

Summer Youth Employment Program's Monthly Publication:

The Road Map



November Features:

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All About Presence

For many people next month will be all about *presents*, but this issue is for *presence* - a concept that is still quite fitting with holidays just around the corner. There are so many things demanding our time and attention, especially at the holidays, that it can be difficult to feel as though any one thing gets our best efforts. If you're like me, you know when you're stretched too thin and it gets under your skin. Sometimes the frustration of not being present pulls me even further out of the moment, bringing out bad habits and a sour mood.

This issue is taking two approaches to the concept of presence. The first approach looks at presence as mindfulness. It's important to consider whether we're simply going through the motions or really giving our full selves to each moment. The second approach considers presence in terms of showing up. Our program is in new territory this fall, navigating how to best make our year-round presence clear and effective. I hope the ideas in this issue will provide some inspiration for your work or school life, as well as a little advance preparation for the upcoming holiday season.

Show & Tell: The SYEP Blog Page

Being Present: Preventers and Practices

Okay, this month you get a special two-for-one deal with the blog post. I wanted to address the things that typically get in our way when trying to be present. But it seemed unfair to leave everyone with problems and no solutions. So I'm including a few things we can all try to keep in mind when practicing better presence. Enjoy.

Top Three Presence Preventers

1. Demands

Most of us can relate to the pressure of having too many demands on our time and attention. We might have too many demands on our finances. If the demands facing us become overwhelming, it is easy to quickly lose the ability to be present. Our focus can shift to worrying about past decisions or future outcomes. Learning from the past and planning for the future are great ways to effectively meet current demands. But we also need to find ways to stay present in the moment and minimize the pressure. This will keep us grounded and can help us approach potentially overwhelming situations with a clear head and positive energy.

2. Detours

It's always stressful to believe you're on a specific path only to find the road ahead is suddenly unavailable. Detours can pull you out of the moment and throw you off-track in an instant. It can be easy to react instead of revising your approach. If a detour appears as a setback, reactions might fall anywhere between giving up and throwing a fit. Sometimes the detours seem so constant that it's hard to remember where you were going in the first place. The stress of feeling lost or displaced can block our ability to see what is around us, and can cause us to miss signs that might help us get back on track.

3. Distractions

I'm not sure any other time in history has offered so many potential distractions for people. We are bombarded by messages, notifications, 24-hour news cycles, and various updates. We have access to millions of television and film options with online streaming sites. If you have a family, your distractions multiply exponentially. Constant and immediate contact, in both virtual and actual forms, can make it hard to focus your attention on being present in any one experience. It's increasingly hard to step away from distractions and let your mind focus on just one thing at a time. It feels almost lazy to do so. But it's a critical part of allowing our experiences to be meaningful for whomever is involved.

Top Three Presence Practices

1. Attention

I found an article on *The Huffington Post* that does a great job explaining the importance of focusing your attention. If you'd like to read it, here's the link:

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/roger-fransecky/are-you-really-paying-attention-b-758025.html>. My favorite part is the idea that paying attention is an act of curiosity. It gives merit to whatever becomes the point of your focus. When Fransecky writes, "you become your attention," he means that we validate those things we focus on. If you think about how much time you spend on your smartphone, this can be disconcerting. Am I becoming *Candy Crush*? Am I turning into Facebook? Yikes. But the discomfort of that idea can be useful in making us more mindful of what we give our attention to each day. Refocusing our attention on the present moment can be practiced. And then it can become habit.

2. Awareness

We're only on our third issue, but most of you have probably already guessed that I love a good quote. Here's one from James Thurber that is perfect for this topic: "*Let us not look back in anger, nor forward in fear, but around in awareness.*" I love this quote. It says so much with so few words. For our immediate purposes, however, it sums up how awareness will keep you in the present moment. Awareness means remembering that we have five major senses with which we can experience the world around us. If you notice your mind wandering or racing away from the present, you can bring it back by shifting your attention to what you feel, see, smell, hear and even taste in this exact moment. We use our senses constantly all day long, but we don't always use them with awareness. It's an easy shift to make and can quickly become a habit - just like attention - with practice.

