

Time to relax

HOW MINDFULNESS CAN DE-STRESS AND HELP CALM YOU DOWN

At first glance the worlds of work and mindfulness may not have much in common. However the practice of a few simple techniques could help you get through the day from hell and just may assist with that Holy Grail we like to call Work/Life balance?

Stephen Marks

FIRST THINGS FIRST. To the uninitiated the difference between meditation and mindfulness may not be clear. Meditation is an umbrella term that encompasses achieving concentration, consciousness and self-regulation of the mind. Mindfulness is the act of focussing on being present in the moment. Mindfulness can actually be a form of meditation. So they are actually two sides of the same coin and overlap and complement each other.

Sometimes, all you have to do is breathe. It is amazing how powerful the breath is but most people are unaware of its ability to lower our blood pressure, reduce heart rate and positively affect the nervous system. Slowing the breath and using the abdomen can have a quick and beneficial result.

It always surprises me how many people cannot use their abdomen to breathe when

I teach yoga at my office. I tell people to put their hand on their stomach and feel it fill like a balloon while counting to four – not forgetting of course to exhale to a count of four also. Next time you see someone angry or majorly-stressed just notice how they breathe fast, shallow breaths from their chest. Now look at how slowly and deeply someone calm and relaxed breathes.

How about some real quiet time? There is something almost contrary to the accelerating pace of today's world about silence. It is as if periods of solitude and silence are viewed as weird. But now science has once again told us what most of us intuitively knew already – that it is demonstrably good for us. Periods of silence can actually cause cell development in the area of the brain called the Hippocampus, which is responsible for our memory.

One way of staying silent is through meditation. There are many ways to try this fantastic practice – whether with apps and online guided meditations, or by the many courses now generally available. It can be a marvellous way to relax and is actually described by some of the leaders in this field as an act of kindness to yourself.

So, how about checking in with yourself for a change? With all the connectivity with everyone and everything else through our phones, devices, and screens what about checking who is on this end of this line? In the process you may just feel yourself relax and take a small step back from the intensity of some situations. Next





time you are on the receiving end of an unwarranted ear-bashing you might just see it as someone else's issue.

It is now official – sitting down all day is the new smoking. Recent reports highlights that the sedentary effects of sitting at your desk all day pose a serious risk to health. Movement is therefore even more important. But the body can be a place we mostly ignore and sometimes barely inhabit.

The simplicity of some basic yoga poses done regularly can ease those hips, lower back, tight hamstrings or telephone neck. Although you might think hard exercise is enough – the chances are it won't get rid of that ache that builds up in your upper back. Yoga is particularly good at freeing up tension and will also relax you too. It also teaches you to listen to your body too.

And so to the last suggestion – mindful listening. I know that sometimes in the workplace we can have so many balls in the air at any one time that it can feel overwhelming. When it comes to conversations though there is nothing worse than talking to a distracted and unengaged colleague.

So, try some mindful listening. See if you can be a bit more present by totally listening and focussing on the conversation rather than ticking-off your 'to do' list in your head. You will definitely get a bit more out of the exchange and the chances are so will your colleague. ●

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