

The Art of Mindful Leadership

Karen Davies



KAREN DAVIES

THE ART OF MINDFUL LEADERSHIP

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PREFACE AND BIOGRAPHY

We are in a fascinating period of enhanced awareness; personally, collectively and globally, all of which seems to have unfolded during the Naughties and has been picking up speed ever since. The relationship between science and religion is hotly debated and Governments are investing in studies that explore the role of well-being, happiness and *mindfulness* in our workplace. Hardly a discussion we would have expected twenty years ago. Yet it is now on the table!

Businesses continue to be put under increasing pressure to perform, to deliver bottom line results and generate a ROI to demanding Shareholders. Evidence of the 2007 financial crisis still ripples on the commercial lake of the developed world and it unceasingly expects companies to perform in highly pressurised environments. And so something more is needed from our personal development and leadership training to thrive in this new era of business. We need new solutions for producing more (and better) with less, as executives struggle under the weight of public and private scrutiny.

It is time we looked beyond the traditional models for the answers to our increasingly pressurised workplaces. The personal development market is saturated with leadership models and behavioural strategies that promise results and yet deliver only short-term fixes. We now need to explore alternatives, as the old models become outdated. Fresh, new leadership perspectives need considering, even if they challenge our conditioned views of the world. Perhaps, rather than looking outside and around us for the answers to our leadership conundrum, we have to look within.

Karen's experience of personal development is about connecting to an inner journey, as her Assertiveness Trilogy books with Bookboon have embodied. It is not until we are willing to go within; to access the very heart of us, that we can really comprehend the true nature of our character. When we glimpse at this inner truth, we can begin to truly unravel the mysteries of our personal performance, achievement and fulfilment. The more tools we access that encourage introspection, the greater the chance of success. This philosophy is gradually becoming the very cornerstone of thriving businesses, because leadership development is about how we raise our game *authentically*, enabling us to more successfully fulfil our potential both personally and professionally.

We are in a period where achieving goals transactionally is no longer enough if a business is to stand out amongst its competitors. Companies who are investing in their leaders' development and nourishment are the legacy creators. That means providing leaders with the opportunity to explore their values, attitudes and behaviours, whilst supporting them to achieve high performance and personal excellence. This approach ensures that their leaders are at the top of their game, delivering results for the business whilst also achieving the personal recognition they deserve.

Whether you are starting out as a new supervisor or an experienced executive, this book will benefit you at so many levels. If you need to enhance your effectiveness, increase your business impact, lead more dynamically or sell more successfully, then investing in this *Mindful Leadership* journey will prove a valuable asset.

Bringing you this fascinating topic is Karen Davies, who is passionate about her work in personal, leadership development and the art of creating authentic assertion and happiness; thanks to the very journey she herself has navigated.

Whilst Karen has been in the personal development and coaching fields for twenty-five years, it has been in the last fifteen that her work has had the greatest impact, thanks to her own self-discovery. After suffering from stress-related depression in 1997, Karen had a unique opportunity to explore herself profoundly and uncover the fundamental triggers that created her health situation. After a cathartic self-development process, she worked through her challenges and these have become the source of her own healing, her inspirational teachings and powerful coaching.

Through her Consultancy, Karen has inspired change in hundreds of executives, employees and aspiring leaders across the globe, achieving success for over fifteen years. Today Karen is role modelling her 'optimise your potential' teachings by shifting her focus from a business perspective to a more intimate, personal transformation. With this shift she hopes to inspire people to fulfil their purpose and potential, through her new vocation – **Conversations with a Butterfly**, where she places *happiness at the heart of her business*. In more recent years, Karen has emerged into the field of meditation and mindfulness, gaining qualifications for teaching adults and children. The role that *mindfulness* is increasingly offering our day-to-day lives, creates a real opportunity to enhance our personal well-being and our leadership.



Karen, as a self-confessed *happiness entrepreneur* and has a refreshing approach to development that is so far beyond the concept of the traditional ‘training course’. She uses her coaching philosophy to guide people on a path of self-discovery, building on the notion that teaching is a passive activity; learning is active. You will not just read this eBook, you will take a journey and, engaged by her coaching exercises, have the opportunity to alter the way you think, how you feel and behave in all walks of your life. Your transformation and personal fulfilment is just around the corner.

thebutterflyway@gmail.com

www.conversationswithabutterfly.com

1 INTRODUCTION – TWO OPPOSING WORLDS COLLIDE

“When you realise there is nothing lacking, the world belongs to you.”

Lao Tzu

We are indeed living in interesting times. With the news awash with suffering, poverty and financial crises, we could be forgiven for feeling that there is little hope and that our efforts to make the world a better place, are fruitless. Yet paradoxically, many of us, certainly in the West are more secure, healthy and knowledgeable than ever before.

This very modern world however glitters with a new, yet very ancient life-perspective that encourages us to be more compassionate, to collaborate, to reflect and be more generous. Honourable values indeed, yet often in our self-preservation existence, this can be hard to remind ourselves about. We are seeing Social Media brimming with stories about how Eastern philosophies are crossing into our Western cultures with yoga, alternative healing therapies, meditation and mindfulness – all focusing on helping us create profound well-being. In my work though, I see so much of this met with cynicism and fear of the unknown. Yet is there something in this philosophy that we are missing through our closed and skeptical minds?

We are being shown more and more scientific evidence that illustrates how Eastern modalities are influencing our Western well-being. Examples of children engaging in meditation in the classroom to reduce their anxiety and create calm; neurological studies that highlight the different parts of the brain that feeling gratitude can light up; the positive effects that cultivating happiness can have on our stress levels and the positive impact that *mindfulness* can have on our pain thresholds. And this is just scratching the surface of anecdotes that are striving to influence our perceptions of these Eastern modalities.

