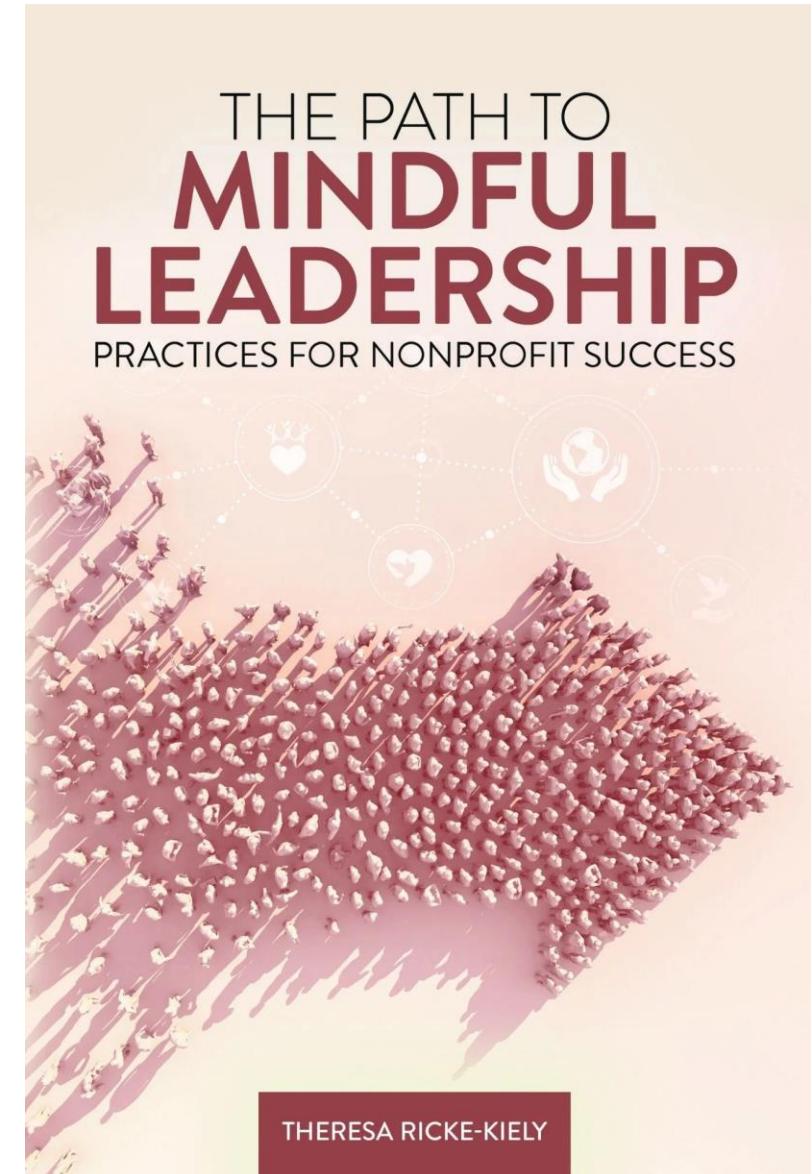


# Nonprofit Leadership Alliance

## Leading with Intention: How Mindfulness Strengthens Nonprofit Leadership.

*November 13, 2025*

Presenter: Dr. Theresa Ricke-Kiely



# A bit about me



- First Career: Nonprofit Human Services
- Current Career: Professor (University of Arizona) and Nonprofit Coach and Consultant
- Taught Nonprofit Leadership:
  - University of Notre Dame
  - University of St Thomas
  - University of South Carolina
- Education: Master of Public Administration and Doctorate in Organizational Leadership
- Trained in Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction
- Intercultural Development Inventory Trainer
- Lifelong volunteer
- CNP and NLA supporter

A close-up, high-angle photograph of a person's face. The person has short, light-colored, curly hair. They are wearing round, gold-colored glasses. Their eyes are a vibrant blue, looking directly upwards and slightly to the right. The background is a solid, muted blue.

