

Corporate Wellness Round Table
February 9, 2017
Mindfulness – Notes

As guests entered the room, they were asked to sit at a seat with a color square that they “felt like” this day. Some people were very intuitive and used only feelings to guide them, while others were much more analytical in their choice. As the meeting began, guests were asked to turn over their color squares to find meanings behind the colors, along with an affirmation. An Example is below:



Seeking strength & passion

“If you want to give light to others, you have to glow yourself.”

I asked how many people were “comfortable” with the subject. While most everyone said that they were, we found that not all of their organizations and wellness programs embraced the topic. Below are some thoughts on working mindfulness into organizations:

- It has to come from the top-down. If the leadership doesn’t buy into it, it won’t succeed in the organization as a whole.
- It must be cultural. Every company culture is unique, therefore the implementation of mindfulness is as unique. Some cultures are much more open to the topic than others.
- Make quiet rooms available for employees.
- Encourage walks at lunchtime or on breaks. Sometimes sunshine can really bring a person back to the present.
- Simply giving people permission to take a few minutes to rest, relax, or concentrate on themselves is what people need.
- Unplug, breathe, pray, meditate 5-15 minutes a day
- Some have experienced being uncomfortable sitting still or even falling asleep. If this is the case, employees may need a more guided meditation or a different type (it may need to be disguised).
- Yoga is very popular right now. Introducing yoga into your wellness program is an easy way to introduce meditation. If your attendance waxes and wanes, try offering it in cycles – yoga for 2 months, spin for 2 months, barre for 2 months, etc.
- Including a long-term step challenge in your program can help weave meditation into your employees’ daily lives.

We know that leadership, although they generally want what’s good for their employees, are in business to make money. I researched and found some figures that show the cold, hard facts about meditation, mindfulness and business. These are included on the following pages and in the included articles. We learned that the idea of mindfulness is not new. On the contrary, it is many centuries old. While learning from the past and planning for the future are important, being present and aware are as important, if not more so. We, as humans, dwell on past failures and successes and worry about what the future will hold. We email, text and post to social media so much these days that sitting in a quiet room can be unnerving. As well, we are having more and more trouble communicating with people face-to-face. Mindfulness is the practice of tuning things out that aren’t important in the “now”. It has shown to reduce stress, increase sleep quality, increase focus, and even to improve health. All of these ideas boil down to happier, healthier, more productive employees that actually save the organization money while producing more at the same time.

MINDFULNESS

BY APAGE

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS MEDITATION? LIVING IN THE MOMENT



MINDFULNESS BEGAN AS A BUDDHIST TRADITION.

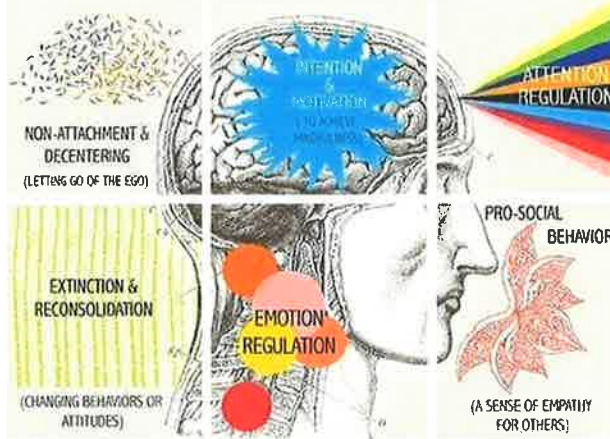
MINDFULNESS MEDITATION IS NOW RECOGNIZED BY PSYCHOTHERAPISTS AS A FORM OF COGNITIVE THERAPY.

IT'S A SEATED MEDITATION TECHNIQUE THAT FOCUSES ATTENTION ON BREATHING, BODILY SENSATIONS AND MENTAL RELAXATION.

WHAT MAKES MINDFULNESS UNIQUE FROM OTHER FORMS OF MEDITATION IS THAT THE PRIMARY FOCUS IS ON ONE'S CURRENT PHYSICAL STATE.

