



## Wicked Problems - Episode 15: Mindfulness Coach, [Anuka]

### Search Inside Yourself. The importance of mindfulness in business with Anuka Gazara-Anthony

URL: <https://wickedproblems.fm/anuka-mindfulness/>

#### Episode Transcription

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#### **Transcription starts**

[00:00:01] **Toby Corballis:** I've got with me today, and I'm very excited about this... Aunka is a mindfulness teacher and a wellness and leadership coach, and we're going to be talking about mindfulness, wellness, and leadership. Anuka, welcome to Wicked Problems.

[00:00:20] **Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Thank you, Toby. So grateful to be here today and really excited to discuss mindfulness with you on Wicked Problems.

[00:00:28] **Toby Corballis:** Mindfulness is... I think this is a sort of a feeling that some people have that it's only been around a little while. It's a fad, or whatever... Is that? Is that fair?

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**[00:00:41] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Well, that's a really good question, Toby, because I...

Actually mindfulness is a way of being, a very deep insight that was actually talked about over 5,000 years ago under the philosophy of Buddhism. And so the real, the, the origin's of this kind of insight and this perspective, this ability to be present, was really discovered through the Bhudda on looking at different ways that we can address human suffering. And so that's where really the essence of it is developed from.

**[00:01:22] Toby Corballis:** And so, on human suffering, being not just the suffering of, you know, I guess people external to ourselves, but also our own internal suffering. Is that right?

**[00:01:33] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Absolutely, yes. So, both the human condition... So, the pain that we feel in our everyday life towards maybe the purpose of our life, or the pain that we experience through our experiences and relationships, with our family members, our friends, in our professional lives... All of that. The human condition of just being here, in addition to, you know – which some people may resonate with – just that the fear of knowing that life is not, you know, eternal and there will be death eventually. So, just, how do you manage that as well? So it looks at both external and internal perspectives of suffering.

**[00:02:22] Toby Corballis:** And... I guess you touched on death, there. It's a topic, but I mean, I don't know, I'm not expert, but I'm guessing a lot of people are more terrified of death than they perhaps are willing to admit. And so, therefore, it plays a negative role in, or it has a negative impact on, their thought processes. Is that, is that true? Or am I jumping the gun a bit?

**[00:02:52] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** No. I think you're right. You know, we're no conditioned, especially in western society, to address death as being a part of life, so we're not really taught to manage it, taught to discuss it, and so when we get to those later chapters of our



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life, it can be something that is really overwhelming and fearful because we haven't really learned how to treat it as, as just another part of our life and accept it as just being a natural end to why we're here, you know? So, because we don't give ourselves that time and that ability to really discuss it openly, I think it can be a real panic. It can cause a real panic and anxiety for some people. Absolutely.

**[00:03:47] Toby Corballis:** And, what's the benefit of, I guess, quelling that a panic or anxiety, as you put it? Or any I mean, I don't want to dwell too much death, not because I'm too afraid of it, because, I'm sure there's, there's, other, other aspects to mindfulness. But I mean, it sounds like that, you know, if you're if you're practising mindfulness then what you're practising is, is an ability, to still the, the panic, the unrest, the, the chaos, perhaps that's internal.

**[00:04:25] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Yeah-

**[00:04:26] Toby Corballis:** What's the... What's the... What's the... What's the negative of not doing that if you see what I mean? So, what's, what's to say, look, I don't need this mindfulness stuff because actually I can just be logical about everything and go, "here's what I've got to do to make my job unfold, and my career better, and... That's it, I'm just going to go and get on with it, sit down, and still the waters every now and again?"

**[00:04:54] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Well, that's the important question. And I think with the current situation that we're all facing now with the pandemic, I think that is a conflict that some people find themselves in, because how do we now address the anxiety that we're living in? And meditation and mindfulness techniques can be a way to quiet anxiety and panic and give you the ability to manage it. I mean, it's not a silver bullet, bullet. If anything, it's going to heighten what you're feeling, but it will give you tools to really stop your mind from ruminating and keep on going back to the emotions and the fear that you may be



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feeling where... And if you constantly feeling that what happens is, we transition from a state of now being in a state of fear to a state of panic. And when that happens, we are in our default mode network. So our minds ability to make decisions is now in that survival mode of the fight or flight, and what happens is you get into this, you know, flight mode where you're completely burnt out because the panic has just become now a crippling overwhelm to your to the brain system and that can cause, you know, really severe physical and emotional burnout as well.

**[00:06:20] Toby Corballis:** Right. So, the danger is that you then are, I suppose, deceiving yourself into thinking that you're doing good job, but you're not seeing the fact that you're actually burning out and, you know, the wick is very low on the candle, as it were?

