



# Mainstream Mindfulness

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## INTRODUCTION

We live in an era of information overload, emotional bombardment, and continual distraction. Every time we open our computers or glance at our cell phones, we are hit by 24/7 access to news, articles, opinions, advertisements, and more. In 2015 alone, the average corporate email user sent or received 122 emails each day. <sup>1</sup> In the past two years, we have seen nine-times more data created than in all of humanity's time on earth. <sup>2</sup>

Our minds are not wired to take in this amount of stimuli, so we tend to naturally respond by distancing ourselves from the present. We allow our minds to wander, and we give in to distractions. We answer work emails at the dinner table and text our children at the conference table, all in an effort to keep up with the growing demands on our psyches. When we consistently have our minds in different worlds, both worlds suffer. The implication for organizations is an unfulfilled and overwhelmed workforce, which brings about sizable impacts on the bottom line.

## RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Companies are losing money due to stressed and distracted employees.

With so many distractions and so much stress, it is no surprise that mindfulness has entered mainstream society while many of us were busy refreshing our Twitter feeds.

**64%**

OF EMPLOYEES VISIT  
NON-WORK-RELATED WEBSITES DAILY <sup>4</sup>

The average person spends  
**47% OF THEIR TIME**  
not paying attention to the task at hand <sup>2</sup>

**54%**

OF THE WORKFORCE IS CLOSER TO  
BURNOUT THAN THEY WERE JUST  
**FIVE YEARS AGO** <sup>3</sup>

DISTRACTIONS COST U.S. COMPANIES  
MORE THAN

**\$650 BILLION  
PER YEAR** <sup>1</sup>

ACCORDING TO THE WORLD  
HEALTH ORGANIZATION, THE  
COST OF STRESS TO AMERICAN  
BUSINESSES IS AS HIGH AS  
**\$300 BILLION** <sup>6</sup>

Employers spend  
**200-300%**  
more on the **indirect costs of healthcare**  
than on actual healthcare payments <sup>5</sup>

**SICK DAYS  
PRODUCTIVITY LOSS  
ABSENTEEISM**

## WHAT MINDFULNESS IS & WHY IT MATTERS TO COMPANIES

Mindfulness is the ability to remain in the present moment on purpose, through the power of intention. <sup>7</sup> Over the past three decades, mindfulness has gone from an obscure Asian religious technique to a widely accepted part of mainstream Western culture. From yoga to meditation to holistic medicine and more, people from various backgrounds are looking for ways to be more present in an age of distraction. Progressive organizations are waking up to the realization that having present, happy, and focused employees is essential for business success.

### RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS



The number of conditions improved by mindfulness training is impressive, ranging from chronic lower back pain to breast cancer and healthy immune system functioning. <sup>8</sup>



Aetna and Duke University's School of Medicine found that regular yoga substantially decreased stress levels and health care costs. <sup>9</sup>



Companies such as General Mills, Google, Mass Mutual, Merrill Lynch, and Target, just to name a few, have introduced mindfulness programs into their workforces in order to lower stress and improve focus among their employees.



Dr. Richard Davidson, a renown professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison reports, "The brain functioning of serious meditators is profoundly different from that of non-meditators—in ways that suggest an elevated capacity to concentrate and manage emotions." <sup>10</sup>

### WHITEPAPER OUTLINE

- Define mindfulness and explain how mindful practice and brain training can increase productivity, focus, and happiness, therefore impacting the bottom line of organizations.
- Explore the science behind mindfulness training.
- Provide examples of organizations that have created mindfulness programs and explore how their cultures were impacted.
- Provide recommendations for building more mindful leaders and creating more mindful corporate cultures.

## THE MINDFULNESS DEEP DIVE: HISTORY AND SCIENCE

The roots of mindfulness are most often traced back to ancient Buddhism; however, modern practices, and the ones discussed in this whitepaper, refer to secular practices that can benefit anyone. Mindfulness practices are typically centered on breathing. The goal is to focus ones' attention on each breath and observe the placement of attention. In an ideal situation, the attention remains on the breath. In reality, the mind will wander. The goal of the practitioner is to realize the wandering of the mind, non-judgmentally, and bring attention back to the breath. This practice allows participants to experience their emotions and thoughts without allowing these distractions to dictate mindset and behavior.