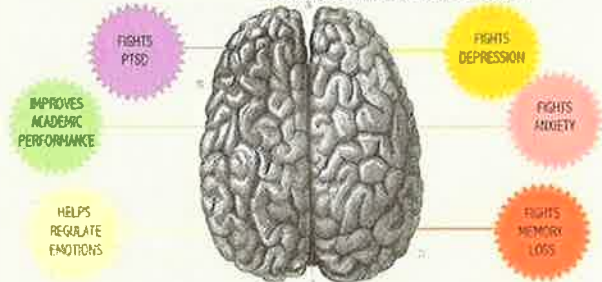
HOW IT WORKS: THE SCIENCE OF MEDITATION

MINDFULNESS INVOLVES SIX NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES THAT LEAD TO A PERSON'S MEDITATIVE STATE OF SELF-AWARENESS.



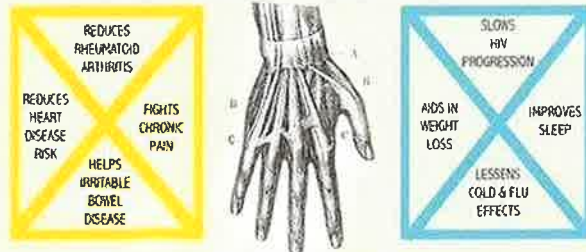
THE MENTAL BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

MINDFULNESS INCREASES BRAIN GYRIFICATION (FOLDING OF BRAIN TISSUE), WHICH ALLOWS THE BRAIN TO PROCESS INFORMATION MORE EFFICIENTLY - PROVIDING A BETTER GRASP ON LIFE'S STRESSORS.



THE PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

IN ADDITION TO REDUCING STRESS AND BOOSTING RELAXATION, RESEARCH SUGGESTS MINDFULNESS CAN LOWER STRESS-INDUCED INFLAMMATION, WHICH CONTRIBUTES TO MANY PHYSICAL AILMENTS.



Mindfulness

Dictionary.com - a technique in which one focuses one's full attention only on the present, experiencing thoughts, feelings, and sensations but not judging them:

“We never keep to the present. We recall the past; we anticipate the future as if we found it too slow in coming and were trying to hurry it up, or we recall the past as if to stay its too rapid flight. We are so unwise that we wander about in times that do not belong to us, and do not think of the only one that does; so vain that we dream of times that are not and blindly flee the only one that is.

The fact is that the present usually hurts. We thrust it out of sight because it distresses us, and if we find it enjoyable, we are sorry to see it slip away. We try to give it the support of the future, and think how we are going to arrange things over which we have no control for a time we can never be sure of reaching.

Let each of us examine his thoughts; he will find them wholly concerned with the past or the future. We almost never think of the present, and if we do think of it, it is only to see what light it throws on our plans for the future. The present is never our end. The past and the present are our means, the future alone our end. Thus we never actually live, but hope to live, and since we always planning how to be happy, it is inevitable that we should never be so.”

Blaise Pascale – Pensees

Written prior to Pascale's death in 1662, but not published until 1670

“Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, and today is a gift. That's why it is called 'the present'.”

Alice Morse Earle, 1902

(also quoted by Master Oogway, Kung Fu Panda)

Harvard Business Review –

- Our calculus for risk and strategy at work is wrong. Hard work, working faster and doing more with less doesn't always equate to productivity and success.
- More than a quarter of Aetna's 50,000 employees have taken part in their mindfulness training program. Aetna mindfulness participants experienced:
 - o Increased mindfulness scores, of course
 - o 28% decrease in stress levels
 - o 20% reported improved sleep quality
 - o 19% reported pain reduction
- Aetna calculated the savings to the company:
 - o On average, mindfulness participants gained 62 minutes of productivity per week.
 - o Estimated \$3,000 per employee increase in productivity per year
 - o Based on the findings that employees in the top 20% of reported stress level rankings cost the company nearly \$2,000 more in medical costs the year preceding the study.
 - o This is a potential savings of \$5,000 per employee, on average.
 - o These figures do not include the positive impacts on turnover, rehiring costs, retaining costs, customer service or client-facing sales.
- Ellen Langer, a psychologist from Harvard, and one of the world's leading experts on mindfulness said in the *New York Times* that mindfulness at work is "noticing moment-to-moment changes around you, from the differences in the face of your spouse across the breakfast table to the variability of your asthma symptoms."

