

My Interest in Mindful Activism

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While I have identified a course in mindfulness as a final requirement for my Master of Arts in Applied Professional Studies degree (MAAPS), I am also aware of how the universe is loyal in helping me address the circumstances which seek to overwhelm and perhaps disable me. It's no secret that the life of a scholar in public or social services often requires the use of tools in reflection, mindfulness, and meditation for the ability and fortitude to address and overcome the dynamics of juggling a personal, professional, academic, and philanthropic life.

The reality that I and many other local professionals in social services have had to face has been nothing short of physically and mentally crippling in recent months due to the Illinois state budgetary impasse; in fact, since I started my graduate program in 2015, I have been forced to watch my youth charity organization's budget cut, resulting in reduction of over 75 percent of programming and staff. As chairman of the board, I have felt limited in my capacity to minimize the impact of over a half million dollars in cuts to our government programming but regardless of the burn-out this has caused, I remain committed to my non-profit organization, and I have been recently orchestrating its merger with another social services organization.

I do not use the term "burn-out" to describe a short-term lack of motivation and focus; in fact, burn-out describes the entire year of 2016 for me. I was dealt a disappointing set-back in my business at the very start of the year, which to date, has made a significant dent in my insurance agency's revenues; this followed with a crippling academic workload into the spring while watching my charity flounder through changes in executive leadership. The summer was spent unconstructively escaping the reality of what life had recently dealt me while the later year, my agency's busy season, would be a total blur. 2016 was a year I had been awaiting for some time; it would truly challenge my faith and fortitude. I feel as if I spent a great deal of time trying to justify a recourse in every aspect of my life; this included thoughts of dissolving my charity and my business while seeking an alternative academic program or just starting over. Gratefully, I now recognize how the difficulty I encountered allowed me to emerge stronger than I've ever been.

I have always been a man of new year's resolutions; in fact, the greatest decision I made at the close of 2016 was to stay true to my calling and plan regardless of the threats life may make in derailing my dreams, however the truth is that I couldn't have reached this point in my wisdom alone.

I must share how thankful I am for one of my previous professors who I also consider a great mentor; Dr. Gabriele Stroschen of the School for New Learning was the one who would diagnose my burn-out and help me begin a meditation of compassion toward myself. She selflessly offered her pro-bono support of my charity even though an impending merger relieved her of the commitment after a few days. Her ongoing presence in my academic program has served as a reminder that it is okay to have a bad day; as long as I stay in faith, the universe will deliver all that is needed for me to heed my calling. To further my interest in meditation, I chose to take a series of classes in my community this past winter and I don't consider coming across this course in mindfulness as any mistake; it is clearly an opportunity for me to continue to strengthen my ability to be proactive and present, regardless of the circumstances life may bring. This leads me

to the other reason for taking this course; now that I am revived in my passion to serve others, I am eager to escape the comforts of the board room for opportunities to advocate for social change.

Aligning activism and social change with the delivery of programming is key to ensuring the successful completion of my MAAPS program deliverables; my final integrating project this summer will be to write a business plan centered in social services programming for older adults. In my line of insurance work, I often find that vulnerable populations such as the elderly are unable to find their voice in speaking against injustices in organizational and government policy which affect them. This includes the costs of healthcare and the catastrophe that will follow in the event that the Affordable Care Act is repealed. Many older adults also feel their purpose in life is lost in retirement because dynamics ranging from institutional ageism to physical limitations. Oftentimes, I serve as a surrogate counselor in addressing the mental health issues bought on by isolation and lack of social interaction, which is a prevalent issue amongst individuals who are in their elder age.

My intentions are to draw from my newfound competency in mindfulness and activism in the development of social change programs that will mobilize and inspire a sense of purpose for common good. This opportunity to develop my personal as much as my professional and academic strengths is of key importance to adult learners and it is pivotal to build such learning activities and mentoring into approaches for educating adults.