In this New Year, I am hearing a lot about slowing down, being present and in the moment. I couldn’t agree more. We live in a world plagued by the busyness disease. Don’t pretend like you don’t know what I’m talking about, because you do. Busyness is when you’re so consumed with stuff that your mind is full of endless activities and projects that keep you from becoming more mindful.

I cared about busyness until I hit a wall.

Mindfulness is about meaningful presence, focus, calmness and full awareness. Having a “mind full” can be as simple as getting a message that distracts you from being present. This happened to me at lunch with my friend Don. We enjoyed a good 80 minutes of focused conversation before I looked down at my cell phone. The barrage of messages on the screen distracted me for the rest of our meeting.

You can choose to be mindful or mind full.

Individuals and companies are choosing to be more mindful. Intel, for example, recently announced the launch of a mindfulness programme for its global workforce. Last year, Arianna Huffington released her book, Thrive, which focuses on creating a life of well-being, wisdom and wonder. Mindfulness isn’t a new concept, and it’s not something that can be taught – it’s a way of living. It has become more important given the epidemic of busyness.

True story

Not too long ago, I let an acquaintance tag along to a networking luncheon with senior leaders. We’ll call her Helen the Hurricane, because she’s the kind of person whose presence sucks the life out of a room. After arriving late to the meeting, Helen took a big breath and introduced herself as the busiest woman she knew. She overwhelmed us with her never-ending busyness medals of honour and talked about the lack of sleep, exercise, and family time she had. She then suggested that younger people weren’t as hardworking because they didn’t “put in their time.” She left the meeting early, having spent about half of the time on her Blackberry and the other half inhaling her lunch. (So much for healthy. I noticed she only ate dessert.)

Busyness has reached a new low – extremely pathetic.

- Busyness is not a badge of honour. This never-ending, back-to-back activity is an addiction. It’s no better than overeating, overdrinking, or an overdoing. The competition has become about being the busiest, and not the most meaningful or focused. My friends, our self-worth should never be tied to “busy”. How and with whom we choose to spend our time are choices. Our choices reflect what we respect and value, as well as how we take care of ourselves and whether we are capable of caring outside of ourselves.

- Busyness is driving distraction to a whole new level. We need to stop the cell phone madness, for one. I am guilty of not shutting my iPhone off when I’m at home. And I know I’m not the only one. We are guilty when we use them during a meeting or, God forbid, in a car. Maybe this is you? It’s OK, forgive yourself, but please stop! The people you are in the room with deserve your presence and your life is worth getting to your destination safely. You aren’t going to be any good to anyone if you don’t focus! Sorry, Don. Next time I’ll switch off.

- Saying “Yes” to everything isn’t sustainable or reliable. It’s a surefire way to tell the world you thrive on the need to please everyone, do everything and be everywhere. I grow concerned about those who say “Yes” often. I worry that their ability to come through on commitments can be hindered by having too many of them. I back away from these types because their inability to prioritise, focus and make good choices reflects on me if they don’t deliver.

What are you doing to be mindful? How is it helping you in work and life? Do you have any Helen the Hurricane stories?

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M is for Mindfulness

The ABC’s of Work & Life

Katie Mehnert makes time for M.