**[00:06:35] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Absolutely.

**[00:06:40] Toby Corballis:** So, tell me a bit more about the programmes that you do to help people with mindfulness, with wellness, and its role, I guess, in leadership, because that's something that you do as well, right?

**[00:06:53] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Yes, that's correct. So, I teach a mindfulness and resilience programme to businesses both locally here, where I'm based in Washington, DC, but also abroad. And I also work with an organisation that's called Search Inside Yourself. It was a, Search Inside Yourself was born at Google and the programme teaches mindfulness to develop emotional intelligence, and this has been an integrated with neuroscience-based evidence... And what we find is that this leads to better leadership, better performance and ultimately better teamwork. So, it really applies secular practises to the business and, you know, organisational leadership world.

**[00:07:43] Toby Corballis:** I guess I'm a little bit of an idiot on these things, or not an idiot, but, you know, I'm ignorant, let's say. And, I mean, it's not that I haven't come across mindfulness on my travels, I just haven't paid a lot of attention to it and emotional



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intelligence. You mentioned neuroscience, you mentioned, and it was kind of, I think: emotional intelligence, neuroscience, mindfulness, equals search inside yourself, if I heard that correctly and it was, I just wondered, you know what? How does one... What's, what is emotional intelligence as opposed to, say, the ability to calculate things quickly or recognise patterns, which I would think of as traditional intelligence.

**[00:08:32] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** That's a really... That's actually you know, you know, like you playfully put your ignorance, but it's not an ignorance, because I think a lot of us are only now becoming aware of the how important emotional intelligence is to our professional lives and, most importantly, our personal lives. Before it was seen as a soft skill. So, it's basically our ability to be aware of our behaviour, and to understand the behaviour of the person, or the people, we're interacting with and then making decisions based on understanding that awareness of their behaviours, instead of just reacting very hastily, which, you know, as you have probably experienced in some, you know in your life... And I know I definitely have. Sometimes we don't give ourselves the space to respond appropriately and then so when we react, that sometimes doesn't create the actual intention or the result that we need and so, and so really emotional intelligence gives us that greater resilience, that well-being to be able to make a more informed response.

**[00:09:50] Toby Corballis:** It sounds a little bit like – let me see if I can sort of create some other words that might equvalate, be equivalent – but it sounds a little bit like it's a kind of empathy in context. I don't know if that does it justice, but-

**[00:10:08] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Yeah, I think that's, that's really that's really nice way of putting it because it's like, you know, empathy is our ability to be with someone, to understand what they're going through. And so, in the same way, emotional intelligence is the ability to understand and skilfully manage our emotions and relationships. So, yeah, I agree. I mean, we follow the model from Daniel Goleman-



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**[00:10:30] Toby Corballis:** Oh yes-

**[00:10:31] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Who is a leader in emotional intelligence. And so in the programme, we actually go through the different spheres of emotional intelligence from self-awareness to, like you mention, empathy as well-

**[00:10:48] Toby Corballis:** Right? Excellent. A lot of... I mean, I think that's interesting, but I think also... I just want to touch on, there's a lot of what I've read around the whole mindfulness thing, there's a lot of sort of centring it on, well part of it is meditation, sometimes, and the, with the, with a sense of that brings you fully present into the "what brings you into the present situation fully", or I don't know quite how to put this but, a lot of people think of meditation, and sorry to do this again, but like I said, at the beginning a lot of people might think of it as, as a sort of, well, it's a bit of fad and it had its day in the seventies or whenever it was. But by meditation, we don't really mean crossing our legs and doing the Lotus position, do we? We mean something different, I think.

**[00:11:46] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Absolutely, Toby. And you know, one of the aspects that I really admire about the Search Inside Yourself programme is that it's really a secular perspective of mindfulness. So, you can come from any space, you can come from any belief mindset, and it really doesn't matter because we're offering you practises that really help you in the moment... In your office, a moment. Whether it be sitting on your desk or having a practise to start just before a back-to-back meeting, you know, that you might be having. So, it's not necessarily... It's not the... It's not the normal image of just sitting down like you say on the lotus position and closing your eyes. We're trying to give you really simple and practical tools that you could do in self, you know, in the moment to just cultivate that awareness and that spaciousness you need to be able to make really focused and aligned



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decisions that you might not necessarily do if you're constantly, you know, rushing around from one decision to the next.

