

THE MINDFUL LEADER

Fact Sheet

How many times a day do you think, "I can't cope"?

Work can be a really stressful place.

With endless e-mails, difficult colleagues and troublesome technology, we can quickly find ourselves overwhelmed; and when it all gets to be too much, we look for an escape route.

But, wait...

What if we told you there's another way?

You don't have to run away every time you feel burned out; in fact, you don't even need to leave your workplace.

If you want to refresh your focus and become a better leader, you need to develop mindfulness.

Before you raise that sceptic eyebrow of yours, we're not talking about a celebrity endorsed self-help trend, nor are we asking you to give up all your worldly possessions in order to become a Buddhist monk.

We're talking about a scientifically-backed method that makes dealing with work issues much easier.

In fact, it's a skill already practised in some of the most successful companies.

This factsheet will teach you all about the benefits of mindfulness, and we'll show you how it works.

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness.

It seems like everybody's doing it. But what's all the fuss about?

In its simplest form, mindfulness means awareness. It's about paying attention to the present moment.

If it's not obvious how this could help you in work, ask yourself these questions:

- In the last week, have you found yourself unable to remember what others said during a conversation?
- Have you eaten at your desk without tasting your food?
- Do you ever get home and have no recollection of your commute?
- Are you even paying attention to this course right now? Or are you just going through the motions whilst checking your e-mail?

If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, the chances are you're spending at least some of the time in autopilot mode.

In the modern workplace, some of us see stress as a badge of honour—proof that we're working hard.

We spend time rushing from one task to another, tricking ourselves into thinking we're working more efficiently; in reality, our brains are exhausted.

Mindfulness helps you to become more self-aware, trains your focus and increases clarity.

These are all really useful qualities in the workplace.

CASE STUDY

For example, if you work with a colleague who doesn't pull his/her weight, it can be really frustrating. Often, those feelings of frustration turn into anger.

Being mindful can help you realise the reasons behind their behaviour.

Perhaps they are tired because of unknown issues at home.

By talking to them in a mindful way, you might be able to solve the problem.

If you're still not convinced, the benefits of mindfulness can now be scientifically proven.

The invention of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) technology allows scientists to measure brain activity.

When we practise mindfulness, our brains become significantly calmer.

With time, those who practise mindfulness become less judgemental, and their kindness and compassion are increased.

Perhaps the most noteworthy finding is the effect mindfulness has on the amygdala, the part of the brain that triggers stress. Mindfulness helps to relax the amygdala, and this in turn keep stress at bay.



TAKEAWAY

Think of mindfulness as the easiest form of meditation.

It makes dealing with issues at work, like conflict management and communication, easier.

And, the many benefits of mindfulness are scientifically proven.

MINDFULNESS TOOLKIT

Ok, so you're convinced.

"Hey, there might be something in this mindfulness stuff, after all. I think I'll give it a go!"

But, where do you start?

There's no shortage of mindfulness books, techniques and celebrity-endorsed videos. So, it can be difficult to identify what you should and shouldn't listen to.

In this toolkit section, we've put together five of our favourite mindfulness practices and strategies that you can implement at work.

But before we get to those, it is important to remember the following:

- To become mindful takes practice, time and patience.
- At first, it may seem unnatural.
- Some days, you'll forget to do it.
- But, try to persevere and before you know it, your workdays will be transformed.

MINDFUL BREATHING

This exercise is very simple.

Spend some time focusing on your breathing. As you breathe, simply identify the in-breath and the out-breath.

When you breathe in, you know this is your in-breath.

When you breathe out, you are mindful that this is your out-breath.

By recognising the in- and out-breath, you've focused your mind on breathing.

This is how mindful breathing works.

If you focused on your steps whilst walking, you'd be practising mindful walking.

If you focus on drinking a cup of tea, you'd be practising mindful drinking.

The point is, when you're focusing on breathing, you're not thinking about anything else. No project deadlines, no past failures. You are simply focusing your mindfulness on your breath.

This is a simple exercise with very powerful results.

In the beginning, sit for 10-15 minutes every morning and/or night and simply stop what you're doing for 30-60 seconds every hour or two during your day to practise mindfulness of breath.