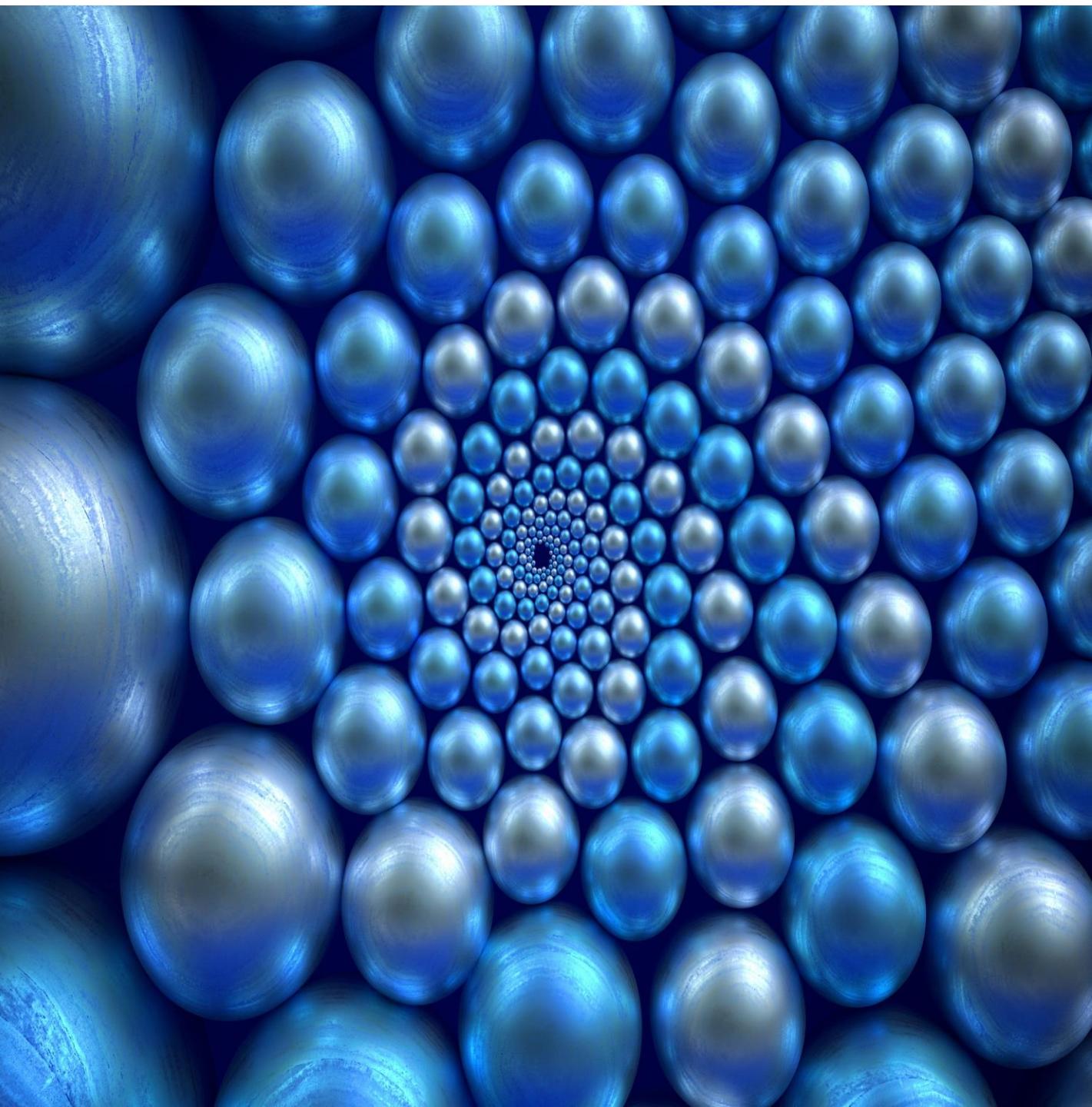
## Questions to Ponder

- What is mindfulness?
- What is leadership?
- How can I practice mindful leadership?

## A Mindful Moment

*Centering  
Ourselves*

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## Defining Mindfulness

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*Share some words that relate to mindfulness*

# Defining Leadership

Share some words  
that describe  
leadership in our  
sector.



# What is Mindful Nonprofit Leadership?

## *My Definition*

**Mindful Leadership is a holistic approach to guiding others, grounded in self-awareness, equanimity, reflection, focus, deep listening, compassion, empathy, and intentional calming of the ego.**

It involves cultivating a heightened consciousness of oneself and others, fostering a deep understanding of diverse perspectives, maintaining emotional balance in the face of challenges, engaging in continuous self-reflection, honing the ability to concentrate on the present moment, practicing attentive and empathetic listening with nonjudgement, and consciously mitigating the influence of personal ego for the collective well-being and growth of the self, the team and the broader organization.

*Dr. Theresa Ricke-Kiely*



# Mindful Leadership Simplified

Mindful leaders respond; they don't react.

Mindful leaders develop a practice of listening deeply without judgment.

Mindful leaders are present and focused.

Mindful leaders are role models; they authentically demonstrate the same compassion and empathy for themselves as they do for their teams.



# How does mindfulness help us to be better leaders?

- Leaders choose to respond rather than react
- Reveals the connection between mind and body
  - When stress or anxiety rises—learn to notice it first, then manage it second
- Cultivates stronger listening
- Sharpens focus
- Expands empathy and compassion
- Supports self-care
- Strengthens our teams—healthy leaders foster healthier teams who carry the mission forward

Intel  
Forbes  
Ford  
General Mills  
Aetna  
Goldman Sachs  
LinkedIn  
and many, many more



**Business Buys In To Mindfulness Practices**

## How Mindfulness Helped a Workplace Diversity Exercise

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What happened when we decided to own the awkwardness.

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## F1 Legend Toto Wolff on Winning, Losing, and Leading Through Both

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# Harvard Business Review

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The distinction is significant.

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## Mindfulness Can Literally Change Your Brain

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## Create a Bold, Safe Space for Discussion

MANAGEMENT VIDEO by Katie McCadden

Set ground rules for an open and productive conversation with your group.

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# Where to Begin?

## Self-Awareness

## Leadership Traits and Skills

# Leadership Traits

## *What are your leadership traits?*

Approachability	Authenticity	Character	Compassion	Commitment	Confidence	Conscientiousness	Courage
Curiosity	Detail orientation	Determination	Emotional intelligence	Empathy	Extroversion	Friendliness	Flexibility
Honesty	Integrity	Intelligence	Introversion	Intuition	Loyalty	Persistence	Relationality
Risk-taking	Social architecting	Add your own!					

