



Three Golden Practices

In this issue, Cyndi and Ellen offer fresh inspiration for revitalizing cornerstone practices that build self-awareness and growth.

As late autumn cedes to winter, we are smitten with gold. Though the brilliant yellow of aspen and cottonwoods are just memories now, the wide fields and rolling hills of prairie grasses shimmering with wind remind us that gold is ever present.

'Golden' also calls forth the Japanese art of kintsugi: mending cracked pottery with gold. The technique honors flaws, imperfections and brokenness as opportunities to rebuild ourselves as stronger works of art.

And who isn't feeling a bit cracked and broken? Resilient and grateful as we may be, the pandemic and politics have fractured us in new ways. As the transition to winter moves energy inward, it is also time to revisit our interior landscape, remember our gold, and mend some cracks.

The three golden practices describe the key actions of meditation, reflective writing and micro experiments. Ellen and her coaching colleague Steven Morrow coined the term, because these actions show up in nearly every coaching engagement as foundational pathways for self-awareness and growth. Since OnGrowing is written with our former coaching clients in mind, we offer some recent inspirations, with the hope that this post inspires you to take a fresh look at the current role these practices play in your life.

Golden Practice #1: Meditation

Our clients consistently report that establishing or deepening a meditation practice has yielded the most significant shift in how they experience themselves and the world. In the words of one client:

“A few months ago I added meditation to my morning routine and it has had a profound effect on my being. By putting myself first for 10-12 minutes each morning, I've found a new path that has changed my brain for the better. One of the greatest benefits I have received is a new way of paying attention. This helps me notice my internal and external life with clarity, and I've grown a lot in letting go of thoughts, feelings and behaviors that interrupt my progress. It has deepened my skills to live a more examined life.”

If your practice has stalled — maybe you've stopped meditating regularly, or meditation isn't feeling meaningful — we suggest using an app. Lately, we've been learning a lot from Sam Harris through his stellar app *Waking Up* (link below).

Early in the Introductory Course, Harris acknowledges the many physical and psychological benefits of meditation (such as reduced stress and improved immunity), yet reminds us that, far more importantly, **“Meditation is a skill that opens doors that you might not otherwise know exist.”** He elaborates:

“You are always meditating on something. Your attention is always bound up in something. We largely become what we pay attention to. We are building our minds in each moment. We're building habits and desires and worries and expectations and prejudices and insights. And mindfulness is just the ability to notice this, with clarity, and then prioritize what you pay attention to.”

What are you paying attention to? Awareness of attention sharpens your focus, clarity, and presence.

Golden Practice #2: Reflective Writing

We are constantly bombarded with information, and it's easy to lose track of our own thoughts amidst all the input. Reflective writing is a way to slow down and listen to yourself. The saying “How do I know what I think until I see what I say?” captures the purpose well.

We appreciate the simplicity of Julia Cameron's daily “Morning Pages” practice described in her classic book *The Artist's Way*: free writing (link below). No audience, no focusing question. Just **dedicated space and time to let thoughts, feelings, observations, words, images — everything — flow through you.** Some prefer journals; others, notebooks. Some go longhand; others, digital. *Your way* is the right way for you. Allow yourself to drop into the stream. See what's here, now.

One client reignited her passion for leading through a reflective writing practice. She had stayed necessarily focused on safety and tactical details for 18 months, because that's what leading in the time of the pandemic required. She was exhausted — surviving, but a long way

from thriving. She took on a practice of writing twice a week for 15 uninterrupted minutes, and she discovered she had a lot to say! She realized that the ways the organization had responded to the pandemic revealed a lot about the staff's collective values. She began to pen very different weekly staff communications, rooted in vision, values, and conviction. And...nearly every member of the staff sought her out to express appreciation for the honest, authentic, personal communication that helped guide them through their week. That response emboldened her to continue, and she reports that her conversations with staff members are now fueled with more "thriving" energy as a result.

Golden Practice #3 : Micro Experiments

This practice is a little different. You can apply it *within* another practice. Instead of taking on a practice indefinitely, choose a brief period of time, perhaps 2-4 weeks. Then keep track of what *really* happens during that time.

After the short stint, ask yourself:

- Did I do it?
- What happened when I did it?
- What surprised me that challenged my assumptions?
- What resistance did I experience?

The intention of a micro experiment is to learn more about ourselves, to investigate the reality of what *really* happens, not just what we imagine will happen. Often, we are pleasantly surprised.

One client set up a micro experiment to ask questions in meetings. She had recently been promoted to CFO, and she was holding back questions of her banker and finance partners because she feared revealing what she didn't know, showing herself as an imposter in her new role. She believed that if she asked questions, her colleagues would lose confidence in her. Nevertheless, she was willing to do a micro experiment in her next meeting with her banker. She asked *all* of her questions. Later that week, the president of the bank called to let her boss know how impressed he was with her. Surprise! Instead of feeling embarrassed or that she had much to lose, she was able to gain important knowledge, and others saw her as confident in her new position.

That's an example of setting up an experiment and following through. But not all experiments go that way. **Micro experiments also help us build our capacity to hold resistance as part of the equation.**

When we choose to do micro experiments, we acknowledge that *we will face resistance* as we take on a new or refined practice. The experiment helps us become curious about the resistance: we can name it, notice it, get familiar with it, and adjust as necessary — all the while keeping in mind that our inherent "gold" does not depend on how perfectly we practice something new, at our growth edge. When we overcome our resistance to try, skillfulness will follow.

As winter enters, may you feel inspired to take on or revitalize a golden practice. May you feel inspired to reconnect with your deeper self, remind yourself of your innate strength, and shine.

Tell me what you pay attention to and I will tell you who you are."

- Jose Ortega y Gasset



Deeper Dive:

Check out the [Waking Up](#) app with Sam Harris (also the title of his book). You can [try it](#) for free.

Appreciate the beautiful simplicity of Julia Cameron's [Morning Pages](#) practice.

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CUSTOMIZED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT