioned Response

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- ▶ Everyone is conditioned from early childhood to perceive the world in a particular way
- ▶ Social conditioning builds on top of mental and physiological conditioning
- ▶ Conditioning distorts our perceptions
- ▶ Our perceptions drive our behavior.

Class Discussion: What is “authentic experience”?

- ▶ What does it mean to experience things as they are?
- ▶ Identify one or two instances in which you and others differently perceived a situation.
- ▶ What happened?
- ▶ What “got in the way” of seeing things more clearly?
- ▶ What can you do about it?



How Do You Become Mindfully Aware

- ▶ Understand and accept the world, as it is
 - ▶ Everything is part of a complex process - do no harm
 - ▶ Accept uncertainty and paradox
 - ▶ Commit to kindness and compassion
- ▶ Practice mindfulness meditation
- ▶ Make everything you do a dedicated activity – a Zen Art
- ▶ Question everything
- ▶ Let go
- ▶ Do – Plan, direct, manage, communicate, solve problems
 - ▶ Ride the wave of your projects and your lives
 - ▶ Monitor and adjust, as needed

Why Care About Mindful Awareness?

TOO MANY THINGS GET IN THE WAY OF OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE

There is Unnecessary Suffering

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- ▶ Two arrows:

1. The painful event or feeling
2. Add-ons

- ▶ Wanting things to be different than they can be

- ▶ OW! That hurts! Make the pain go away – now!

- ▶ Reactive thinking and worry

- ▶ Who put that “!#%^” tack there?
 - ▶ With all possible places to walk, why do I always have to step on a tack?
 - ▶ Will I get tetanus or an infection?

Why be Mindfully Aware?

Project managers (and humans in general) benefit from being

- ▶ Responsive rather than reactive,
- ▶ Objective and calm in the face of chaos
 - ▶ Able to manage uncertainty and expectations
- ▶ Healthy
- ▶ Energized
- ▶ Focused
- ▶ Kind and compassionate



Mindful Awareness in Action

YOU CAN ELIMINATE THE UNNECESSARY SUFFERING

What are Mindfulness, Concentration, and Awareness?

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▶ **Mindfulness**

- ▶ Attention to the moment to moment movement of thoughts, sounds, sensations, emotions, and external activity

▶ **Concentration**

- ▶ Ability to focus the mind on a chosen subject
- ▶ Exclusion of thoughts that take one's attention from the chosen subject

▶ **Awareness**

- ▶ Perception of oneself and one's thoughts as an object of attention
- ▶ Subtle, objective self-observation

Mindfulness Meditation Practice: Present, Noticing and Allowing

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- ▶ **Sense** your body weight against your chair, the air against your skin, the sensation of inhalation and exhalation wherever it is most prevalent for you – at the nostrils, the rising and fallen of the chest.
- ▶ Find a **comfortable, erect and relaxed** posture
 - ▶ Hands, arms, shoulders resting. Body balanced and stable.
 - ▶ Lips slightly apart. A subtle inner smile
 - ▶ Head gently reaching upward (imagine a string pulling upward from the crown); chin slightly tucked, head, neck spine relaxed and erect. Shoulders gently dropped back and down. Chest open.
- ▶ **Notice** sensations, feelings, thoughts, sounds, sights, smells as they occur
- ▶ **Allow** everything that occurs with a friendly accepting attitude
- ▶ If you get “lost” or distracted – as soon as you realize it **come back to the body, the breath and begin again**



The Master Project Manager

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- ▶ **Outer work:**
 - ▶ Continuously perfect your work and its results
- ▶ **Inner work:**
 - ▶ Use everything you do to
reach for self-actualization

Abraham Maslow:
“What a man can be, he must be.”

Mindful Awareness and Dedicated Arts

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Zen arts like Tea Ceremony and Archery are dedicated to approaching perfection.

- ▶ Perfection of self
- ▶ Perfection of process
- ▶ Perfection of result

Make everything you do

- ▶ a vehicle for honing the mastery of
- ▶ your performance and yourself.

Choose to master your art alone or both your art and yourself.

Open-mindedness

Working with Your Mind

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- ▶ Who's in charge of your mind?
- ▶ Can you stop your thoughts?
- ▶ Can you change your thoughts?
- ▶ Why would you want to?



Intention: Service Servant Leadership

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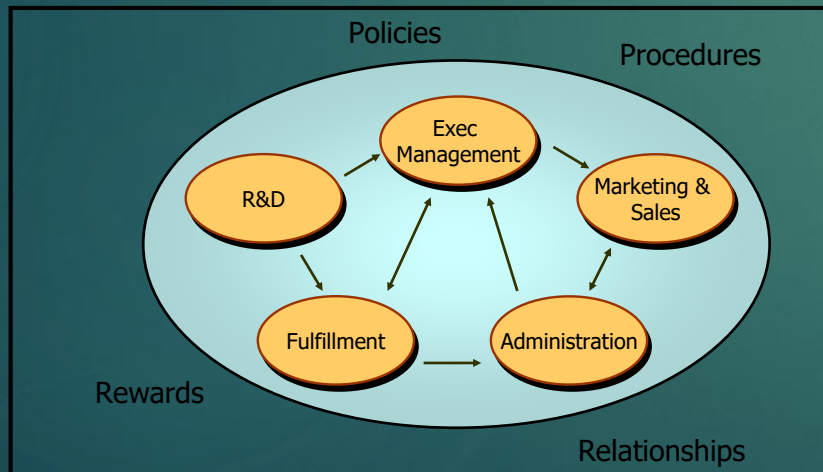
- ▶ What do others need?
- ▶ How can their needs be served?
- ▶ What do I need?
- ▶ How can my needs be served?
- ▶ When do I serve my own needs best by serving others?
- ▶ How do PMs serve their stakeholders:
team, clients, partners, sponsors?



