

Mentalligence

A New Psychology of Thinking

Learn What It Takes to Be More Agile, Mindful,
and Connected in Today's World

KRISTEN LEE, EdD, LICSW



Health Communications, Inc.
Deerfield Beach, Florida

www.hcibooks.com

This is a work of nonfiction that accurately conveys a multiyear teaching, learning, and qualitative research endeavor. In order to protect the privacy of those featured, certain names and identifying traits have been reconfigured and/or compressed to protect privacy, without compromising the integrity of the narrative presented.

This book is not intended to be a substitute for professional consultation, therapy, or medical advice. Neither the author nor the publisher shall be held responsible or liable for any loss or damage arising from any recommendations provided in this book.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
is available through the Library of Congress**

© 2017 Kristen Lee

ISBN-13: 978-07573-2059-0 (Paperback)

ISBN-10: 07573-2059-7 (Paperback)

ISBN-13: 978-07573-2057-6 (ePub)

ISBN-10: 07573-2059-7 (ePub)

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher.

HCI, its logos, and marks are trademarks of Health Communications, Inc.

Publisher: Health Communications, Inc.
3201 S.W. 15th Street
Deerfield Beach, FL 33442-8190

Cover design by Jim Pollard
Interior design and formatting by Lawna Patterson Oldfield
Signature design by Alexa Nguyen
Author photo by Alexandria Mauck

*To my students, of course—
for teaching me more than I could ever teach you.*

*For Anna Hrvatin—
for modeling the good life.*

*We are not
going in circles,
we are going upwards.
The path is a spiral;
we have already climbed
many steps.*

—Herman Hesse

CONTENTS

ix	Stuck: An Introduction
1	PART I: The Waking UP Sessions: Find Your Reflective Lens
3	SESSION 1 The Physics of Mental Intelligence
13	SESSION 2 Changing Directions
31	SESSION 3 Cutting Strings
47	SESSION 4 Popping Bubbles
61	SESSION 5 Waking the Sleepwalker
75	PART II: The Tuning-In Sessions: Find Your Mindful Lens
77	SESSION 6 Flipping Couches
91	SESSION 7 Embracing Your Spiral
107	SESSION 8 Unfriending Chicken Little
121	SESSION 9 Waiting for Marshmallows
137	SESSION 10 Embracing Impermanence
151	PART III: The Breaking-Out Sessions: Find Your Global Lens
153	SESSION 11 Purging Kool-Aid
167	SESSION 12 Getting Un-Thrust

181	SESSION 13	Discovering the Human Museum
199	SESSION 14	Coming Out of Corners
213	PART IV:	The Going-Beyond Sessions: Find Your Imagineering Lens
215	SESSION 15	Choosing Your Code
231	SESSION 16	Rethinking Work
243	SESSION 17	Reimagining School
257	SESSION 18	Maintaining Your Mentalligence
269		Spiral Playlist
270		Disclaimer
271		Manifesto of the Mentalligent
274		Acknowledgments
280		Notes
290		About the Author
291		Index

mentalligence

[men-tell-a-jence]

1. A new psychology of thinking model that teaches ways to launch UPward spirals through a process of unlearning and pivoting away from social conditioning and indoctrination that damage human progress.
2. A collection of reflective, mindful, universal, and imagineering lenses to overcome blind spots and primitive instincts that lead to ignorance, mindlessness, insularity, and stagnation.

Terry is the ultimate embodiment of mentalligence—always such an agile and mindful thinker who brings social impact and can connect with anyone, anywhere.



STUCK

An Introduction

*I thought how unpleasant it is to be
locked out; and I thought how it is worse,
perhaps, to be locked in.*

—Virginia Woolf

It was 10:10 a.m. and I was in full sprint mode, running down Boylston Street, the historic site of the Boston Marathon finish.

Not that it was official race day—just my own variation: à la pencil skirt, sneakers, beat-up tote bag brimming with long to-do lists, a now-too-heavy laptop I'd wished I'd left back at the office, and remnants of half-eaten Scooby snacks for those *just-in-case* but *all-the-time* moments when there wasn't time to stop for a proper meal.