**[00:13:02] Toby Corballis:** You talk about rushing around and anxiety and so on. I think one of the words used that it was panic. If, if I were to put myself through a Search Inside Yourself programme, for example, then, then, the, it seems like the opportunity is to reduce my stress levels, actually? And, we know that stress is a big killer, right? But it's also, it's also something that can lead to poor decision making. Is there... Have you... Have you been able to measure that the amount of like, if there's a reduction in stress levels from people who practise the Search Inside Yourself method?

**[00:13:48] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Yeah, absolutely. So, in 2010, I believe, we did some data across all the Search Inside Yourself programmes around the world and a typical Search Inside Yourself programme – we do offer a bespoke ones, but the typical one is over a two day process – and what we noted was, when we collected the data pre-programme from the participants and then four weeks after, is that we saw an increase from 44% to 65% of participants saying that they were now able to increase their ability to maintain calm and poise in challenging situations based on the tools that they learned at the programme. And really interestingly, as well, is that we also saw an increase in participants saying, from 46% to 67% saying that they were now able to pause before reacting. And, you know, as you can imagine, Toby, if we all just spent a moment to pause before we reacted, can you just imagine how that could change the flow and the development of some of the really horrific and painful events that we're seeing right now across our globe? If we just gave ourselves the ability to pause before reacting?

**[00:15:20] Toby Corballis:** Well, I think... I think I can. And I think I can also see that if I couple that reduction in stress that you're talking about with what you were saying earlier around being present in the moment and bringing that emotional intelligence and the, the ability to sort of still the water, you know, calm the waters as it were, and be empathetic, I



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think we said towards other people in the context that you're in, then I can see that would be really powerful. Because I can imagine that because I... I remember, right, and this is confession time, I suppose a little bit. But when I, when I first got into a sort of position of responsibility, it was a scary time, right and... And part of the problem was, nobody trains you and how to do that stuff. You know, a lot of people just expect that you can, and so you kind of feel like you have to know the answers and then you got, you just kind of, you know, something arises in a meeting or somebody says something or somebody wants an answer, and you feel like you have to give the answer immediately. And so, you do and quite often the answers are wrong. And then you beat yourself up because you found... You realise that the answer you gave was a bad answer or could've been better, or whatever, and that causes stress. And it sort of becomes a bit of a loop, really, you know, a self-fuelling loop. So, yeah, I can really see the benefits that that could bring, so I think it's very, very interesting. Tell me, where do you do these courses?

**[00:17:07] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** So, up until Covid19, we've been teaching them in major cities around the world, so you could even do them in London where you're based. And in the US, we are doing it all over, from Chicago to San Francisco. And now, because of Covid, we're actually offering online public programmes. So, if you go on to [siyli.org](http://siyli.org) – so that's S I Y L I dot ORG – you'll get a sense for this Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute. You'll be able to see all the virtual programmes that we offer throughout the next year online and you will be able to see and there's different ones as well. If you, if two days is too much for you to commit to, we also offer resilience programmes and the one-day programme as well.

**[00:17:58] Toby Corballis:** I mean, you say two days might be too much for some people, but it strikes me that actually two days' worth of learning how to make better informed decisions or, or give yourself the space in which to think about things so that you can make... You could bring yourself to the moment and make the decision more fully, I suppose, and have that empathy with other people, and if you're talking about what difference would that make on the global stage to some of the awful things that happening



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in the world at the moment, I'm sure that's worth two days' worth of investment, right? I can't see that that doesn't pay for itself. But even in, in smaller companies, you know... So, we're not all global leaders and it doesn't seem, mean often, I suppose where I'm going with this is that often, you know, people say oh come and do our course, it's six weeks and you have to come to some exotic location and it'll cost you tens of thousands of dollars. But actually, that doesn't sound like that, that this is that at all? This sounds like it's a very practical short, not expensive, and would have a really good return on investment.

**[00:19:26] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Absolutely, Toby. And we offer it to global, and, of course, small businesses, start-ups. I mean, especially because our head office is based in San Francisco, so we actually work with a lot of start-ups over there. It's really interesting. Last year we got invited by the Kingdom of Bhutan to teach their entire Civil Service this programme. So we taught over 10,000 civil servants and 4,000 teachers how to teach this so that they could, you know, keep on... Really, like you say, bringing this ability to just be aware of how you are in the moment creates such a focus and such a spaciousness that we all need in the different levels of our work, whether it be, you know, creative level, a focus level, implementation, that ability to be present with how you're feeling in the moment is extremely important in making decisions. And that's why we say that emotional intelligence is so important as we're now kind of easing our way into this uncertainty and moving forward, because if we're not able to understand how we react, how we behave to things as the world becomes even more uncertain, then it may be more difficult to move forward.