Perspective: Process and Systems Oriented

See the big picture

- ▶ Everything is operating within a system of systems
- ▶ Every action has an effect
- ▶ Everything is caused by something



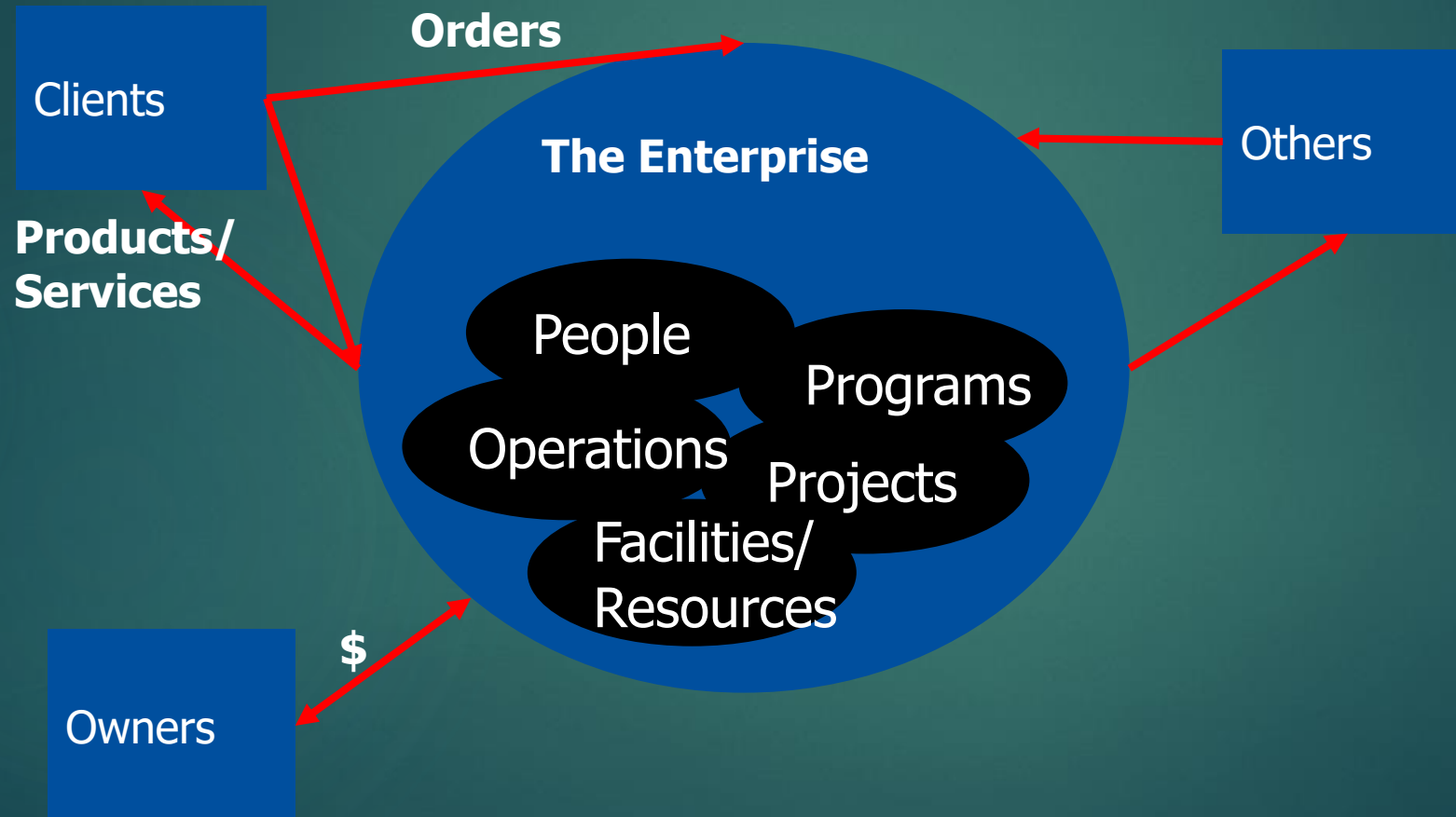
Application in PM: PM as a Dedicated Art

Use everything as an opportunity to
optimize your performance

Enterprise Goal: Meet Expectations

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What is the value of effective PM?



What Are the Problems?

