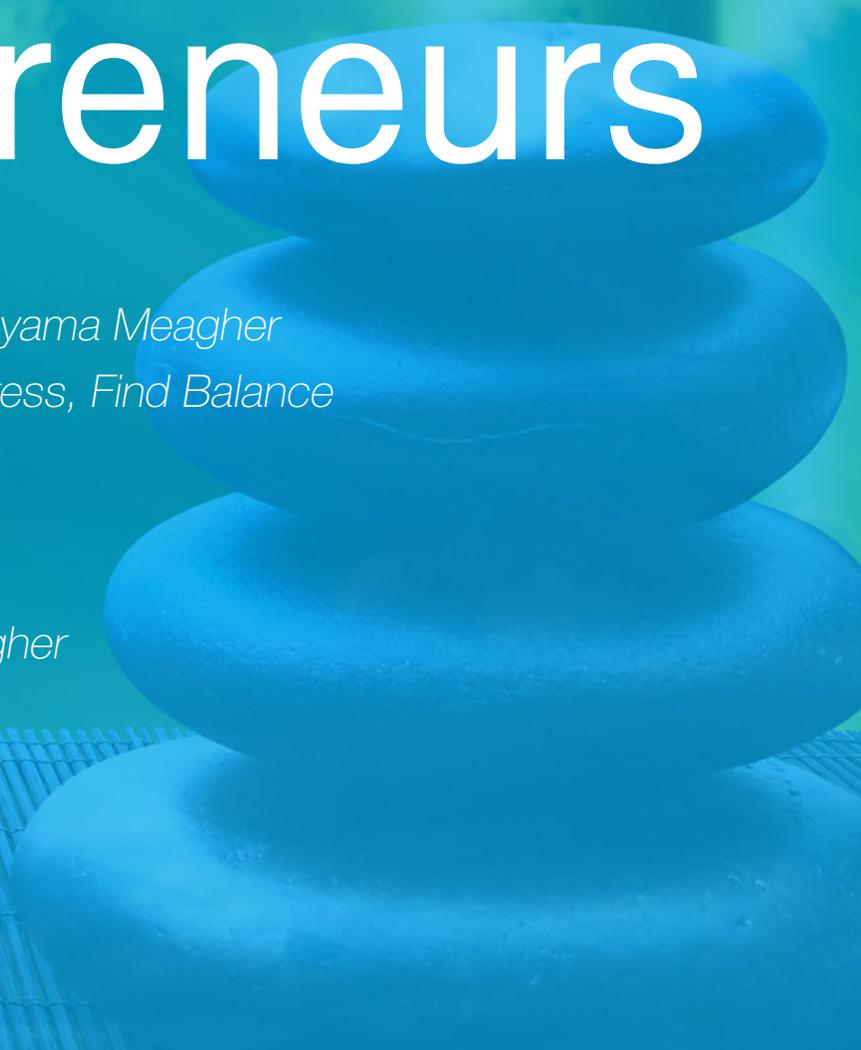


Mindfulness for Entrepreneurs

*Entrepreneurs Michael Kass and Syama Meagher
discuss Techniques to Manage Stress, Find Balance
and Create a More Fulfilling Life.*

By Michael Kass and Syama Meagher



Author's Note



If you're reading this, chances are that you're a bit like us. You're an entrepreneur, solopreneur, maverick, 21st century samurai, pick your descriptor of choice. Perhaps you've worked for other folks or even big companies and left after feeling the siren call of freedom. You make things or help people make things or report on people who make things. Whatever the case, you have something of value to offer.

It's not always easy to walk this path. In fact, it can be *really hard*.

We decided to write this guide after catching up over coffee one day in Los Angeles. After exchanging the normal pleasantries for a few minutes, the standard 'how's it going,' 'so GREAT,' 'me too!' conversation, things got a bit more Real. We'd both been struggling with feelings of being overwhelmed and isolated. It seemed like the work, as much as we both loved it, never ended and no one was there to help carry the burden. We'd been losing sleep, relying on coffee and pizza to get through the day, and noticing deterioration in our personal relationships.

Sound familiar?

It turns out that we're far from alone. According to multiple studies, stress and depression among entrepreneurs, particularly young ones, has never been higher. One clinical survey of 242 independent professionals found that 49% struggled with feelings of depression and isolation and nearly a third grappled with anxiety. [Here's another study](#) . [And another](#) . [And another](#) . [And another](#) . [And, yet, another](#) . This isn't new, but it's just now being discussed.

This is probably not news to you. But it's nice to have hard research to back up our individual experiences.

