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## Shama Barot of Amrit Ocean Resort & Residences: “How To Develop Mindfulness And Serenity During Stressful Or Uncertain Times”



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**As** a part of my series about “How To Develop Mindfulness And Serenity During Stressful Or Uncertain Times”, I had the pleasure of interviewing Shama Barot.

*Shama embodies what it takes to balance life, career, and wellness. Today, she is focused on Strategy & Development as the Co-Founder of Amrit Ocean Resort & Residences — the Next-Generation, Destination Wellness Spa Resort in the Palm Beaches, Florida. Shama grew up experimenting with wellness — small lifestyle changes to optimize her ability to perform as a competitive dancer, enhanced by ancient practices from her Indian heritage.*

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**Thank you so much for doing this with us! Our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you share with us the backstory about what brought you to your specific career path?**

**T**his is always such a fun question because it makes me wonder what career path I’m perceived to be on! Personally, I grew up a competitive dancer. I was very in tune with my body — how I felt, how I performed, what posture I maintained, what movement felt right, etc. — from a very young age. When I was dancing, I was practicing my deepest state of mindfulness — through movement. To deepen my practice, I learned how to improve my nutrition, fitness, & sleep — components that would later become pillars of my work. Through my Indian-American upbringing, I learned about both ancient and modern sciences that allowed me to experiment on these pillars from multiple modalities — knowledge that I became passionate to share with others.

Professionally, I grew up around the real estate. I never thought I would be a part of it but about 7 years ago, it hit me like a calling because I realized that my parents had spent 30+ years building a platform to do good. At the time, I was on sabbatical, volunteering at a children's hospital in Morocco and was blown away by the inequality & lack of access that many people had to education and employment. Similarly, my immigrant parents — who came to the US from India with \$0 in the bank — learned from their parents that the greatest gift to give someone was the gift of employment. As the saying goes, “give a man a fish, and you'll feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you've fed him for a lifetime.” Fast forward to today, they have built a successful company with focuses in real estate & technology, employing over 20,000 people. Through their actions, I learned about hard work and doing well by doing good. Through my experiences, I became passionate about using this platform for education, employment & equality.

Bringing all of this together, today I am building a wellness community that combines ancient and modern sciences to provide people with personalized wellness through 5 pillars of mindfulness, nutrition, fitness, sleep, & relaxation to enable them for a healthier, happier, & longer life. In creating over 1 million square feet of oceanfront real estate for this community, we have created employment for over 1,000 people. To operate this destination wellness resort and residence community, we are educating, training, and employing over 500 people. It is a very exciting “career path”, but I am almost certain that this will be one of many outlets of bringing wellness, defined in many ways, to the world in my own humble way.

**Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you started your career?**

Wow, this is really hard to answer. In this journey, every day is interesting! I wear many hats and my “job” changes every day, sometimes every hour. At 9:30 am, I am deep in the dirt with our construction team, walking the site, observing progress, and rallying the team to push forward. Come 11 am, I am in a round table with our operations team, talking pre-opening strategy, steps, and status. By 2 pm, I am brainstorming with our food and beverage team, improving our menu, crafting beverage ideas, and exploring experiences that people would love to see, smell, touch, and taste in our restaurant. At 5 pm, I am chatting with leading wellness experts and organizations, building alliances, and growing our mutual platform for the greater good. Any given day is mixed with catching up with financing partners, elevating our brand and making it more authentic, crafting uniquely relevant marketing and sales strategies, and constantly executing on all fronts. The most interesting story is that of our team, our people — watching them grow, debate, succeed, fail, and flourish as we march on to bring this much-needed product to life.

**What advice would you give to other leaders about how to create a fantastic work culture?**

Connect. Relationships make a difference. It’s so important to intimately understand both your customer and team, their needs, and what they care about. Where these priorities intersect there is an opportunity to accomplish great things.

