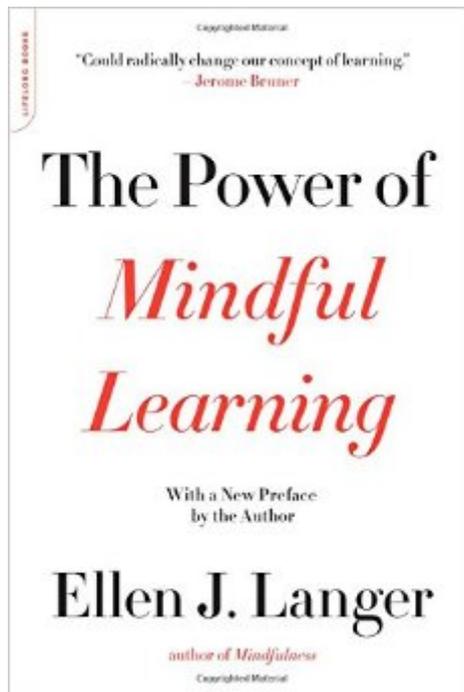


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# The Power Of Mindful Learning (A Merloyd Lawrence Book)



## Synopsis

Radical in its implications, this original and important work may change forever the views we hold about the nature of learning. In *The Power of Mindful Learning*, Ellen Langer uses her innovative theory of mindfulness, introduced in her influential earlier book, to dramatically enhance the way we learn. In business, sports, laboratories, or at home, our learning is hobbled by certain antiquated and pervasive misconceptions. In this pithy, liberating, and delightful book she gives us a fresh, new view of learning in the broadest sense. Such familiar notions as delayed gratification, "the basics", or even "right answers", are all incapacitating myths which Langer explodes one by one. She replaces them with her concept of mindful or conditional learning which she demonstrates, with fascinating examples from her research, to be extraordinarily effective. Mindful learning takes place with an awareness of context and of the ever-changing nature of information. Learning without this awareness, as Langer shows convincingly, has severely limited uses and often sets on up for failure. With stunning applications to skills as diverse as paying attention, CPR, investment analysis, psychotherapy, or playing a musical instrument, *The Power of Mindful Learning* is for all who are curious and intellectually adventurous.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Langer's style is more popular than academic. She presents plenty of empirical evidence to support her ideas, though there may not be enough data to satisfy some scholars. What she does well is

challenge conventional wisdom, for example, that you have to learn to do the basics before acquiring a new competence. Or, that we should encourage our children to 'pay more attention'. She dissects these beliefs and exposes the relatively shallow assumptions that underpin them. This has had great power for me, and I have tried to apply these insights mindfully. It is over a year since I first read this book. In that time I have found endless applications for Langer's concept of mindfulness. My training designs have been completely transformed by the idea, backed up by empirical evidence, that teaching people 'steps in a process' is essentially meaningless. I have borrowed constantly in writing and speech from her suggestion that 'conditional' language is more persuasive than 'unconditional'. Most importantly, I have learned to help other people become mindful about solving their problems in my coaching work.

Ms. Langer effectively conveys her theory of mindful learning and its implications for education wherever it takes place - in school, on the job, in the home - and does so in a clearly expressed nonacademic manner. What is mindful learning? It is learning that involves "openness to novelty; alertness to distinction; sensitivity to different contexts; implicit, if not explicit, awareness of multiple perspectives; and orientation in the present." What might this all mean for us? Perhaps our educational curriculums need to be taught differently, maybe our jobs could be more enjoyable, and self-improvement less onerous. She states the myths of conventional learning: 1. The basics must be learned so well that they become second nature. 2. Paying attention means being focused on one thing at a time. 3. Delaying gratification is important. 4. Rote memorization is necessary. 5. Forgetting is a problem. 6. Intelligence is knowing "what's out there." 7. There are right and wrong answers. Each chapter discusses, in a nondogmatic manner, theory and possible reasons why these myths are not always helpful. This is not, as Professor Langer states, a "how-to" book with prescriptions and study programs for the self-help "professional learner" (as one reviewer phrased it.) It doesn't have cute little "mind-maps," and it isn't a De Bono's "Thinking Course"-type book. The reviewer (Adamson, January 22, 1999) might have learned something if he'd been less smug about his naive faith in those "accelerated" learning books which don't deliver half of what they claim. Personally, I found this book extremely helpful in my own personal studies - from learning to play tennis and golf better, becoming more fluent in Spanish, improving my chess - since I try to find alternative methods, perspectives, and just plain fun in learning. I don't try to be perfect. I don't think there's only one way to do something. Try it.

I read this book from the perspective of a college teacher, looking for new ways to think about what

goes on in the classroom. My eyes were opened! Langer argues that learning need not be boring and students don't have to think of education as "work." She suggests ways to re-frame activities in ways that engage students in what they are doing and give them a reason to care about the outcomes. Langer attacks the myth that rote learning & blind memorization are the foundation for higher-order skills. She makes a strong case that "forgetting" is often a good thing. Teachers should be concerned about students understanding the contextual limitations of what they learn, rather than with "covering the material." Coupled with Bob Boice's several books on mindfulness in teaching, this book changed the way I think about college teaching.

Ellen Langer has taken a thought and put great amounts of research into it. It is said that knowledge capital decreases quickly in our information-based society, so not only must we keep ourselves up to date on current changes--we must also re-evaluate the old facts we've learned. Langer points out six myths and explains them away with research to support it. One of those myths and our perception have made us medicalize an academic deficiency. We have medically treated many children, diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder, when the educational system including parents do not understand that the student is being distracted by something else more attractive. The idea here is to make our learning more attractive than it currently is by allowing a more creative and questioning environment. I watched a 30-minute PBS special with Ellen Langer discussing her book and have read the book--her interview was much better and to the point. However, her book questions five other myths all related to the fact that the environment changes. To leave you with my favorite sentence in the book--it will give you a taste of what the book is about--"Not only do we as individuals get locked into single-minded views, but we also reinforce these views for each other until the culture itself suffers the same mindlessness."

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