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Symptoms

**Frustration,
anger, and
animosity**

**Low
Margins**

**Customer
Complaints**

Problems

**Inflexible
Products**

**Dissatisfied
Users**

**Unmet
Expectations**

Causes

**Deficient
Requirements**

**Late/Over
Budget Projects**

**Poor
Communication**

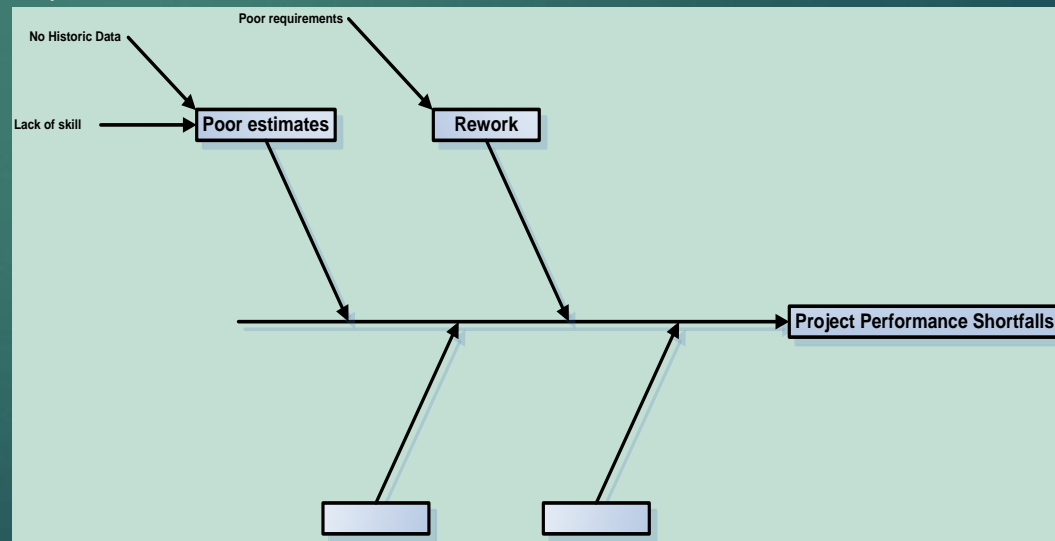
**Process
Deficiencies**

Discussion: Root Cause Analysis

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- ▶ Is root cause analysis useful?
- ▶ How often do you do it in your organization and projects?
- ▶ What are the barriers to doing root cause analysis?
- ▶ How can you overcome them?
- ▶ How do they relate to
 - ▶ Mindfulness?
 - ▶ Attachment?
 - ▶ Personal motivation?
 - ▶ Trust?



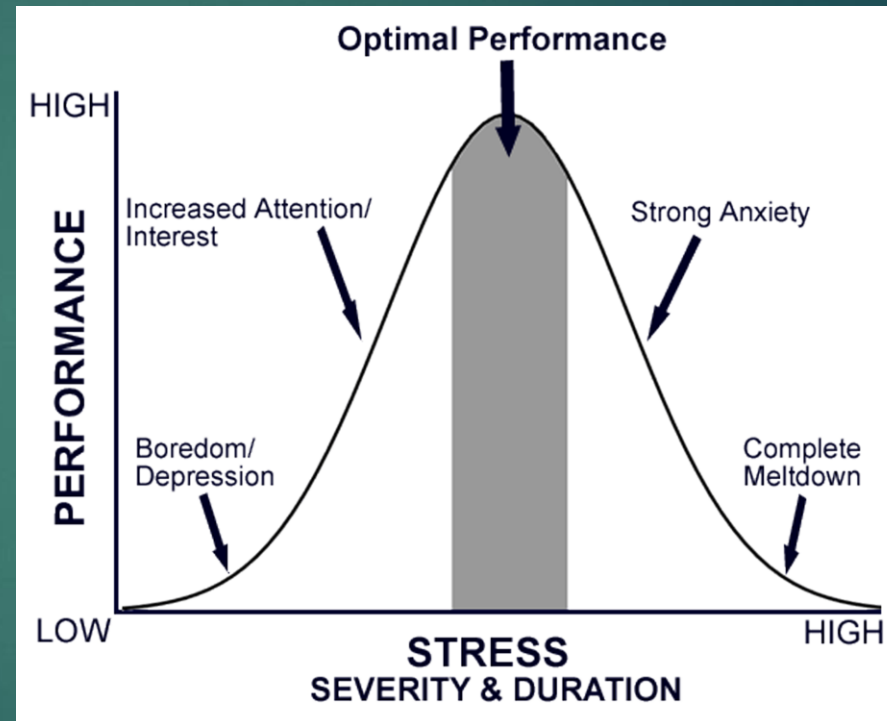
Expectations, Quality, Risk, Change Relationships, and Conflict

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Project Success & Optimal Performance

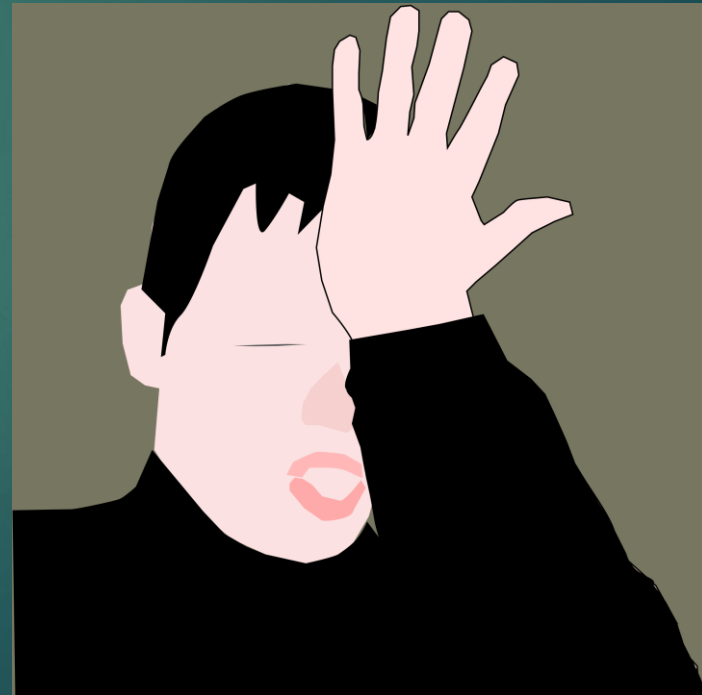
- ▶ Meet expectations
- ▶ Manage
 - ▶ Risk
 - ▶ Relationships
 - ▶ Conflict
 - ▶ Change