**Is there a particular book that made a significant impact on you? Can you share a story or explain why it resonated with you so much?**

Linchpin by Seth Godin. It is easy to be self-limiting in work and life alike. First, this book reminds you to approach your craft like an artist, with all the emotion and passion that comes with it, including the possibility of failure. Second, it also provides a perspective that failure is not something to be feared — take a chance, and increase your probability of success by having multiple parallel options, so that failing on one front does not mean failing overall. Finally, he instills the importance of genuine gifts — give, meaningfully, without expecting. These three tenants resonate so deeply with me because it brings me back to my mindful movement, dancing, where I would choreograph with emotion and connection to the music, where I would make mistakes, sometimes on stage, and where I would always have another move right after to make up for it, all while sharing my gift with those who offered me the opportunity to perform for them. It reminds me to apply those same principles to my work today.

**Ok, thank you for all that. Now let's move to the main focus of our interview. From your experience or research, how would you define and describe the state of being mindful?**

Focus, but a very soft kind. Where you are fully immersed in what you are doing or experiencing, not worried about what happened or what will happen. Simply taking it moment by moment. It is honestly very practical. You are observing and accepting the reality as it is, without judgment and with compassion/kindness. With this clarity, when the next moment comes, you can act most optimally for that moment.

**This might be intuitive to you, but it will be instructive to spell this out. Can you share with our readers a few of the physical, mental, and emotional benefits of becoming mindful?**

Physically, mindfulness allows you to maintain constructive stress, the kind that motivates you and lights a fire in you to create your impact while letting go of non-constructive stress, the kind that creates knots and tightness in your body — studies have also shown that it lessens chronic pain, improves weight management, and increases gray matter in the brain. However, the looseness and flexibility physically improve the “mind-body” connection, so mentally, it means that better sleep and better blood flow to the brain, allowing you to think more clearly. When you think more clearly, you are more in control of your emotions, so you can use them effectively to align your thoughts, your words, and your actions. This alignment leads to greater inner peace, and thus happiness.

**Ok. Here is the main question of our discussion. The past 5 years have been filled with upheaval and political uncertainty. Many people have become anxious from the dramatic jolts of the news cycle. The fears related to the coronavirus pandemic have only heightened a sense of uncertainty, anxiety, fear, and loneliness. From your experience or research what are five steps that each of us can take to develop mindfulness and serenity during such uncertain times? Can you please share a story or example for each.**

1. **Gratitude** — I try to pause every day and be thankful for things, big and small. The current pandemic has truly opened my eyes to the number of blessings I hardly noticed before — meeting up with friends, hugging loved ones, enjoying local restaurants, taking adventures with my husband, mingling with strangers at the beach, park or grocery store, our health! Practicing gratitude leads to me always finding more things to be thankful about.

**2. Movement** — as I shared earlier, I am big on the mind-body connection. While I am staying out of the gym these days, I make sure to fit at least 30 minutes of movement into every day, as I have observed that it improves my ability to manage my thoughts, words, and actions. Right now, that means a daily walk around the neighborhood after dinner, enjoying #OrangeTheoryatHome online sweat sessions, or reconnecting with my love for dance through the (endless!) outbreak of social media quarantine challenges.

**3. Connection** — while many people may perceive mindfulness as a solo undertaking, I believe that now more than ever, it is important to make this connection with self and translate it into connection with others. Mental wellness is critical, and isolation or loneliness can lead to so many challenges for our global community. Giving right now is not only about money and resources, but it is also equally about time and talent, sharing, serving, loving, and caring for each other. We are true #AloneTogether and I am so grateful to live in an era where technology is allowing us to be socially connected while we are physically distant.

**4. Time Alone** — on the other hand, taking even 5 minutes to sit alone and meditate allows you to improve your awareness and let go of things that are not working for you. This is a time for growth and discovery. Taking time to be with yourself allows this. Mute the show you are watching for a second, set a timer and close your eyes, just breathe, experience what you are feeling, moment by moment. I have grown my practice to 20 minutes in the morning and try to get at least another 10 minutes before bed. There are apps like InsightTimer or Headspace that make it easy for beginners.