In 1979, renowned scientist Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn created the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. Kabat-Zinn earned a PhD in molecular biology from MIT in 1971, and it was during his time at MIT that he became exposed to mindfulness, specifically, meditation. He fused Western science and Eastern thought to begin studying measurable impacts of mindfulness on health. His groundbreaking research helped pave the way for health care systems and hospitals on their journey toward embracing mindfulness as an addition or even substitution to medication.<sup>11</sup>

The science of mindfulness is in a constant state of progress, as new technologies continue to expand our understanding of the human brain. Functional MRI (fMRI) has enabled cutting-edge research in the field of contemplative neuroscience. The fMRI machine allows neuroscientists to measure and map brain activity.

One of the most critical scientific studies on mindfulness brought together neuroscientists and monks. Dr. Richard Davidson, a Harvard University PhD and a neuroscientist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, was issued a request from the Dalai Lama in 1992. The Dalai Lama said, “You’ve been using tools of modern neuroscience to study depression, and anxiety, and fear. Why can’t you use those same tools to study kindness and compassion?” In response, Davidson conducted

an experiment on eight Buddhist practitioners who had spent an average of 34,000 hours in mental training. He asked the subjects to alternate between a meditative state and a neutral state in order to observe brain changes. Davidson found that there were high-amplitude gamma-oscillations in the brain during meditative states. This finding means that the subjects' brains were more capable of change, and in theory, also becoming more resilient.<sup>12</sup>

In a recent study conducted by J. David Creswell, Director of the Health and Human Performance Laboratory at Carnegie Mellon University, 35 unemployed men and women were recruited to participate in a mindfulness experiment. Half of the group participated in a three-day formal mindfulness meditation course, and the other half completed a sham mindfulness meditation course. The sham course essentially encouraged relaxation, while the formal course taught the principles of meditation, movement, and focused attention. Creating two separate participant groups was critical to eliminating a possible placebo effect. Before participating in either the formal or sham version of mindfulness training, each participant had a brain scan and blood samples drawn. After the three days of training, every participant said they felt better-equipped to deal with the stress of unemployment. However, their blood tests told a different story. Four months later, the participants who were trained in formal mindfulness showed significantly lower levels of an unhealthy inflammation marker in their blood than did the individuals who participated in the sham mindfulness course.<sup>13</sup> We should note here that unhealthy inflammation is linked with depression, psoriasis, heart disease, dementia, and short sleep durations.<sup>14</sup>



In another study, researchers based in the Massachusetts General Hospital showed that meditation reduced the size of the amygdala after just eight weeks of practice. A reduced amygdala meant that practitioners were less likely to overreact or let their anger get the best of them.<sup>16</sup>

There are many other scientific research reports that specifically demonstrate how mindfulness practices can bring about the following benefits:

- Lowered risk of depression, anxiety, heart disease, dementia, and many other chronic conditions
- Increased ability to control emotions and manage stress
- Improved cognitive functions (concentration, memory, learning ability, and more)
- Increased empathy and compassion
- Increased ability to be present in every moment



## THE CASE FOR MINDFUL WORK

Regardless of scientific support for the benefits of mindfulness, many companies are hesitant to offer mindfulness training in the workplace. There is an assumption that mindfulness encourages relaxation and a slow-down—both of which are at odds with our perceptions of rapid growth, competition, and speed. However, mindfulness and growth often go hand in hand. Of what use are hard-charging employees if they constantly give into a barrage of distractions and have little emotional regulation? Studies conducted by the National Institute of Health-UK, the University of Massachusetts, and the Mind/Body Institute at Harvard University suggest that mindfulness at work is good for the bottom line.