3. Appreciation

If you want to truly be present in each moment, you can't do it without appreciation. Most often, appreciation is linked with a positive. But a more simplified understanding of the word means to fully understand a situation. That requires applying both attention and awareness to the moment. It means staying curious and using your awareness to analyze whatever information you're picking up. When we appreciate the moment we are in, we will necessarily be completely present in it.

Somewhere along the way I heard another quote: "Practice doesn't make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect." I'm not sure how much value perfection really has when it comes to living authentically, but the concept of it can at least push us to break out of our comfort zones. And sometimes the comfort zone is nowhere near the present moment. But that could be a whole separate blog entry. Thanks for reading this one!

Showing Up: Students

It probably won't surprise you to hear that showing up is the first step to cultivating your own unique presence. But that first step can sometimes seem hard or unimportant. Sometimes you are asked to show up for things that don't interest you or seem like a waste of time. High school is an ideal time to learn how to show up and be mindfully present even when you want to be somewhere else. This ability will help you with your educational experiences, and it will prepare you to go after your ideal future.

Here are a few ways you can practice being present in situations when you notice your mind is wandering:

- ***Come back to the moment*** - If you notice your thoughts have strayed from the current moment, bring your attention back. It's perfectly normal for thoughts to wander. Just notice when it happens and let go of whatever isn't relevant to your present experience.
- ***Check in with your senses*** - If you notice you're struggling to focus, think about what you see around you. What do you hear? What can you feel from where you are? It's very hard to think about these things and not be present.
- ***Body scan*** - Sometimes it helps to simply notice what you're feeling physically. If your thoughts are restless or verging toward anxiety, this is a particularly good grounding idea that brings you back to the current moment.

Here are a few benefits that come from showing up:

- ***It shows you care*** - Showing up is a great way to be supportive of groups or individuals. This applies to all areas of life from attendance at school and work to being there for your friends and family. You would be surprised how much the simple act of showing up can influence another person's opinion of you in a positive way.
- ***It shows you respect the individual/group asking you to be present*** - Showing up is a huge sign of respect. It proves that you value the person or group for whom you are being present, and that you want to be supportive.
- ***It shows you are trustworthy and reliable*** - When you show up for others, it proves that you can be counted on. It's one thing to show up when it's required of you. It's another thing altogether to show up for things that appear optional or less monitored. Choosing to be present when you could have been somewhere else shows you are reliable and trustworthy. And that will make you memorable in all the best ways.

Showing Up: Adults

Our program currently has a long off-season and a short, intense peak season. There is a lot happening behind the scenes during that off-season now that we are year-round. We are navigating changes and finding ways to be more clearly present, and we're doing it with a smaller staff. To that end, we welcome the support and presence of our community members whenever possible to complement our efforts. Here are some ways you can show up:

- **Word of Mouth** - Because many of our events are brand new, we need all the help we can get with spreading the word and driving interest. Even though the fall semester is nearly over, the spring will have its own new initiatives. Any chance you get to pass information on to students and families who might benefit would be incredibly helpful.
- **Recruitment** - We're always looking to add to our employer database and welcome any referral suggestions. Our goal is to ensure that we have a position to match each student's skills and interests. It's the best way to make solid matches and ensure everyone has the most meaningful experience possible.
- **Volunteer** - If you like working with high school students, we have a variety of ways you can volunteer. We can always use help with our Resume Workshops and training sessions. In the spring, there will be more hosted events where we could use adult participation. Feel free to reach out to program staff if you have an interest in learning more about these opportunities.

There are also ways you can impact the work being done by SYEP on your own time. We want our youth to feel supported by their community. Our aim is to help them build bridges to meaningful employment, but the program can only do so much on its own. Here are a few suggestions if you want to help extend the work we are doing:

- **Be a Mentor** - There are a number of organizations that work with students on a mentoring level. You can start with mentor coordinators at the high schools.
- **Be an Organizer** - Get a group of teens together at your church or through another community group and volunteer somewhere. Help provide opportunities for students to learn firsthand how much of an impact they can make in someone else's life.
- **Be a Bridge** - Help provide a link between students and experiences that will help them reach their ideal future. Some examples would include: making space for students to shadow you, helping them expand their networks for college and job seeking, and putting them in touch with individuals who can relate to what the students are struggling with right now.