

# Convert Your Brain to be a Change-Maker: The Importance of Intentionality

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The world we live in has changed drastically over the decades, most recently through the pandemic and controversies ignited by social injustices. Through all these conversations and movements, one thing remains constant — the human race must continue to work towards being intentional every single day — that is, thinking, feeling and acting in a deliberate way toward a purpose.

As public relations professionals, we are natural communicators serving as catalysts of change. Yet we still need a better, more comprehensive understanding of what it means to be a communicator. Every single person is a communicator, either verbally or non-verbally or both. As such, every individual has the ability to be an agent of change.

The ecosystem we live in is noisy, supersaturated with unnecessary and blinded desires. Most of us have good intentions but fail to follow through with actions that could turn those good intentions into a reality. This fact is underscored by a research finding that most of what we do every minute of every day occurs in the context of an unconscious mindset.

According to cognitive neuroscientists, our brain activity functions in a conscious state approximately 5% of the time. The majority of our decisions, actions, automatic skills, emotions, behaviors, phobias and desires depend on the 95% of our unconscious mind. In fact, neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, believed the unconscious mind to be the primary source of human behavior. In other words, we live mostly on autopilot.

This tension between our conscious and unconscious minds should serve as a motivating challenge to find ways to become more conscious and, thereby more intentional, in our everyday lives.

Mark Pettit, a time management and business coach at Lucemi Consulting, authored an article on intentionality in which he says, “Intentionality multiplies the power of each relationship that is important to us. Intentionality helps us understand the purpose and importance of every relationship we have. When we take a moment to understand why a relationship is important, it grows. Being present in communication and in person ... shows how much we value [the relationship].”

Individually, as agents of change, we must decide to make changes in our own lives — personally, professionally and within society. We need to find time to stop, listen, empathize and meet others *where they are* in their day, or their week, or their life. Doing otherwise is a disservice.

Here is a simple example of what happens more often than we realize. Frequently one starts a conversation with “Hi, how are you?” Think about how often each party *actually* approaches the question with intentionality. A short answer is given and the initiator expeditiously moves on to the pre-determined reason for the conversation. Alternatively, a conversation with intentionality would spend a little more time on that answer, or the initiator might simply include “today” at the end of their question. Specifying a time range shows a deeper desire to connect with a person about their day rather than leaving it as just a superficial lead into the conversation.

A single person with a clear conscience and a willingness to speak up can make a difference, but it requires intentional decisions and follow-through. Think about PRSA Tampa Bay’s Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Statement, which says D&I can also include class, socioeconomic status, life experiences, learning and working styles, personality types and intellectual traditions and perspectives, as well as cultural, political, religious and other beliefs. “These defining attributes impact how we approach our work, connect with others and move through the world ... inclusion is about ensuring everyone’s voice is heard and fully considered.”

Katie Mae, president of Katie Mae Coaching, LLC, supports this approach, saying, “There is a real difference between reacting and responding. It takes work to be intentional with your thoughts and words.”

Listen to behavioral and data scientist, Pragya Agarwal, who published an article in *Scientific American* on neuroimaging and unconscious bias: “Neuroplasticity is one of the major breakthroughs in neuroscience: we now know that different short- and long-term experiences will change the brain’s structure. Social attitudes and expectations such as stereotypes can change how the brain processes information, and so brain-based differences in behavioral characteristics and cognitive skills change across time, place and culture. This means that our unconscious biases are not wired into us. They are learned through our experiences and hence can also be unlearned.”

Bingo! We *can* shift to a more conscious state of mind.

Up for a challenge? Read the book *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell. It will help teach you how to educate and manage your unconscious mindset or reactions. Gladwell writes that “our snap judgments and first impressions can be educated and controlled . . . [and] the task of making sense of ourselves and our behavior requires that we acknowledge there can be as much value in the blink of an eye as in months of rational analysis.”

Respect must always help determine how we steer our thoughts and conversations. We need to honor others even when others disagree or have a different opinion. Most importantly, we must pay attention to emotions. When we respect others’ dignity, we increase gratitude.

Take it from Jay Shetty, an English author, former Hindu monk, life coach and the host of the podcast *On Purpose*. His perspective is beautiful: “Always remember the bad you’ve done to others and remember the good others have done for you. When you remember the bad ... you always feel grounded ... humbled. And when you remember the good others have done for you, you feel grateful.

Many of us struggle to embrace vulnerable moments in our personal and professional lives. However, when we convert our brains to function more consciously, our human race will reap the benefits. We have to work together, live together and reason together. Be conscious. Be intentional. Make a difference.

Tips for Being Intentional Each Day – Remember, it’s a Journey!

- Make a commitment and identify one thing you can do every day to be more deliberate and conscious.
  - Example: *Really* take the time with family, friends or colleagues when you ask about their day. Don’t be like mascara and run at the first sight of emotion. Be present and respond.
- Be willing to be uncomfortable, or vulnerable. As my former colleague Lori Baggett (now vice president, associate general counsel for PODS) once put it: “Comfort and change are not compatible.” So be deliberate about your intentional efforts — you will grow.
- Make time for self-reflection. Start a gratitude journal and list three things you are grateful for each day. Alternatively, journal your journey to become a change-maker.
- Ask “why?” Keep digging until you have a more detailed answer.

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