No one Wants To Be Disappointed

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Even when they seem to behave as if they would
Rather get a really good sounding “promise” than a
Reasonable high probability prediction

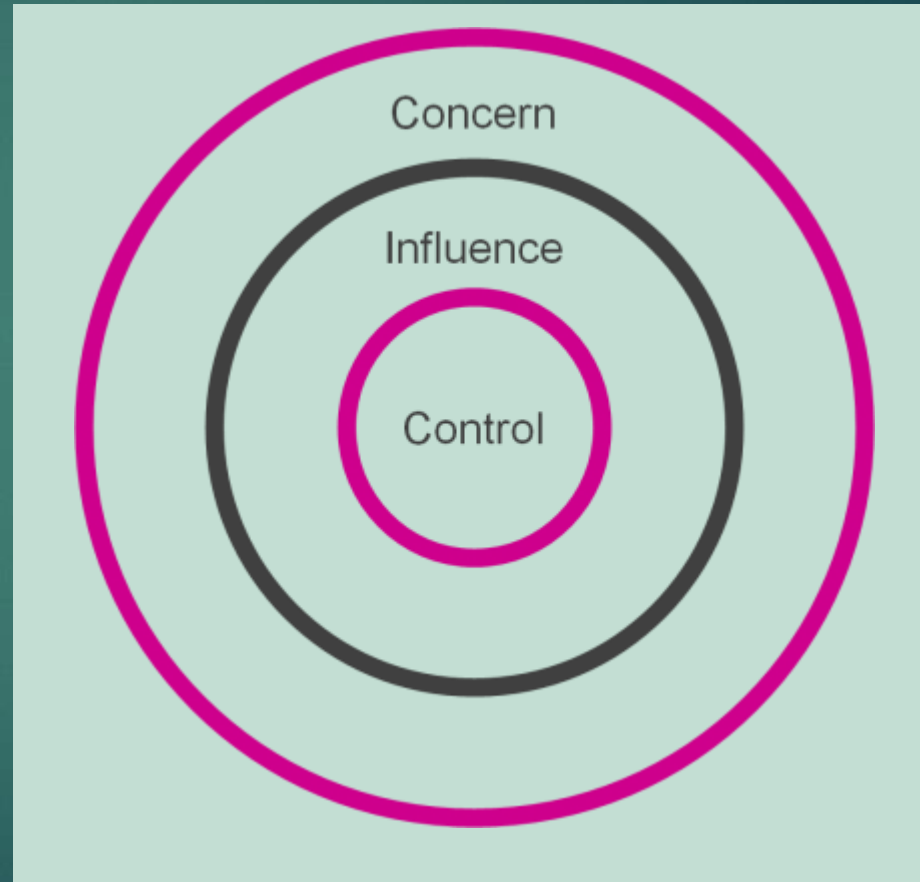


Expect Things To Be As They Are

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You are out of control

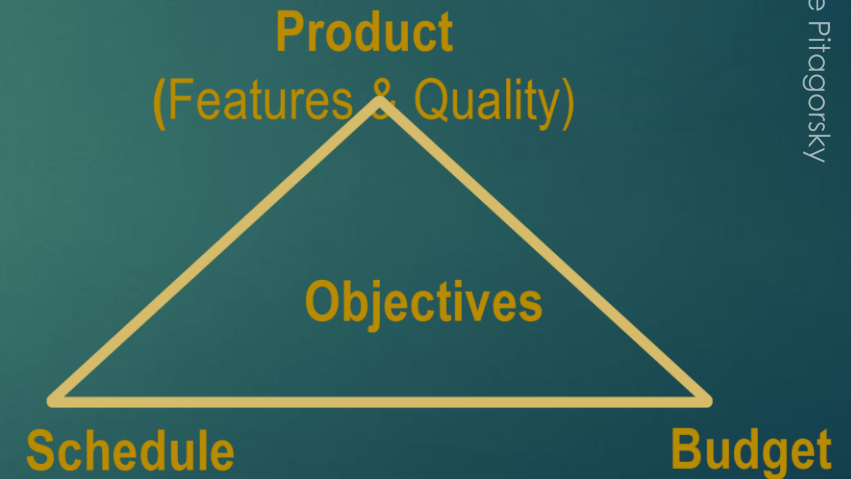
- ▶ Impermanence
- ▶ Uncertainty
- ▶ Paradoxes and continuums
- ▶ Continuous change
- ▶ One complex system
- ▶ Action and reaction
- ▶ Personal responsibility



What Do People Expect?

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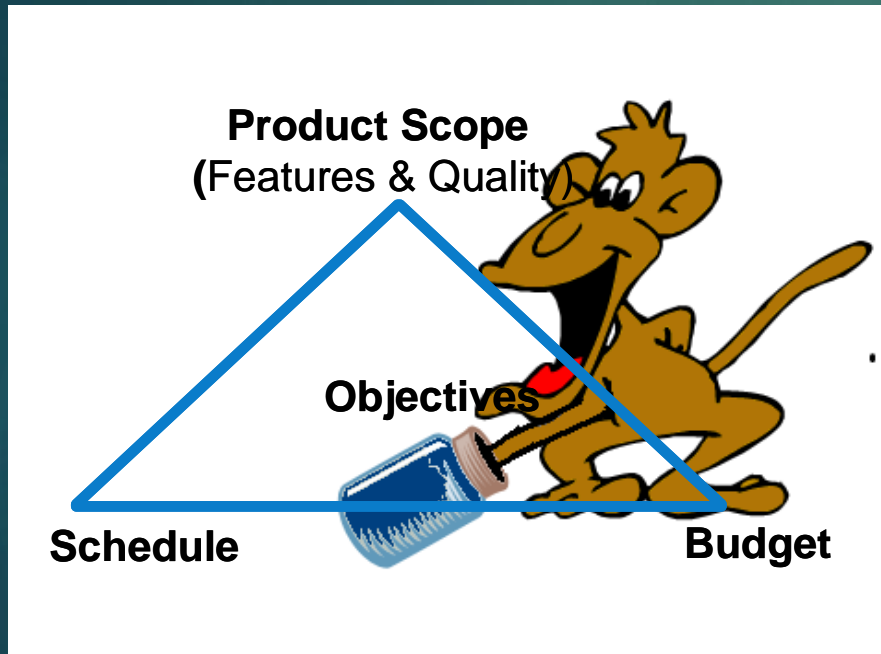
Schedule and Budget = f (Technique, Resources, Environment, and Product)