As entrepreneurs destined for a life of multiple projects, and businesses we quickly realized that if we didn't solve our feelings of stress and exhaustion we wouldn't be able to sustain the paths we were on. After all, being an entrepreneur is a volatile path and can be a lifelong one.

These challenges led both of us, completely independent of each other, to seek out a more sustainable and balanced path. As we traded stories, we realized how quickly we'd been able to move towards a healthier path with a few lifestyle changes and we decided to share what we learned with as many people as possible.

Here's the thing: neither of us is a meditation master or guru. We don't have any secrets or magic bullets. We have two intentions in sharing this Guide:

One: We want you to know that you're not alone. That's an important one, so we'll restate it: You're not alone. Got it? Cool.

Two: We want to give you some concrete tools and strategies you can put in place today to help move through stress, anxiety, and isolation.

That's it. We're grateful for the opportunity to connect with you through this Guide. Thank you for reading!

With much Warmth,



Syama Meagher



Michael Kass



Finding More Time

Time. There's not enough of it.

When it comes to 'better living,' there's no shortage of articles out there telling us about the '8 Things We Must Do Every Morning to Be Happy' or the '32 Characteristics of Fulfilled People' or the '57 Things That Will Bring You Joy.' If we spent all our time doing this stuff, we'd be very joyful people living on the streets.

That said, there are some easy ways to buy back out time by working smarter and using some of the tools, many of them free, that technology places literally at our fingertips. The resources below are in three categories: Technology & Apps, Task Management, and Community Support. The intention here is not that you use all of these tools, but that you take what works for you and run with it!

(As a disclaimer, we are not compensated by any of the companies, tools, or apps mentioned. We just think they're cool.)

Tech Apps and Integrations

Boomerang: This easy to use plug-in for Gmail can schedule emails to send at a later time or date, incredibly useful for working across time zones. The app also 'boomerangs' emails back to you if they have not received a response, making keeping track of follow ups a breeze.

Streak: This free app turns your Gmail inbox into a simple CRM platform complete with pipelines, point-person assignments, contact notes and more. It also allows you to track who has read your emails. While it's not as robust as a dedicated CRM, but is simple to use and meets the needs of many solopreneurs.

Mail Merge: If you've ever wanted to send personalized emails to a large group without sending through a service like MailChimp or Constant Contact, check out this free gmail extension. Create a contact group, paste into a spreadsheet, and you're good to go. You can even send attachments!

Task Management

Wunderlist: This simple task management app lets you set deadlines, track projects and more. You can also check out [ToDoist](#). Both are great tools to help you stay on top of multiple priorities and avoid overwhelm.

Glip: A great tool for small teams, Glip allows real-time communication, video-chat, task tracking, calendar integration, and more. For a similar set of features, check out [Slack](#). Both are free!

Community Support

Reboot Podcast: An amazing podcast featuring entrepreneurs, start-up CEOs, and leaders talking about the challenges they face on a day to day basis. An excellent way to remind yourself that you're not alone.

'Mastermind' Groups: Finding a group of peers and creating a Slack/Glip channel or even a private Facebook Group can give you real-time access to a community of support. It's great to be able to post a question and have a bunch of responses from trusted colleagues pop up within minutes.

Exercise: Ways You Can Spend More Time

How to Spend Your (New) Time

Now that we've freed up a little bit of time, let's look at ways to spend it wisely. The temptation may be to fill up all that time with more work. Because there's always more to do and it sure is easy to fill all that time!

You can do that. We definitely did at first. But it won't help alleviate anxiety or feelings of overwhelm. Trust us, and your own experience, on that one.

Vision Quest:

Take a moment to imagine what a more balanced life looks like for you. As you look at the questions below, let your imagination go a little nuts. None of this is binding, you're not making A Plan. If you feel resistance, that's fine and completely normal. Try to notice the resistance without judgment, observing where you feel it in your body, and answer the questions, allowing your intuition guide you.

Picture yourself some time in the future...

What do you have more of in your life?

What do you want to have less of?

How do you feel when you wake up in the morning? And before you go to sleep?

Who surrounds you each day?

What are you able to contribute to your community?

So that's a really general picture of where you're headed. Now, we wish we had Easy Path To Success to sell you. That'd be nice. We don't. But we would like to offer some tools that can help. They're in three broad categories:

[Reconnection with the Breath](#)

[Reconnection with Community](#)

[Reconnection with Gratitude](#)

Here we go!

Reconnection with the Breath

Breathing is the most basic, essential human function. We do it over 20,000 times each day. And most of us, ourselves included, are doing it. . .not so well.

