MIA

Managing Internal Awareness

(abridged version from the book "Life In Harmony" available on Amazon)

"I have often regretted my speech, never my silence."

Publilius Syrus (~100 BC), Maxim

There are different ways to help prevent our minds from wandering. Mandalas, candles, incense, chanting, music, and using breaths all help us manage our attention. Models can also be added to the list.

Writing in "The Grand Design", published in 2010, Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow suggest how valuable models can be to help us understand reality. They coined the term "model-dependent realism" to show the value of a model is its usefulness. Different models allow us to work with different levels of reality. That does not mean we treat the model as reality. The model only helps to represent what is known about reality.

MIA (Managing Internal Awareness) is my own fabricated model to help me stay mentally focused. The model helps reduce anxiety and fear of the unknown. It helps me view life from different perspectives. It reminds me to monitor my mental health on a daily basis.

Normally, I stay distracted throughout the day. Without conscious effort, my mind tends to run on "autopilot" but thinking of the MIA model during the day, helps me manage my attention and reduces the amount of time I spend on autopilot.

Over the course of time, I have found value in specific techniques, or tools that I use to help me manage my awareness. I use 9 graphical images to represent each of the 9 "tools" or control points used in my MIA model. I like the graphical images because sometimes my brain can focus on an image much better and faster than words.

At times, I imagine myself in a control room like you would find at a power plant. Other times, I imagine I am a captain on the bridge of a starship. I visualize the graphical images as lights on a panel in front of me, allowing me to press one of the images to monitor and control my thoughts.

I try to begin each morning, in silence, thinking of each of the 9 tools. I mentally envision the 9 images and repeat the word for each image (the label for each of the images). Some days one specific tool might stand out and stay in my mind throughout the day. Other days, I may use any one or combination of the 9 tools.

I use MIA the most when I feel stressed, disoriented, or anxious. Usually one of the 9 tools will help me to focus and provide a sense of calmness.

Leonard Mlodinow wrote one of my favorite books, “The Drunkard's Walk” where he emphasises the role of randomness and the dominance of the bell curve. Our cognitive biases often lead us to misinterpret random events in our lives. By using a useful model (such as MIA), I try to counterbalance my tendency to assign meaning to a random event, by keeping my attention grounded in multiple ways of viewing reality.

By trying to stay focused on my MIA model each day, I am reassured of the lessons I’ve learned over the years as well as providing my mind with specific tools to stay focused and avoid innate cognitive biases.

Here is a list of the 9 tools and controls, I use in my MIA model. Some of them are active techniques I use, others are simply reminders of lessons learned over the years, from experience. All of them, help me manage my awareness.



Mindfulness - By managing your attention, you can choose what you give your attention to, as well as what you do not. You engage in many different activities each day, often without giving them any attention at all. By managing your attention, you can become mindful whether you are meditating or kayaking or doing any activity.

Breathing - Breathing is something you always do, even without giving it any attention. But when you do pay attention to your breathing, you will immediately find yourself, relaxing.

Condition - Take time to check your condition. Pay attention to your different states of being throughout your day.

Senses - You can adjust the attention you give your senses anytime. Pay attention to your senses to learn how to watch yourself and the world around you.

Perspective - You can quickly change your perspective in time, by thinking of the past or of the future. You can always bring your attention back to now and this present moment. You can also use knowledge and information to change your perspective of space, both at a macroscopic level and a microscopic level. Atoms are made mostly of space as is the universe.

Emotions - Pay attention to fear, anger, and sadness. By giving your emotions some attention, you can reduce stress levels caused by negative emotions. Let visions of the future be full of joy and peacefulness.

To Do List - There is always a to do list. Keep it short and give it attention when necessary, but do not constantly dwell on things that need to be done. Remember to keep the fun things near the top of the list.

Roles - You have many roles in your life. Everyone wears a mask at different times. Remember to use your imagination to view your life and your day, as if it were a play or a movie and you are in the audience watching. Sometimes you may imagine who is in the audience also watching you play your role.

Reality - Reality, it is what it is. Pay attention to your rules, your activities, your habits, and your routines. Give attention to desires and things that bother you. Once you focus your attention, you can change, reduce, or eliminate what is unwanted.