Attached to Impossible Expectations?

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- ▶ Can you achieve the impossible?
- ▶ Can things be different than they are or have been?
- ▶ Can things be different in the future?
- ▶ Can we stop things from changing?
- ▶ Can we control the way things change?

Expectations: Quality & Peace of Mind

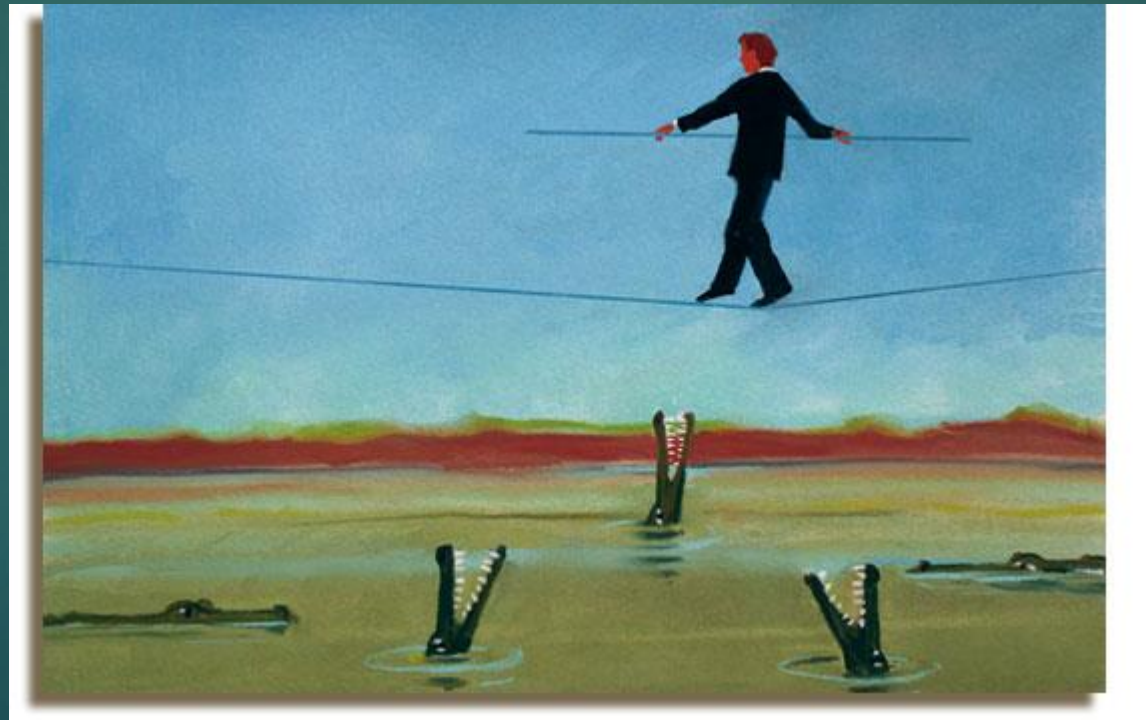
- ▶ “Cultivate the peace of mind, which does not separate one’s self from one’s surroundings.
- ▶ When that is done successfully, then everything else follows naturally.
- ▶ Peace of mind produces right values, right values produce right thoughts.
- ▶ Right thoughts produce right actions and right actions produce work which will be a material reflection for others to see of the serenity at the center of it all.”

Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

Uncertainty and Managing Risk

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- ▶ Can you always know the effects of every action?
- ▶ Can you and your stakeholders accept uncertainty
- ▶ Can you get better at predicting outcomes?



Change – Managing the Chaos

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- ▶ In Dr. Siu's version of baseball:
 - ▶ As long as the ball is in play, anyone can move any of the bases anywhere.
 - ▶ In other words, “everything is changing – not only the events themselves, but also the very rules governing the judgments of those events and the criteria of value.”