The Economist

- Google's internal course, "search inside yourself" was so popular with employees that they began to offer entry-level courses, such as "neural self-hacking and managing your energy". They have also built a labyrinth for walking meditation.
- EBay has meditation rooms with pillows and flowers
- Twitter and Facebook are following suit
- Ray Dalio of Bridgewater Associates and Bill Gross of PIMCO, two of the biggest names in money management are both regular meditators. Dalio says it has had more of an impact on his success than anything else.
- Steve Jobs noted a trip he took to India he took as a young man for the Zen design that influenced many of Apple's products.

- Electronics – constant pinging of notifications, tweets, and retweets, the overload of our senses – create a need to unplug and become aware of our present surroundings.
- The Rat Race – chasing material success causes stress
- Selling Mindfulness – mindfulness has become a business

- Business schools, including Harvard School of Business, are introducing mindfulness courses in an attempt to build leaders who are self-aware and self-compassionate.
- Duke University School of Medicine – an hour of yoga a week reduces stress in employees by 1/3 and cuts health care costs by an average of \$2,000 a year
- Beware of selling mindfulness and meditation as a way to get ahead. It then becomes part of the problem, rather than the cure.

OU Medicine Health Library

oumedicine.com

- May ease PTSD
- May help recurrent depression
- Might help with back pain
- Seems to soothe breast cancer survivors
- Help with weight control
- Boost mood



The Busier You Are, the More You Need Mindfulness
Harvard Business Review, Shawn Achor & Michelle Gielan
December 2015

The most forward-looking companies are willing to take risks to achieve greatness. Most leaders give lip service to this idea, but few actually do it. We have worked with banks willing to take on toxic assets (again) and hedge funds willing to take a \$100 million gamble on a failing company. But their leaders would still be terrified to ask their employees to stop working for two minutes a day to watch their breath go in and out.

In over 700 of our talks at conferences, we have only twice heard a senior leader follow up the financial goal-setting for the next year by telling the company that one of the biggest keys to success will be mindfulness. “Hard work, working faster, doing more with less” — those are the limited solutions of myopic, risk-averse organizations. The problem is that our calculus for [risk and strategy at work is wrong](#). Truly forward-thinking leaders recognize that one of the best business strategies is developing the mindfulness of their workforce.

Aetna, one of the leaders of the movement to apply positive psychology practices to work, instituted a mindfulness training program designed to teach employees how to take short breaks to center themselves through meditation and yoga. More than a quarter

of Aetna's 50,000 employees have taken part. Mindfulness scores increased as expected, but incredibly, on average, [stress levels dropped by 28%, reported sleep quality improved 20%, and pain dropped by 19%](#). Aetna also [calculated the savings to the company](#), finding that, on average, mindfulness participants gained 62 minutes of productivity a week, which is an estimated [\\$3,000-per-employee increase in productivity for the company each year](#). Individuals in the top 20% of stress rankings have nearly [\\$2,000 more in medical costs](#) for the preceding year, so this intervention could create significant medical savings. Based on Aetna's experience, that's potentially a \$5,000 average swing per employee, depending on the employee's starting point. And even that number probably underestimates the financial value of mindfulness, as it doesn't include the positive impacts on turnover, rehiring costs, retraining costs, customer service, or client-facing sales.