I managed to blend in with my fellow harried travelers even as I broke into a massive sweat, while internally defaulting to a slew of self-criticisms for finding myself in yet another time pickle. My plan had been to arrive a little early. Today was important.

Between my poor sense of direction and chronic propensity to pack too much in, here I was on the verge of missing my first appointment and sending my system into complete anxiety overdrive once again. Plus, I had a meeting back at work at the top of the hour and hadn't told anyone I had left or where I was going.

Heart pounding, I finally made it to the office of Lyla, my new therapist.

“So, you’re here because you want to manage the pressures of your new job, right?”

Right on cue, I was totally out of breath.

Even with all the efficiency and productivity strategies I’d cobbled together, the eighty-hour workweek was putting me on the brink of adrenal overload.

I presented the sanitized story, for starters: the polished, carefully edited version to give her context so that she wouldn’t think I was a total mess. The bullet points spilled out: *Age thirty-eight. Fast growth trajectory. Seasoned human behavior expert. New faculty position. Two teenagers. Book about to be released. Chronically sick mom. Crazy travel schedule. My family, students, colleagues, and patients show lots of affinity. I love them, too. I handle it all pretty well . . . most days.*

I wanted her to see my best side: that I was relatively smart and capable, that I had it together. Not that I was a lot like Dory from *Finding Nemo*—forgetting everything else I’d previously learned about not overloading my plate.

I downplayed my Dory moments and true anxiety levels. I was simply a seasoned behavioral health clinician practicing what I preach. My harried arrival into her therapy office signaled a proactive approach. Everyone should take advantage of the free EAP sessions, after all. I left out the footnotes about the constant knots in my stomach, middle-of-the-night panic jolts, endless time spent ruminating over everything, and the alienation and loneliness I often felt, even within my closest relationships.

Lyla didn’t appear convinced that my workaholic ways were just for the love of the sport, or just because I’m from Boston.

“You seem to take a lot of pride in your work and family. But it seems you’re stuck in constant overdrive. . . .”

It was only eleven minutes into the session.

“It sounds to me like you’re a bit of a perfectionist.”

I instinctively nodded and smiled politely, as only a true seasoned perfectionist can.

Inside, I fumed. *Did she miss how conscientious I am? How challenging*

working in a university was? How much my family and patients needed me? Isn't my session time up? Maybe this therapy thing was a huge mistake. I need some peanut butter cheesecake and wine, now! My impulse was to run, so I scrambled for clever rationalizations.

Luckily, she didn't budge. She masterfully connected the dots between my gluttony for work and the extreme performance obsession embedded in my fabric. She saw I was working myself to the bone. My perpetual yes was costing me a lot. My definitions of working hard and worthiness had collided.

The anxiety I was marinating in, she felt, was evidence of me living in extreme overcompensation mode to please everyone. She saw how much I relished my identity as someone who does it all, in true heroic fashion. *Great, I'm a superhero wannabe.* Lyla knew that the ridiculous messages lambasting us at every turn were dumping gasoline on my fire.

You've got to have the Kardashian ass. Be a goal-setting machine. Start your own nonprofit by the time you're twelve. Answer every ding within milliseconds. Parent like Jolie, joke like Schumer, shake like Shakira. Don't let anyone see you sweat—unless it's to show off the insanely hard hot yoga class you managed to sneak in between all the deadlines, meetings, and time spent triaging the latest disaster.

There's even pressure to be Zen. Mindfulness has become the new kale. We're supposed to be fully present every minute of our day—from the boardroom to the bedroom, even when our brains have been violently sucked into the vortex of perpetual chaos. *We're expected to meditate like the Buddha, eat our five almonds a day, swoop down, save the day, land on our feet like ninjas, have a good hair day, and pretend it's all easy and normal, as if there are such things.*

Clearly, this wasn't working for me. My pursuit of the good life wasn't turning out so well. Like a doctor who smokes, my hypocrisy was incredibly difficult for me to admit. Here I was, the go-to person at work and home—twenty-two years under my belt in behavioral sciences, hooked into being puppeteered to act perfect, while behind the curtain I was crumbling. The words to one of my favorite Alanis Morissette songs flooded my mind:

Isn't it ironic?
Don't you think?
A little too ironic.
Yeah, I really do think. . . .