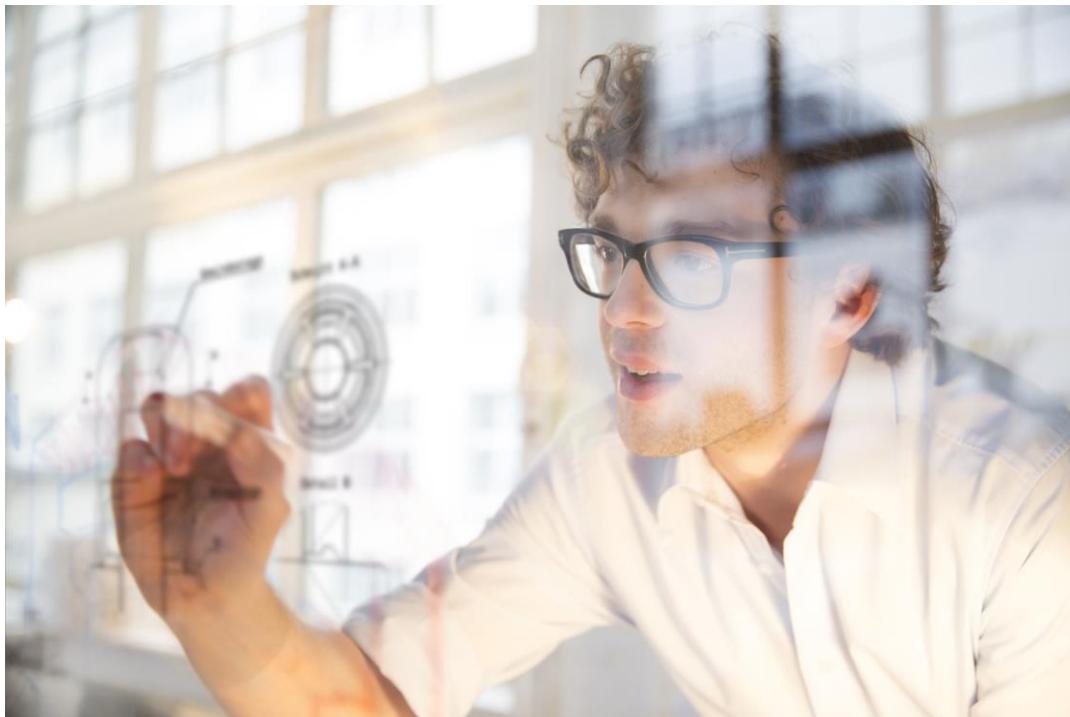
# Leadership Skills

## What are your skills?

Adapting  
Coaching  
Collaborating  
Communicating  
Conceptual thinking  
Conflict resolution  
Connecting  
Cultural competence  
Decision making  
Empowering others  
Encouraging others  
Entrepreneurship  
Ethics  
Feeling and expressing appreciation

Feeling and expressing compassion  
Focus  
Foresight  
Genuineness, authenticity  
Healing  
Humility  
Imagining  
Influencing  
Innovation  
Inspiring others  
Listening  
Magnanimity  
Managing change  
Mentoring  
Mindfulness

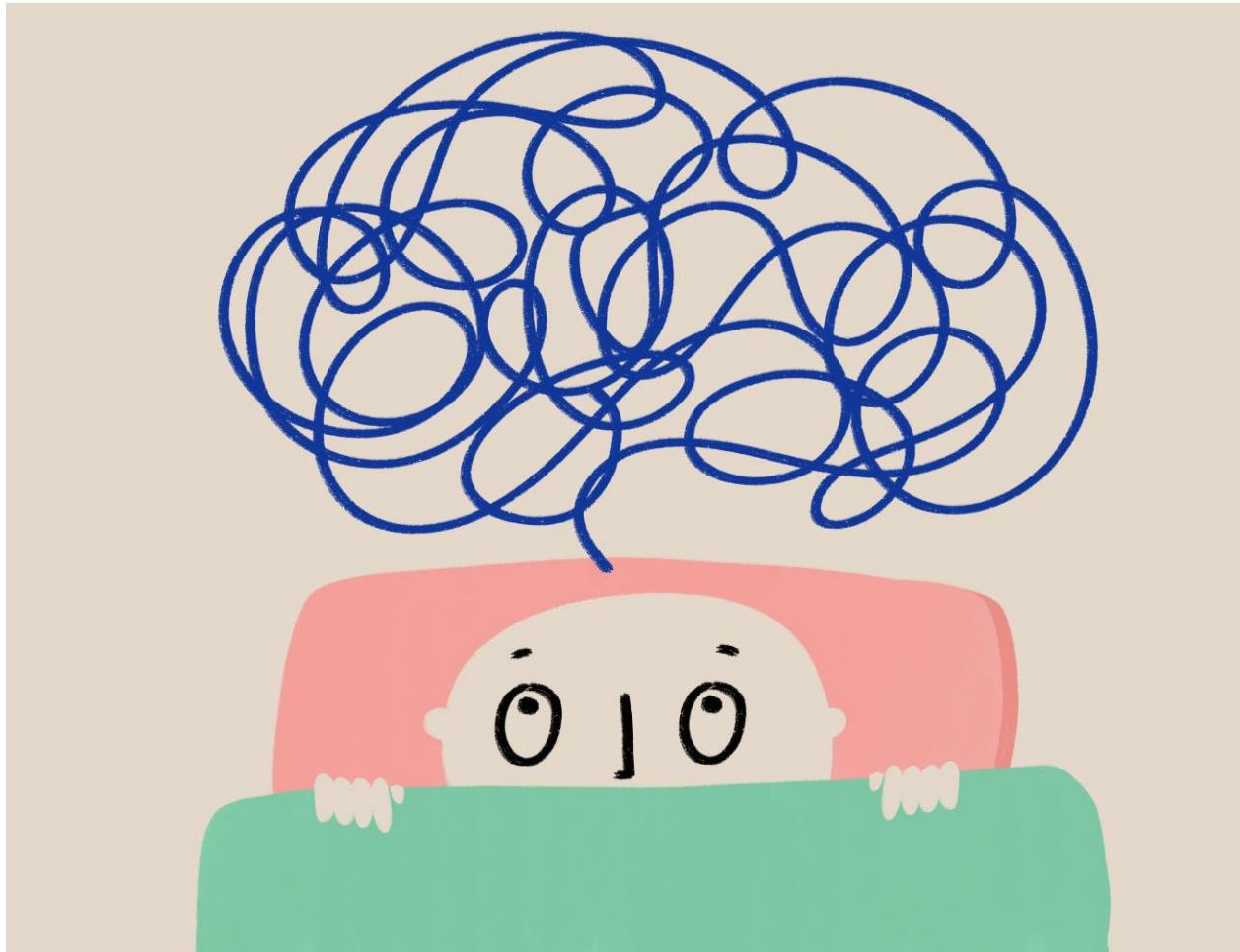
Motivating others  
Networking  
Problem-solving  
Receptivity  
Reflecting  
Relating  
Role modeling  
Self-awareness  
Storytelling  
Strategizing  
Team development  
Teambuilding  
Visioning