Even Positive Psychology is working its way into our vocabulary, as we start to hear about the influence that simple *happiness strategies* are having on corporate sales figures, performance statistics and employee well-being.

So is it time to explore these concepts further? Is there potential for our personal well-being and our leadership performance to accelerate when we open our minds to the possibilities that ancient cultures have been living and breathing for centuries? Perhaps we have exhausted the Western traditions and we are now ready to at least explore the alternatives.

It is at this point that my inspiration for this book is conceived. With the duality of my two passions; personal/leadership development and meditation/mindfulness, I am ready to fuse the paradoxical worlds of East versus West in order to offer a modern take on our leadership performance. Commerce is reaching breaking point with the external pressures being put upon it, and out-dated models are simply not engaging enough sustained change. Something new may be needed – a different way of thinking, a new way of looking at things.

1.1 THE CUT-THROAT WORLD OF COMMERCE

The commercial world generates a high demand for outstanding performance, driven by competition and customer needs. We have seen an increase in Talent and Performance Management models, Target and Performance matrices and Capability Review programmes, all intent on measuring achievement through a set of controllable mechanisms. Yet behind each of these lies one important component – *people*. However solid an organisation's procedures might be, *people* are key to a business's success and, without human dynamics, an organisation's potential can never be realised. With a highly attuned workforce, *the sky is the limit* in terms of performance, success and Stakeholder results.

In my experience, when organisations are willing to invest in their greatest resource – *their people*, real progress can be made and results achieved. Imagine if business philosophies centred on how to get the best out of people by paying attention to relationships and having quality interactions; by cultivating compassion and collaborative behaviours and being encouraged to be creative – what could those businesses achieve?

Add to this, the fast-pace of change that influences the corporate world, placing businesses and their employees under immense pressure to perform and adapt to the ever-changing environment. Change requires courage, open-mindedness, resilience and self-awareness; all things that tend to subside behind the fear and anxiety that change often evokes. When we invest in exploring new possibilities for enhancing our effectiveness, we begin to harness our potential, our performance and our capabilities. Today's commercial world requires leaders who are willing to look outside of the box and find innovative ways of getting the best from their people. Today's leaders are required to think differently, behave differently and find more humanistic ways of achieving results. So what is the answer?

1.2 BUSINESS AND SPIRITUALITY DICHOTOMY

For centuries there has been a huge division between science and religion, business and spirituality and idealists and realists. Each have their own perspectives of what will make for a perfect environment and a better world. Each leave their own legacy and yet are often competing or battling for supremacy against the other. Yet interestingly, the very differences that define them are what could make them succeed, when harmonised collectively.

In my experience, I see many businesses being rooted in a Newtonian philosophy of mechanistic processes that have defined, rational and predictable black and white outcomes. Driven by facts, objectives, tangible results and measurement, the business world cultivates a group of leaders and employees that have to sign up to this, potentially linear mentality. It generates a *Command and Control* environment, which risks producing insular cultures that breed blame, individuality and silo operations. Clearly Newton's transactional influence must have a degree of success, as commercial enterprises continue to survive – so there must be something about the mechanics that serves a useful purpose.

Add to this, our digital age of technology; developed countries have moved from a highly industrialised society to one that is now dominated by technology and, consequently a greater focus on time management and productivity. Somewhere amidst these concepts of mechanics and technology we have lost sight of what really matters in business – the people, the employee, the team. This has a huge impact on how we conduct our business and, the cultures that are emerging out of these restrictive perspectives may not be satisfying the customers' needs.

We know from experience that business consists of a delicate balance of employees, customers, suppliers, decisions, emotions and conditioning, that together, create an incredibly complex environment within which Newtonian influenced principles have to operate. The world exists on a base of intricate interactions, webs of human engagement, of decisions based on emotion and actions that are driven by insecurity and fear. And yet the Newtonian way of doing business rarely creates space for this melee. People in today's business are being deprived of connection, meaning and fulfilment for the sake of goals, targets and performance measures.

What then could be our saviour? Well, perhaps not a saviour, although certainly an alternative world-view that could begin to rebalance the scales of business – *spirituality*. Now before you recoil in disbelief that this very word can even sit within the context of a leadership development book, let me be totally clear about its place here. Management Consultant, James Ritscher defines spirituality as *'An experience of depth in life. It's living life with heart rather than superficially.'* There's no religious intention here, simply a view on life that has a deeper meaning than our current commercial fragmentation allows.

My inclusion of spirituality here, is an offer of alternative consideration. Could we find a greater connection in our business affairs with a new way of thinking and behaving? Could we consider developing a greater sense of awareness and insight and be willing to think about connection, community and creativity? Are we willing to overcome the illusions of separation and permanence that fuel our Command and Control business models? Could we take a step towards reengaging ourselves and our people to create a healthier culture that enables us to feel happier, more fulfilled and with greater meaning to our working days?

This is the potential that I believe this spiritual paradigm has to offer the workplace. The result of developing a more profound way of conducting our business is that we create a generation of leaders who are able to shape their organisations with a sense of creativity, rather than being restricted by the rigid Newtonian structures that risk promoting mistrust and a lack of worthiness.