Recently, more researchers have brought mindfulness from the mountaintop to the meeting room to study its effects on business success. Ellen Langer, a psychologist from Harvard and one of the world's leading experts on the impacts of mindfulness, helped clarify what mindfulness looks like at work and beyond in the [New York Times](#). She says that it's "noticing moment-to-moment changes around you, from the differences in the face of your spouse across the breakfast table to the variability of your asthma symptoms." (You can watch her video about Mindfulness for Senior Executives [here](#).) In our own work, we define mindfulness as "the awareness of events and potentialities within an environment." Observe your team at work: Do they seem very aware? Or are their brains constantly ahead of the present and missing what's happening in the here and now — the facial reactions of other team members, opportunities to see meaning in stress, and the opportunity to praise or recognize someone before jumping into problems? A lack of mindfulness robs everyone of the opportunity to see potential paths to success.

It's not hard to spot the ill effects of mindlessness. We can all fall victim to the productivity trap of frantically filling our days with meetings to attend and forms to fill out. Think about these questions: 1) When you aren't doing something "productive," do you feel like you are getting behind or not using your time well? 2) When you aren't scheduled, do you fill micro-moments by pulling out your phone and checking stocks, refreshing your inbox, reading headlines, or playing a quick game of Angry Birds? 3) If you have downtime, do you sometimes feel lost as to how to fill it? 4) Do you want a more successful team? 5) Do you want a promotion? If you answered yes to any of these, you or your company may be ready for mindfulness training.

Mindfulness training, with significant results, is possible in just minutes a

day. In a fascinating intervention, Amy Blankson from the Institute of Applied Positive Research ran a pilot study with Google's new hires, called "Nooglers." The pilot study encouraged the new hires to practice mindfulness by meditating for two minutes a day and writing down gratitudes in a journal. Engagement scores rose for those who took part in the program. While this is just one example of many, the reason we're highlighting Google is because it might seem from the outside that the company has the least need for finding ways to increase engagement. But as Laszlo Bock, the Head of People at Google, described in his book *Work Rules*, after the newness and excitement of all the great perks in the Google environment (endless swimming machines, micro kitchens, colorful bikes, free sushi, etc.) wear off, engagement can drop unless the employee takes proactive steps to consciously choose mindfulness and gratitude.

Some of you might be thinking that you have too much going on to focus on meditation. We would argue you have too much going on NOT to focus on it. Researchers from the University of Washington found that your accuracy rates, ability to multitask, and ability to handle stress significantly improve if you practice meditation for just eight weeks. In an article published in one of the top psychology journals, our research colleague Alia Crum found that by making individuals mindful of the meaning behind their stress, the negative effects of their stress dropped significantly. Mindfulness training can help people become aware of meaning when we would otherwise miss it.

There are lots of researched ways to increase mindfulness, but instead of overloading you with options you probably won't adopt, let us suggest an easy one: When you first get to work in the morning, spend two minutes a day starting a ritual of doing nothing except watching your breath go in and out and being aware of your surroundings.

Too often, the most ambitious leaders assume that if you are running around, you are achieving much. If you want to be a forward-thinking professional, stop thinking about the future for a moment. If you want to do more today, sit down and practice being aware of your breath and the fact that you have access to meaning right now.

[READ ONLINE](#)

↩ Share this post     

 Related posts

The
Economist

Schumpeter

The mindfulness business

Western capitalism is looking for inspiration in eastern mysticism

Nov 16th 2013

IN HIS 1905 book, “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism”, Max Weber credited the Protestant ethic with giving rise to capitalism. Now it sometimes seems as if it is the Buddhist ethic that is keeping capitalism going. The Protestants stressed rational calculation and self-restraint. The Buddhists stress the importance of “mindfulness”—taking time out from the hurly-burly of daily activities to relax and meditate. In today’s corporate world you are more likely to hear about mindfulness than self-restraint.



