

After The Interview

by [Nelly Kaufer](#)

In the space of a few minutes, our mind can go in so many directions. It takes more time to read these thoughts than it did for this fictional character to think them.

Randy, a pudgy person in their mid-forties, eases into the Jeep Cherokee. They just shared their meditation experience at the meditation group and their mind is full of impressions. As they glance into the rear-view mirror, they see a work suit neatly hanging on the rear hook. They are so glad to now be dressed in comfortable sweats and a fleece. They work as a sales rep just like their father did. They are happy to be in a meditation group. This feels closer to who they are.

Randy has read lots of Buddhist meditation books, but this is the first time that they joined a meditation group and worked with a teacher. Because of anxiety, they did brief psychotherapy with a “mindfulness-based therapist,” and it seemed to help. The therapist suggested that continuing with meditation might help. Randy found a listing for this meditation group on the web.

As Randy drove, they wondered to themselves. I don't know if my meditation was good? I really want to get it right this time, that's why I'm sharing a lot. Other people seem hesitant, but I'm tired of being nice and always waiting my turn. Something feels really important, but I'm not sure what that is.

I had permission to do whatever I wanted in my meditation. I did the meditation my therapist taught me. My therapist taught me to notice when I was getting all worked up and when I was “catastrophizing” about what might happen, and then to return to the breath. My therapist called this the “sacred pause”. It does feel sacred. I am so tired of thinking about my boss and what he wants and whether I will meet the sales goals he set up for me. It feels like such a relief when I am aware of nothing but my breath, which is so much purer than my petty thoughts.

I was hesitant to tell the teacher about how my thoughts strayed to work and how I went over the same incident over and over again, but I told the teacher anyway. I really wanted to talk about how to get back to the sacred breath. But instead of helping me learn how to get back to the breath, this teacher asked questions about the scene I went over and over in my mind, when boss man had charts of sales goals and commissions projected up on the wall. When the meditation teacher questioned me about this, I realized that the colors in the chart were vivid and seemed to pop out at me. Right after that, I slipped into something I can barely remember. It seemed like daydreaming to me or maybe like I was almost asleep. Then I popped out of that and directed myself right back to the breath. I was pretty sure that daydream-like space I went into was not meditation, and I felt a little guilty. But the teacher seemed interested in the daydream. He asked me more questions, and I was able to remember a little more about it, but not much. Talking to the teacher about my meditation felt good, somehow, comfortable, and safe. Daydreams are cozy, but aren't they an utter waste of time? Still, if the teacher thought it

was a waste of time, why did he ask me questions about it? I am confused. I wonder if this is the right meditation group for me. I think I need more direction. When my therapist gave me instructions in mindfulness; I knew just what to do and what not to do. Sometimes, I couldn't do what I was supposed to do, but I think that's because I wasn't trying hard enough. That's what my boss tells me when I don't meet my sales goals, that I could have made more sales if I only made more outreach phone calls and had more conviction about the products we sell. If I could just try harder, I would become a "great salesman." I hate it when he calls me a "salesman." Why doesn't he listen when I tell him I'm a salesperson? It's not that hard. Or does he refuse to acknowledge my pronouns because he disapproves? Or thinks I am making it up? Or thinks I am wrong?

I am not sure if Reflective Meditation is a good fit for me. It seemed like the teacher was encouraging me to think about work, and I came to meditation to forget about work. I'm not sure if this teacher really gets what meditation is all about. I opened my eyes during the meditation and the teacher's head was slumped over. Can I trust a teacher who slumps? That's not real meditation posture.

Anyway, in the dharma talk, the teacher encouraged us to be interested in our thoughts and feelings. He said we could learn a lot from what goes on inside of us. When I go back to the sacred breath, everything feels wonderful, and I feel a part of everything. I feel my inner goodness. It seems like I will stay there forever. That's why I want to do meditation—to feel like that. But inevitably my anxiety about work often bursts right into that sacredness. This is terribly frustrating. Maybe I need to try harder to hold onto the sacred breath.

Driving home Randy flips on the radio to their favorite soft jazz station. Randy eases right into the music and forgets everything else. The next day at work, the boss coaches Randy to try harder to reach the sales goals, prodding them to make more outreach phone calls and project more conviction about the new irrigation system they're selling. Randy hears slightly veiled threats in their boss's words.

Okay, just breathe deeply. Remember what my therapist said. I need to stop these thoughts about how bad the economy is and how I might never get a job again if I lose this job. Actually, I can't stand this work, but I've never done anything else. I don't know if even I could do something else. Will they replace me if my sales drop? After all, these are hard economic times, and my girlfriend thinks of me as someone who can provide what she wants. I'm not at all convinced that I can sell this new product. I feel like this sales pitch is a bunch of crap. STOP, remember the sacred pause. Why couldn't I find the sacred pause last night in my meditation? Did I do something wrong? Did I ruin it? Why can't I find that sacred pause now? BREATHE! Maybe my boss is right. I must be a loser. I am a loser at sales, and I am a loser at meditation.

Suddenly Randy remembers the interview from last night and the impression that the teacher thought that his meditation was going along just fine. *But this teacher is not very famous. How do I even know if he is trustworthy?* Randy had been reading books by famous Buddhist

meditation teachers and they seemed to agree that the breath is where it's at. Good meditators must spend most of their meditation focused on their breath. And since Randy wasn't able to hold his attention on his breath, then Randy must be a bad meditator.

Yet last night the dharma talk seemed to suggest just the opposite. That I could be gentler, more receptive and that something positive could develop from that. I am skeptical, but this teacher seems kind and smart and seems to be able to deal with whatever comes up in the group. When other people talked about their meditation, they talked about many different kinds of experiences, and the teacher seems to understand what they were talking about. Actually, there was something different when I went to work today. It's like I knew something more about how I really felt about this job and something more about why I wasn't making those outreach calls. It's scary to think, but what if this job is not good for me? What if this isn't where I am supposed to be? What would I do then?

Randy paused for a moment, held their hands together, felt the touch of their fingers against their thumbs, closed their eyes, took a deep breath, and sat still for a moment. They could feel their anxiety climbing. *What if I don't really want to work here?* Randy sat with that thought.

For a moment, Randy wanted to chase the sacred breath instead of feeling their rising anxiety. Instead, they followed their curiosity for a moment, and noticed they were starting to feel a feeling that was uncomfortable and calm.

What if I don't really want to work here? This has the ring of truth about it.

Randy took another deep breath. *I think I am beginning to get a sense of what that ring of truth feels like.*