



## Suit Yourself: Customizing Your Mindfulness Practice

This Integral Coaching®-based guide will help you shape a practice that suits your personal style and native perspectives. It is a supplement to Chapter 10 in the book, *Mind Your Life*.

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# Suit Yourself: Customizing Your Mindfulness Practice

Why would you want to customize your mindfulness practice? Because one size does not fit all. We each have a unique motivation for learning and a preferred way of going about our day. When we work with our natural style rather than some rigid benchmark, we can maintain our mindfulness practice over time, allowing us taste the benefits we hoped for.

This short guide will help you customize your mindfulness practice to your natural style. Based on an element of Integral Coaching®, it helps you discern the Native Perspectives through which you naturally view the world. With this in mind, you can adapt your mindfulness practice to suit yourself.

First, I will give you an overview of the Four Quadrants lens of integral theory, and how this shapes the perspectives we naturally gravitate towards. Next, you can take a short quiz to help you determine your natural style, based on these four quadrants. And lastly, I will guide you in how you might use this self-understanding to design a practice uniquely suited to you.

## About the Four Quadrants of Your Native Perspective

If you've ever studied another language, you probably found it easy to learn the equivalent words for the basic pronouns; I, We, It and Its. They are found in all major languages, everywhere in the world. According to Integral Theory and the work of Ken Wilber, this structure of human language reflects a larger truth of reality. Every event has four basic aspects or dimensions: the subjective and the objective aspect, the individual and the collective aspect.<sup>i</sup> Each of these dimensions is valid; by itself is also partial. To create a comprehensive understanding of the world, we need to take all of these dimensions into account.

- How I personally see and feel about an event - I
- How we see and feel - WE
- The objective facts about a single person, behaviour or event – IT
- The objective facts about a collection of events, natural or systemic structures - ITS

Here's an example of how these four basic dimensions play out when you are eating a meal;

- I: your individual perceptions of taste, your sensations of being satisfied, your thoughts about the food
- WE: the shared conversation and mood around the table, the culture's valuation of the food (special vs. ordinary),
- IT: your individual body's digestive system, your actions of eating and chewing, the nutritional content of the food
- ITS: the farming, transportation, financial and economic systems that support food production

Here's how these four quadrants look when arranged along two basic dimensions; individual and collective, subjective and exterior.

Upper Left (UL) – INDIVIDUAL INTERIORS <b>Self and Consciousness</b> Interior thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, meanings, perception of sensations, <i>"My subjective truth"</i> I	Upper Right (UR) – INDIVIDUAL EXTERIORS <b>Body and Behaviours</b> Measurable parts of body, observable behaviours and movement, <i>"My physical body and objective actions"</i> IT
WE Lower Left (LL) – COLLECTIVE INTERIORS <b>Culture and Relationships</b> Shared relationships and community, cultural norms and belonging, shared language and symbols <i>"Our subjective truth"</i>	ITS Lower Right (LR) – COLLECTIVE EXTERIORS <b>Environment and Systems</b> Measurable aspects of the collective world, systems, sciences, business processes, frameworks, environment and physical world <i>"Our collective, observable world"</i>

A unique contribution of Integral Coaching® is that these four quadrants are also reflected within people. Each of us has a native perspective or a way of orienting to the world based on one or two of these quadrants. We tend to speak from the perspective of these quadrants, regardless of the topic of conversation<sup>ii</sup>. For example, I personally gravitate toward personal meaning making (Upper Left), and frameworks that tie together multiple systems (Lower Right).

## Self-Assessing the Four Quadrants of Your Native Perspective

This short questionnaire will help you determine the perspectives you naturally gravitate towards. For each question, circle your preferred response; one of a. b. c. or d. Then transfer your responses to the score sheet that follows.