© 2013 The Economist

Google offers an internal course called “search inside yourself” that has proved so popular that the company has created entry-level versions such as “neural self-hacking” and “managing your energy”. The search giant has also built a labyrinth for walking meditation. EBay has meditation rooms equipped with pillows and flowers. Twitter and Facebook are doing all they can to stay ahead in the mindfulness race. Evan Williams, one of Twitter’s founders, has introduced regular meditation

sessions in his new venture, the Obvious Corporation, a start-up incubator and investment vehicle.

The fashion is not confined to Silicon Valley: the mindfulness movement can be found in every corner of the corporate world. Rupert Murdoch has a well-developed bullshit detector. But earlier this year he tweeted about his interest in transcendental meditation (which he said “everyone recommends”). Ray Dalio of Bridgewater Associates and Bill Gross of PIMCO are two of the biggest names in the money-management business, and both are regular meditators. Mr Dalio says it has had more impact on his success than anything else.

What got the mindfulness wagon rolling was the 1960s counter-culture, which injected a shot of bohemianism into the bloodstream of capitalism: witness the rise of companies such as Virgin, Ben & Jerry’s and Apple, whose co-founder, Steve Jobs, had visited India on a meditation break as a young man, and who often talked about how Zen had influenced the design of his products. But three things are making the wheels roll ever faster.

The most obvious is omni-connectivity. The constant pinging of electronic devices is driving many people to the end of their tether. Electronic devices not only overload the senses and invade leisure time. They feed on themselves: the more people tweet the more they are rewarded with followers and retweets. Mindfulness provides a good excuse to unplug and chill out—or “disconnect to connect”, as mindfulness advocates put it. A second reason is the rat race. The single-minded pursuit of material success has produced an epidemic of corporate scandals and a widespread feeling of angst. Mindfulness emphasises that there is more to success than material prosperity. The third is that selling mindfulness has become a business in its own right.

The movement has a growing, and strikingly eclectic, cohort of gurus. Chade-Meng Tan of Google, who glories in the job title of “jolly good fellow”, is the inspiration behind “search inside yourself”. Soren Gordhamer, a yoga and meditation instructor, and an enthusiastic tweeter, founded Wisdom 2.0, a popular series of mindfulness conferences. Bill George, a former boss of Medtronic, a medical-equipment company, and a board member at Goldman Sachs, is introducing mindfulness at Harvard Business School in an attempt to develop leaders who are “self-aware and self-compassionate”.

Many other business schools are embracing mindfulness. Jeremy Hunter of the Drucker management school at Claremont university teaches it to his students, as does Ben Bryant at Switzerland’s IMD. Donde Plowman of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s business school has even tried to quantify the mindfulness of management schools themselves. The flow of wisdom is not one-way: Keisuke Matsumoto, a Japanese Buddhist monk, took an MBA at the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad and is now applying its lessons to revitalise temples back home.

As for its exploitation as a business, Arianna Huffington runs a mindfulness conference, a “GPS for the soul” app and a mindfulness corner of her *Huffington Post*. Chip Wilson, the boss of lululemon, a seller of yoga gear, has set up a website, whil.com, that urges people to turn off their brains for 60

seconds by visualising a dot. (“Power down, power up, and power forward.”)

A walk in the countryside

Does all this mindfulness do any good? There is a body of evidence that suggests that some of its techniques can provide significant psychological and physiological benefits. The Duke University School of Medicine has produced research that shows that, in America, an hour of yoga a week reduces stress levels in employees by a third and cuts health-care costs by an average of \$2,000 a year. Cynics might point to the evidence that a walk in the countryside has similar benefits. They might also worry that Aetna, an insurer which wants to sell yoga and other mindfulness techniques as part of its health plans, is sponsoring some of the research that supports them. But it seems not unreasonable to suppose that, in a world of constant stress and distraction, simply sitting still and relaxing for a while might do you some good.