**How do you know what your leadership skills and traits are?  
How do you show up for people?**

**Self-awareness is a powerful way to become mindful.**

*And we have many leaders who lack self-awareness.*



### What is it?

Self-awareness is the ability to understand & reflect on one's thoughts, emotions & behaviors, enhancing personal growth & decision-making.

### Why do it?

Developing self-awareness involves mindfulness practices, seeking feedback & reflecting on past experiences to gain deeper insights.

### What is the outcome?

Increased self-awareness leads to improved emotional intelligence, fostering better relationships & enhancing overall wellbeing.

# 5 Tips to Become Self-Aware



# #1 Assess and Reflect

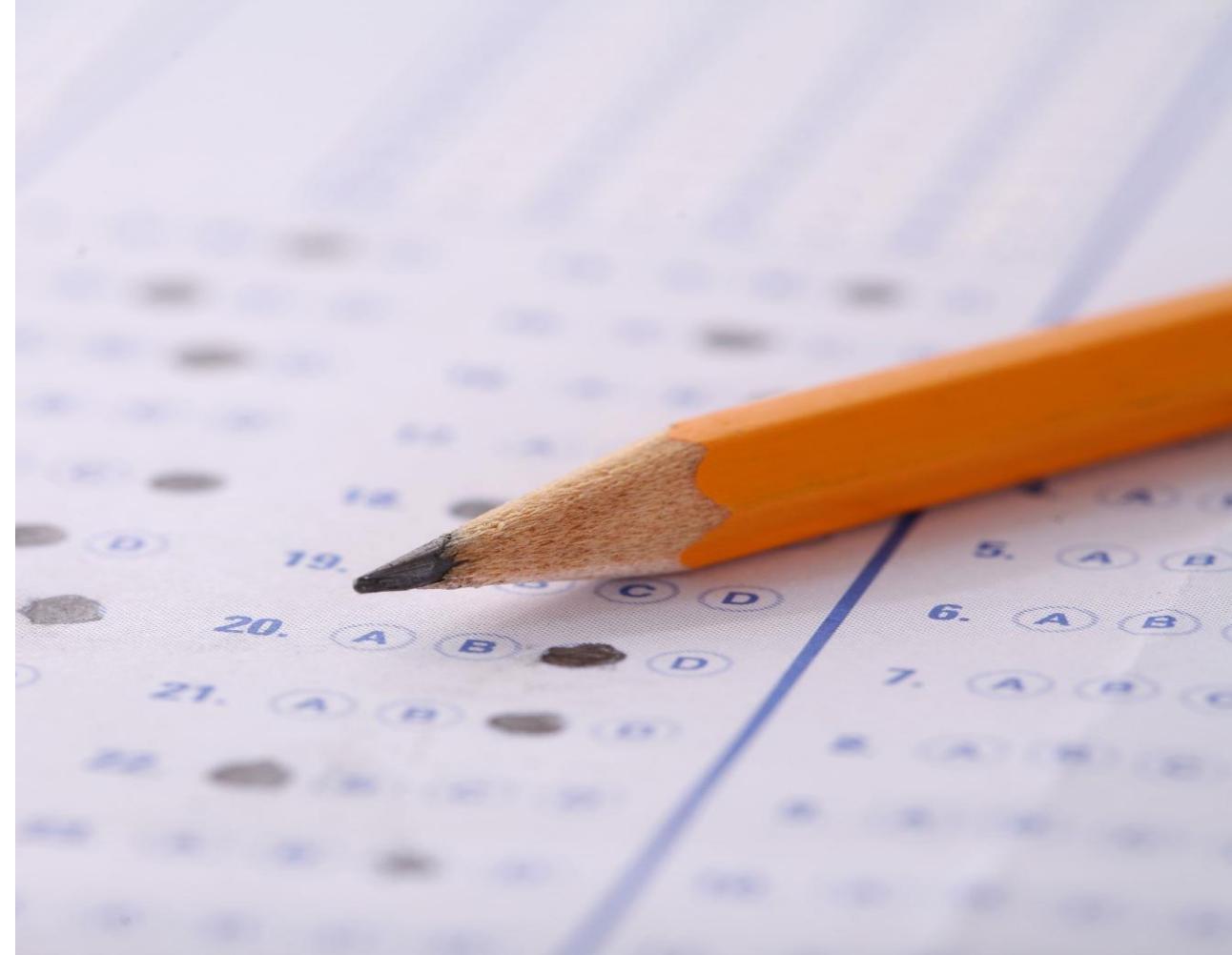
## Self-Assessment

- Tools like StrengthsFinder, DISC, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and many others
- Be truthful with yourself

## Seek other perspectives

- 360-degree evaluations
- Colleagues/peers
- People you supervise (including volunteers and interns)
- Your supervisor

**And remember, it is just feedback. But it is helpful to note any trends.**



## Free self-assessment tools

- <https://daretolead.brenebrown.com/assessment/>