Dysfunctional breathing patterns run rampant in modern communities and especially among entrepreneurs. Take a moment as you read this to just check in with your breath.

How often do you breathe each minute?

When you inhale, where does the breath land in your body?

How much breath do you take in?

In the U.S., most of us are shallow breathers. We breathe into our upper chest in relatively quick gasps. If we're sitting at a computer all day, hunched over, we may breathe only a few times per minute. And when we're stressed, we may forget to breathe altogether.



All of this bad breathing has a pretty negative impact on our mental and physical well-being.

Shallow breathing signals our brain that there's danger nearby (like a tiger or bear) and our body goes into Fight or Flight mode. This stimulates the brain to release a hormone called cortisol. In small doses, cortisol is great. It helps redirect the body's system to increase the chance of survival. Oxygen and blood gets routed away from the brain and to the muscles. We can run faster for short bursts. Cool, right?

Here's the catch: our system evolved for 'survival' way back when we spent a lot of time being chased by dangerous beasts. Back then, cortisol would get released in a quick burst. We'd run away from the bear, climb a tree, the bear would leave, and our brain would chill out, turning off the cortisol.

Today, the constant stimulus of computers, cell phones, calls, emails, and even keeping up with friends, puts us in a state of overwhelm. We breathe shallowly and the brain doesn't get a chance to relax. The cortisol keeps flowing and we experience depressed immune response, depressed cognitive function, exhaustion, compromised digestive function, and elevated stress & anxiety levels. Ever have a stomachache or headache during a stressful day? This is what we are talking about.

It's not fun. So what can we do to signal the brain that we're safe and stem the flow of cortisol through the bloodstream?

Reconnect with the breath. Here are some simple, powerful exercises you can do any time, pretty much anywhere:

1. The Coming Home Breath: This is a deep breathing exercise that immediately signals the brain to relax and increases oxygen flow through the body, allowing you to find center in moments of stress.

- A. Take a moment to center yourself. Feel your weight and bring some awareness to how your body feels.
- B. Inhale deeply through the nose. See if you can take the breath into your belly, expanding into your diaphragm (it's the big area right under the rib cage).
- C. Exhale through the mouth. Let the exhale be a release, a sigh, like you're sinking into a really decadent bubble bath.
- D. Repeat 3 to 5 times.

As you play with the exercise, you can explore the idea of 'expansion.' On the inhale, give yourself permission to really enjoy inflating the belly and diaphragm. You can expand from the bellybutton to the spine as well as side to side. Like a beach ball. And then luxuriate in the exhale, letting the whole body relax and deflate.

Reconnection with the Breath (continued)

If you're alone (or not particularly self-conscious), you can add a bit of physicality. Let the breath be like a wave moving through your body and let your body move with it. Whoosh up with the inhale, allow the body to deflate like a noodle on the exhale. It's fun! And silly! Here's a video of us doing it so you can have some inspiration! It's not weird at all!

As you work with the Coming Home Breath, notice what shifts in your body and mind. You'll feel some sort of shift after less than two minutes. It's that powerful and backed by science.

2. The Box Breath: This exercise is used by Navy S.E.A.L.S., athletes, and pretty much anyone who regularly faces extremely stressful situations. Again, it can be done anywhere, anytime and quickly resets the brain, helping de-escalate the Fight or Flight response.

- A. Take a moment to center yourself. Feel your weight and bring some awareness to how your body feels.
- B. Inhale through your nose for a count of four.
- C. Hold for a count of four.
- D. Exhale through your mouth for a count of four.
- E. Hold for a count of four.
- F. Repeat 5 to 7 times.

This one may feel really odd or challenging at first. The counting brings a high level of conscious awareness to the breath, giving the mind something to focus on. Especially as you start working with this exercise, you may feel a strong pull to stop and get back to what you were doing. Stick with it. Allow yourself to really experience each breath and each pause. Count out the 4s on your fingers or use a timer. Over time, you can work up to 6 counts.

The exercise only takes a couple of minutes. Again, notice how your body responds. How do you feel before? After? If you do this one a few times a day, or alternate it with the Coming Home Breath, you'll see shifts quickly. Again, scientifically proven.

Here's a video demonstration of us doing this one. Practice it with us!

3. Meditation & Yoga: The breath lies at the center of these ancient practices and we'd be remiss in not at least mentioning them. There are many different schools of meditation and yoga, each with its own emphases, quirks, and teachings. A regular meditation or yoga practice can greatly accelerate bringing a greater sense of balance. But it has to be a regular practice. Doing yoga or meditating once or twice won't do a whole lot more than the breathing exercises above. It takes at least three to six months to see lasting change.