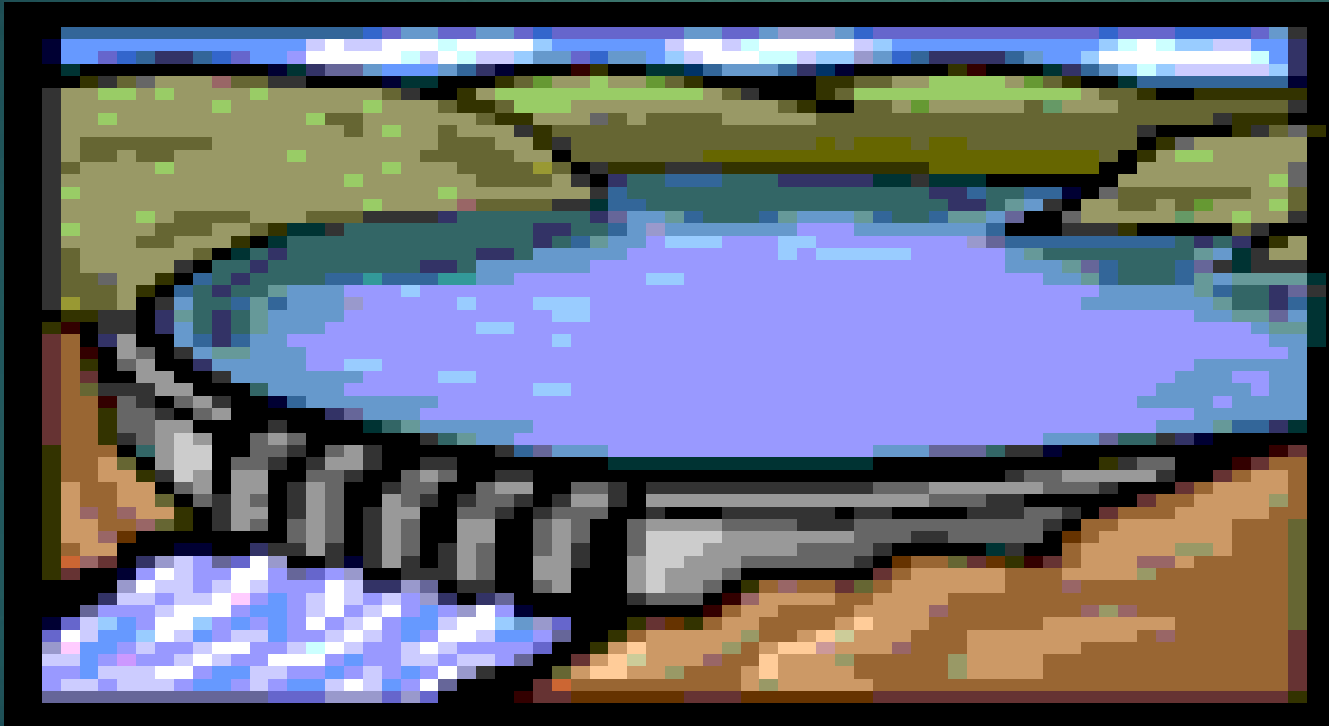


Adapted from SIU, R.G.H., *The Craft Of Power*, N.Y. John Wiley and Sons, 1979, pp. 178-9

You Can't Stop the Flow

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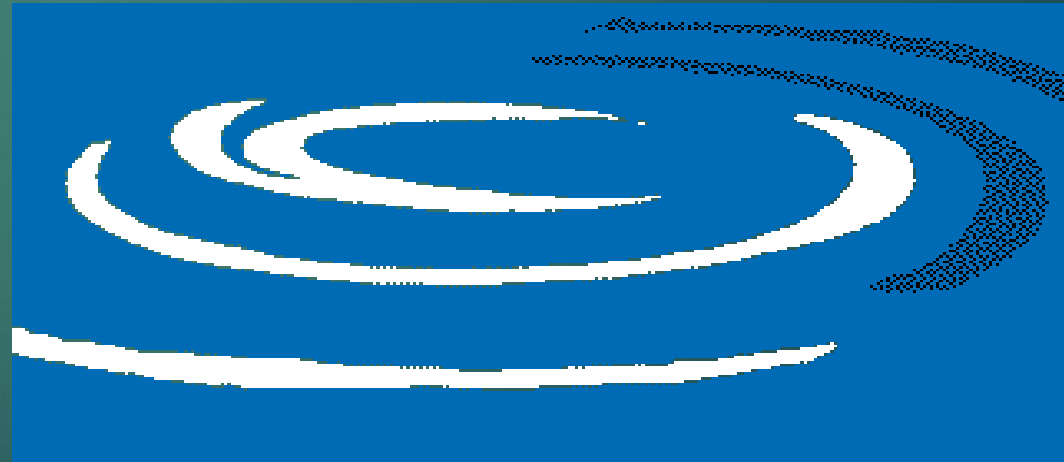
▶ But you can direct it.



Getting Caught in the Chaos

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- ▶ What does “getting caught” mean to you?
 - ▶ How often are you caught up in the waterfall of activities that are our thoughts our projects, our work, and our relationships?
 - ▶ When you are caught up, do you make errors both in the content of our work and the way we relate with others?
- ▶ How do you get caught?
 - ▶ Pressure to meet schedule
 - ▶ Budget short falls
 - ▶ Irrational stakeholders
 - ▶ Conflicts
 - ▶ Anger, fear, stress





Relationships and Conflict

HARMONY AND DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT
IDEAS AND BELIEFS

Relationships are at the Core of PM

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Mindful Awareness improves

- ▶ Self awareness (accurate self-assessment)
- ▶ Control of impulses – Responsive; NOT Reactive
- ▶ Altruism
- ▶ Self-motivation
- ▶ Empathy
- ▶ Social competence in interpersonal relationships
- ▶ The ability to manage emotions

Relationships and Emotions

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- ▶ Emotions: How do they effect thought, decision making, group performance, teamwork and individual success?
- ▶ Emotion:
 - ▶ A complex of psychological and physical feelings that are strong enough to create a distinct pressure to react
 - ▶ Anger, joyfulness, sadness, fear, love, and shame
 - ▶ Fear may manifest as terror, anxiety or concern;
 - ▶ Anger as fury, resentment or annoyance;
 - ▶ Joyfulness as pleasure, thrill, contentment or ecstasy.

Reactivity vs. Responsiveness

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- ▶ Emotions drive behavior and inhibit rational thought
 - ▶ Action without assessing the consequences
 - ▶ Outbursts, obstruction, passive-aggressive behavior
- ▶ Free from emotion – NOT emotion free
- ▶ Able to respond optimally

How has reactivity effected your projects and relationships?