- <https://www.purdue.edu/meercat/ldp/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/08/LSA.pdf>
- <https://edge.sagepub.com/northouseintro5e/student-resources/downloadable-self-assessments>

## #2 Find a Truthteller

- A truthteller shares their reaction to your leadership behavior
- It is someone who can see you in action and understands the context (we tend not to be reliable self-reporters)
- It is someone who is compassionate and cares about your leadership growth and can give you an honest assessment

### A truthteller is not:

- *your mother*
- *someone who holds power over you (or under you)*
- *A mentor*



## #3 Get a Mentor—or Two (or a mindful leadership coach)



### A Mentor

- is an individual with expertise who can help develop the career of a mentee.
- provides advice to enhance professional performance and development.

### How can they help?

- Listen
- Build collective goals that are SMART
- Hold you accountable
- Another form of professional development
- Offer support

Citation: <https://www.apa.org/education-career/grad/mentoring>

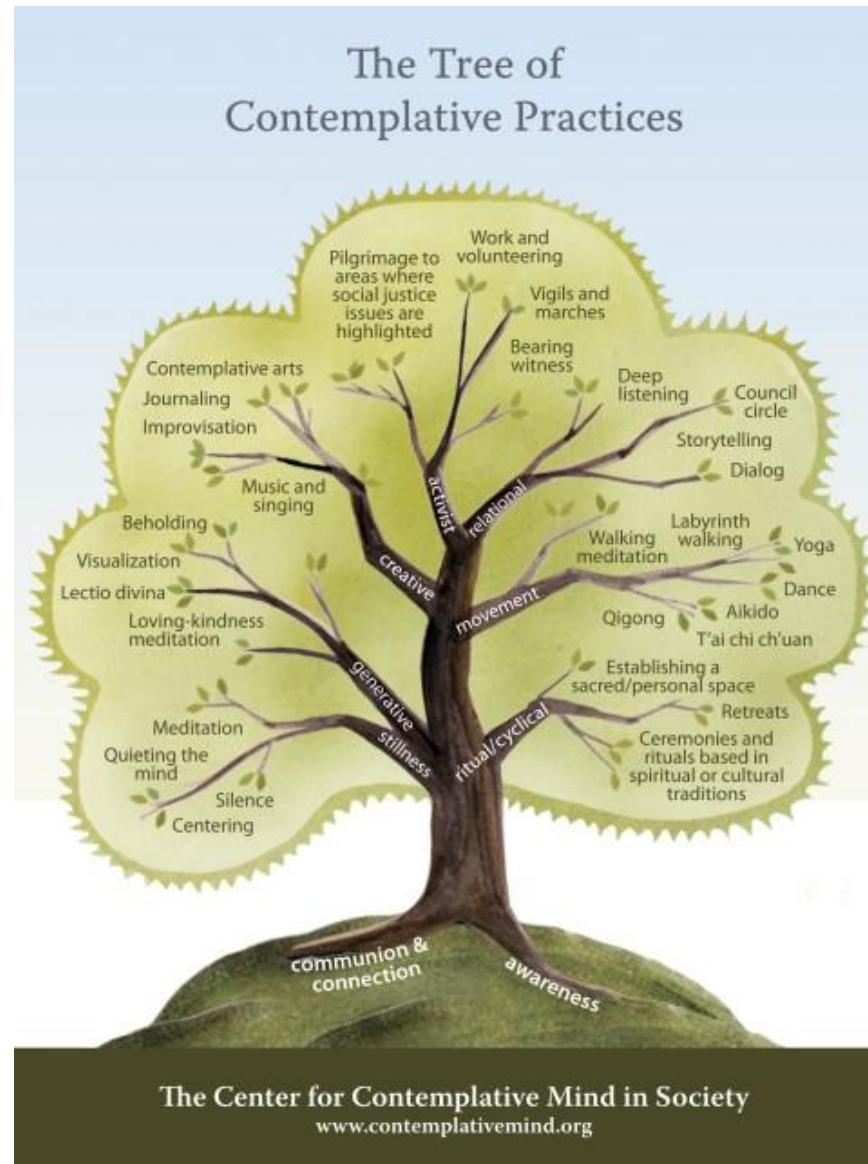
## #4 Be Curious and Courageous

**Becoming self-aware is not easy**

- Learning about your positive leadership traits and skills is fun
- Learning about your gap areas can be intimidating and daunting

