



JULY SCOPE PRACTICING PREVENTION TIP

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July can be a tricky month if we're not mindful. On the one hand, the stings and satisfactions of the previous academic year tend to have faded by now (save for any positive or negative critical incidents). On the other hand, we may already be thinking about staff training, student orientation, opening week programs and other intense annual demands. In any case, despite this month being situated indisputably in the middle of summer, it is common for people to dwell on the past and worry about the future.

As I prepared to write this month's tip, I realized that I had spent the bulk of June considering what had gone well, what had not, and what I wanted to do about it next school year. I know that August will bring a series of retreats, meetings, programs and an influx of eager and nervous students with a lot of questions, fears, and hopes. This left me with something more precious and fleeting, in the form of the present moment; It was, and is, perfect.

My tip for July is for us to hold ourselves to our espoused values of being mindful, contemplative and present. I think of all the students and colleagues who came into my office radiating anxiety and how I helped them first by inviting them into the present moment, prior to even dealing with their particular concern. Being present is calming and it opens up the higher order elements of our thinking and feeling. Insights are almost always available only when we are present.

Please know that I am speaking with a spirit of solidarity rather than judgment about a very simple idea that can be enormously difficult to achieve and maintain in practice. I am reminded of the first day of the very first course in my M.A. program in Counseling, over 20 years ago. The professor breezed into the room and immediately wrote something on the board: "You can't take someone somewhere you ain't goin'." At the time, I thought it was some kind of platitude. Since then, I have realized that it would only be so if I didn't actually take its meaning to heart. We identify ourselves as educators. SCOPE includes the phrase, "prevention educators" in its name. To be sure, we want to prevent bad things from happening. But what are we building?

Perhaps we want our students and staff to pursue and achieve their best selves. We want their choices to reflect their values. We want their daily practices to be situated within incremental progress toward their bigger goals. We tell them to have a balanced life and to take time for rest, reflection and fun. We speak of the importance of sleep and of time with loved ones and friends. At work, we discuss the importance of being long-sighted and strategic, not allowing the daily headaches and demands to distract from our big picture.

We can't take anyone anywhere that we ourselves are not going.

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For more information about Dr. Laker and his role as Visiting Scholar with SCOPE, please visit <http://wearescope.org/resources/visiting-scholar/>.

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