

Habit 1: Not paying attention

As we have already discussed, we all tend to spend a considerable amount of time thinking about the past or the future, and subsequently miss a lot of what's happening in the present moment. This is a shame, because if we think about it carefully, we realise that the present moment is all that we have to work with. The past has gone, and the future is uncertain – however much attention we give to it we cannot change that.

Thich Nhat Hanh, meditation teacher and Nobel Prize nominee: You have an appointment with life, an appointment that is in the here and now.⁷

The Habit	The Compassionate Antidote	Our Experience – Your Insights
<p>Our tendency to spend the present moment with all these thoughts about the past and the future tends to tire us out and means we are rarely bringing our full attention to bear on what is right in front of us. Even more serious is our habit of filling in the gaps in our attention in order to reassure ourselves that we are in touch with what is going on. This is why we can all have such different memories of the same event – each of us will have filled in the gaps in our attention with details from our own experience of the situation.</p>	<p>As we have seen, we behave as if we are independent units that just carry on with our own concerns when, in fact, we are part of a deeply interdependent world – one that is constantly moving and changing. As we train ourselves to adopt a compassionate mind, we are becoming more aware of the interconnectedness of all aspects of life, as well as seeing that it is in perpetual motion. This helps us to pay attention to how things actually <i>are</i>, rather than as we would <i>like them to be</i>. Learning to pay attention is the basis of awareness – self-awareness in the first instance, and then awareness of others. It is in itself an act of compassion for us and for other people because it reduces the extent to which we misperceive our life, and so decreases how stressed we feel.</p>	