The biggest problem with mindfulness is that it is becoming part of the self-help movement—and hence part of the disease that it is supposed to cure. Gurus talk about “the competitive advantage of meditation”. Pupils come to see it as a way to get ahead in life. And the point of the whole exercise is lost. What has parading around in pricey lululemon outfits got to do with the Buddhist ethic of non-attachment to material goods? And what has staring at a computer-generated dot got to do with the ancient art of meditation? Western capitalism seems to be doing rather more to change eastern religion than eastern religion is doing to change Western capitalism.

[Economist.com/blogs/schumpeter](http://www.economist.com/blogs/schumpeter) (<http://www.economist.com/blogs/schumpeter>)

This article appeared in the Business section of the print edition

What Mindfulness Can Do for You

You've heard the buzz about "mindfulness," but you're not sure what it is or how to apply it to your life. Turns out, it's as simple as taking a few moments to focus on yourself.

What Is Mindfulness?

Being mindful means paying close attention to what's happening in the moment. Put simply, mindfulness is about being present.

It means noticing what's happening inside your mind and in your body. (Your stomach hurts when you think about doing your taxes.)

And it means being aware of what's happening around you. (Flowers are blooming on your route to work.)

When you're being mindful, the key is not to label or judge what's happening. Your feelings aren't good or bad. They just are.

In that way, mindfulness is about observing. You notice your life with a little distance, instead of reacting emotionally.

The opposite of mindfulness is being on autopilot. That's when you do things without any thought or consideration.

You're on autopilot, for instance, when you back out of your driveway and head to work on a Saturday when you meant to go to the park.

How Do You Know You're Doing It Right?

You can focus on the present anytime, anywhere: in your car, standing in a line, or at work.

Try "single-tasking." That's doing one thing at a time and giving it your full attention. It can be on something as common as flossing your teeth or eating an apple.

Here's how to be mindful when you have a few minutes to yourself and don't need to concentrate on a more pressing task (like driving):

First, pause and focus on your body. Notice what you see and hear. Also, check what you smell, taste, and feel. Don't label these sensations as good or bad. Just let them go.

Then narrow your focus. What do feel in your body? Notice subtle sensations like an itch or tingling. Give each part of your body a moment of your full attention. Start with

your head and move to your toes.

Next, be more intent on your breath. Where in your body do you feel it most? Rest your attention there.

Ask yourself, "How am I in this moment?" Acknowledge your thoughts and emotions. Spend a few moments with them, being with things as they are. Allow your feelings to be present without judgment.

When your mind wanders (and it will), simply return to your breath. There's no need to beat yourself up for losing focus.

Why Practice It?

Being mindful helps you notice when you're on autopilot. That lets you change what you're doing in the moment, rather than regretting it later.

Let's say you find yourself eating a bag of chips in front of the TV -- your evening pattern. Being mindful can help you break free from the autopilot trance and take a moment to make a different choice. You could trade the chips for carrots, or decide to skip TV and take a walk around the block instead.

Mindfulness can keep you in touch with your goals and hopes. Focusing on the moment keeps you from reacting quickly and doing what you usually do without thinking about it -- like feeling stressed and grabbing a king-size candy bar.

Mindfulness and Mental Health

How You Can Use It to Lose Weight

You can also use this practice to help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

With food, you have multiple chances to be mindful:

1. Do a gut check to see if you're really hungry before you eat.
2. Focus on each bite, savoring its flavor and texture.
3. Notice if what you're saying to yourself is helpful.
4. Do another gut check to see how full you are. That way you can stop eating when you feel full instead of mindlessly cleaning your plate.

Exercise Your Mind

Want to exercise more? Mindfulness can help you enjoy activities. That, in turn, will make you more likely to stick with them.

How do you exercise  mindfully?

- Tune in to how your body feels. Are your muscles tense? Do you feel antsy?
- Does the activity you're doing make your body feel good while you're doing it?
- If the exercise targets a certain body part, how does that part feel while you're doing it?

- Notice your thoughts about how you're moving. Are the thoughts encouraging?

When you focus on your body, it can motivate you to move more throughout the day. You might also be more appreciative of your body and be kinder to yourself.

Want to be more present in your daily life? Just put your mind to it.