1.3 A LEADERSHIP SOLUTION TO PERFORMANCE

We need strong, dynamic, engaging leaders, now more than ever. The days of the Management Club, common-place in the '80 and '90s are dwindling; we are demanding so much more than a culture of transactional dependency. We want a transformational, inclusive environment that allows us to reach our potential, whilst earning a crust. We have, for too long, endured the '9-5' *hamster wheel* that leaves customers cold and organisations with mediocre performance. Employees need leaders, customers need leaders and businesses need leaders. And all this pressure, takes the already overwhelmed figureheads into burn-out. We need to offer a solution that nourishes them so that their impact can have a positive, ripple effect.

When we look to our leaders to take us to the next level of organisational development, we need to find a new angle that reconnects them to the central component of a successful business; positive, happy, thriving people who can perform to the best of their ability. Evidence now demonstrates that positive employees utilise their brains in a more creative and focused way. Through this positivity, we change our brains from one of fear-based insecurity to an optimistic and purposeful thinking style that increases our creativity, productivity and performance. And this is just the leaders! Imagine the influence that this leadership solution could offer the workplace and the people who are so essential to its operation.

Therefore, we must put our energy into the development of our leaders, our agents of change who can influence such an important evolution for the commercial world. The solution? ***Mindful Leadership***. A spiritual angle on how to do business in a way that nourishes the worker, cultivates social connection and positivity and generates performance and productivity such that it delivers results to the shareholder and the customer. A solution where everyone wins.

The following pages aim to explore this new spiritual paradigm and examine how *Mindfulness* can be integrated into business in a seamless and non-threatening way and create a real solution to a pressure-cooker problem that the financial community can not sustain.

"A wandering mind is an unhappy mind."

Science – Science Journal

2 WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

"Lean into the discomfort."

Brené Brown

In order for this eBook to be of value, we must first get really clear on this spiritual dimension and explore what *Mindfulness* is as a spiritual practice. When we reach a common understanding, then we can explore how this can be a leadership solution for a modern business. So I invite you to think about and write down your understanding of the word MINDFULNESS for a moment.

My Understanding of Mindfulness

Notice the nature of your words; are they negative, sound slightly judgemental; or are they positive and indicative of value? However they are, it is fine. There is no judgement passed on the nature of your current understanding – it will certainly have been shaped and influenced by past experiences, other people's views or the media – all of which is great. Although, I would ask you to suspend those thoughts for now, as we begin to explore more about *Mindfulness* and set out a foundation, on which our leadership solution can sit.

2.1 A DEFINITION AS OUR STARTING POINT

The father of *Mindfulness* in the West, Jon Kabat-Zinn, describes it as:

Paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally.

It is nothing more mystical than that. A simple practice of paying attention, being in the moment and seeing things just as they are. It is not about religion or reducing stress, although this is a by-product; it is a way of focusing our minds in the *here and now* and training our brain to refocus.

Mindfulness is actually a natural state for our minds, although typically we tend to operate so much in our heads with our ego, that we miss the opportunities that *Mindfulness* can offer. Our default mental state to external stimulus, is one dominated by a primal ***Fight, Flight and Freeze*** reaction. It is an instinctive, chemical response carried out by the body to protect it from danger. There is nothing wrong with this state; in fact, it is essential to our survival. Although we have developed an unnatural conditioning to it that influences habitual passive or aggressive patterns of behaviour.

In today's world, the stresses and strains of life are constantly reinforcing these instinctive behaviours, keeping us operating in our heads.

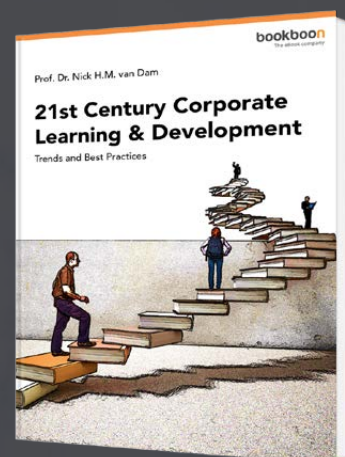
As an experiment, let us put this to the test. Look at the list of typical emotional responses over the page and identify how many of them you can relate to, say in the last week:

- * Anxiety about something happening in the short-term
- * Worry or dread about something that may happen in the longer-term
- * Fear of something that could happen at any point
- * Fear of something that will be happening imminently
- * Expectations of something happening tomorrow

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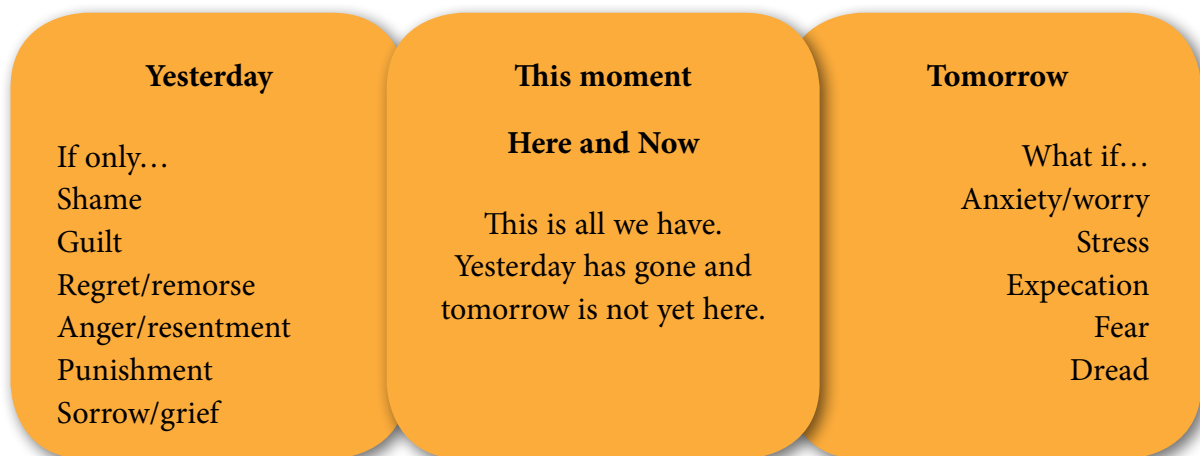
By the Chief Learning Officer of McKinsey

