

Member's Quarterly

Summer 2020 Edition

Feature

Become a More Mindful Leader

Use mindfulness skills to boost your effectiveness

Mindful leadership practices help leaders strengthen their focus, lead in the moment and develop the qualities leaders need today. These qualities include openness, compassion, emotional intelligence, resilience and more. In the process, they become more effective leaders.

Mindfulness research also confirms that key benefits are strongly aligned with leadership effectiveness. These include:

- better attention, working memory, focus and executive functioning capacity
- deeper empathy and compassion
- improved emotional resilience
- reduced stress

So, what is mindfulness? What does it mean to be a mindful leader?

One of my favorite definitions of mindfulness comes from Mindful.org: 'Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us.'

When leaders cultivate their capacity for present moment awareness without judgement or emotional reactivity, they enhance their leadership. For some, it's the ability to stay focused throughout the day, while others find it helps them manage emotions. Mindful leadership also helps leaders be more open to others and fully present in the conversations so vital to effective communications, relationships and leadership success.

What's the good news? Mindful skills and competencies can be cultivated and every leader can develop proven practices that support their growth. These may range from the introduction of simple, everyday ways of being more mindful to deep immersions into meditation practice. Leaders who integrate mindful practices into their leadership report personal and professional benefits that enhance their leadership success.

How do you recognize a mindful leader?

You can recognize a mindful leader by their calm, measured and consistent ways of leading — especially in the face of difficult situations. Look closely and you may see them pausing, ever so briefly, to consider how (or if) they will respond to a situation. In doing so, they lead from choice typically in full alignment with their values and principles.

You will also see them modelling vital leadership skills such as the following. Each of these skills can be cultivated through mindfulness:

Awareness: Through mindfulness, leaders can deepen their self-awareness, the most vital of leadership skills. They learn to be aware of their thoughts, emotions, actions and also the impacts each of those may be having on their leadership. For example, being aware when thoughts are wandering unproductively (perhaps second-guessing a well-considered decision), then returning focus (and energy) to the present moment.

Self-Management: Mindful leaders use their self-awareness to tune in to their emotions when situations may provoke an emotional response enabling them to respond thoughtfully rather than reacting. This is especially important for leaders when they're under pressure and challenged to maintain an even keel.

Focus: Focus allows leaders to lead in the moment giving their full attention to the matter at hand.



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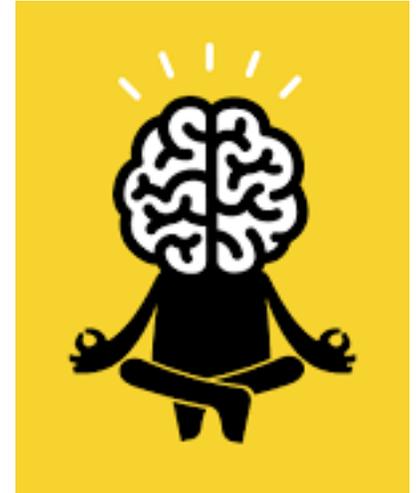
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Mindful leaders do this well, whether engaged in a conversation, solving complex problems or shifting nimbly when circumstances warrant. Their focussing skills also come with the ability to pay attention to what may be arising around them or within them, and being aware of potential distractions or emotions without getting caught up in them.

Better Listening: Mindful leaders listen deeply and actively enabling them to hear and better understand what those around them are saying or wanting to say. By listening in ways that invite genuine conversations, mindful leaders build more meaningful connections.

Better Decision-Making: Through mindfulness, leaders bring an open and objective lens to their relationships and work. They are open to others and to other ideas even when they differ widely from their own. In the absence of judgement (about themselves, their ideas and perspectives, as well as those of others), they engage in an honest exchange about possibilities, potential impacts and the best path forward. This leads to better decision-making often leading to better outcomes for all.



Are you ready to lead in the moment?

When I coach leaders, I often weave mindful practices and learning into our work. Why? Mindful leaders are more effective leaders. They lead from choice with a deep and enduring awareness of self. Through self-awareness, they are in touch with their thoughts, emotions, actions and impacts. When those impacts influence their leadership negatively, they self-correct. Mindful leaders also develop strong focussing and listening skills enabling them to connect deeply with others. They make better decisions too.

Though it takes regular practice to develop strong mindfulness skills, there are many proven, easy-to-learn ways to do it. Mind-body practices such as yoga and Pilates are a great way to begin paying attention to your breath and deepening your focussing skills. Meditation and reflective practices provide another option, including training programs specializing in mindful leadership practice. Search the web and you'll find a host of opportunities to introduce you to the power of leading in the moment.

Michelle Lane is a leadership effectiveness consultant and coach with more than 35 years of diverse leadership experience in the public, private and non-profit sectors. Michelle can be reached at mlane@vibrantleaders.ca.