### Studies have found that practicing mindfulness at work:

- ➡ Reduced absenteeism and turnover
- ➡ Increased productivity
- ➡ Enhanced employer/employee and client relationships
- ➡ Improved job satisfaction
- ➡ Improved self-control and discipline, which can create more focused employees

### TIPS FOR BEING MORE MINDFUL AT WORK

- Commit to a meditation practice for 30 days. This is the most difficult suggestion, yet therefore, the most rewarding. Many brain studies around the impacts of mindfulness are closely tied to the practice of meditation. There are a few resources that can assist beginners practicing mindfulness. A meditation app named Headspace offers guided meditations. The Everyday Zen Foundation ([everydayzen.com](http://everydayzen.com)) offers guided meditations by Norman Fischer, a poet and Zen Buddhist priest who has taught for many years at the San Francisco Zen Center. Most cities have Zen centers that can assist in the creation of a meditation habit. If accessing meditation training still does not seem realistic, more immediate and practical suggestions follow below.
- Remain in control of your attention and more easily focus on the task at hand by following these four Ss:
  - **Select:** Decide what is worth your attention right now. What matters the most to you? Is it the person in front of you? A family member? An email? A project? Whatever is most important, intentionally select this particular person, project, or activity deserves your full attention.
  - **Suppress:** The brain is constantly barraged with stimuli, and something is always vying for our attention. Intentionally suppress what is not relevant to you right now. This could



be the chatter of the office, the noise of the television, or the ping of your cell phone. Intentionally suppress the distractions in order to focus on what you have selected as most important.

- **Sustain:** Without attentional staying power, your mind will wander, regardless of what you have selected and what you are suppressing. Practicing the art of consistently bringing your attention back to the task at hand can create more attention endurance over time.
- **Shift:** Hone the ability to shift attention focus seamlessly from one thing to another with changing circumstances.<sup>17</sup>
- Take three deep breaths. This is age-old advice, yet many people still react without taking a moment of respite between stimuli and reaction. In such quick-response moments, people often make mindless comments that can have lasting repercussions on relationships in the workplace and at home. Here is the good news: You have to take breaths anyway, so why not take a few consciously?
- Read articles and news in print. The Internet can be a black hole of distraction. When we click on one article, advertisements and suggested articles fill our eyes and flood our brains. Take a few minutes to read through a newspaper or magazine on paper in order to take in information without distractions.
- Do one thing at a time. Cal Newport, best selling author and Georgetown University professor, wrote in his book, *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*, “bouncing around from task to task, or multitasking, deteriorates the muscle allowing you to focus. The more you multitask, the less comfortable you’ll be going deep for an extended period of time.” Research repeatedly tells us that multitasking is detrimental to our brain.<sup>18</sup>

## MINDFUL LEADERSHIP

The benefits for employees are numerous, and the benefits for leaders are equally impressive. Employees know when they are in the presence of a present leader. They will say things such as, “It feels like she’s speaking directly to me” or “It feels like I’m the only one in the room.” How rare it is in our modern era to feel like you really have someone’s full attention. If you are a leader who is trying to engage and motivate an entire workforce, showing up with presence may be the most important leadership decision you make.

Leaders need to know how to handle difficult and overwhelming emotions, accurately identify and focus on top priorities, and motivate their employees. These are not easy tasks. Therefore, having exemplar emotional intelligence, focus, and discipline is critical to leading in times of change and distraction. **Consider that the opposite of being a present and mindful leader is being a distracted and mindless leader.** Most leaders, if not all, would agree that being a mindful and present leader creates better results.



Mindfulness can help senior leaders improve flexibility and adaptability, along with other must-have qualities in order to remain competitive through volatile times. Mindfulness also helps leaders move beyond familiar ways of thinking about and seeing the world, which often leads to more innovation.

## TIPS FOR BECOMING A MORE MINDFUL LEADER

- *Be aware of your attention when you are listening.* When someone is speaking with you, how much of your attention is focused on what they are saying, and how much is focused on what you will say as soon as they are done speaking? Be conscious of your attention, and when it wanders from the conversation, gently bring it back to the person at hand by focus on what they are saying—rather than on your response. *State your intention in meetings.* Meetings, the epicenter of mindlessness at work, can be greatly improved when a leader takes a moment to state the meeting's intention. Such an intention does not necessarily have to match the meeting's objective. The objective of a meeting could be to make a final decision regarding a certain project, while the intention could be to give team members a chance to connect and build consensus around a given project.
- *Facilitate intentionally.* The leader in the room is not typically the person speaking the most; rather, the leader is encouraging others to speak up and facilitating productive dialogue. If you, as a leader, notice that one person is dominating the conversation, ask everyone to take a moment to write down the main points they want to make in the meeting and ask them to stick to those points. This can alleviate interruptions, tangents, and other causes of wasted time.
- *Tune into your mental state and change it if needed.* The leader sets the tone. Before conversing with anyone, take a moment to ask yourself, "What mental state am I in right now?" "Do I feel like I'm drinking from a fire hose?" "Did I fight with my child or spouse this morning?" "Am I upset about traffic?" By taking a moment to realize your mental state, you give yourself the control to change it, which in turn can change the tone of an entire interaction.

