



Ryan M. Niemiec

# The Mindfulness and Character Strengths Workbook



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# About the Author

**Ryan M. Niemiec** (pronounced “knee-mick”), PsyD, is a leading international figure in the education, science, and practice of character strengths that are found in all human beings. Dr. Niemiec is Chief Science and Education Officer of the renowned Values in Action (VIA) Institute on Character, a nonprofit organization in Cincinnati, Ohio, that leads the global advancement of the science of character strengths. He has been at the center of this work, positively impacting many millions of people.

Ryan is also an award-winning psychologist, certified coach, annual instructor at the University of Pennsylvania, and a member of the special guest faculty at five coaching and positive psychology institutes. Ryan received the Distinguished Early Career Award from the American Psychological Association and was awarded Fellow of the International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA), also serving on their Council of Advisors. He is cofounder and president of the Spirituality/Meaning Division of IPPA.

Ryan has authored 14 books, over 100 academic papers, and several hundred user-friendly articles (his blog on *Psychology Today* is called What Matters Most?). His books include the bestselling consumer book *The Power of Character Strengths* and books on stress management, strengths in teens, positive movies, and strengths for disabilities/abilities. He is also the author of the two leading practitioner-focused books in positive psychology – *Character Strengths Interventions* and *Mindfulness and Character Strengths*. The latter book contains the evidenced-based program he founded, mindfulness-based strengths practice (MBSP), now used by practitioners and researchers in more than 50 countries. He created an MBSP Certification in 2021, the first character strengths certification program. Ryan has led hundreds of mindfulness-based program sessions for clinical and lay audiences and has led the MBSP program in particular over 20 times.

Ryan cofounded Blooming Strengths Sangha, an open, global mindfulness and character strengths community that focuses on practices, experiences, and mindful-living community building. His lineage name, in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh, is Fullest Breath of the Heart, and he is an aspirant for ordination in the Order of Interbeing.

Ryan lives in Cincinnati with his wife and three young, zestful children. His highest strengths are hope, love, honesty, fairness, spirituality, curiosity, and appreciation of beauty. In his leisure time, he practices tai chi, plays tennis, basketball, and chess, and is a zealot of Michigan State University athletics, a collector of vintage and rare Pez dispensers. He also engages in creative writing and in building communities in mindfulness and character strengths.

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#### **SALES & DISTRIBUTION**

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# Gratitude

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With thankfulness to my family, friends, and other colleagues, past and present. I acknowledge, with a sense of interbeing, that none of what I do is alone and all I do is a culmination of countless experiences and efforts of you and others across numerous generations. From an immediate perspective, I bow to my Mom, Dad, siblings, wife, and three children. Love to “R4 x M” always...



# Dedication

*I once had this conversation with a wise person: I asked them,  
“Of all the great teachings out there, what is the best practice you would recommend?”  
“There is only one practice that matters,” they said.  
“Really?! Which one?” I asked.  
“The one you do.”*

*I dedicate this book to my wise teachers, past and present, all who reside in my present.*

*One of my wise teachers is my son Ryland who reminds me that mindfulness should be playful and enjoyable. He dislikes brushing his teeth so to improve the experience, one morning when I was helping him brush I asked him to take a slow inhale and exhale while brushing. After the inhale, which he found a bit odd, he exclaimed out of nowhere, “Chicken!” Now, hundreds of times later, as I support him in brushing, we take an inbreath, exclaim “Chicken!”, roar with laughter, and continue brushing.*

*This is true mindful teeth-brushing. May I always learn from you, my gentle and loving boy, Ryland.*





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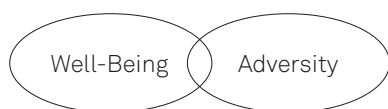


# Preface

A student asked a Zen master, “What is the most important thing?” and the Zen master responded with, “The most important thing is to remember the most important thing.”

With mindfulness (your curious and open awareness) and character strengths (the best, core parts of you), you always have the most important things within you. As you learn, practice, and discuss these areas, you’ll take notice of your kindness and fairness, you’ll feel more gratitude and hope, you’ll uncover your bravery and perseverance, connect with your honesty and humility, and readily use your curiosity and spirituality. You’ll see that mindfulness and character strengths are pathways to the most important thing, and they are the most important thing itself.