### Questionnaire

1. You are experiencing financial difficulties and you want to make more money. Would you;
  - a. Write down a list of things you could do to make more money.
  - b. Ask yourself what you are passionate about and how you could make more money from doing this.
  - c. Determine your financial goals, consider your work experience, explore market opportunities and make a plan.
  - d. Talk with successful friends and colleagues and get advice from them.
2. You are going out for dinner with a friend and they ask where you'd like to go. Would you;
  - a. Consider the kind of food your friend likes or eats before you respond?
  - b. Imagine the kind of place that would suit or improve your current mood.
  - c. Make a suggestion based on the kind of foods you're craving now.
  - d. Consider multiple variables, like your available budget, the location, food and atmosphere.
3. You want to determine your unique purpose or contribution to the world. Would you;
  - a. Keep track of what gives you energy; ask yourself 'where does the time just fly by?'
  - b. Share your ideas with other people to get their perspective. Ask them how they see you most contributing?
  - c. Keep your question and possible intention in mind and reflect on it periodically during the day. Where do you feel a sense of clarity and passion?
  - d. Develop and refine your sense of purpose by reading a book, working with a coach, or going to a workshop.
4. You want to lose 8 pounds over the next three months. Would you;
  - a. Create a plan of how to achieve this goal, including an exercise schedule, the foods you will eat and your milestones along the way.
  - b. Start today to eating less and exercise more.
  - c. Ask a friend to do it with you, so you can support each other with your goals.
  - d. Explore your motivation, imagine how you will feel at this new weight and set a goal that feels meaningful to you.

5. You and your partner want to improve your communication skills. Would you
  - a. Reflect on the current way you communicate, where it's working for you and the relationship and where it's not, and make some suggestions to your partner for new ways to communicate.
  - b. Practice new behaviors like active listening, not interrupting, feeding back what you heard the other say, or making direct eye contact.
  - c. Talk with your partner about how you communicate together now and explore new ways that feel right for both of you.
  - d. Suggest that you both gain more knowledge on this topic, by reading or going to a workshop, sharing what you've learned and begin to implement some new communication methods.
6. You discover you have a health issue you must deal with. Would you;
  - a. Share what's going on with trusted friends or family, to gain their support.
  - b. Research the symptoms, possible causes and range of treatments.
  - c. Consider what you can do to get better, ranging from seeing a health professional to changing diet or behaviors, taking supplements
  - d. Consider how you've been living lately, how this condition impacts your view of yourself whether this might be some kind of wake-up call.
7. You finished a project meeting at work. You felt it was a good meeting if:
  - a. You know exactly what you need to do now for your part of the project and how to get it done.
  - b. Everyone was able to share their part of the project and you came to a mutual understanding of the next important areas of focus.
  - c. The group decided on a comprehensive plan of action, bearing in mind the linkages between this project and other important initiatives in the organization.
  - d. The most important issues were openly discussed and resolved in a way that felt right and fair.
8. You are considering taking up mindfulness meditation. The question that will be most important in motivating you is;
  - a. Will mindfulness enable me to understand myself and what drives me at a deeper level?
  - b. Will mindfulness enable greater healthy living and personal wellness?
  - c. Is there verifiable, proven evidence for efficacy of mindfulness?
  - d. Have people I've known experienced positive changes as a result of mindfulness?

## Scoring

Score yourself by circling below your response for each of the eight questions, then adding up the total number of responses for each column. Within the bottom row, the top two scores give you an indication of your preferred orienting quadrant perspectives.

Quadrant	Upper Left <b>Self &amp; Consciousness</b>	Upper Right <b>Body &amp; Behaviours</b>	Lower Left <b>Culture &amp; Relationships</b>	Lower Right <b>Environment &amp; Systems</b>
Question 1	b	a	d	c
Question 2	b	c	a	d
Question 3	c	a	b	d
Question 4	d	b	c	a
Question 5	a	b	c	d
Question 6	a	c	a	b
Question 7	d	a	b	c
Question 8	a	b	d	c
Total # of responses for each column				

## Customize your Practice Based on Your Native Perspective

Use the following guideline to customizing your own mindfulness practice, based on your top two scores.

### Upper Left Quadrant - Experience and Consciousness

If one of your high scores was in the upper left quadrant, a primary perspective you bring is subjective meaning making and experience. This will be reflected in your motivation for practice, how you design your practice and how you assess whether it's working for you.

Your motivation for practicing mindfulness may include

- Looking for a greater sense of personal meaning.
- Understand the thoughts and feelings that drive you, or trip you up
- Enabling you to touch deeper truths

Your practice design supports meaning and personal values

- Practice structure; Formal practice may emphasize practice in stillness, sitting
- Choice of practice technique; has to resonate and make sense. You trust your inner radar
- Practice supports; have a space where you can be alone and quiet, make a commitment to yourself, post it where you can see it, use journaling to enrich and track insights and benefits.