**5. Fresh Air** — I think being outside is the easiest way to be mindful, especially in nature, though I realize many people live in urban cities. Living in South Florida, I love the beach, it's hard not to be mindful when you so clearly feel the breeze brushing against your skin, smell the salty air passing under your nose, hear the rolling sound of the waves crashing, see the palm trees swaying and the bright blue waters — I like to pretend I'm in Mexico with a fresh coconut cracked open, tasting the sweetness of the water, but here it's just me and my tea!

**From your experience or research, what are five steps that each of us can take to effectively offer support to those around us who are feeling anxious? Can you explain?**

**1. Enthusiasm** — I use my energy and enthusiasm to inspire the same in others. A good friend, mentor, and colleague recently shared the teachings of Jon Gordon and reminded me that if you want an exciting life, you have to be excited about it. Dive into each day knowing that it is a gift, not an obligation, so you don't have to do anything, you get to — that shift in perspective is truly empowering.

**2. Positivity** — taking care of others starts with taking care of yourself. I like to bring a spirit of optimism to any situation with a healthy dose of reality. This allows me to shift my focus from the problems to the solutions. Right now that means knowing that we will get through this situation, we will come out stronger, and we can take actionable steps to reduce its negative impact, starting with washing our hands better, staying at home, and building immunity through the cultivation of a lifestyle that is heavier on healthy habits over non-healthy ones — all things in moderation, even good things.

**3. Understanding** — anxiety is expressed in a variety of ways, but typically people fall into one of three categories of response: flight, fight or freeze. In an article published by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkley, they nicely expressed it: When you understand “how anxiety manifests in the person you care about, you can learn their patterns and be in a better position to help.” By paying attention to them, you can learn the traits they express when under anxiety, and then you can match your support to their needs, whether that means concrete practical support, emotional support, or something else — don't just guess what they need, ask them!



**4. Balance** — in a world where the negative happenings are more prominently highlighted over the positive ones, it can really amplify feelings of anxiousness. In those situations, I like to temper thinking by sharing the facts and talking through the scenarios — worst, best, and most likely. It's important to remember that you are supporting the person, not taking over or enabling them by trying to eliminate the problem yourself. They are the driver.

**5. Improve Health & Well-being** — I always come back to this. The mind-body connection is so strong. There is some well-known research finding that the bacteria in our gut is the same as the bacteria in our brain. Simply speaking, your brain is only as good as your food. Moreover, I recently learned about data that shows that thinking impacts the cellular make up, and vice versa. Energy, consciousness, mind-body is all inter-related. Building our immunity in current times will not only get us through the coronavirus challenge, but allow us to thrive as people, improving our creativity, productivity, and positive impact on the world.

**What are the best resources you would suggest for someone to learn how to be more mindful and serene in their everyday life?**

The best part about mindfulness and serenity is that they truly do not require too many resources — it is not about thinking, it is not about doing, it is about being, simply be. I think practicing the five steps I mentioned earlier is a great start. For meditation more specifically, apps like the InsightTimer or Headspace can be helpful, though there are more online resources than I can name — find what works for you.

**Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Do you have a story about how that was relevant in your life?**

I love sharing this! It’s a quote from Mother Teresa that my Dad has repeated many times for my sister and I since we were young. It helps me stay grounded, grateful, and giving by reminding me to “do it anyway:”

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.

What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.

Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.

In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

**You are a person of great influence. If you could start a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. :-)**

#HackingHappiness — this would be practical, actionable, and preferably science-backed steps for cultivating happiness. While there are many problems in the world that I would love to solve, cleaner water, cleaner air, a healthier environment, less poverty, less homelessness, the list goes on... if I can make the world happier, kinder, more giving, more loving, I think we could collectively be in a better place to chip away at global issues in a local way.

**What is the best way our readers can follow you online?**

The best way for me to share is through my work. My current work and undertaking can be followed online at [amritocean.com](http://amritocean.com) or @amritocean on Instagram. I'm also on professionally on LinkedIn & personally on Instagram — @shamabarot — where I am me, a normal everyday human.

**Thank you for these fantastic insights. We wish you only continued success in your great work!**