



## *Communications Digest*

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*Because Good Copywriting Should Grow on Trees!*

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### **Welcome Mid-March!**

The return to sunshine and warmth is so welcome, as I write this issue of "Communications Digest." Seed packages have appeared at the supermarket and many of us are planning our gardens and flower beds!

In last month's issue, I cited "happiness researchers" Shawn Achor and Michelle Gielan on how to increase one's resilience in the workplace. In "Ask An Expert," I visited a complementary article by guru Alex Soojung-Kim Pang on how building rest into your work schedule can increase your productivity. And in "Word Nerd's Corner," Bryan Garner distinguished between the terms "sensational" and "sensationalistic."

This month I visit performance psychologist Dr. Jenn Bennett on how "mindfulness is more than just a fad," and psychologist Dr. Joshua Gowin, on how meditation can improve our brain functioning. When deadlines loom, I personally find meditation helpful and hope you will too (if you are not already a convert)! And in "Word Nerd's Corner," I cite word doctor Bryan Garner on the case of "no holds barred."

Even if more of winter returns, it will be no match for the good mental resources discussed in this issue, which can help us optimize performance *and* rest, no holds barred!

Sincerely,  
*Elizabeth*  
Principal

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### **Article One: Mindfulness is more than just a fad . . . (with Dr. Jenn Bennett, performance psychologist)**

In a recent article on the headspace mindfulness and meditation website ([www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com)), performance psychologist, Dr. Jenn Bennett, offered six timely reasons that we should make mindfulness a central process to our lives. In a previous issues of “Communications Digest,” I’ve discussed writers and thinkers (including Thich Nhat Hanh) on mindfulness, but Bennett ties the process explicitly to our mental performance. Here’s a synopsis of her article on six reasons to “get back to” mindfulness and meditation practices:

- (1) Bennett says that at the heart of every goal we set is the “desire to be happier.” Less than two months ago (at the end of 2015), we set resolutions much like those we set the year before. We tend to tie losing weight or eating better or exercising more to gaining better health, but even more importantly, to becoming happier in life. She stresses that engaging in “mindfulness” exceeds the capacity of these other goals by offering “not only improved well-being, mental and physical health, better sleep, reduced stress . . . but also to an improved level of happiness.” For those readers who haven’t significantly committed to trying mindful and meditative exercises, can you remember when you last felt the kind of genuine health and happiness that Bennett refers to?
  
- (2) Mindfulness helps us in what we do because life is “unpredictable and stress is normal.” Bennett says that those who make resolutions usually drop them quickly, because “stress triggers automatic behaviour, routine habits we have established over years that have become familiar and safe.” By contrast, when we engage in mindfulness, it helps us to develop an awareness of our internal state and the feelings that are driving our behaviour. [Mindfulness] allows us the space and time to sit with difficult feelings and make deliberate choices toward more helpful behaviour.” Instead of traversing that weary,

same ol' path, we find one that is new to us, that offers shelter from the wind and a far better view.

- (3) Bennett also recommends mindfulness because none of us is perfect. She says that “our minds have a preference for complete, whole outcomes,” preferring, for instance, “one hour” to “57 minutes.” But that kind of thinking is perfectionism and dooms us to failure: “The truth is that . . . life happens” and it’s normal that we can’t fulfill our goals. Instead of feeling abject failures, “mindfulness teaches us acceptance and letting go. Simply accept, and commit to moving forward.” Whether that’s after missing a workout, eating a chocolate bar that is definitely not on your diet, etc.
- (4) Mindfulness is valuable “because patience is a virtue.” When we decide what we want, we tend to want it *immediately*. And the high tech age allows us to get “consumed in the everyday race from one thing to another without stopping to think.” When we are mindful, we teach ourselves “to slow down our body and mind, so we can actually experience the things we do, and at a pace we can enjoy.” Recall the patient, dishwashing process recommended by Thich Nhat Hanh.
- (5) Developing a positive frame of mind “gets results.” Bennett says that people tend to set goals that are “driven by our desire to stop doing something.” That kind of focus on negative thinking and behaviours makes it all the harder to avoid the problematic behaviour. By contrast, mindfulness “helps to focus on the positive and what you will gain “when you achieve your goals. For instance, ask yourself, as you meditate, what do you want to do? How do you want to think, feel and behave and what will be the outcome of that? She says that through positivity, mindfulness “connects us to the bigger picture” and to a “greater sense of self.” Some good advice: “Seek pleasure in the simple things and set [goals] based on what you will gain, not what you hope to lose.”
- (6) Finally, mindfulness is valuable because it will help you achieve other goals. Key to reaching our goals is starting from the “right place to succeed.” Bennett says that to achieve anything, we need to be aware. Only with awareness can we manage our thoughts, feelings and behaviours “to consciously move toward our goals.” The benefits (improved sleep, reduced stress, better relationships and communication) are so valuable and, she adds, within everyone’s reach. She recommends a meditation practice that “can be integrated into any of our daily activities, like cooking, cleaning, walking or gardening,” folding laundry and so on.

