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Life in LAMORINDA

Lafayette Book Store Supports Budding Entrepreneur

By Sophie Braccini

Dave Simpson enjoys throwing parties for the community. Locals and book lovers come to his Lafayette Book Store, sip wine and browse through the offering of new and used books; there is always something or someone special at these events. On January 7th, the party was for Asma Abu-Taleb, a Jordanian woman who hopes to become a bookseller, and who just concluded a "Vocation Vacation" with Simpson and his team to figure out if owning a bookstore is indeed the right endeavor to pursue.

"Vocation Vacation is a national company that connects

people with the job of their dreams," says Susan Chritton, a career coach in Lafayette who consults with the company, "For a fee, individuals interested in a career spend two days shadowing a mentor in the profession they are interested in. The vacation is preceded and followed by a coaching session to assess their needs." Right now the company offers more than 175 different 'vacations' with mentors in such professions as cheese maker, green home builder and schooner captain; Simpson is their bookstore mentor.

"When I first heard about

Vocation Vacation from Susan I immediately agreed to be their bookstore partner," said Simpson, "teaching and transmitting my passion is one of the things I love to do." Simpson mentored a mother/daughter a few months ago, but they ended up giving up on the dream. "They understood that the job was just as glamorous as they had expected, but on the other hand I gave them a reality check, and the complexity scared them off," said Simpson.

Abu-Taleb was not discouraged by Simpson's warnings. The resident of Amman has friends in United States who told her about

the program. "I went online and started browsing all the different possibilities they have for a 'Vocation Vacation,'" she remembers, "when I saw the bookstore I immediately contacted them." She took the opportunity of a planned vacation in the United States to meet with Simpson and his team. "I learned so much in a short period of time," said Abu-Taleb at the party, "we worked with Dave on the business plan, the financing and the logistics. Now I'll have to localize it." She now has additional ideas to consider, such as a used book section, an internet store, and the

facilitation of book clubs.

The experience has been interesting for Simpson as well. "I had spent hours before, for the mother/daughter team, to establish a curriculum," said Simpson, "I reviewed it for Asma with an international perspective that was different than my business-as-usual practice." Simpson then spent two days focusing on Asma and her business project. She shadowed him around the bookstore and, together with the team, they brainstormed her specific business plan. "In the process, I thought of new international angles for my own business,"

said Simpson.

For Abu-Taleb the next step was to meet with the Vocation Vacation coach to talk about implementation steps. She seemed pretty confident about her chances to start a business in Jordan. "There is only one major traditional bookstore in Amman," she says, "the way Dave manages his business is different and I think I have an opportunity to seize." She is back there now, armed with Simpson's experience. "I have promised to continue to consult with her pro bono," adds Simpson, "I'd like to see her succeed."

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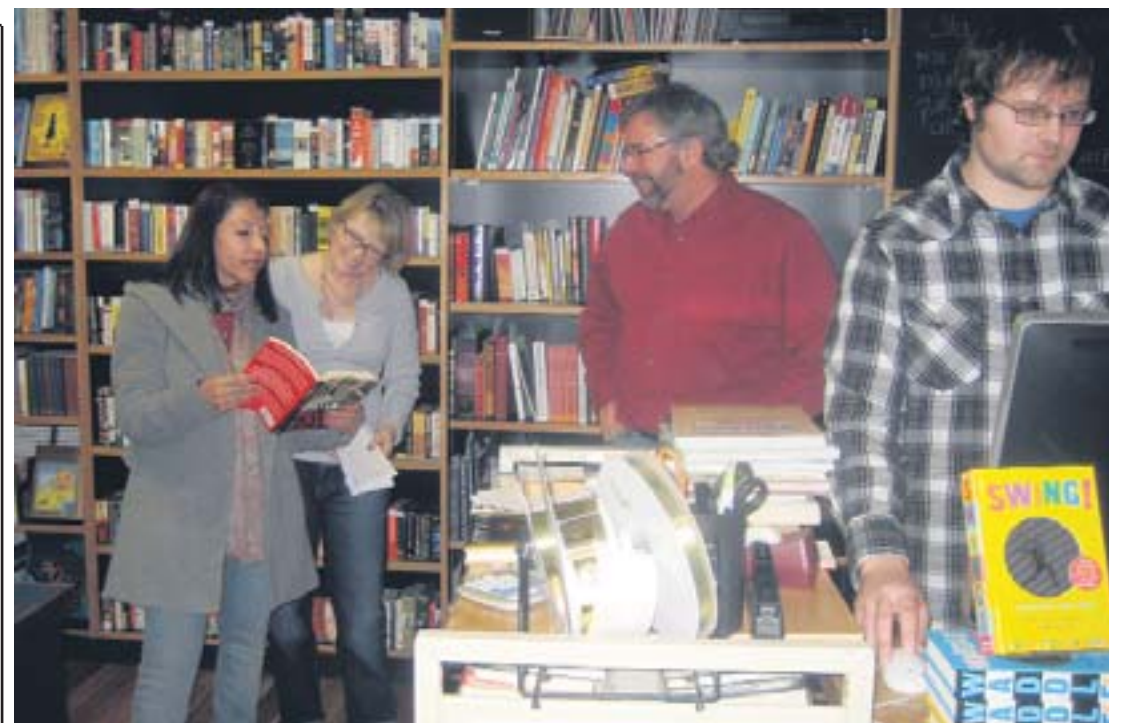
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(L-R) Asma Abu-Taleb, Linda Grana, Dave Simpson and Aleks Sedzielarz working in the Lafayette Book Store
Photo Sophie Braccini

