

## **The Mindful Meditation Revolution – Reducing Stress Across the World!**

In today's society the notion of sitting still is becoming almost impossible to achieve. I think this is a main contributor to the mindfulness meditation revolution underway. Let's not pretend that however successfully we do it juggling family, relationships, career and the ordinary pressures of life is easy. It isn't. From business leaders to soldiers on the front line, these days coaches and therapists will be advocating mindfulness meditation to manage stress.

There is always something to do or somewhere to go and that's before we tweet, blog or receive emails on our smartphones. You can see why the intensity of change can become overwhelming. Our brain never gets chance to pause and with so many thoughts racing around our head, it is easy to see why the result is often stress.

### **So how can we manage that stress?**

Here's where mindfulness meditations can help you and your clients, and I hasten to add there's no chanting, no sitting crossed legged and no need for a particular religious orientation. It is simply about becoming aware of what's within and around us, here and now. In fact mindfulness is now commonly used to treat stress, anxiety, pain, insomnia, fatigue and depression and is recommended by NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence).

### **How can mindfulness meditation help us?**

It helps us kick the habit of negative thinking and stop ruminating over what has happened or what might happen. This gives us the headspace to be clear about, and take responsibility for our own thoughts and emotional reactions. With awareness we can embody the Americanism PMA! (Positive Mental Attitude.)

We all get stressed. You know the scenario, "I am stressed because he/she did/said this/that." "I am angry because I lost my job." Or "I am in pain because a friend or lover betrayed me." There is no denying that each of these situations will cause pain. Life can be tough and some of the conditions we are called to face will result in stress. Stress is a major form of suffering and we often make it worse, perpetuating our worries and woes by constantly thinking about them. In the training world we describe stress, anger, resentment or jealousy as the poison we feed ourselves to get back at one another!

With mindfulness or self-examination we step off the auto-pilot and get to see that this type of thinking doesn't make sense, as we only end up hurt or in pain ourselves. Mindfulness develops self-compassion and actually works because you become an observer of your thoughts and emotions allowing yourself to become informed and able to choose how to express yourself. By repeatedly 'checking in' on your thoughts and feelings, you begin to reprogram the brain and lay down new neuro-pathways to support happiness and well-being.

Mindfulness and meditation are effective ways of re-wiring your brain and this is done in the spirit of non-judgemental awareness or unconditional love. That is to say, when we are being mindful we are aware of our life without judging it. For example awareness of a particular emotion does not lead to condemning it as either good or bad, it just is what it is and we have awareness that this too shall pass.

### **How can it help in the business world?**

The benefits are enormous for the workplace and many business leaders are reaping the rewards of mindfulness training personally and professionally through:

- Increased emotional intelligence leading to more empathy in your work environment.
- Enhanced self-awareness and awareness of the needs of others
- Greater resilience and ability to respond to life's challenges
- Decreased stress and anxiety, fostering great relationships
- Clear and creative thinking, helping grow the business focus
- Greater listening skills and the ability to communicate more clearly.

Mindfulness will help you have a clear identity for your business and build an inspiring vision, where relationships are authentic and you and your people are creating great performance in all areas. This can only be good news for you and your customers.

### **Can it help increase my personal potential?**

Yes. Remember it helps us recognise what's in our wiring! We've all been conditioned through our life experience and training our brain with mindfulness helps us become aware of that conditioning.

This story illustrates the point beautifully:

**As a young man was passing some elephants, he suddenly stopped, confused by the fact that these huge creatures were being held by only a small rope tied to their front leg. No chains, no cages. It was obvious that the elephants could, at any time, break away from their bonds but for some reason, they did not.**

**He saw a trainer nearby and asked why these animals just stood there and made no attempt to get away. "Well," the trainer said, "when they are very young and much smaller we use the same size rope to tie them and, at that age, it's enough to hold them. As they grow up, they are conditioned to believe they cannot break away. They believe the rope can still hold them, so they never try to break free."**

**The young man was amazed. These 4.5 tonne elephants could at any time break free from their bonds but because they were conditioned to believe they couldn't, they were stuck right where they were. Source unknown**

Like the elephants, how many of us go through life conditioned to believe we cannot break the chains that bind us. As the observer, we see that 'thoughts are not facts'. We are said to process around 70,000 thoughts a day, so no wonder the mind feels so busy. In the words of Mathew Johnson the 'the brain never shuts up!'.

All too often we are riding the primeval stress response, state of high alert, where the brain fixates on the immediate problem rather than thinking clearly. Cortisol produced by stress also reduces the levels of serotonin and dopamine in the body (probably the most important two neurotransmitters for maintaining a good mood). In short, stressing lowers the mood and makes you feel more vulnerable. So it's easy to conclude what we think about really does matter.

You can only believe in benefits of mindful meditation through direct experience, so don't just take my word for it – give it a try! This 7/11 breathing, through focus and attention, helps us find the center of calm within.

*Breathe in to the count of 7 and then out to the count of 11. Repeat about 6 times. It couldn't be easier! After a while just sitting and being with your breath you filter out any chattering going on inside your head and can become immersed in the simple act observation. Breathing in I am aware, breathing out I am calm.*

So whatever the unrest, be it financial, an argument or even a traffic jam you can choose to breathe a little more consciously and find the calm centre within. We experience our world through the mind, so it makes sense to spend a little time training it: It is hard to believe that the mindfulness meditation revolution has taken so long to arrive!

**In short, mindfulness meditation is an invitation to wake up and shape up our lives ...**

*'We are what we think; all that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make our world'. Buddha*