Exercise: The Subjects and Sources of Conflict

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Are there conflicts?

What are the typical subjects of the conflicts in your PM environment?

What are the differences between positive and negative conflict?

What are the underlying causes of negative conflict?

How does it relate to mindful awareness?



Manage Conflict: Perspective

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- ▶ No absolutes
- ▶ Systems oriented
- ▶ Analytical
- ▶ Intuitive
- ▶ Objective
- ▶ Flexible – open-minded
- ▶ Service oriented

Healthy Conflict is an Opportunity to

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Improve outcomes

Learn about oneself
and others

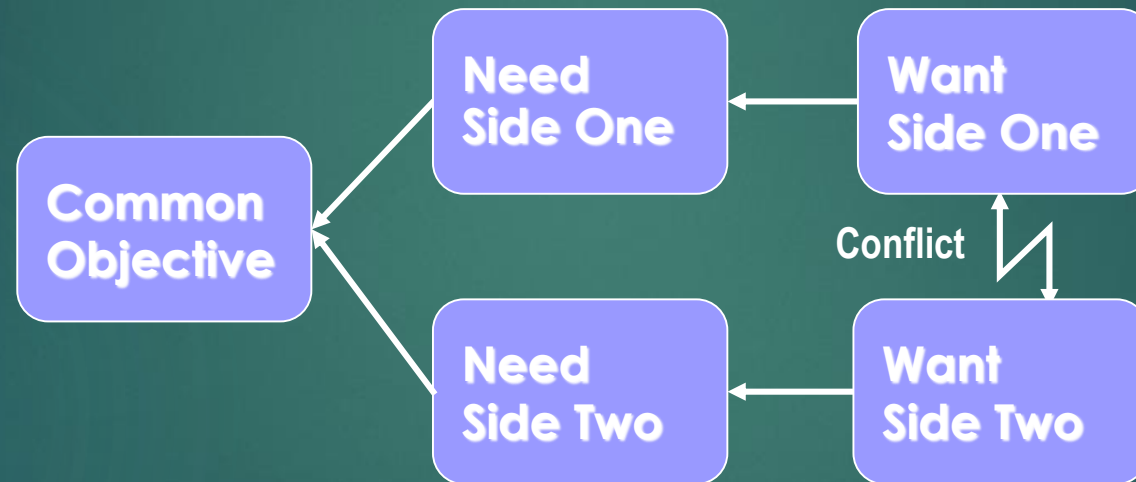
Sustain healthy
relationships

Learn about the
subject

Analysis of a Conflict

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**Win-win collaboration using a
conflict resolution diagram**



Working from Your Center

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- ▶ Come in contact with the:
 - ▶ Calm, peaceful place inside
 - ▶ Seeing things objectively; clearly
 - ▶ Being *present*
- ▶ A state of mind, not a place
 - ▶ Deep listening
 - ▶ Being open beyond one's preconceptions and historical ways of making sense
 - ▶ A state of "letting come"
 - ▶ Of consciously participating in a larger field for change

Mindful Awareness: Foundation for Effective Behavior and Relationships

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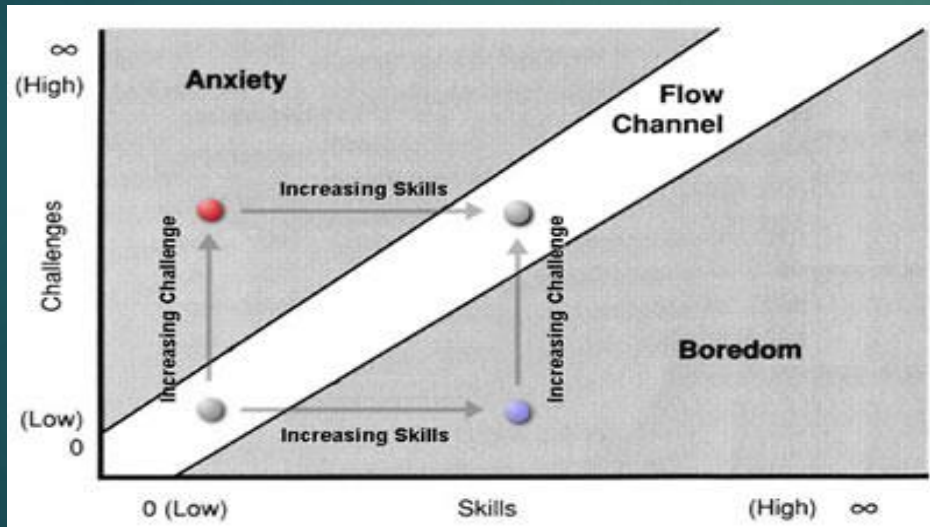
*“The thought manifests as the word,
The word manifests as the deed,
The deed develops into habits,
And the habit hardens into character.
So watch the thought
And its ways with care,
And let it spring from love
Born out of respect for all beings.”* Buddha

In Flow

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- ▶ The state of consciousness experienced by people when they are:
 - ▶ Deeply engaged
 - ▶ Genuinely enjoying the moment
 - ▶ Performing optimally

- ▶ Causative factors:
 - ▶ Clear goals
 - ▶ Immediate feedback
 - ▶ Balance between opportunity and capacity
 - ▶ Control as a natural part of the process
- ▶ Result in and are enhanced by:
 - ▶ Concentration
 - ▶ Focus on the present
 - ▶ Distortion of time
 - ▶ Loss of ego