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- * Stress of worrying how something might turn out
- * Guilt or regret towards something that has already happened
- * Shame of or remorse about something from the past
- * “What if...”
- * “If only...”
- * Punishing ourselves or another for something that has already happened
- * Angry or resentful about what happened yesterday
- * Sorrow for something in the past

These phrases typify our daily reactions and illustrate how much we are conditioned away from a *MINDFUL* state. Instead it becomes a MIND FULL state. In essence, these statements show how much time we spend in our heads, focusing on yesterday or tomorrow and not putting our attention into the here and now.



When we look at where we put our energy, just notice how much we waste thinking about yesterday or tomorrow, when neither moments actually exist right now. They are purely a concept of time and not our reality. The amount of energy that goes into these emotions creates burn-out, depression, stress-related conditions, misery, unhealthy relationships and low self-esteem. The only moment that exists is this very moment; *here and now*. And with all our thought, energy and emotions going into past and future, we miss the very real existence of our present. It is only in the present that the truth of something occurs and we very often do not see it, hear it or feel it, as we are in our heads, pondering on what has been before or what is about to happen. And all this comes at a cost. A cost to our relationships, our health and our productivity.

Researchers at Harvard carried out a study, using an iPhone App. They randomly sampled responses from thousands of people, to questions about their happiness and what they were thinking about, at that particular moment in time. From this exercise, 50% of respondents admitted that their minds wandered away from the activity they were doing at the time. Also it concluded that when those wandering thoughts involved negative or neutral thoughts, they appeared to contribute to respondents' happiness.

Mindfulness is a practice that allows us to stay present and focus our energy on the very moment that exists, which is now.

I think it is really important, at this point, to add some more context to the *Mindfulness* picture, otherwise there is a danger, that we wander from this ancient treasure-chest without realising its full potential. *Mindfulness* is so much more than simply focusing on the present moment – here is some more definition:

- *Mindfulness* is about awareness – of you, your emotions, your thoughts, the environment and the people in it.
- *Mindfulness* is also about using that awareness to increase your listening and observation capacity.
- Branching out further, *Mindfulness* creates space and stillness from the frenzied activity in the brain, which then cultivates a greater appreciation and compassion for others.

2.2 EASTERN TRADITIONS TRAVEL WESTWARDS

The previous section presents a very modern and Western predicament that highlights why we are so in need of ancient practices that have stood the test of time. Eastern customs have been influenced by Meditation, Mindfulness and natural healing practices for centuries and they are never questioned or doubted in their efficacy. In our Western cultures, unless there is scientific evidence of truth, we perceive these practices as inadmissible. Yet this is so far from the truth. Eastern tradition has adopted these practices as part of their every-day lives for centuries and never think to question their place in society. Why do we therefore question their validity?

Meditation and Mindfulness have been practiced for thousands of years in many Eastern traditions and religions, most often linked to practices by Buddhists, Hindus and Taoists, to name just a few. Over the centuries, Western philosophers created a simple translation of Eastern meditation as a form of concentration and attention; and meditation was soon adopted as a practice of contemplation. So meditation has in fact been around, even in the West for so much longer than the media would have us believe.

It was not until the mid 20th Century that sectors of society started to explore meditation's role in stress reduction, relaxation and self-improvement. More particularly, meditation found its mainstream roots through the social revolution of the 1960/70s when there was a rebellion towards traditional belief systems, in pursuit of deeper spiritual insight.

Interestingly you might note, that I have been using the word meditation and not specifically *mindfulness*. It has only been within the last twenty years that there has been a distinct separation between the two modalities. The Western Medical and Psychological community are now beginning to acknowledge the benefits of a specific *Mindfulness* practice, as opposed to pure meditation, which goes way beyond the concept of sitting on a cushion, whispering a mantra and engaging in deep breathing. *Mindfulness* is now a well-established strategy that is navigating its way through psychology into businesses, schools and medicine. Whilst it has perhaps lost some of its Eastern mysticism, for Western society this may be necessary for our cynical minds, allowing us to more openly accept its presence in our lives.

And so we begin to see how East meets West. Meditation and *Mindfulness* are slowly becoming a more common practice outside of Yoga halls, gaining respect for their mainstream capability in improving our well-being, happiness and success.

2.3 THE SCIENCE BEHIND MINDFULNESS

One of the advantages of our technological world is our ability to examine, explore and study. This capability has seen us take so many strides forward in science, creating a greater understanding of how the world and the human psyche work. Science now provides a plethora of information and evidence that satisfies our ego minds and helps us consider alternative routes of self-improvement. Before we delve briefly into *Mindfulness* science, I would like to recap on what *Mindfulness* is;

It is an intentional focus (or attention) on the present moment, without any form of judgement.

Remember that our primal, default conditioning is for our minds to be racing with over 50,000 thoughts each day, most of which are concerns about yesterday or tomorrow. Imagine with repetition of the same pattern of negative thoughts what is happening to the brain. That organic muscle, which is responsible for a set of complex processes and for co-ordinating our every day movements, reactions and behaviours; imagine what the long-term influence of negative thinking could be for us.

