



63 – Skilful Mindfulness: the captain's memory

This document is an extract from the full chapter which is available for download in the table via this [link](#) and is intended for use by participants of meetings.

Remembering the map in the midst of the storm

The glue of the programme

'Mindfulness is the authority. Mindfulness is the governing principle that keeps all other factors in their proper place.' ~ Nyanaponika Thera

'But mindfulness... I say is always useful.' ~ Gotama (the Buddha)

The keeper of the watch

In this Training stage of our journey, having established our direction, ethics, and energy, we arrive at the seventh factor of Gotama's Middle Way Programme – 'Mindfulness'. We might reasonably ask, 'Haven't we already worked with mindfulness?' We have explored mindfulness through many different lenses – but its function has matured as our raft took shape.

At this stage, mindfulness means something simple and practical. It is the capacity to remember what we are doing while we are doing it – not losing the plot. It is remembering our values in the middle of a conversation, our intention in the middle of an urge, and the wider direction in the middle of a small emotional storm. Mindfulness keeps us awake to what is happening now, so that we are not simply swept along by habit, craving, fear, or resentment.

If Skilful Application (Chapter 62) is the engine of the raft, Skilful Mindfulness remembers why the engine is running and in which direction we intend to travel. If Skilful Perspective (Chapter 57) is our realistic view of how things work, Skilful Mindfulness remembers to see through that lens when pressure rises. If Skilful Intention (Chapter 58) sets the rudder straight, then Skilful Mindfulness notices any subtle drift. And when Skilful Speech, Skilful Action, and Skilful Livelihood (Chapters 59–61) are our chosen ways of moving through the world, Skilful Mindfulness checks whether the next word or step aligns with those commitments.

Without Skilful Mindfulness, the operating protocols drift apart. Application becomes blind striving. Perspective narrows under stress. Intention fades. Action slips into habit.

With Skilful Mindfulness, the Middle Way Programme functions as one coordinated system, keeping the view clear, the rudder steady, the engine purposeful, and the platform stable.

Self-reflections

1. When I forget my practice in the heat of the moment, what exactly did I forget – my intention, the consequences, the tone of the body, or the next wise step?
2. Where has my attention been resting most today – on worries about the future, replaying the past, or staying with what is happening right now?
3. When a strong urge or reaction arises, do I notice it early in the body or only after it has taken the wheel?
4. Which areas do I tend to skip when I'm reactive – body, feeling tone, mind state or principles – and what changes when I deliberately include them?
5. Can I identify a recent moment when remembering returned just in time? What triggered the recollection?
6. Does mindfulness feel effortful and fragile right now, or steady and protective? What helps to strengthen it?
7. Looking back at a recent misstep, can I see the precise moment when carelessness replaced remembering? What was the signal I missed?

Journaling prompts

1. **The remembering log:** Write about one moment today when you forgot your practice and were carried by anger, craving, or distraction. Then write about one moment when remembering returned. What helped the remembering happen?
2. **Feeling-tone → breath → choice record:** Describe three small moments where you named the feeling-tone and took one conscious breath. What changed in the next step you took?
3. **The four-area check:** Write a brief status report on your current state:
 - a. Body – what is it doing right now?
 - b. Feeling-tone – pleasant, unpleasant, or neither?
 - c. Mind state – contracted, restless, spacious, bright, dull?
 - d. Patterns – is any familiar loop beginning to form?What do you notice when you look at all four together?
4. **The early signal:** Describe a recent reaction that gathered momentum. At what exact point could remembering have entered? What was the earliest signal in the body, feeling-tone or mind's mood?
5. **Rewrite with a pause:** Take one recent unhelpful interaction. Rewrite it with a single added breath and one moment of remembering. What would realistically have changed?
6. **Watching a thought:** Choose one thought you noticed today. Was it moving toward steadiness or away from it? How did you respond when you saw it clearly?
7. **One lens for the day:** Choose one guiding lens for tomorrow – examples include impermanence, kindness, restraint, patience, clarity... At the end of the day, write how viewing events through that lens shaped your choices.

Remember to remember

Skilful Mindfulness is the quiet thread that keeps the whole training intact. It is not just watching what happens – it is remembering what matters while it is

happening. It remembers our direction when the mood shifts. It remembers our values when the urge speaks loudly. It remembers that feeling-tone precedes reaction, that actions have consequences. Crucially, it remembers that we have chosen a different way to live.

Without this remembering, the factors scatter – effort strains in the wrong direction, intention fades, and we drift into old weather before we notice. With it, the system holds together. We do not need to be dramatic. We simply need to remember, again and again, what we are practising.

In RAFT terms, Skilful Mindfulness keeps the journey alive. It remembers the map, checks the compass, and notices when the rudder has slipped a few degrees. It protects the crossing not by force, but by presence. When we maintain the watch, we protect ourselves – and in doing so, we protect everyone who travels with us. Each time we remember instead of drifting, mindfulness grows from a fragile faculty into a reliable power. Carefulness replaces carelessness. Over time, the path is no longer something we try to remember – it becomes the way we naturally move: steady, aware, and quietly committed to arriving at the Safe Shore.

“Mindfulness isn’t difficult. What’s difficult is to remember to be mindful.” ~ Sharon Salzberg

“My experience is what I agree to attend to.” ~ William James,

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