Is it working?

- When you try this, does something ping inside you?
- Are you more aware of your unconscious assumptions, thoughts and feelings?
- Is practice keeping you on track with my personal purpose and values?
- Are you experiencing greater self-knowledge?

### Upper Right Quadrant - Body and Behaviour

If one of your high scores was in the upper right quadrant, a primary perspective you bring is objectives actions and body energy. This will be reflected in your motivation for practice, how you design your practice and how you assess whether it's working for you.

Your motivation for practicing mindfulness may include

- Looking for greater personal wellness and healthy living.
- Wanting to be aware of your body more often (or for the first time)
- Enabling your actions to be more productive?

Your practice design supports actions and behaviors

- Practice structure; Formal Practice may emphasize Practice in Motion
- Choice of Practice techniques; pick whatever appeals. By trying it out you'll know if it works for you. You trust my energetic reaction.
- Practice supports; put meditation time in your calendar, set training targets, create appropriate physical space.

Is it working?

- When I try this, do I feel good?
- Did I do a practice?
- Are my overall energy levels and sense of vitality higher, or more consistent?
- Are a greater range of my actions more effective?
- Am I able to carry out desired behavior changes?

### Lower Left Quadrant - Relationships and Connections

If one of your high scores was in the lower left quadrant, a primary perspective you bring is through shared meaning and relationships. This will be reflected in your motivation for practice, how you design your practice and how you assess whether it's working for you.

Your motivation for practicing mindfulness may include

- Looking for deeper connections with people.
- Trust the people involved (teacher, class)
- Knowing people who have experienced positive change as a result of this mindfulness
- Enabling less stressful or more harmonious relationships?

Your practice design supports relationships and connections

- Practice structure; may start with group classes or guided meditations, then later include solo practice.
- Practice technique; pick techniques that can be implemented when interacting with other people.
- Practice supports; implies learning and practicing in a group, buddy system, sitting partner. Make your commitment public to others. Use an app that lets you know when others are sitting with you and can offer encouragement.

Is it working?

- Am I calm and responsive vs. reactive in stressful relationships?
- Do others experience me in a more positive way?
- Am I more present, at ease and connected with a greater diversity of people?
- Am I experiencing a greater spirit of love and service?



## Lower Right – Systems and Nature

If one of your high scores was in the lower right quadrant, a primary perspective you bring is through natural or mad-made systems and environments and processes. This will be reflected in your motivation for practice, how you design your practice and how you assess whether it's working for you.

Your motivation for practicing mindfulness may include

- Seeking a comprehensive map of how this works, or fits into the natural order of things.
- The verifiable evidence for efficacy
- Meditation processes enable you to be and act in a more coherent manner?

Your practice design is evidence based and reflect coherent frameworks

- Practice structure; may start with reading or research to verify credibility, get a big picture map
- Practice technique; follow a teacher's approach; understand the larger system first then pick techniques in a way that makes personal sense. I trust the process.
- Practice supports; reading, using guided meditations such as an app on my phone, expanding knowledge of meditation systems, practice in nature

Is it working?

- Do I have a greater comprehension of the big picture of things, and my place in that?
- Does this structure support my needs?
- Does this practice enable a greater connection to nature and natural systems in our world?

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See **Mind Your Life** for a practical guide to cultivating a sustainable mindfulness practice. Combining Integral Coaching® techniques with Shinzen Young's Unified Mindfulness system, **Mind Your Life** offers essential tips for inviting more attention into your day, from the boardroom to your commute to the dinner table. Learn how to incorporate attentional skills into your daily lie and customize a path that suits your style and schedule. Available from all major online book sellers.

See [www.megsalter.com](http://www.megsalter.com) for more information

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<sup>i</sup> Ken Wilber, *The Integral Vision*, (Boston: Shambhala, 2007): 66 - 73

<sup>ii</sup> Laura Divine, "Looking AT and Looking AS the Client; The Quadrants as a Type Structure Lens," *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* 4, no (2009): 21 - 40