

Member's Quarterly

Fall 2016 Edition

Feature

Mindfulness Increases Profit and Boosts Productivity: Get On Board!

The Mindfulness Revolution takes its place in the boardroom

A *Maclean's Magazine* article published in April 2013 talked about how "mindfulness is being marshalled to grow profits and productivity". The term mindfulness has become a priority aspiration for many people in both their personal and professional lives.

What is Mindfulness and how does one obtain it?

My favorite functional definition of mindfulness is borrowed from a pioneer in the mindfulness and stress reduction field, Jon Kabat-Zinn, and it goes something like this: "Mindfulness is paying attention, on purpose, to what you are doing while you are doing it"

Trust me when I say the concept of mindfulness is simple in theory, but far from easy in practice. There is often the added intention of suspending the tendency toward judgment, preference or mental commentary — this is tricky territory given the chaotic nature of the human mind. Here are some of the hallmark features of mindfulness to help you put it all into perspective:

- Mindfulness is an impartial watchfulness — it does not take sides
- Mindfulness is non-conceptual awareness — 'bare attention'
- Mindfulness is present time awareness — it takes place in the here and now
- Mindfulness is non-egoistic alertness — it takes place without reference to self
- Mindfulness is goal-less awareness — one does not strain for results
- Mindfulness is awareness of change — it is observing the passing flow of experience
- Mindfulness is participatory observation — the meditator is both participant and observer

Dr. Patricia Rockman, Senior Director of Education and Clinical Services at Toronto's Centre for Mindfulness Studies, says that "Mindfulness practice isn't about fixing anything or getting rid of pain and being happy and relaxed". While these benefits are natural by-products of embracing a mindful way of being, she says "it is really about waking up to your life and enhancing mental and emotional resilience."

Mindfulness is both a formal practice and an attitude toward experiencing life's unfolding with awareness. Mindfulness is experiential; the capacity to be mindful is developed through the practice of meditation. Rockman says that you can't learn mindfulness simply by talking about it or reading about it: "The effort comes in the development of a practice. It begins with self-discovery and becoming more compassionate to self, then ultimately toward others." The idea is that with consistent practice of moment-to-moment presence, mindful awareness begins to organically spread into and suffuse all arenas of life, coloring everything more vital and vibrant. It is said that contentment and peace become possible through mindful abiding in the present moment.

Mindfulness pioneer Jack Kornfield presents mindfulness as a remedy to "Western excesses or the egoistic, hedonic treadmill of continually avoiding discomfort and seeking pleasure from outside sources that are ultimately unsatisfying and short-lived."



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Being touted as a clinically proven method for alleviating chronic pain and stress, mindfulness is the hottest ticket in medical research. The *Macleans* article states "...it has metastasized into an omnibus panacea — to help children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder concentrate, soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder recover and, now, Fortune 500 executives compete." It continues, "What has gripped Western attention is mindfulness's ability to improve performance of Olympic athletes, parents, and even nations".

A more recent article in the *Harvard Business Review* from 2015 "How Meditation Benefits CEO's" states that mindful meditation practice can build resilience, boost emotional intelligence, enhance creativity, improve relationships and helps you focus. It's no wonder business leaders are embracing the concept.

Business leaders and astute entrepreneurs have already picked up on the merits of mindfulness and are exploring how those benefits can be quantified. Mark Bertolini, the chief executive of Aetna Insurance shared some statistics in 2013 on CNBC regarding "the bottom-line incentive of reducing employee disability payouts and increasing productivity" stating that "the most stressed-out employees' health care costs are \$2,000 higher than average employees". He continued to report that the benefits of mindfulness which can be learned through professional and personal life-coaching, yoga and meditation classes can yield an 11-to-1 return on investment.

I'd say that's a pretty safe investment!

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