I don't blame Lyla for thinking I was a bit of a mess. My attempts to disguise my disarray were no match for her clinical eye. My *frenetic, always-in-my-head life* was not without cost. She was right. I had some changing to do. And she reminded me this didn't mean peanut butter cheesecake and wine interventions, slugging down more power smoothies, or finding ways to barrel through my list more efficiently. I swore at myself on the way out of her office. She must have heard me; she smiled and gave me the proverbial therapist head nod. We exchanged knowing looks. This was going to be a lot of work.

I would need to start thinking and behaving differently. I had fallen for the delusions of our culture, telling me to be pretty, bootstrap, suck it up, and calmly carry on so that I could achieve "success" in this world. If I kept on making the textbook mistake of confusing *doing* with *being*, I was destined for even more trouble.

This wasn't new behavior for me. And it was more than the stereotypical plight of being an overworked high achiever that was pinning me down. My strict religious-brownie-points upbringing had trained me to hustle for acceptance.

For a while, I stewed in resentment at the church, bitterly shutting down my spiritual side. In many ways science rescued me, but my new obsession with measurability wasn't bringing relief. I was living entirely in my head, disassociating from my whole self. I didn't know who I was, what I believed, or how to make the million-mile march from my brain to my heart. I craved certainty, not the messy and uncomfortable state in which I found myself. Something was missing.

The same mind that had gotten me stuck was (hopefully) the same one that could set me free. I started to realize that indoctrination wasn't limited to religion. It was everywhere: work, school, and society. It was time to rip up the script, breathe deep, and reclaim a healthy definition of success

that wasn't compartmentalizing my mind, body, and soul. I needed a new organizing framework that allowed more flexibility and moral grounding—one that lets *science + emotion + spiritual* to fuse—not to bicker with each other on who's superior or, worse, dismiss the other's credibility and value.

When I arrived back at my desk, a mound of data greeted me from questions I'd asked my high-performing graduate students, gathered over years of teaching. Here in front of me were the stories of hundreds of incredible people, with their own ups and downs. As graduate students of all ages, they were the classic heady, overachieving, cape-always-on types who wanted to bring impact, and sometimes got a little stuck hustling for brownie points. They were weary, too.

Rethinking what you've been taught is the greatest gift you can give to yourself.

I wanted to know what was happening behind the scenes for them. Were they reeling from the forms of indoctrination they underwent? What types of strategies were they drawing upon to avoid compartmentalizing? What helped them find their way, without losing their way?

The analysis seemed daunting, but just a few minutes in, I couldn't put it down. I could see they also were struggling with disintegration. They had their own wounds from being prescribed a formula for life that just didn't serve them well. But they'd also found ways to wriggle their way out of it. Soon, the discoveries would help me unlock important truths. I'd been given a major gift, as I began to realize my students were just as much my teachers as I was theirs.

A few months later, I had broken new ground and developed a framework that allows us to build mental agility, so that we can work to not only accelerate progress for ourselves but for all—the real good life that we all want.

The mentalligence (mental intelligence) model—born out of my grounded theory research, the latest behavioral science, and all my years as a clinician, educator, and parent—isn't a magic wand or linear process. It has limits, too. We should be skeptical of any advice that makes big promises or overgeneralizes life's complexity to a simple 1-2-3 solution. There's no quick-fix, one-size-fits-all formula to crack life's code.

But Mentalligence is an inclusive framework, grounded in new neuroscience, that consciously integrates the many sides of human essence while embodying our global context. Mentalligence guides us to become agile thinkers who:

- Rethink and unlearn behaviors that leave us stuck.
- Refuse to be held hostage by prescriptive, socially indoctrinated norms and rules.
- Prioritize human progress and collective success.
- Open the mind, integrate, and spiral upward toward social impact.

Or, put Twitter style: Rethink. Unlearn. Sleepwalking through life is dangerous. #SpiralUP #Agility #MI #Learn4eva #Consciousness #Onlywe #GoodLife.

After months of immersion in the data, and all the moments of painstaking learning, unlearning, and relearning, I couldn't wait to share my new mentalligence model with Lyla, my students across the world, and especially now with you.