### Here are what some leaders have said about mindfulness and presence:

*"Meditation, more than anything else in my life, was the biggest ingredient of whatever success I've had. Meditation gives me a centeredness, it gives me an ability to look at things without emotional hijacking, without an ego, in a way that gives me certain clarity."* – Ray Dalio, founder of \$130-billion hedge fund firm Bridgewater Associates <sup>19</sup>

*"The main business case for mindfulness is that if you're fully present on the job, you will be a more effective leader, you will make better decisions, and you will work better with other people."* – Bill George, former CEO of Medtronic and Harvard Business School professor <sup>20</sup>

*"When players practice what is known as mindfulness—simply paying attention to what's actually happening—not only do they play better and win more, they also become more attuned with each other. The real reason the Bulls won 3 straight national championships from 1991 to 1993 was that we plugged into the power of oneness instead of the power of one man and transcended the divisive forces of the ego that have crippled far more teams."* – Phil Jackson, Chicago Bulls Head Coach <sup>21</sup>



## CORPORATE MINDFULNESS CASE STUDIES

### GOOGLE'S "SEARCH INSIDE YOURSELF"

In 2007, Chade-Meng Tan created the Search Inside Yourself Program at Google. Tan was an engineer. Analytical engineers and mindfulness may not seem like a natural pair, but Tan changed that for the rest of the Googlers. The program is focused on using mindfulness to create more emotional intelligence within the organization. The program has been so successful that employees typically have a six-month waiting period just to get in. The program consists of 19 sessions or a two-and-a-half day intensive retreat. The training is mainly focused on three development areas. The first is attention training. Attention training focuses on developing the ability to bring one's mind, under any circumstance and at any time, to a place that is calm and clear. The second development area is self-knowledge development. Self-knowledge development focuses on becoming more aware of one's self. Becoming more aware of one's own self allows people to view themselves objectively. They can then adequately understand how to leverage their strengths and ask for help with their weaknesses. The third area focuses on creating mental habits—for example, creating a mental habit of kindness or compassion. <sup>22</sup> Google participants of the Search Inside Yourself program report feeling calmer, more patient, and better able to listen. They also say the program helped them better handle stress and defuse emotions. <sup>23</sup>



## **GENERAL MILLS' MINDFULNESS LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

In 2006, Janice Marturano, deputy general council of General Mills at the time, created a mindfulness program for leaders within the company. The program consisted of sitting postures, yoga, and dialogue in an effort to reduce stress while enhancing productivity and leadership. Marturano reported that the reason for the program was to “train our minds to be more focused, to see with clarity, to have spaciousness for creativity, and to feel connected.” The results of the program were impressive. A full 89% of senior executives reported that they had become better listeners; 80% of senior executives reported a positive change in their ability to make better decisions; and 82% reported that they subsequently made time to eliminate tasks with limited productivity value (an improvement of 32% from self-reports taken before the course began).<sup>24</sup>

# **BLACKROCK**

## **BLACKROCK'S MEDITATION PROGRAM**

Mindfulness and the world's largest asset manager may seem like an unlikely pair. The founder of this program, Golbie Kamarei, knew that the hard-charging environment of Wall Street did not have time for “fluff.” She also knew that mindfulness was not fluff. In the high-stress emotions of her work environment, mindfulness was a necessity. On her own time, in 2013, Kamarei launched the BlackRock Meditation Program. Twice a week, employees have the opportunity to join Kamarei in person or dial in to a 30-minute session. She focuses on how mindfulness practices can create higher performance, she provides examples, and then she leads participants through a 15–20 minute guided meditation. Over 1,400 BlackRock employees in 17 countries have opted into the program. Results showed the following:<sup>24</sup>