**[00:21:02] Toby Corballis:** And, I think... I mean, we can't... Predictions easy apart from for the future as the Danish saying goes. But, you know, people have been locked up right for, locked down, I should say, but for, for... Well, it's three months now, at least in the UK. I mean, that is quite a long time for human beings, who are social animals, not to be interacting with each other in the ways that they used to and not to have that stimulus that you get by being in the same office of somebody and so on. Arguably, I would say we are going to enter a time even if we were to fully, I don't know what the opposite lock down is...



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Unlocked, let's say? Then people are going to have I would imagine a lot of issues to deal with. Just on a personal, inter-personal level. Is that... Do you think that's true? Or do you think maybe actually being at home for a while has allowed people to have that calmness?

**[00:22:14] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** I think, I think you're right. I think initially especially, you know, we are social beings and so feeling locked up or feeling, you know, restricted can create this fear and this anxiety. And, I just want to address, as I say, by sharing with you this quote from Norman Vincent Peale. And he was like what we call the father of positive psychology. He wrote the book *The Power of Positive Thought*. And he said, If you change your thoughts, you can change the world. And, so, when we talk about mindfulness the opposite of mindfulness is this resistance, this inability to experience this moment, and what happens is if we feel overwhelmed or restricted, we tend to ruminate about the path. We're really good, as human beings, to keep on thinking about our failures, our fears, what I should have done, what I could have done... And if you're in this environment where you're not able to physically communicate that with someone, then yes, absolutely. I think you can be experiencing a lot of trauma related to fear and panic about the situation; that people will have to address as we slowly come out of the lock down.

**[00:23:37] Toby Corballis:** I was reading somewhere that there's a number of psychologists who, who expect that there's going to be quite some PTSD coming out of lock down – post traumatic stress disorder – for one reason or another, and you know those of us who have, I'm lucky I have a relatively, you know, nice part of London that I live in, there's a room I can go and hide in to do my work... But we're not all in that boat, right? And there's lots of people who, who don't have that space and have been confined to very small spaces for a very long time. Is this something that can help employers if they've got people in that situation? People who maybe have now got some anxiety levels raised because they've been, they've been locked down. Is it... Would this be a very good way of helping those people?



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**[00:24:35] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** I think so, Toby. I mean, I personally have been working with clients over the last couple of months, especially clients that are based abroad and perhaps not with their, couldn't be with their family during Covid, and giving them some really simple tools to really manage those feelings, if people are feeling very lonely or very fearful, and offering them something which we call in the programme called Self Compassion. And, self-compassion is something unique. It maybe, at first glance, sounds like something very soft, like just being kind to yourself, but it is actually being a bit more insightful with giving yourself that ability to be concerned with another's suffering, but also being concerned with your own suffering and giving yourself like, warm and assurance that, you know you are not alone in this, that looking at this notion of what we call common humanity, where we have this sense of the interconnectedness, this sense of recognising that all human beings are flawed and this, sometimes, allows us that perspective that you know we're not alone. And it cultivates that reassurance and that, you know, self-acceptance that we need sometimes to just address those moments of feeling really alone or fearful.

**[00:26:08] Toby Corballis:** I'm going to ask you because, I have to really... Because there's a little voice inside my head saying go on, ask her, ask her. If, if there's anything you could share with people who are listening on this... Just a little technique one or two that without giving the whole programme away. But is there something that if I was feeling anxious, I could do today right now that might help me, you know, achieve a bit more calms and a bit more perspective?

**[00:26:39] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Oh, absolutely. It would be my honour to just share with you this practise that we call the three-breath practise, and if the breath is something that is causing you a lot of anxiety or trauma, then I would suggest focusing on this sensation – or any sensation within your body, including your feet being on the ground or the surface beneath you. Okay? So, I invite you now to just close your eyes, if you like, or just to lower your gaze with a soft focus to a spot beneath you... And let's just take one breath together,



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like about a nice deep inhale... And then a nice exhale... Let is all go... And with your next inhale, I invite you now to just focus on the breath or the sensation of your feet on the surface below you... And then with a gentle exhale out... And the next breath, as you inhale, just kind of check in with the body, see if you can notice your breath in any other areas of the body... And if you're feeling, as you're observing the body, any tension or tightness, maybe try and direct your breath to those areas, and try and just create this softness... And then, with next step, inhale, I invite you either to place your hand, if you like, on your heart or in your mind's eye just ask yourself, what's important to you right now. What would serve you most, in this moment? Just take a moment to allow whatever arises to just arise... And just observe it without judgement... And then gently come back to your breath, and when you're ready, open your eyes.