As described by Dr. Daniel J. Siegel, studies now show that when we activate our *Mindfulness* practice, placing our attention intentionally on the here and now, it induces a certain type of brain state. He states that, “*With repetition, an intentionally created state can become an enduring trait of the individual as reflected in long-term changes in brain function and structure. This is a fundamental property of neuroplasticity – that is how the brain changes in response to an experience. Here, the experience is the focus of attention in a particular manner.*”

Essentially, we now know that our brain has the capacity to adapt and develop according to the activity we initiate, on a consistent basis. So we will have one type of brain state when we habitually worry, are fearful or become angry, and another when we practise the focused attention of *Mindfulness*. It is choice we are able to make.

Dr Daniel Siegel talks about the different parts of the brain and shows the link to a *Mindful* activity. He uses the hand as an analogy;

- **The forearm and wrist symbolise the spinal column and reptilian brain**, which is the oldest part of a human brain. This is responsible for the primal functions that we take for granted, such as breathing, sweating, homeostasis, heart beat and other innate roles. This is the main source of communication between our organs and the brain.
- **The thumb, if wrapped across our palm symbolises the limbic area** of the brain and holds the amygdala, which is known for emotional responses and our fight, flight and freeze reactions. Both the reptilian and limbic areas of the brain, are referred to, by Siegel, as the ‘downstairs’ brain and are the oldest and most primal regions.
- **The four fingers represent, what Siegel calls our ‘upstairs brain’**, which when folded over the thumb in our hand analogy, is the pre-frontal cortex and our master controller. It is where our executive functions operate, including decision making, problem solving, empathy, self-regulation and rational thinking.

Siegel goes on to describe how, when our limbic brain is in charge, we operate from an instinctive mode and when our emotions take control, we can literally ‘flip out’, which is symbolised by our four fingers flipping upright, exposing the thumb and palm. This flipping out may look like a tantrum, a cross word or primal and aggressive reaction to a trigger that leaves us regretful of our actions.

To regain control, we must learn to reactivate our pre-frontal cortex with *Mindfulness*, after which we take back the reigns of our primal brain and initiate clear thinking and a calmer, more thoughtful response. This allows us to adopt a more assertive interaction, more rational decisions and choices when the limbic brain is regulated, intentionally.

At a more scientific level, studies in the last decade have inversely linked *Mindfulness* with mind-wandering and the latter's negative impact on task performance. (Smallwood et al 2003, 2004, 2007). Studies have shown that through the introduction of *Mindfulness* to a group of participants, the degree of mind-wandering could be reduced such that their working memory capacity and reading comprehension was enhanced.

In other examples cited by Dr. Siegel, office workers who practised *Mindfulness* for twenty minutes a day, reported an average of 11% reduction in perceived stress. And after eight weeks of *Mindfulness* training, there was an improvement in the immune profiles of people with breast and prostate cancer, which corresponded with decreased depressive symptoms.

This is just a superficial look at the mounting evidence that is being collected by scientists on the impact of *Mindfulness* in classrooms, businesses and at the Doctor's surgery. More will undoubtedly come to the surface as the years roll on and the acceptance of this practice takes root.

In the meantime, there is sufficient scope for us to have our curiosity piqued at the very least. And so with that possibility in mind, let us move on.

2.4 GIVE MINDFULNESS A GO – EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE

Often, when we are introduced to something new, our reptilian brain kicks in and, partnered with our ego, they do as much as possible to debunk the theories. When we are conditioned to think and behave in a certain way, to change can be really challenging for us. With that principle in mind, I would like to give you a chance to make *Mindfulness* a practical experience and not just some intellectual mumbo jumbo that holds no credence for you.

Here are a number of ways to experience *Mindfulness* in all its glory, without you really having to do anything much at all.

1. Tuning into your environment

Where ever you are at this moment in time, whether at your desk or somewhere at home, just start to notice your surroundings. We are going to use our senses to experience everything that is going on in this moment – which, most of the time we either ignore or simply take for granted.

Using your sight, look around the room and take note of what you see; how the walls look, the furniture and what people close to you are doing. Simply watch. Notice if your mind starts to free-wheel into judgements about 'I've always hated that wallpaper', or, 'What is she doing?' Just observe and notice yourself perhaps seeing something for the very first time, or in a detail that you have never really acknowledged before.

Now use your hearing. Listen really intently at all of the sounds. The hum of the computer, the chatter of people going about their business or the radio on in the background. Notice the quality of that sound, the tone, the volume. What noises beyond your immediate environment can you hear? Are the birds singing, the wind howling or traffic commuting? May be it is as simple as a phone ringing in the background.

What about your taste? It might seem like a strange one to tune into, as we normally would only do this when eating. What does your coffee taste like? What does the air around you taste like? Can you taste the salt in the air at the beach, the fumes on the street or the smell of the kitchen cooking up lunch? Just notice, don't judge.

Finally, tune into your mind and feelings. What are you thinking about right now? What are you feeling about doing this exercise? Does it feel awkward and uncomfortable or are you enjoying the experience of noticing things in a new and different way? How do you feel about the sights, sounds and tastes that you are picking up? How calm or stressed do you feel? Again there is no suppressing of your feelings or judging them as right or wrong, I just want you to tune into those emotions.

We rarely take time to really acknowledge what is happening around or within us and to do so is one of the first steps in a Mindful practice. The world suddenly becomes more alive, more colourful, and has more texture. And this is because we are not investing all our energy in thinking about tonight's dinner, how that deadline is going or what approach you will take in that appraisal discussion. Note down your experiences here.