Ask Dr. Harold Mindfulness

By Dr. Harold Hoyle, Ph.D.

It is a new year and as many of us do, I tried to establish some new patterns. I had taken a few stabs at yoga over the years, attending classes, buying books, and I even bought my own yoga mat, which I thought increased my commitment. I mean really, I have my own mat. The new decade seemed like a great time to start back at it.

So there I was at Oakwood in a level one yoga class. My body is not overburdened by flexibility, but I was doing better than I had remembered at the "being present" part of the practice. This experience caused me to reflect on different activities we can practice that are associated with psychological health. Here is a review of the recent research on mindfulness and psychological health.

So, what is mindfulness? Mindfulness is an awareness that comes from paying attention. It is one type of meditation practice; the practice of noticing what is going on in the present moment. This is nothing new. In fact, the practice of attending to the moment is thousands of years old. The recent research on the effects of this practice is new and quite compelling.

One of the first therapies using mindfulness was developed by Dr. Kabat-Zine, a professor at U Mass Medical School, and is called Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). This therapy was originally used for people with chronic physical pain that failed to be managed by the invasive and medication based ther-

pies of western medicine. Thirty years old, this therapy has shown remarkable results in dealing with managing stress reactivity, pain, anxiety, and depressive symptoms.

One of the by-products of paying attention is a state of clarity. Remember back to when you were a kid and you were climbing a tree. You were focused on every turn and twist of the branches. You were in the moment noticing when the branches were too thin for you to go any higher. With modern brain scans we can identify the brain functions of this type of focus and clarity. They are remarkably similar to the state of brain activity that meditation practitioners get into when they practice meditation.

Very often in couple therapy, clients and I spend time talking about how one partner doesn't see or notice what the other is doing. After a conversation, we find out that the person in question is not very practiced at noticing anything. With a few homework assignments around noticing any and all things, they start to see their partner in a new way. The problem is not with the partner, it is with the practice of noticing.

There is a newly published book entitled, The Art and Science of Mindfulness by Dr. Shauna Shapiro. This book collects the western research into one place for the first time. This is a book designed for practitioners, but I believe it can inform the rest of us.

The three pillars of MBSR

are: 1) Formal meditation practice, 2) Informal meditation - this consists of taking deep and conscious breaths throughout the day as many times as you can. It could be hundreds of times a day you notice and take a conscious breath, 3) Yoga or stretching - this gets you noticing your body and what it can and cannot do. The data on these practices suggests that if you participate in these focusing and attending activities you will find clarity and mental focus to be more available to you. Give it a try and get your kids outside climbing some trees.



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Harold is licensed clinical psychologist and a lecturer and in the School of Counseling Psychology, Education, and Pastoral Ministries Santa Clara University. With his wife and two children he is a 14-year long resident of the Lamorinda area. He is a sought after speaker in the areas of parenting, education, behavior with adolescents and children. He has a local small private practice.

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