

5-4-2020

Review of The 360 Librarian: Integrating mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and critical reflection in the workplace

Geraldine R. Kalim

Review of The 360 Librarian: A Framework for Integrating Mindfulness, Emotional Intelligence, and Critical Reflection in the Workplace

Geraldine Kalim

University of Georgia

Abstract: Review of Owens, T.M. and Daul-Elhindi, C.A. (2020). *The 360 librarian: A framework for integrating mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and critical reflection in the workplace*. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries. 164 pp.

Keywords: *mindfulness, emotional intelligence, communication, empathy, librarianship, mindful practice, self-awareness, leadership, interpersonal skills*



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

When I committed to reviewing this title, it was well before I knew what was ahead of us. Now, amidst the chaos of teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic, I am so grateful to have read this book and to be practicing (to the best of my ability) the recommendations provided. It was a calming book to read and to implement, and I think if there is anything we all need right now, it is encouragement to be calm and present in the moment within the authors' 360 Framework. Incorporating mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and critical reflection into your daily professional life may sound like a complex and weighty task that could take a lifetime to complete. This book makes it feasible, and the authors know that their readers will not become perfect 360 librarians overnight. They are both inspiring and forgiving. Despite social distancing, I already have incorporated some of the practical advice here into my daily life (both personal and professional), and I have plans to incorporate other ideas when my workplace reopens and I can see our students again.

The five 360 Librarian Ideals are Mindful Practice, Emotional Awareness, Engaged Communication, Empathetic Reflection and Action, and Reassurance, which are displayed in a useful graphic on page five that I could see on the cover of readers' journals (discussed below) or posted in my office for a visual cue (pp. 4-5). It is worth noting that the 360 Framework for situational awareness provided in this book is not ephemeral or vague, but rather practical guidance that science tells us can actually make us happier and more successful professionally.

Is there a greater personal or professional mantra than "suspend judgment" (p. 8)? Many of the ideals put forward in this book are inspired by the work of John Dewey and Stephen Brookfield in the early twentieth century. Dewey defined reflective thinking as "questioning one's beliefs, reserving judgment, and investigating all facts and theories before coming to a well-reasoned conclusion" (p. 8). The reader can easily find this ideal throughout the book.

This book is interactive. At the beginning, the authors encourage readers to start either a paper or electronic journal as a dedicated space in which to participate in the various “Do the practice” exercises throughout the book. I kept a journal informally as I read -- just a running Note on my iPhone, which seemed to be the most convenient way to read and take notes at the same time. As an early career librarian, I could not always think of examples specific to librarianship to answer the prompts, but the 360 Framework could be both applicable and beneficial to a variety of professions beyond librarianship.

The authors define nonjudgmental awareness as “the practice of sitting with your thoughts and reacting to situations without assessing whether they are good or bad, attractive or repulsive, pleasant or unpleasant” (p. 20). This reminds me of the Parable of the Old Man and the White Horse, in which a man endures both perceived ups and downs, but in the end, which events were the ups and which were the downs? I work in an academic law library, and I think we all know that law school is a stressful place. Nonjudgmental awareness absolutely has an important role to play when working with students. I know students would benefit from librarians who exude a calm and nonjudgmental presence. I often get so wrapped up in my own to do list, that I have to remind myself of my purpose, which is being there for the students and providing a supportive and positive experience for them.

I really appreciated the practical guidance offered in this book, with steps for exercises you could start incorporating into your days right away. For example, one of the “Do the practice” exercises is a desk chair meditation that anyone can do, involving attention to breath and a body scan. Regular desk chair meditations can become part of a broader effort to “transform[] mindless motions into an experiential activity” (p. 22). The authors encourage us to acknowledge and to become consciously aware of daily tasks that we may currently experience on autopilot. We may be grieving the separation from those daily routines right now (maybe you walk to work the same way every day or have a favorite

lunch spot), but there are applicable routines in our quarantine lives, like brushing your teeth, taking a shower, or walking the dog. While this book promotes traditional breath counting or mindful awareness, the authors also encourage unstructured thinking or brainstorming for creative mindfulness.

In my day-to-day life as Student Services Librarian and as a new instructor, I sometimes breathlessly rush from meeting to meeting, or shut my door when I need to focus and use every minute of my workday to prepare for class (or so I believe). Before I read this book, I would have absolutely considered myself a person who did not have time for mindfulness. Now, because of this book and because of some new programming I have been involved in at work, I would instead say that I do not have time *not* to practice mindfulness. “[R]esearch shows that we are focused and present just 53 percent of the time. Distraction leads to not only a lack of productivity but also results in a disconnect between you and your colleagues when your mind wanders during a conversation” (p. 22). The authors admit that while slowing down during a busy day certainly seems counterintuitive, it will allow you to respond with “compassion and fluidity” throughout your day and distance you from rigidity (p. 23). Inspired by this book and by the new programming at my library, I have been practicing mindfulness through a live, daily University-wide program. It is helping me gradually move from rigidity to fluidity.

This book articulated a concept to me that existed previously in a fuzzy, unnamed way in my brain -- being an “emotional leader” (p. 90). “The intended outcome of a daily Emotional Awareness practice is the mindful application of one’s own emotions in order to specifically *positively* affect any interaction, including self-talk” (p. 27). I often sense a fine line between commiserating and feeding others’ negativity, or between being positive and dismissing students’ legitimate fears and problems. Law school is stressful, and I think I would do our students a disservice to pretend otherwise. Both with myself and with students, some positive themes I can focus on without being unrealistic are resilience,

mental endurance, a sense of accomplishment, and the opportunity to do work you enjoy. These themes have become all the more relevant during our campus closure and move to online instruction. I now see other leaders in the workplace being “emotional leaders,” and especially during this time, it is comforting and appreciated.

Another skill featured in the book is deep listening. The practice of deep listening helps us to de-emphasize our own egos while focusing ourselves on the speaker (p. 46). One setting in which I currently try to practice deep listening is Zoom, where my own experience and many recent articles tell me that we all struggle with focusing on the speaker and the conversation when we are confronted with our own face to dissect. While some nonverbal cues are obscured on video conferencing, developing an awareness of the nonverbal behaviors we exhibit can help us “gently unwind and release” these behaviors from our communication styles (p. 42). An awareness of these behaviors seems especially important in librarianship, where as librarians and instructors we have power and an information advantage in our relationships with patrons and students.

Not all parts of the book will have the same relevance to all of us. For example, in Part 2, *Implementing an Intentional 360 Librarian Practice*, the chapters on consulting with students and on outreach and marketing especially spoke to me. Some readers may instead find the chapters on information literacy instruction or information technology to provide some key advice and practical guidance for your daily professional lives. In particular, a story from a contributing author to me encapsulates the meaning of outreach. The author had assembled a few students in hopes of hearing new ideas for library programming. The students had nothing to say; however, when the author asked the students to talk about their hopes and fears using more familiar language, the students were full of topics on which they needed help or reassurance (p. 117-118). This approach seems useful no matter your type of patron.

Many of the techniques and much of the advice in this book takes on new meaning in the time of coronavirus. For example, the ability to put patrons at ease over chat reference sounds much more important to me than it did a few months ago. Not because I do not think chat reference is important, but rather, I much more commonly received reference questions in person or via email. Now, chat is one of the two ways that my library is offering reference help. Another challenge unique to our time is the interpersonal dynamic inside your web conference platform of choice. As we attempt to virtualize as many of our services as possible, I hope our 360 Framework can help us navigate these heavy and physically distanced new lives.