Describe your experiences

2. The simplicity of breathing

Mindfulness and meditation both have *the breath* at their roots. When we tune into this simple and innate physical functioning, we begin to remove ourselves from the 50,000 mental distractions that cloud our positive experience of life.

When we notice the in-breath and out-breath, we naturally find that our mind stills. Many people talk about meditation and *mindfulness* being about *emptying your mind*. This is not the authentic way to meditate because, in reality, the modern human condition is not intended to be still. These ancient practices are about acknowledging all that exists, in whatever state that might be. Focusing on the breath, just allows the intensity of the brain's activity to calm, purely as a biological reaction.

Why not give this a go? It takes some practise, because the brain is so used to whirling like a computer's core processor, although over time, you begin to notice the benefits. If you find yourself getting frustrated and wanting to give up, this is normal. Just acknowledge that this is the ego part of ourselves, looking to sabotage this healthy practice.

Find a comfortable place to sit or lie and close your eyes if you wish. Then simply take your attention to your breath. Do not do anything specific with your breath, no deep breathing is required for this exercise. Just simply notice your chest rising and falling. See how the breath flows without us having to instruct it. This just shows us the amazing power of the human body – we are not controlling this in any way!

If you find your mind wandering back to its pattern of manic thoughts, then return to the breath. I find it really helpful to notice how the breath feels as it comes in through my nose and out through my mouth. Recognising what is called *the breath sensation* allows you to really connect with the breath and not your thoughts. You might experience this sensation at the tip of your nose, the roof of your mouth or the back of your throat. It might feel warm or cold. There is no one right answer, just explore how it is for you and then place your attention here.

Another way you can begin to build your *breath awareness muscle* is to count your breaths. On an in-breath, count 1, then breathe out. Next in-breath count 2 and so on until you reach 10. Then count to 10 on your out-breath. Each time you realise that you have lost count and your thoughts have consumed you again – simply return to your counting.

I find the simplicity of the breath so empowering and it instantly calms me if I am in pain, fearful or overwhelmed. The instant feeling that focusing on the breath gives me is better than taking any medication. Why not practise this for a couple of moments every day and note down what you experience – positive or negative?

Describe your experiences

3. Through the eyes of a child

For those of you who are parents or who have children in your life, you will understand the sheer joy of watching a young child develop their sense of awareness of the world around them. Babies particularly take in so much of their environment, absorbing every inch of what they see, hear and feel. They are experiencing that moment of the world for the very first time and their connection to it is non-judgemental, joyful and, very much in the here and now.

As adults, parents, leaders, this innocent view of the world is another way we can reconnect to this moment and divert our attention away from the frenzied mental activity that clouds our minds through the day. If we imagined ourselves experiencing the world as if we were a young child and see the colours, textures and movement, we too could have that same sense of wonderment.

Take time to see events, people and your environment as if through the eyes of a child. Recapture the awe of the world, as though it is the first time of seeing it this way. When we look at others like this too, we really start to see them for the people they are, beneath our judgements, perceptions and conditioning.

Describe your experiences

4. Mindful eating and walking

There is such a big mis-conception, that being *mindful* is just constrained to sitting on a meditation cushion and chanting for twenty minutes a day. *Mindfulness* is far beyond this as a practice and there is no better a way of experiencing it than through paying more attention to your daily activities.

For example, imagine how much better your food would taste, if you took time to really taste it rather than gulping it down before your next meeting or whilst watching television at night. We miss so much of the flavours of life, quite literally, when we rush or try to do too many things at once.

Experiment with this over the next week. When you sit down for your lunch or evening meal, take time to really taste your food. Experience the meal in a completely different way by paying attention to the textures, tastes, sweet and sour, salt and sweet or spicy. Slow down your eating. Remember how we were often taught as children to chew our food properly before swallowing? When did we forget this childhood rule? Really savour your meals and you will find a whole host of dietary, nutritional and health benefits that come with this simple and mindful practice.

Similarly, when out walking, either to work, to the sandwich shop or with the family at the weekend, focus on the walk. Notice one foot moving in front of the other, the sensation of each foot being on the ground. And, as I have mentioned in the previous paragraphs, you can then take your attention to the environment around you; the noise, the colours, smells and the feelings that this brings up for you.

Describe your experiences

As we begin to turn our attention to this moment and practise the simplicity of a *mindful* practice, we find ourselves rewarded with a very new and richer exposure to life. If we can then take that appreciation into our family lives, into work, into our relationships, we begin to experience a more harmonious and happy way of living and working. I hope that these exercises, have given you a more practical flavour of what it means to be *mindful* and acknowledge how it feels to you. It will help you move through the next two chapters, having had a direct experience, rather than just an intellectual one.

2.5 HOW MINDFULNESS BENEFITS HUMANITY

Having a self-regulation strategy that enables us to move from an insane level of brain activity and its associated emotional reaction has to be good for our overall well being. Surely a loss of anxiety, worry, guilt, resentment and shame, has to have some biological impact at a cellular level, if not simply by reducing our head and stomach aches?



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Here is a list of just some of the benefits that practising *Mindfulness* can bring us.