“The simple act of being present with what you are doing can soon become a way of being.” And from that state of enriched being (the new pathway you carve through the woods) we will readily meet the goals that once eluded us.

## Article 2: Ask an Expert with Dr. Joshua Gowin on how meditation can improve our brain functioning and health (“Psychology Today”)

In keeping with the theme on meditation, psychologist Joshua Gowin has published an article in “PT” about how brain scans show meditation improves our mental focus.

Chief amongst his insights is that regular meditators have “stable brains and stable thoughts.” Citing recent research by Italian neuroscientist Giuseppe Pagnoni, Gowin says that meditators demonstrate quieter brain activity related to mind-wandering, in MRI tests.

Gowin says that Pagnoni, who has long been interested in how meditation affects the brain, recruited 12 meditators (with at least three years of experience) and 12 non-meditators, a control group, who had never meditated but were the same age and had the same education as the meditators.

The meditators demonstrated “more stability in their ventral posteromedial cortex (vPMC). The vPMC, a region linked to spontaneous thoughts and mind-wandering, lies on the underside of the brain, in the middle of your head,” Gowin writes.

For most people the vPMC is “almost always active” and could not be easily shut off by patients, even when they tried “not to engage in any mental act.” The brain has activity that’s “constantly running in the background.” Pagnoni found that meditators appeared to gain increased control over this default activity of the brain and so could “rein in wild thoughts so they don’t snowball out of control” and “curb mind-wandering.”

Pagnoni performed a visual information processing test, where subjects had to press a button whenever a pre-set sequence of numbers appeared before them, on a screen. Missed sequences and false alarms lowered the subjects’ scores.

Gowin writes that Pagnoni found that meditators outperformed the non-meditators in the task. His findings may well pertain to gaining increased mental focus for everyone and may assist in understanding of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), whose rates amongst children have soared in recent years.

Pagnoni’s findings also may explain why meditation and mindfulness activity also help to treat depression, “a condition characterized by recurring negative thoughts. By controlling the brain regions responsible for letting the mind wander to gloomy thoughts, someone with the blues may be able to keep their mind trained on the positive” (Gowin).

Meditative practice, such as that described by Bennett in article one, aims to sustain the subject’s attention, so that as Gowin writes, “it makes sense that meditators have enhanced focus.” But back in 2012, when some of Pagnoni’s trials began, mindful practices were still stigmatized and

viewed as quackery or “wishy-washy.” Since then, people are taking notice, as numerous websites, such as headspace.com illustrate. “Stable brains and stable thoughts” are coveted by anyone who lives and works in this high tech, performance driven age.

Pagnoni’s research provides biological evidence for the changes that meditation, by all appearances, produces for our brains, our mind-body connection and therefore for our overall health and happiness.

### **Article 3: Word Nerd’s Corner: The case of "no holds barred" versus "no holes barred"-- Wordsmithing with Bryan Garner**

Etymologist Bryan Garner says that the correct form of this idiom is "no holds barred." The metaphor comes from wrestling, where in some matches, no wrestling holds are illegal. In others, some are illegal or "barred." When used as an adjective, the idiom should be hyphenated.

A correct use of the idiom would be: "Mindfulness can enhance one's mental acuity so that one can perform cognitive tasks, no holds barred."

Garner cites the following error in usage, which is understandable, if also amusing: " 'If Phil Mickelson is ever going to win a major . . . he will not do it backing down from his *no-holes-barred* [should be "no-holds- barred] style of play' " (Hank Gola, *Daily News* [NY]: 23 March, 2003, 50).

## **SHOP NEWS**

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Particular thanks this month to Kanchan, Raj (Jr.) and Sona Manek of Edmonton, AB, for masterfully organizing last month's 21st Annual Raj Manek Memorial Banquet. The banquet was preceded by two hours of entrepreneurial networking at Prairieland Park.

It was wonderful to meet prospects and clients and to discuss my writing and editing services.

Thank you to participating mentors and dignitaries from the Raj Manek Mentorship Program (including Silvia Martini, Monica Kreuger, Bob Pitzel, the retiring Executive Director of the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce, Kent Smith-Windsor, and many others), who made the evening--and indeed the program itself this year--so generous and positive.

And a shout-out of thanks to my friend (and informal mentor) Dani vanDriel, who may enter into more formal mentoring with the Raj Manek Mentorship Program in the future. Dani took an interest in all of the proteges with tables at last month’s banquet and boosted spirits with her gracious and attentive ear.

## **ABOUT US**

Since 2011, Elizabeth Shih Communications has provided B2B communications and marketing services on the Prairies and across Canada.

Please contact me through my website, via the CASL-compliant email form, on the right-hand side of each page there ([www.elizabethshih.com](http://www.elizabethshih.com)). I'll be pleased to discuss projects with you!

I specialize in entrepreneurial storytelling--chronicling how small- and medium-sized businesses succeed and at the same time give back to the community.

I tell such stories primarily through articles, case studies and newsletters. But I also adapt stories to write press releases, blog postings, brochures, website copy, annual reports and white papers.

New to my portfolio: I now edit professional, HR-style resumes and prepare awards' applications (SABEX and ABEX) for my clients.

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