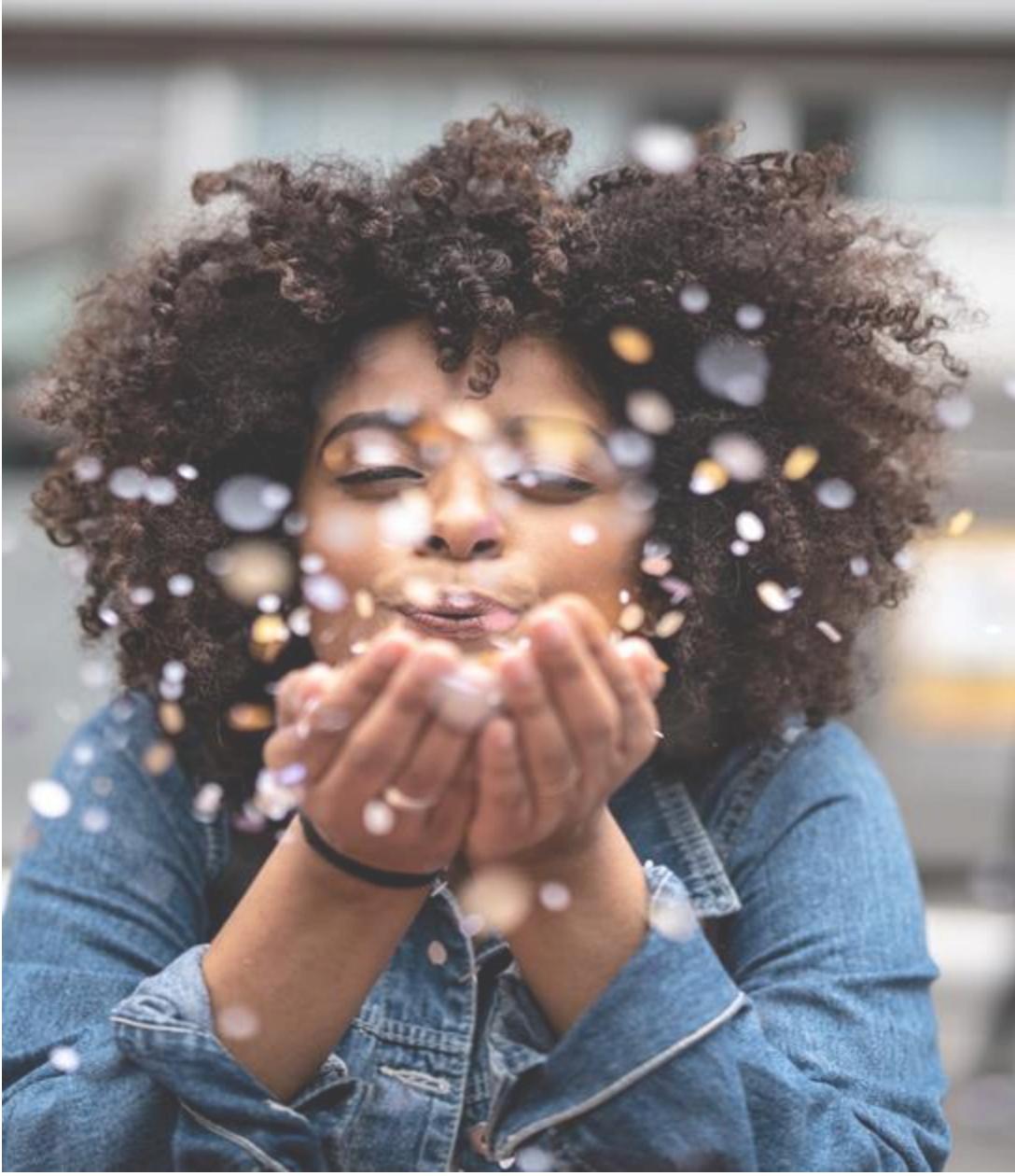


# #5 Practice Mindfulness



# 5 Mindful Activities





# #1 Breathing

- ▶ You take 17,000 breaths a day, six million each year!
- ▶ You are breathing unconsciously all the time
- ▶ Your breath is your companion from the moment you arrive until the moment you depart this life
- ▶ Consciously taking deep breaths is one of the body's strongest self-healing tools to:
  - ▶ Lower blood pressure, reduce heart rate
  - ▶ Exercise the lungs
  - ▶ Increase physical and mental energy
  - ▶ Improve immunity
  - ▶ Decrease stress hormones
- ▶ As little as 90 seconds of deep breathing reduces stress hormones in our body

Credit: Julie Bryant, Higher Education Consultant



# Intentional Breaths

- When you walk through a doorway
- Before you answer a text
- Before you go into a meeting
- Before you react- so that you can respond

*Just the act of pausing to breathe is a mindful moment.*

## #2 Set Boundaries

- Check your email/phone at certain times-do not be on call 24/7
- Take vacation time (do not be the martyr)
- It is ok to have your door shut so you can focus on intense work projects
- Engage in activities that give you joy. Schedule it on your calendar.

*Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.*

Anne Lamott

## #3 Practice Gratitude

- It is hard to hold worry and appreciation at the same time
- Practicing gratitude regularly enhances emotional resilience and reduces stress
- Gratitude encourages noticing small daily kindnesses and joys.
- Expressing gratitude strengthens relationships by fostering appreciation and connection.

Authentic gratitude benefits the giver and receiver



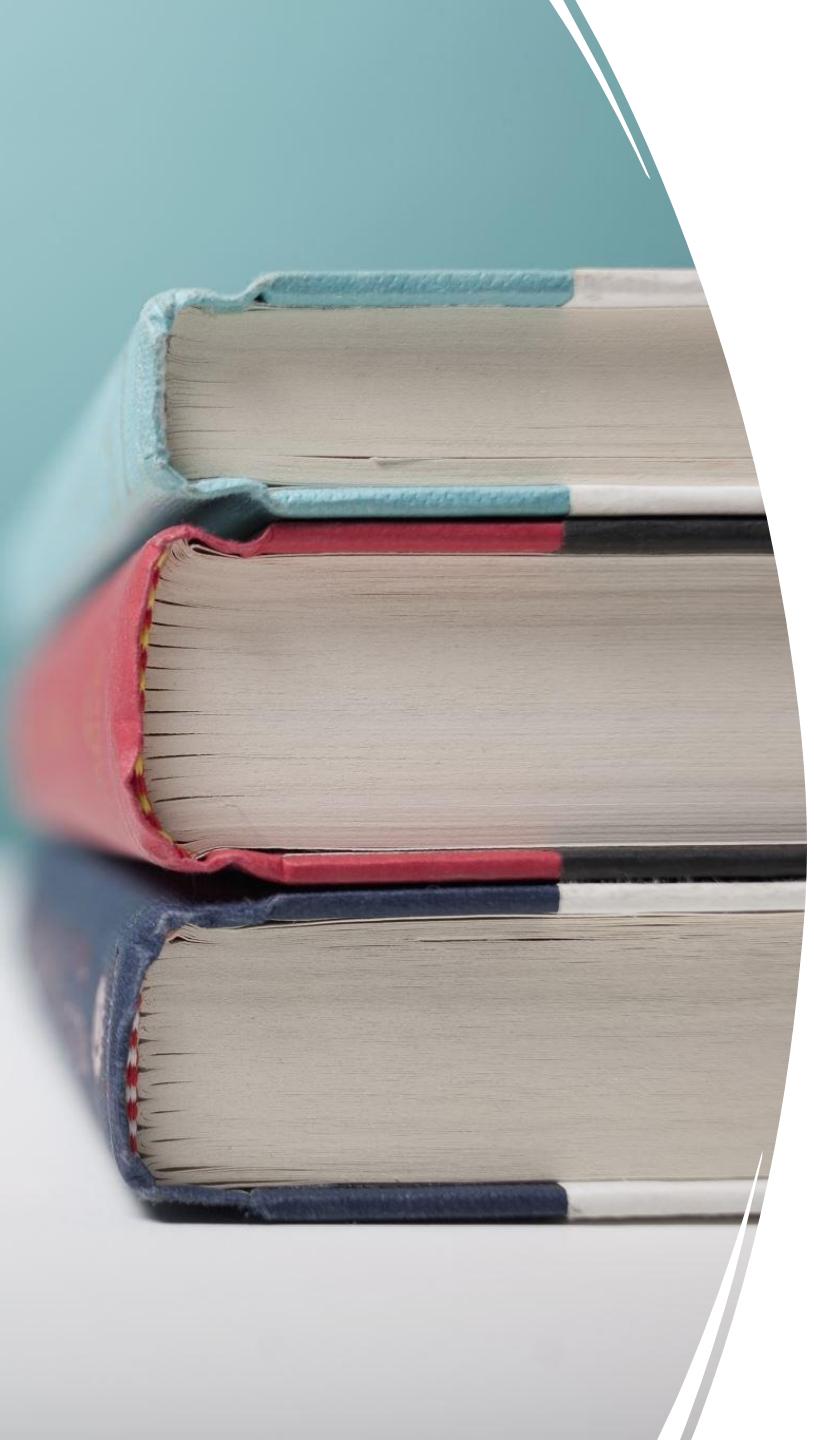
# #4 Compassion

(for you and your team)

- Model self-compassion by admitting when you make mistakes and showing yourself kindness and grace.
- Recognize and respond to struggle on your team. Notice when someone seems overwhelmed or withdrawn, and check in with genuine concern — “How are you doing, really?” Demonstrate that people matter.

When leaders demonstrate that it's okay to be imperfect, it encourages a culture of growth over fear.





## #5 Be a Learning Leader

- Practice self-reflection to examine your assumptions and biases. Set aside time to think deeply about what's working and what isn't.
- Create space for active listening with your team and colleagues. Be fully present in conversations, suspending judgment, and genuinely seeking to understand different perspectives before responding.
- Continue to learn. Stay curious, ask questions, and be transparent about your learning journey. When you show vulnerability and growth, it gives others permission to do the same.
  - Book Clubs
  - Mindful moments

# The Mindful Leader



focused and present



self aware



responsive not  
reactive



compassionate and  
empathic



brings out the best  
in others



authentic



a supporter and a  
coach



gratitude



engaged in self- care  
for self and others

# Your chance to be an intentional leader

Put in the chat one activity you will do to start your mindful leadership practice.



