

mindfulness is not the explicit focus of today's column, it — along with the technique you will learn — involves the balancing of these two faculties.

As you might imagine, what you attend to in the foreground of experience chews up a lot of mental bandwidth and influences a good deal of activity in your brain. In contrast, what appears in the periphery is taken in more holistically. When on a Zoom call, this foreground/background relationship can be confined to what appears on the screen as the vastly larger landscape of your present moment experience is essentially closed off. You may know this from reading or watching news reports or immersing in an episode of your favorite show. As a general rule, the more fully your attention is captured, the more vulnerable is your emotional state and the less vivid that which is arising in the background.

THE ANTIDOTE TO ZOOM: ZOOM OUT

Many of us know “Zoom fatigue,” all too well. Tired, we zone out; restless, we check our cell phone and e-mail, naively believing no one notices as we disengage. We notice it with others, of course, unless we too are zoned out. And we all are susceptible to the adverse effects this can have on our productivity, connection, and well-being.

The simple technique I call “zoom out” (or “zooming out”) involves *intentionally* shifting perspective from foreground to background — from a narrow focus of attention to the larger field of awareness. Just as a camera's focus can zoom out from a single object, like a flower, and take in a more holistic and contextualized view, like the flower and garden in which it grows, so too can we. It's akin to relaxing a tight grip. As an example, right now you are likely reading this on your computer, tablet or cell phone. Your “attention” is narrowed within the frame of the device; you are locked in. There is an energy cost that accompanies such intense focus and it can be helpful to loosen it up a bit. How? First soften your gaze and notice the entirety of the reading space. Then look beyond the device and take in the larger view. You'll likely find that tense muscles (eyes, shoulders, stomach) soften a bit, and a shallow or held breath frees up, as you take in a bit more of the richness of your experience in that moment. Try this during your next online video meeting. You can place a note nearby as a reminder, set a timer, or let the impulse to check for messages cue this shift. Such moments can also serve as helpful reminders to take a few

slower, deeper breaths, to stretch, and to reflect on how fortunate we are to have these devices, to live at a time when a global pandemic can be met with technology, to be interacting with other human beings.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS AND CHALLENGING NEWS REPORTS

Zooming out is similarly available amid a difficult conversation with another person, whether in person, over the phone, or online. So too, it can be useful when reading or viewing unsettling news reports. So, the next time you are doom-scrolling, zoom out and enlarge the view. Even if you remain fixed on the screen, you are reminded there is more out there than *met* the eye. The news report becomes a little smaller, moves into proportion. Similarly, the next time you are feeling agitated in a trying conversation, expand your view. Open to the sensory richness of that moment (things like sights and sounds, even your own thoughts and feelings). This attentional pivot is akin to stepping back and creating space. In broadening the container of your experience, you might just wake up to the larger humanity and complexity of the other person, and of yourself.

2021 is an important year for all of us, a defining moment in history, when holding multiple perspectives, seeing the larger picture, and not getting lost in narrow fields, will make a difference both to outcomes and to our well-being. Zooming out during Zoom sessions can be helpful unto themselves, and a practice for opening up to the larger view in general.

If you have a question about mindfulness and integrating it into the practice of law that you would like answered in this column, send it to srogers@law.miami.edu.



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