You'll gradually begin to develop your ability, and establish mindfulness as a habit.

Do this for at least 2-3 weeks before trying anything else.

CONCENTRATION

Concentration is the anchor of mindfulness.

Imagine mindfulness as a ship, with you as the captain who decides where to place the anchor.

The object of your mindfulness, such as your breath or steps, is the anchor point.

When you consciously decide to focus on your breath and work to keep your focus on it, you're developing concentration.

Whilst breathing in, follow your in-breath from the beginning to the end. Really concentrate on your breath.

If the in-breath lasts three or four seconds, then you stay mindful for the same time.

When you breathe out, follow it all the way through.

The aim is for your mindfulness to be uninterrupted.

It's common when doing this for a thought to pop in your head like, "I need to get some groceries later".

This is an interruption. At the start, you'll seem to have a new thought or some other distraction every few seconds.

This is perfectly normal.

It takes time to quiet your mind as well as develop concentration, but it's well worth it. Simply quieting the mind can bring you a great sense of peace and happiness.

MINDFUL COMMUNICATION

This is an effective tool for improving the quality of the communication between you and co-workers while simultaneously deepening your mindfulness practice.

Step 1 - When listening, really listen.

When someone is talking to you, be fully present for his or her words.

Avoid distractions like phones, and don't let your mind wander.

Simply listen to everything they have to say.

Step 2 - Become aware of your words.

Mindful speech means you become aware of the effect of your words.

Focus on the moment before you speak and be aware of the reactions of other people as you're speaking.

Try to communicate clearly, in a way that doesn't intentionally hurt the other person.

SLOW DOWN

We're taught to move quickly, multitask, and ultimately be as productive as possible.

We're so used to rushing around all day, we sometimes forget there's another way to live. We think that it's "just how life is". But, it's not. And, of course, part of the point of mindfulness and meditation is to calm the mind.

While developing your practice of mindfulness, you should also work to become aware of when you're rushing around and when you're not.

Aside from helping to calm your mind, if you actively work on slowing down, you'll also find more opportunities to practise mindfulness.

It's highly beneficial to analyse your daily schedule. You'll find that opportunities to practise mindfulness abound in our daily lives.

Walking from point A to point B, sitting in a waiting room, driving to and from work, and just stopping for a moment to follow your breath anywhere and at any time. Slow down and really start taking time to enjoy the little moments with mindfulness.

FAST TRACK MINDFULNESS

Life can be busy, so it can be difficult to commit to being more mindful at the start. These quick tips are designed to introduce mindfulness into your day, in a subtle way. Over time, if you feel the benefit, you can move onto more advanced skills.

- As the workday begins, slightly slow down as you walk to the car, check in with your body and notice any tension. Try to soften this tension.
- Try driving to work a little slower today and let red lights be reminders to just notice your breathing.
- As you walk to the office, breathe in and out with every three steps. Notice the sensation of walking; it took you over a year to learn how to do this.
- If you sit at a desk, take a few breaths before checking the computer for e-mails or updates.
- If possible, maybe once a week, eat by yourself in silence, eat slightly slower and really tune into the sense of taste while eating.
- When walking back to the car from work, practise the same way you walked to your car earlier.
- No need to 'rush' home to 'relax'; drive slightly slower and experiment with new radio stations, maybe reflect on what you actually did that day. What was positive? What things would you like to do better?
- When getting home, if you have a family, take a few minutes in the car and keep your breath company. Notice if your body is tense, and if so, try to soften those muscles by breathing in and out of them, with awareness, and just letting them be.

FINAL SUMMARY

By now, we hope you're thinking about mindfulness differently and can see why so many big companies are introducing mindfulness into their culture.

Of course, you're not going to become a mindful expert overnight. This factsheet is only designed to increase your awareness of the subject.

The challenge for you now is to take what you've learned and develop it.

Mindfulness can be practised by anyone. Even small amounts have really positive impacts on your emotional and physical wellbeing.

The next time you're stressed or you catch yourself multitasking, use mindfulness to remind yourself that when it comes to your reactions, you're the one in charge.

Thanks for reading the factsheet, and good luck becoming a calmer you.