# A Few Resources

<b>1. Yawn and stretch</b> One of the easiest ways to bring yourself back to your body.	<b>2. Sit and observe</b> Sit down somewhere outside and simply watch the world around you.	<b>3. Wash your hands</b> Every time you wash your hands, use it as a reminder to come back to the present.
<b>4. The STOP method</b> Stand up, Tune in to your body, Observe physical sensations, imagine new Possibilities	<b>5. Transition moments</b> Take advantage of "transition moments," like walking across a parking lot. Do it with care.	<b>6. Mindful breathing</b> Take 60 seconds to notice your breathing. When your mind wanders, bring it back.
<b>7. Loving kindness</b> Loving kindness meditation is a practice to send warmth, kindness and peace to others.	<b>8. Set an intention</b> Take a one-minute pause in your day to decide how you want to move through the day	<b>9. Self-compassion</b> Remind yourself that it's common to be hard on yourself, but you need to be nurturing instead.
<b>10. Mindful hug</b> Ask a partner or friend for a hug. Take three deep breaths together. (Releases oxytocin!)	<b>11. Mindful eating</b> When you catch yourself eating on autopilot, take 60 seconds to slow down and eat mindfully.	<b>12. Morning meditation</b> Take one minute right when you wake up to meditate before you begin your day.
<b>13. Chair meditation</b> When you're at your desk in the middle of your workday, take 60 seconds to meditate.	<b>14. 4-7-8 breathing</b> Breathe through your nose for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, then breath out for 8 seconds.	<b>15. Box breathing</b> Visualize a square. Move along each side of the square, breathing, holding, and exhaling.
<b>16. Do a door reset</b> When you pass a door and enter a new space, use that as a chance to do a mindful reset.	<b>17. Guided meditation</b> Find a one-minute guided meditation for a quick mental reset.	<b>18. Cloud watching</b> Pick a cloud, or anything in your environment, and watch it for one minute.
<b>19. Mindful listening</b> Choose a piece of music you've never heard before. Listen to every element of it carefully.	<b>20. Gratitude</b> Carve out one minute of your day for a moment of gratitude.	<b>21. Focus</b> When you catch yourself multitasking, slow down and work on just one thing for one minute.

- [Insight Timer \(Free App\)](#)
- [Harvard Business Review](#)
- [Psychology Today](#)
- [Mindful.org](#)
- [The Science of Mindfulness](#)
- [The Garrison Institute](#)
- [AI can be a great thought partner](#)



# Last Thoughts

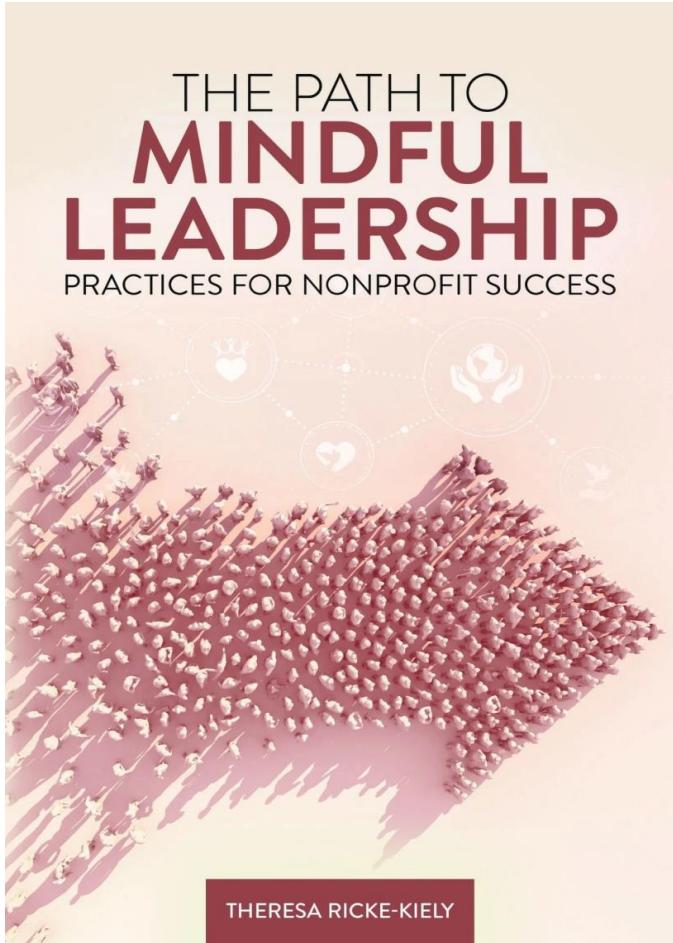
**Leadership is a practice. Mindfulness is a practice.**

*The more you practice, the stronger you become.*

**It is like swimming.**

- I can teach you from my experience.
- I can share a book about how to swim.
- But you won't know if you can do it until you get into the pool.

# My gratitude for your time and attention!



@drtheresarickekiely  
Dr. Theresa Ricke-Kiely  
[www.theresarickekiely.com](http://www.theresarickekiely.com)  
theresarickekiely@gmail.com



<https://www.linkedin.com/in/theresa-ricke-kiely/>

<https://www.facebook.com/drtheresarickekiely/>

[The Path to Mindful Leadership. Practices for Nonprofit Success.](#)

Interested in learning more? You can find my book on KendallHunt Publishing or on Amazon

Collective Wisdom

Thoughts, Comments, and Questions