Motivateplay.com

Open Minded: Intuition & Analysis

Objective, Structured, Flexible

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Weigh pros and cons
Unbiased
Fact based
Goal focused

Mindful

Present

Attentive

Observant

Aware



Orderly & rational
Progressive elaboration
Iterative refinement
Process and systems oriented

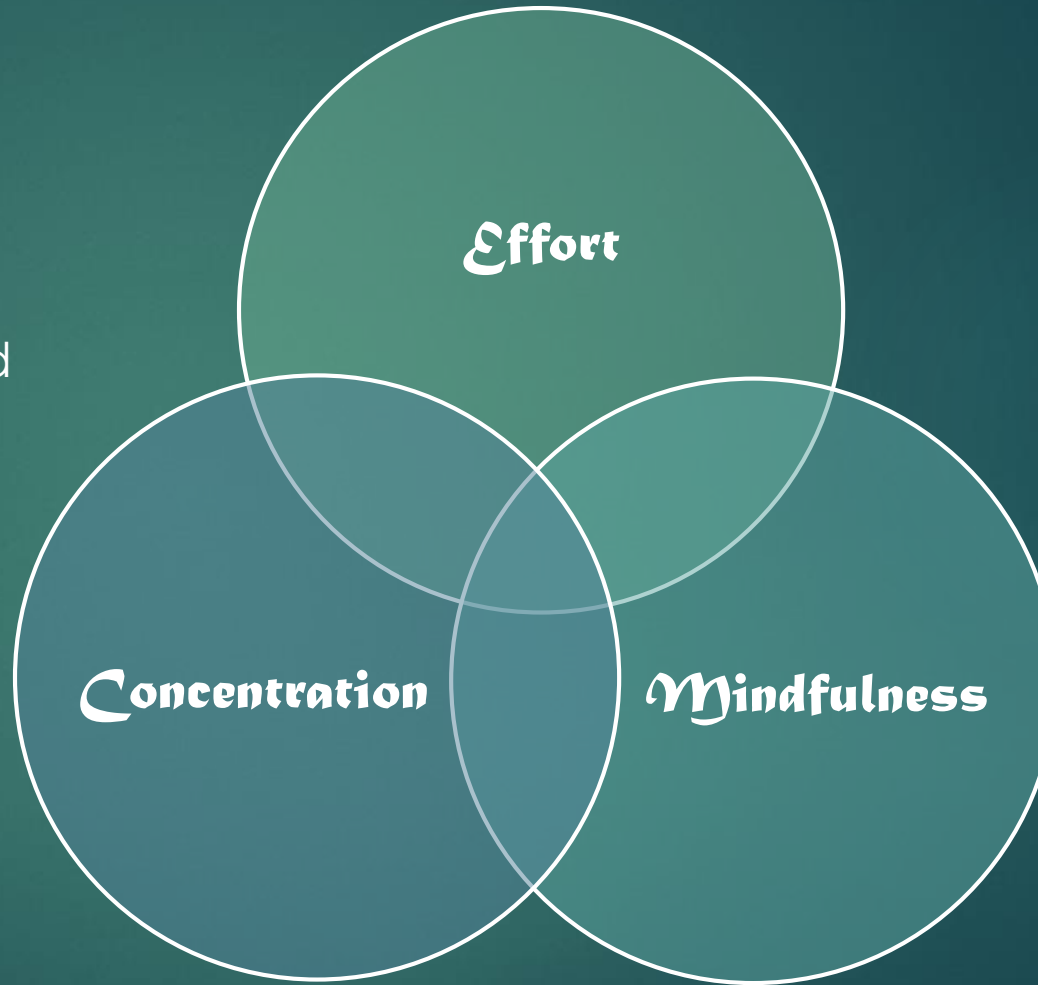
Open to change

- Realistic
- Adaptable
- Situational
- Scalable

Get **REAL**

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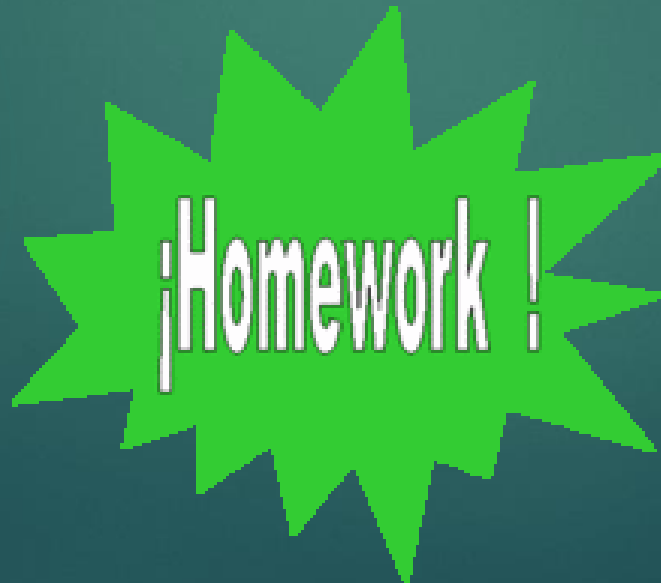
- ▶ **R**elaxed
 - ▶ Calm, cool and collected
- ▶ **E**nergized
 - ▶ Ready to act
- ▶ **A**ccepting
 - ▶ Knowing what you can and cannot change
- ▶ **L**istening
 - ▶ Caringly and carefully



How Will You Take It Home?

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- ▶ How can you apply a mindfully aware approach?
- ▶ What might get in the way?
- ▶ How can you overcome the obstacles?



Thank you!

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Any comments or questions? Please email
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