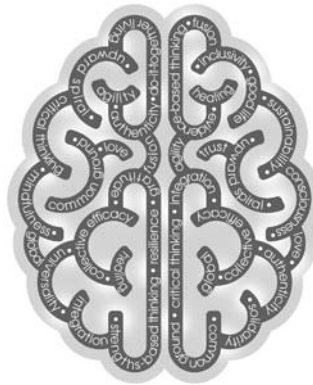
Boston, Massachusetts

February 6, 2018

PART I

The Waking UP Sessions

Find Your Reflective Lens



Rethink the 5 Forms of Indoctrination That Lead to Unconsciousness:

- From Fake It 'til You Make It to Agile Thinking
- From Me, Myself, and I to Do-It-Together Thinking
- From Performance to Meta-Awareness Thinking
- From Hiding to Healing Thinking
- From False Truth to Evidence-Based Thinking

The Waking UP Sessions will help you unlearn five forms of indoctrination that lead to unconscious behavior. You will pivot to become more expansive in your thinking, stay woke, and learn how to develop five thinking practices to find and strengthen your reflective lens. The sessions will help you stay alert, not lulled to sleep by the lies of our culture. They help combat inauthenticity, insecurity, unhealthy behaviors, avoidance, and wrong conclusions. This is our new psychology of thinking: becoming an agile twenty-first-century citizen. *Sounds good right about now, doesn't it?*

agility

noun | [e'jilide]

1. The power of moving quickly and easily; nimbleness.
2. The ability to think and adapt; intellectual acuity.

Hayden works hard to be the embodiment of agility—always on toes and ready to make needed shifts to avoid being rigid or being subject to society's many forms of indoctrination.

indoctrination

noun | [in,däkrə'nāSHən]

1. The process of teaching (someone) to fully accept the ideas, opinions, and beliefs of a particular group and not consider those of other persuasions.
2. To imbue with a usually partisan or sectarian opinion, point of view, or principle.

Camelia works hard to make sure students don't accept an entire set of beliefs uncritically, without a second blink.

SESSION ONE



The Physics of Mental Intelligence

Objective:

*Unlearn fake-it-'til-you-make-it indoctrination
that breeds inauthenticity.*

Pivot toward agility.

*The quality of your life depends on
the quality of your thinking.*

—Richard Paul and Linda Elder

When you're a human behavior analyst, you're like a people watcher on steroids. In the twenty-two years I've been doing this work, I've seen it all. Human beings act in mysterious and interesting ways. There's never a shortage of material—from toxic to bizarre—proving that fact is, indeed, often stranger than fiction.

You have your own material, too. Personality quirks. Family drama. Relationships. Hard-to-shake habits. Emotional baggage. Unexpected twists. The seasons of life. Plus, someone at work is bound to be simultaneously entertaining and annoying. And if you're stuck in a cube, *Fuggedaboudit.*

When first asked to teach a new graduate class to help students make their way through all of this, I was excited. Then it started to smell bad. The name hit a nerve—Personal Branding. *Am I going to have the students develop their very own creepy all-about-me sales pitch so that they can climb the ladder? Not into that. No thanks.*

My colleague Barry convinced me otherwise. He gave me license to approach it creatively—code for he was too busy to contribute. I immediately interjected the word *authentic* into the title. In a culture that primps and primes us to show up as airbrushed, caricatured versions of ourselves, authentic was becoming elusive. I wanted my students to stop drooling over society's narrow prescriptions for success and start living more agilely, mindfully, and purposively.

Before the teaching assignment, I'd been thinking about authenticity for a long time. As a therapist, I've seen a lot of airbrushing tendencies. We expend a lot of time and energy covering up because the worry about what people think is so ingrained in us. *No, no, no. I'm not a hot mess. Everything's fine, really.* This can only take us so far.

My patients, students, and colleagues were telling me how hard *authentic* was. They were afraid to really be themselves. Ditto for friends and family. Everywhere—at work, home, church—it was easier to fake it 'til you made it.