What is your “most important thing?” For me, it is my family. Is family not a manifestation of our love, kindness, forgiveness, social intelligence, humor, gratitude, and mindful attention? For someone else, the most important thing might be work productivity or contributing to others. Is that not a manifestation of perseverance, zest, self-regulation, hope, kindness, creativity, and mindful effort?



Mindfulness and character strengths are within all of us, and they are for all of us – regardless of age, gender, occupation, education level, country of origin, beliefs, and personality type. The many benefits of mindfulness and of character strengths are captured in the graphic above. Modern science points to these two overarching buckets of benefit – the uplift to our well-being and the facing, coping with, or overcoming of adversity.

Within each, there are many streams of benefit such as enhancing happiness, inner peace, meaning in life, improved health, better work performance, and more positive relationships in the well-being bucket. And in the adversity bucket, there is stress management, illness coping,

reducing relationship conflict, and handling anxiety, sadness, and anger. Both mindfulness and character strengths help with well-being and with adversity. Imagine what bringing them together can do!

I wrote this Workbook for two main reasons: One, there are no available books for the general public on the integration of character strengths and mindfulness. Two, I heard over and over again from practitioners leading *mindfulness-based strengths practice* (MBSP) sessions that they needed a user-friendly book for their MBSP students, employees, and clients. This is that Workbook to serve both purposes!

Therefore, this Workbook is a stand-alone resource for anyone. If you are not part of an MBSP program or group, then you might view this Workbook as a guidebook supporting you. View the Workbook as containing your own personal *self-development sessions*! You might take 1 week per session (give or take) and really dig into your personal growth, and engage in the explorations, activities, and suggestions in the worksheets. May this Workbook be like a peaceful yet challenging friend, supporting you on your life journey.

And, this Workbook can (and should) be used as a companion for those participating in MBSP groups or individual MBSP sessions or workshops. The facilitator of MBSP will naturally have the MBSP manual found in *Mindfulness and Character Strengths* (2nd edition), which was written for practitioners who lead MBSP programs and who study the integration of mindfulness and character strengths. MBSP facilitators will often recommend that participants attain this Workbook you have in your hands. You’ll be able to follow along in this Workbook session-by-session with the 8-week program of MBSP. You have the activities, worksheets, home practice suggestions, and more (!). It is all right here, and I hope it will help you make the most of the MBSP experience, help you connect with others in your MBSP community, and support you on your life journey.

If you are interested in learning more about what MBSP is, then you can read Reading Activity 1.1 in Session 1.

The MBSP program is being used across the globe, having reached every continent (except Antarctica), with an estimated hundreds of MBSP facilitators (in-person and virtual) from all walks of life – coaches, psychologists, business professionals, human resources specialists, teachers, parents, and scientists. They report that participants experience large benefits from the program. The latest science is showing their findings are not unique to them. When MBSP has been compared with the most popular mindfulness-based program on the planet (mindfulness-based stress reduction/MBSR), MBSP has come out as stronger every time.

All of this means you have arrived at the right place. Whether you are hoping to manage stress and problems better, are seeking growth and self-improvement, or are helping others to do the same, this Workbook will be an important and supportive tool for your journey.

May this Workbook brighten your journey, lighten your tension, and deepen the joy and meaning of your life.

Ryan M. Niemiec  
July 2023

# Introduction: Beginning Your Journey

*Smile, breathe, and go slowly.*

Thich Nhat Hanh

## A story to remember

I was in a Zoom meeting with a group of 20 people – all cameras on. It was a social gathering, but the topic had grown serious – one of the members had an untreatable cancer and was speaking about how he was coping with his situation. The mood was somber, and all of the participants were attending closely to the man as he slowly shared his experiences, with a heaviness in his voice. Then, unbeknownst to me the head of Maya, my 7-year-old daughter, popped up behind mine on the screen. She must have picked the lock on my office door and crept in! At an angle, she smiled widely and curiously at the many faces of the group. I immediately attempted to *verbally* guide her to the door, while simultaneously listening to the man sharing his suffering, but she responded by breaking out into one of her new dance moves and starting to sing (thankfully, my computer was muted). My words were futile to my dancing daughter, as were my feigned attempts to continue listening closely to my friend.

