

SENIOR FELLOWS AND FRIENDS

Alert. Relaxed. Collegial.



12/17/24 Session Recap

Audrey & George Hall: Resilient, Empowered, and Present

Dear Senior Fellows and Friends,

Tuesday evening's conversation, led by the Halls, was a valuable introduction to a mindfulness practice we can use. Of necessity, in each of these sessions we're only able to skim the surface of the mastery a guest has attained over years of work. However, since Audrey Hall's practice includes working with combat vets at the V.A., and since the group accepted her invitation to engage in a short guided meditation, we learned enough to understand how we could apply her work. Many colleagues in public service are struggling to keep an even keel as we anticipate the Presidential Inauguration and the next four years; this will help.

George and Audrey have brought complementary skill sets to the creation of their two books, [Stress Management - Part 1 & 2](#), the first of which George introduced to us. George, an e-learning designer who has been thinking about how adults learn for years, helps Audrey translate her insight and clinical experience into frameworks that can help readers find stability and a sense of control amid upsetting situations. During the pandemic, they turned her work into the two books, and are now in the process of transforming them into courses on Canvas, an open source learning management system.

Audrey began by asking participants what was getting to them (that's not exactly how she put it; my note-taking always has holes!). The answers I heard were "stress, continuing polarization, our jobs, and uncertainty." She dug into stress a little, looking at whether a person is reactive or responsive, and what's going on

outside and inside. Two mnemonic devices, SEE and STEAMM (which can be used to structure journaling) can help us find our triggers:

SEE helps us scan our environment: **S**=Sense Situations (taste – touch – see – smell – sounds), **E**=Events, **E**=Environment.

STEAMM looks at other aspects of our experience: **S**=Sensations in the body including urges and cravings, **T**=Thoughts including perceptions, reasons, rules, judgments, plans, worries, **E**=Emotions/Feelings, **A**=Actions – behaviors – coping, **M**=Memories, **M**=Meaning making and values.

Audrey draws on heart-centered meditation, which can use mantras, mindfulness, movement, sensing, and reflection, and can be formal or informal, with eyes open or closed. She mentioned Pema Chödrön, the American-born Tibetan Buddhist teacher who talks about stabilizing the mind – important because stress takes us out of the present moment. Meditation invites us to notice when our mind wanders and is hijacked by memories. We can choose to keep bringing ourselves back to the present.

Next, Audrey shared her insight about accessing a meditative state to ground and center oneself using poetry. George mentioned that she has composed 250 poems for this purpose, which are intended to be heard as part of an 8-step “Creative Mindfulness Learning Flow” that builds nine skills using metaphor and emotions. Audrey suggested that we record ourselves reading some of the poems and then reflect during playback in a quiet space, rehearsing the nascent skill when not feeling stressed. She cautioned that everything hinges on being willing to engage with the material and practice. This takes committed action – does it move me toward what I value?

Audrey told us that she practices for 20 minutes when she gets home from counseling vets at the V.A. She talked a little about PTSD, and said the point of mindfulness meditation is to anchor ourselves to reality in a way that feels safe and gives us a time-out from emotions. We pause, and we ground ourselves. The grounding can also be accomplished via yoga or stretching, walking in nature, and so on.

Near the end of the session, we tried out mindfulness meditation by reflecting on two poems Audrey read to us. This resonated with some session participants, and a few of us will meet to try it out again over the holidays.

Participant affiliations

ASPA National Capital Area Chapter
Brandon Hall Group
Charlestown, RI Town Council, Retired

PhD Student, Old Dominion University
Procurement Pros Group, LLC
Senior Leadership Coach
U.S. Department of Education
U.S. Department of Education, Retired
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission

People joined from Dunedin, FL; Colorado Springs, CO; Wickford, RI; Coatesville, PA; and the DC/MD/VA Metro Area.

Each time, we begin with a round of introductions to warm up the space. Afterward, participants are sent a "Who was in the room" message to facilitate ongoing connection. Please consider joining us in the future.

Sincerely,
Kitty Wooley