As great as is the desire to be yourself, the pressures to conform and perform are also intense. Even play-by-play social media displays reveal just how paradoxical this situation is. We put it all out there, while saying little beyond the superficial. *Did we really need to know you just got flipped off on your way to the market, or that you just found your very best selfie angle?*

Watch Out for the ASSIE Trap

If we're not careful, authenticity becomes rhetoric. It's a popular buzzword, permeating our work and home conversations: authentic leadership, authentic parenting, authentic living. Its overuse can make it start to feel trite and inauthentic in its own way.

One of the biggest roadblocks to authenticity is rigidity about who we think we're supposed to be. I refer to this trap as Asinine Societal and

Self-Imposed Expectations (ASSIEs). The term may not seem very scientific, but it captures the consistent theme running through my research, teaching, clinical work, and own self-flagellating moments.

We're afraid to cry uncle and say what everyone else is thinking. Like characters in the Andersen tale, we're caught in a culture of emperors, salivating for success and scrambling for status, to the point we're not willing to admit there's a foolish naked guy in the room.

Our legacy can be so much more. In the grand scheme of the universe, we won't be remembered by how fast we responded to emails or how many letters we have after our names. Most people aren't going to sit at our funeral and carry on about the length of our resume, the car we drove, or how well we took a photo.

ASSIEs metastasize into an airbrushed you, and although kinda cute, the real you is waaaay better. When our emperors go unchallenged, we're held hostage, forgoing the mental agility to rethink what we've first been sold and break free.

Like millions of people, we simultaneously buy into and resent the ideas of our culture. Instead of calling the absurdity out on the carpet, we force a smile and nod politely because we're afraid people will shun us if we go against the grain. We cover up, rehearse, and isolate. We get so caught up in our own agendas that we miss chances to bring our full presence and impact to our roles and relationships. It's a *nice-knowin'-ya* form of authenticity.

A lot of books teach ways to neatly resolve the whole authenticity dilemma. Most of them present a prescriptive path with a certain number of easy steps based on a set-in-stone organizing framework that's supposed to help you instantly find deep purpose and work your magic. I've read dozens of such books,

Being real is the power skill of the century, but we're taught to be otherwise in the places that should hold it most sacred: our families, schools, workplaces, communities, houses of worship, and governments.

"I no longer look for the good in people. I search for the real . . . because while good is often dressed in fake clothing, real is naked and proud no matter the scars."

—Chishala Lishomwa

Show up as the real you. The airbrushed you isn't sustainable, or even half as awesome.

and maybe you have, too. And like Bono, you still haven't found what you're looking for.

ASSIEs are rooted within a deeper issue most of us know all too well: self-serving perfectionism. If you're the kind of person who is sick of ASSIEs and want to escape them—along with the many ridiculous traps society sets for us—prepare to unlearn most of what you've been taught and pivot toward a new direction. It's time to accept the airbrushed you's resignation before the cancer spreads.

What Is Mentalligence, and How Can It Help Me?

Mentalligence (pronounced “MEN-tell-a-jence”) is a new psychology of thinking model that launches us into UPward spirals through a process of Unlearning and Pivoting away from indoctrination that damages human progress. We then become more agile, mindful, and connected thinkers who bring social impact. Mentalligence helps us rethink our way to the *real* good life, not the one that's being sold writ large.

You've probably already noticed that mentalligence is a fusion of the words *mental* and *intelligence*. It might remind you of the term *emotional intelligence*, coined by Daniel Goleman. As you'll soon see, many popular terms and theories need some rethinking.

Mentalligence helps you rethink your way to the good life. It's a pretty tall order, but worth the investment. Throughout this book, you will learn how to unlearn and pivot, or “spiral UP,” through four sets of sessions that teach how to use specific lenses to help undo damaging indoctrination. You'll get the backstory of how these lenses emerged from my research findings, clinical practice, and the latest neuroscience.

Certain key words and concepts can change the way you engage with the world: *agile*, *mentally intelligent*, *forever learner*, *ethics of reciprocity mind-set*, *impact-driven living*, *imposter syndrome*, and *collective efficacy*. Academic and more common definitions throughout will help you put your learning into action. For now, here's the short list of the driving principles behind Mentalligence.