As I started to stand up to physically guide Maya to the door, he spoke to us: “And I appreciate the young new member of our meeting,” and he began to laugh. Smiles began to appear throughout the group. “I needed that levity right now. Sometimes it is just too much always talking about my cancer.” He paused, with the group hanging on every word. “This little girl’s curiosity...and humor...and zest – that’s what I needed to see. That’s what I want for myself too, right now. Thank you, thank you.”

## Your Journey Begins Now

Life can appear messy and unpredictable. Often there are no perfect responses – only responses. However, we have tools to help us. We have tools to make our lives better and the lives around us better.

The pursuit of a happier and more meaningful life is vitally important to people in today’s world. The challenges, stressors, and obstacles to building greater well-being, better relationships, more work productivity, and a higher purpose are too numerous to count.

New research shows that practices with mindfulness and character strengths offer some of the best pathways for you to not only unleash greater fulfillment and live your best life but also improve in managing your problems, stressors, conflicts, and other typical life adversities. This Workbook will help you boost your mindfulness and your character strengths. You’ll learn ways to catch your mind wandering and being distracted, and become more mindful at home, work, and in your relationships.

You’ll learn ways to become more tuned into your best qualities – your character strengths – and how to explore and use them not only more frequently but more wisely. Along the journey, you’ll practice the many ways to weave together both, in your daily life.

If you smile, breathe, and go slowly, you’ll soon see, mindfulness and character strengths work hand in glove.

## Why Bring Mindfulness and Character Strengths Together?

You will soon dive into mindful awareness practices and character strengths practices. The latest science shows that mindfulness practices help you feel happier and more positive, as well as give you a strong boost in your coping skills to deal with stress and other life difficulties. Research suggests the same is true for practices involving your character strengths. But what are the benefits of



bringing the two together and developing them in unison?

Here is a summary of the importance of bringing mindfulness and character strengths together.

**Mindfulness without character strengths is deflated.** Many people who engage in mindfulness or meditation practices quickly lose focus, find their interest wanes, and hit so many detours that they give up. Character strengths provide energy, substance, and direction to the practice of mindfulness. Strengths help you to start and then maintain a practice of mindful walking, of mindful listening, or of mindful meditation. They lead you to get the most out of mindfulness practices.

**Character strengths without mindfulness are hollow.** The mindless use of our character strengths is commonplace (think of an automatic “Thank you” or “I love you” that we offer without even thinking about it, without conscious use of your character strengths of gratitude and love). At times we may speak in ways that are superficial and unconscious, and at other times judgmental or unbalanced. As mindfulness is applied to character strengths, however, use of them becomes focused, like an archer directing an arrow to a bull’s-eye. Your relationships are enhanced. Meaning is deepened. Fulfillment is reached.

by offering a variety of questions, activities, and opportunities to reflect on your thoughts, feelings, ideas, actions, and behaviors. In the process of connecting the dots, you can formulate a plan to bring your strengths and mindfulness into your everyday life.

This Workbook will help you explore your mindfulness and character strengths and support you with reflection questions. Let’s try it now:

## Mindfulness, Character Strengths, and You!

In this Workbook, you will:

- Discover and deeply understand your inner capacity to be mindful and to see and use your character strengths.
- Identify your signature strengths, overused strengths, and underused strengths, and how to improve each.
- Examine ways you can connect character strengths and mindfulness in your life to enhance your well-being and manage problems.
- Learn new ways to apply mindfulness to your character strengths and, in turn, to apply your character strengths to daily mindful living.
- Build your mindfulness/character strengths toolbox by gathering numerous practical strategies that can be used throughout your life.
- Take immediate action with your character strengths and mindfulness.

A wonderful way to grow your self-awareness is to explore your mindfulness and character strengths from multiple angles. This Workbook guides you through doing that



What got you interested in mindfulness and/or character strengths?

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What excites you about these topics?

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What brought you to this particular set of self-awareness tools?

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What do you hope to accomplish by engaging with this workbook?

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