- Creates peace of mind, as we quieten our thoughts and calm down the pace of our thinking. In truth, *Mindfulness* is not about forcing the mind to be empty, it is about allowing the thoughts to arise and acknowledging them. Although, when we concentrate on our breath or on the reality in front of us, this naturally quietens the mind.
- Allows us to rationalise anxieties, fears and concerns which are fuelled by an over-active mind, which has a tendency to dramatise, generalise and negate situations and events.
- Helps us to self-regulate our thoughts, feelings and behaviours, allowing us to interact in a more assertive and rational manner.
- Generates a greater appreciation of our day-to-day experiences because we are 'in the moment' rather than in our heads.
- It keeps our heart-rate more balanced, which can often be stimulated by the stress of living in the past and future and the effects that worrying has on our biology.
- Promotes health and well-being because of a reduction in anxiety and the increase in more positive interactions.
- Helps us to cultivate a calmer disposition, which promotes healthier relationships.
- Improves our self-worth, because we are quietening our self-limiting beliefs and allowing a more *present* dimension into our worlds.
- With practise, *Mindfulness* creates a greater capacity for attention, concentration and focus. This, in a work setting, allows for improved performance and greater clarity.
- *Mindfulness* allows us to reduce the number of errors that stress and rushing induce, so we can gain greater efficiency with a *mindful* approach.
- When we reduce the amount of energy we expend in worrying, being fearful and playing out 'what if' scenarios, we can experience more harmony in our work and home relationships. A greater personal balance will be felt by letting go of the future and past and allowing ourselves to fully enjoy 'this moment'.
- The people around us will experience a far calmer and more peaceful person when we become *mindful*, as we can be with those people fully and not lost in our thoughts.
- We can make superior decisions through a *Mindfulness* practice, because the clarity we get from being in the moment rather than clouded by anxiety or anger, gives us space to think more clearly and therefore be more discerning.
- We will become healthier in mind, body and spirit, because our choices, interactions and attitudes will all be based on a more 'present' philosophy rather than fear and anxiety.
- When using the breath to develop our awareness, science is showing how this can help us reduce the impact that painful conditions and illnesses can have on us.
- We gain huge relief from knowing that 'this moment' is all that is real and it allows us to stop the insane striving for something that is outside of us, allowing us to be very appreciative of what we have, right here, right now.

- We can develop a greater tolerance to people and events when we disengage with the mindlessness of our busy brain that over-thinks.
- Our appreciation of life increases when we begin to tune into smells, sights, sounds and textures. We begin to really experience things rather than them pass us by. This then opens us up to feel more grateful for those elements.
- *Mindfulness* also helps us to listen more actively to people around us, which in turn increases their sense of value. So their self-esteem is enhanced by our attention.
- We experience greater confidence and less doubt, because our discerning mind will be so much clearer when self-limiting thoughts cloud our judgement.
- *Mindfulness* generates a great awareness of ourselves and also people we live and work with. So where we might be quick to make judgements, Mindfulness encourages us to see things as they are and to accept this rather than judge or change it.
- Our general life satisfaction increases because we are not wasting energy on trying to force solutions or feel depressed because of a potentially negative outlook.

These are not just wild claims. Science, for one, is showing clear evidence in studies on *Mindfulness* benefits and also my experience support the points I have made above. So this gives us a really good basis on which to consider the possibilities of a mindful practice for professional purposes.

**"Failings to understand the workings of one's own
mind is bound to lead to unhappiness."**

Marcus Aurellius

3 CORPORATE MINDFULNESS

"You must learn to be still in the midst of activity and vibrantly alive in repose."

Indira Gandhi

Having read the previous two chapters, I am interested to gauge how the art of *Mindfulness* sits with you, in a business context. Using the prompt below, give some thought to, and note down how you believe *Mindfulness may* contribute to professional and leadership success and high performance.

Mindfulness in a Business Context

However you perceive the impact and usefulness of *Mindfulness* in the business context, there is no doubting that something innovative is required to help stimulate our leadership effectiveness and corporate success. As we become entrenched in metrics, measurement and plenty of other left brain activities, something more dynamically simple is required – could *Mindfulness* be an option?

Having introduced (and still practise *Mindfulness*) as a life philosophy, I am convinced that it can fit inside organisations, along with other traditional business activities. I have spent over twenty-five years in and around organisations, experiencing them from both within, as an employee and from outside, as a development consultant; and I see plenty of opportunity for a more humanistic and spiritual approach that could enable businesses to *thrive* more than *survive*. I would like to explore this a bit further, just in case you are still unsure.

3.1 BUSINESS AND MINDFULNESS – PARTNERS IN CRIME

Having experienced *Mindfulness* for yourself and read the intellectual basis behind this practice, I guess we are ready to explore how this fits into a work context. As a point of reference, it might be worth casting your eyes back to section 2.5 How Mindfulness Benefits Humanity. There are plenty of links in there that have significant relevance to business.

In her book, 'Finding the Space to Lead', Janice Marturano says, "*You can learn to lead with excellence by cultivating your innate capability to focus on what is important, to see more clearly what is presenting itself, to foster greater creativity and to embody compassion. When you are able to do so, then you are much more likely to make the conscious choices that we need our leaders to make.*"

With these, not so mystical capabilities for us to tune into, we have a very doable and more innovative way to lead. Although before I get into the specifics, let us explore the philosophical bedrock to a *Mindfulness* approach and its link to our leadership development.

3.1.1 MINDFULNESS AS A PHILOSOPHY

For me, *Mindfulness* is more than just being in the moment. Sure this is the practice that enhances our work and life experiences, although *Mindfulness* is just as much about the roots that give it its blossom.

