

Are You Being Mindful of Your Mindset?



You ever look at one of those optical illusion images that show two things at once? Two faces or a vase? An old or young lady? I always saw the young lady and the two faces first, and I struggled to force my eyes to see anything else. And I didn't see a problem in that—until this week.

To elaborate, I own a 2006 Volkswagen Jetta that previously belonged to my grandfather, and I'll do almost anything to keep it running to preserve a piece of my grandpa who is no longer with us. It's silly, which I can admit, but I love this car as if it were human (his name is Henry). Henry broke down last week. On the freeway of all places. Any acceleration over 15mph caused serious tremors reminiscent of the Northridge earthquake of '94. So there I was, on the side streets of Los Angeles scooting along at a snail's pace during peak morning traffic, desperately trying to get Henry safely to the repair shop. My fellow Angelenos were not about it. If I had a dollar for every side-eye aimed in my direction, I'd give Elon Musk a run for his money. As I approached each intersection, I prayed for the green light to lapse, and around the sixth celebrated red light it struck me—*how funny that I'm passionately,*

and quite sincerely, hoping for red lights when every other day of my life I view them as an extreme annoyance at best.

It got me thinking. What other things in my life could I have mindlessly slapped a label on that might not be entirely fair?

The way you perceive things has the ability to completely change your experience, and the formidable truth of the matter is your mindset has everything to do with it. Imagine if you flipped a coin each morning to decide how you'd react to occurrences for the day: heads you look at things as you would normally, tails you take the exact opposite approach—red lights are positive, sales calls are simply informing you of your options, at least your office provides that terrible coffee... How differently would your day unfold?

Obviously some things in life have less wiggle room than others as far as interpretation goes. You should always treat everyone with respect and accept nothing less, yourself. However, the bulk of our lives, and our mindsets as a result, are not definitively set in stone. We can change our minds about conclusions we've reached in the past. We can try new things and build on ideas and beliefs we already have. Put simply, we can grow.

There's always the alternative where you choose to rather not. You can make judgments quickly, put your foot down, draw lines in the sand, and stay closed off to new people and perspectives. But with a mindset so rigid, you're going to run into a lot of red lights and none of them will be the ones you prayed for.

We cannot control every challenge that enters our lives, nor can we prevent strangers from scowling in our direction when we're doing our best. We can, however, take a minute to breathe and process if we'd like to absorb those sour emitting vibes and react, or simply wave as they pass on by. I've found it's often in those spared 60 seconds a silver lining grows.

And let me emphasize, stopping those sometimes reflexive emotional responses in their tracks to choose your reaction matters. The 6 Degrees of Kevin Bacon law applies to more than just Kevin Bacon. We are all connected. Your mood affects your partner's mood, which affects their co-workers' moods, which affects their children's moods, which affects their teachers' moods... Even a moment of mindfulness ripples in ways we can't always see.

In a time when it feels people jump to the worst conclusions first, people who are willing to flip their coin and see things from an expanded perspective are a commodity we can't afford to lose. Your mindset has the power to lift a car off a

trapped child, or crush someone's self-confidence with a sentence in passing—a wonderful or destructive tool depending on how you wield it. It's important you, and not your current circumstances, are the one operating that vehicle.

If what you put into the world stems from how you *look* at the world, does your current mindset match the legacy you want to leave behind? If that answer isn't yes, I hope you'll approach your next red light differently.