Not quite ready for a full yoga class? Do a Google search on these:

1. **Sun Salutation A:** Full body stretch
2. **Pigeon:** Hip opener
3. **Side Angle:** Strengthen legs and side body stretch

We both have dedicated practices and encourage you to explore on your own. Let us know how it goes!



Reconnection with Community

Recent studies on depression and addiction have linked both to feelings of isolation and lack of community [link to studies]. By nature, we are tribal creatures wired to exist in community. Allowing work to pull us away from community has a negative impact on our sense of well being.

When we reconnect with community, with something greater than ourselves, the brain relaxes and releases a hormone called oxytocin. Oxytocin is known as the 'empathy hormone' and is associated with feelings of joy, connection, and positive self-regard. Sounds good, right?

Here are some ways we've reconnected with community. The key is to reconnect with folks outside of a work context, no agenda, just spending time with other humans. Find ways that work for you!

- Have a Dinner party / game night: This one is pretty self-explanatory. The game night aspect helps give you something to focus on so the conversation doesn't revert to work.
- Share your feelings and struggles with your friends. Be vulnerable. Its extremely inspiring to hear your friends be honest and real, especially in the day and age of social media.
- Give back. Volunteer at a senior home, work with kids, volunteer at a homeless shelter, or a senior service center. Make it regular. That could be once a week or twice a year. Being in service to others is a fantastic way to regain perspective while building community connections.
- Join a meditation group. There are so many to choose from and it's always great to practice with and get support from peers who are on a similar path.



Reconnection with Gratitude

Gratitude lies at the center of most spiritual practices and religions, from Buddhism to Christianity. True gratitude goes beyond simply saying 'thank you' to allowing yourself to experience a deep sense of connection with the recipient of gratitude. The cool thing is that you can feel and express gratitude towards just about anything. Here are some quick ideas:

- Play with showing gratitude to your body. Take a moment to bring awareness to the millions of small processes your body executes in each moment to keep you going. Each breath, each beat of your heart, triggers a chain reaction that puts millions of cells into action to keep energy and life flowing through your body. Try taking a few deep breaths (like the Coming Home Breath) and infusing them with a sense of gratitude towards your body. Notice what happens.
- Feel and express gratitude towards friends and loved ones. None of us lives or works in isolation (even though it may feel that way sometimes). Take a moment to bring awareness to even the small interactions that you experience throughout the day. A smile or brief moment of eye contact can have incredible impact at the right moment. What can do you to express this gratitude and appreciation?
- Experience gratitude towards your pain. This can be a tough one! Take a moment to think about the ways that you have been wounded or challenged, or people who have caused you pain. What did the experience of moving through that pain teach you? How did it bring new awareness or development to your life? Hardship can be a great teacher and finding gratitude towards it can be a key part of healing and moving forward. For more on this, [check out this article](#) on cultivating compassion.

Where else can you find gratitude? Once you start to explore, the options are boundless! Here's a video of us having a quick conversation about gratitude if you want to join along.

Conclusion

Breath. Community. Gratitude.

Like we said earlier, these are not magic bullets. But they are tools and concepts that are accessible to you now and that both experience and science show are effective for moving through stress, anxiety, isolation, and depression. We're not therapists or gurus so if you ever experience acute symptoms, please seek out professional help!

Over the past few years, we've played with these concepts and it's safe to say that it's changed both of our attitudes towards work, relationships, and success. The key word is 'play.' Give yourself permission to choose what works for you, try stuff, embrace new techniques, and get a little comfortable with the discomfort that comes along with change. Change happens, it's always a bit distressing, might as well embrace it!

By reconnecting with ourselves through breath, with others through community, and with something greater through gratitude, we can take a more proactive role in our own lives and development. All too often, we, as entrepreneurs and humans making our way through an increasingly frenetic world, find ourselves in a reactive state, constantly playing catch up. Take a few minutes each day to breathe, connect, and be grateful can give a new perspective.

Thank you so much for reading! We hope you found this useful.

Want to keep the conversation going? Follow us on social media, shoot us an email or sign up for our fabulous newsletter at www.storyimpactgroup.com/mindful or www.scalingretail.com/mindful.

To your sanity!



Syama Meagher

Connect with **Syama**:
Email: Syama@ScalingRetail.com
[@ScalingRetail](https://twitter.com/ScalingRetail)



Michael Kass

Connect with **Michael**:
Email: storyimpactgroup@gmail.com
[@michael_kass](https://twitter.com/michael_kass)