**[00:29:11] Toby Corballis:** I'm back. Well, that was, that was-

**[00:29:13] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:**

**[00:29:15] Toby Corballis:** Well, it was interesting. I mean, certainly you become aware of pressure in your body, or parts of the body that aren't... I don't know what the right term is, really. But, you know, I became more aware of certain parts of my body as I did that and I guess that means that my mind has been pushing those to you, you know, pushing the signals from those, or papering over the signals of those, because it was prioritising something else, let's say. So, that... I think was interesting from that perspective. And it strikes me as well, though that one of the things you said there was think about something... I think about something that would be important to you right now, and I'm guessing you don't mean you know, oh, if I'm unemployed, I need to get a job, but more sort of... Well maybe you do mean that? Or is it... is it more, sort of, what's important to me, excluding all those... Well forgetting all the sort of the – Ah, I'm struggling for words – all that breathing's made me forgetful. But you know, the material stuff. But thinking about what about... Less about material, more about the sort of about: me as me?



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**[00:30:51] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Absolutely, yes, just checking in with yourself. You know, because we don't do that very often, kind of us being ourselves. In this moment, what would serve you most? Maybe it would be like sitting down and just breathing. Or maybe it would be going to have a cup of tea or, if you're feeling, you know, pain in the body, maybe be going to do some movement. But we don't always take time to address what's happening internally or even give ourselves that awareness. And so, it's about that. I mean, of course, there will always be those problems around us, but just kind of really just thinking into that awareness of what do I need now, in this moment, you know? What will fulfil me the most? And especially when I work with parents, they find this a really good practise when their... Especially parents looking from home right now who are really struggling, you know, with that home life balance I'm making that transition from, you know, working and then, you know, feeding the kids

**[00:31:54] Toby Corballis:** and

**[00:31:54] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** then go back to work and then being with the kids in the afternoon or whatever their schedules are, and so they find this is a great practise, to kind of in one minute just transition from work into being a parent, you know, or being a carer.

**[00:32:11] Toby Corballis:** I can see that completely. Home schooling, particularly if you're well, I mean... Home schooling, if you're in a very small apartment... Home schooling, if you're trying to work as well... You know, balancing all of that together can be, could be tough. I can absolutely see that. Before we wrap up, you mentioned earlier, I think, that Google sort of – for the Search Inside Yourself stuff – they were kind of the originator of it. Do they still use it? What's their... Do they talk much about the experience of it? Is there something that people go to see and have a look at this?



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**[00:32:56] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** So, that's... That's a great question. Google actually was just one of many organisations that decided to do their own internal mindful of programme. It actually started with an engineer called Chade-Meng Tan, who was looking for ways to help his colleagues and staff integrate mindfulness practises because they were... They were feeling, you know, like we all do at work, sometimes, feeling the stress, experiencing burnout, and what he did was that he invited the leaders of these different fields, so he invited a very well-known mindfulness teacher in the US called Jon Kabat-Zinn. He came in and really helped with the mindfulness this aspect of the programme. And then he was invited Daniel Goleman for the Emotion Intelligence and several others... Leaders in emotional intelligence, as well as neuroscientists like Richard Davidson, who's done a lot of neuroscience to show how is the mind actually affected by mindfulness practise by looking at expert meditators. So, people that have done 10,000 hours of more in their lifetime. And, the programme started in Google around 2008 and what happened was it got so popular that Google gave Tan the permission to make it an independent non-profit. So, we're now completely separate from Google. But the programme is still being taught to over 5,000 employees every year in Google and it's very much still inactive programme for the organisation.

**[00:34:51] Toby Corballis:** Oh fantastic. If people wanted to learn more and maybe get in touch with you to find out a bit more about what you have to, you know, what the programme offers and to get on it, where should they go? Is there a website?

**[00:35:10] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Yes. So, people can feel free to contact me at Janu Joyful Services dot com - so that's J A N U, Joyful, J O Y F U L, Services dot com – Or you can also read... Chade-Meng Tan wrote a fantastic book called The Search Inside Yourself, and you can read that and feel free of course to visit our website or social media site, they're on the same name: Search Inside Yourself.



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**[00:35:41] Toby Corballis:** We'll make sure to put those links also under the entry on the WickedProblems.fm website. So, if anybody wants to, they can just look under there as well and get them from there. Anuka, it's been fascinating. I feel like we could probably carry on and you know it to a whole new one of these. And maybe we can invite you back at some point to talk about this again. Thank you very much for your time.

**[00:36:16] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Thank you, Toby. This has been wonderful. I've enjoyed every minute and would definitely... Would love to come back and have another conversation with you at some point.

**[00:36:24] Toby Corballis:** Fantastic. Anuka, thanks.

**[00:36:26] Anuka Gazara-Anthony:** Thanks.