- 46% experience increased innovation and creativity
- 60% experiences increased focus, mental resilience and better decision-making
- 63% are better able to manage their own productivity at work
- 66% experience less stress or are better able to manage stress
- 88% would recommend the meditation program to a colleague
- 90% of participants believe the program positively adds to the culture



## **AETNA'S MINDFULNESS PROGRAM**

Mark Bertolini, the unconventional CEO of health insurance giant Aetna, is an avid mindfulness practitioner. Under his tutelage, mindfulness became a part of Aetna. The company offers free yoga and meditation classes for its employees. More than 13,000 employees have participated in the classes, and results have been positive. Of those who participated, 28% reported a reduction of their stress levels, 20% reported an improvement in sleep quality, and 19% reported a reduction in pain. These employee participants also became more effective on the job, gaining an average of 62 minutes per week of productivity experienced by each person. Aetna estimates that this increase in productivity is worth \$3,000 per employee each year. <sup>25</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

Stress and distraction are bad for people and bad for business. In an era of increased stress and continual distraction, it has become more important than ever to train our brains to remain present and focused. Mindfulness practices offer scientifically backed tools to help wire our minds to be more focused, balanced, and clear; thus creating a happier, more innovative and more productive workforce. As Google, General Mills, Blackrock and Aetna can attest to, mindfulness can lower stress, increase presenteeism, lower absenteeism and build a better place to work.

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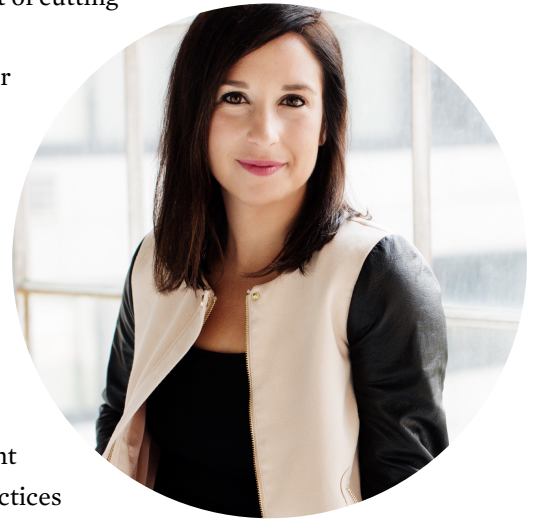


## INLAY INSIGHTS

### SPEAKER

Kim Lear is a trendspotter and researcher who explores how emerging trends impact the future of our workforce and marketplace. She spent the majority of her career as the director of content at a research and consulting firm focused on Millennial trends and generational dynamics. Now, as the founder and content director of Inlay Insights, Kim is at the forefront of cutting edge research to uncover cultural shifts that revolutionize how organizations engage employees and consumers. She is known for her ability to use a mix of data, storytelling, humor, and actionable takeaways to discuss the trends that most impact the bottom line of organizations.

Kim has keynoted for some of the most renowned companies in the world. She has received rave reviews from clients such as American Express, Cisco Systems, Deloitte, Disney, General Mills, Linked In, Mastercard, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Wells Fargo, and more. In addition to speaking, Kim has written whitepapers on the topics of generational wealth transfer in the finance sector, retirement trends in the hospitality industry and the impacts of mindfulness practices on healthcare costs.



A researcher to the very core, Kim employs eye-opening statistics to accentuate her points and mixes them with stories and case studies to make her message come alive. She is a sought-after expert and has been featured on NPR as well as national publications such as The Wall Street Journal, The Huffington Post, USA Today and more. She is currently the head of research on a new book published by Harper Collins about Gen Z, the teenage demographic.

Kim lives and works in Minneapolis where she is currently running a research initiative to identify how the Sharing Economy impacts our perspectives on community and consumption.

When not delving into the minutia of human behavior, you can find Kim paddle boarding, planning an overseas adventure or re-watching Game of Thrones.

### ABOUT INLAY INSIGHTS

Inlay is a social insights company. We identify emerging cultural trends that impact the way we work, the way we buy, and the way we live. We put those trends to work for businesses, marketers and researchers.

Through inside access to top universities and some of the best companies in the world, Inlay Insights brings clients holistic and actionable perspectives on the new world of work and the needs of the new consumer.





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