The roots of *Mindfulness* run deep, giving it a robust set of values, attitudes and behaviours that serve us well throughout life and in the workplace. Here are the roots that I believe anchor this ancient practice that can sit so well in our modern boardroom:

- * **Operating from your heart not your head**

So many of our business decisions come from our logical, left-brain that focuses on strategy, rationality and reason. And this has its place in our commercial world, without doubt. Yet, too many decisions and actions miss the opportunity of coming from a more wholesome place – the heart, where our intuition speaks so loudly to us. Have you ever toyed with an idea that feels right and then talked yourself out of it, because someone in the organisation might reject it? Perhaps the risk of following that idea just feels too great when you think about the objectives that you are measured against. This is the conflict we often struggle with between our head and heart and, all too often, the head wins.

Learning to trust in our heart and gut, has a very real place in our leadership armoury as they offer robust and creative solutions to our business challenges. When we by-pass the head, we can begin to make more wholesome choices that nurture people, first and foremost, and which then grace the business with profit.

* **Value people first**

My experience of business is that we are driven by the need to achieve goals, satisfy the shareholders, deliver value to the customer and make money. What if we turned this philosophy around, and started to work on the basis of satisfying our employees – by understanding their intrinsic needs, motivators and personalities? What if we put our human resource, right in the centre of our business model, such as UK Department Store John Lewis, Google or Virgin. Imagine if we changed our business priorities to be about people and developing a more humanistic practice that focuses on *mindful* listening, attention, appreciation, trust and humility. A happy and valued workforce will be committed, will contribute more freely and raise their game when those core principles are practised throughout an organisation's culture. Shawn Achor, in his book *The Happiness Advantage* says that when we adopt a positive and *mindful* leadership style, research shows that sales revenue triples, because of a happy workforce.

* **Connectedness not separation**

The notion that everything in the universe is separate, fragmented and uniquely individual is a concept that is widely accepted as being *inaccurate* by modern-day scientists. The latest philosophy is that we are connected and that the intricate web of universal networks keeps us together in more of a community than we realise. So whilst many managers may invest their energy in protecting their own patch, the reality of *collaborating*, *sharing* and *supporting* is far more relevant in today's modern business world. When we practise togetherness rather than separation, then we can experience a far more rewarding business transaction that is more wholesome for all the key players.

* **Emotional Intelligence**

Mindfulness sits firmly on the principle that whatever we are experiencing in this moment is to be embraced and not fought, battled with or overcome. When we learn to tune into what we are feeling, we become so much more sensitive to the emotional responses of the people around us. In a business context, this is such an important contribution to a positive leadership strategy. Being able to acknowledge how people feel and indeed, how we feel, gives us the emotional acuity to really understand others, and from this point, build strong, supportive relationships. People matter, emotions matter!

* **Gratitude and Optimism**

When we develop a *mindfulness* approach to life, we begin to give attention to the beauty of what is around us and we start to see things as they are, rather than as we think they are. As we wake up to this reality, we begin to develop a greater sense of gratitude for the simple things in life rather than the materialistic possessions that we collect, believing that they give our lives meaning.

Mindfulness offers an innate gift of gratitude and optimism and when we adopt this philosophy for our leadership world, then we begin to adopt a whole new level of positivity about situations that have arisen. That enables us to see the good in all things and the ‘cloud that has the silver lining’. Whilst the reality is that bad things still happen, adopting a more *mindful* attitude to the world, means that we let go of our expectations and so can tackle the ‘bad things’ with a great optimism and gratitude.

* **Connecting to Meaning**

We are so busy rushing from one appointment to another and keeping all our plates spinning, that we forget to focus on what life is truly all about. We get lost in the ego traits that make us warriors, competitors, aggressors, ruthless decision-makers and consequently, exhausted and stressed. If only we could take more time to think about meaning. Let me be clear, this is not about encouraging profound discussions over religion or the meaning of life per se, although it does enable us to have the space to consider the meaning behind the choices that we make and the actions we take.

Have you ever considered why you do what you do? Have you ever stopped to think about the purpose of some of those activities? Here are a couple of great questions to ask yourself – **What useful purpose does this serve me? What meaning is there in my investment in this activity?**

When we take *meaning* into a business context, then we have ourselves an interesting conversation around *what we do* and *why we do it*. At the root of a business, I believe, is *service* and *adding value* – which could well be very contentious language, because we have become conditioned to see that business is about winning, being better than the competition and making money. How did we become so far removed from the real essence of why a company is created in the first place?

When we look at this important *Mindfulness* philosophy with our leadership hats on, then we begin to see a different way of working emerge. When we examine what a meaningful organisation would look like and its central purpose to the community, we start to focus our activities in more valuable way. Purpose, mission and objectives become so much more than corporate jargon; they become a very clear and meaningful route to adding value and offering service, which demand meaningful performance and generate meaningful results. This in turn generates meaningful profit.

When we look deep into *Mindfulness* and its key philosophies, we begin to see a subtle shift into the way we run our businesses and how to lead our people. Coming from this different value-set gives us the opportunity for partnering hearts and minds with a business infrastructure to create a healthier experience and output.

3.1.2 MINDFUL PHILOSOPHY AND YOU

Using these core principles that give *Mindfulness* roots, I would like to take a moment to reflect. An opportunity to examine these six philosophies and see how they connect you to, in your corporate role. Use the box below to consider what they mean to you and think about what the results tell you about your leadership style. Make some notes in a journal somewhere and take plenty of time.

Mindfulness Philosophy and You

1. Examine how you feel about the role of intuition in business. If you made more decisions based on your heart rather than the rational, logical head, in what way could you benefit?
2. How would you describe the relationship you have with your team and peer group? How many of your decisions are based on the need for results versus the need to put people first? What actions do you specifically take that are people-led?
3. In relation to your departmental colleagues, what do you do that is collaborative? How 'together' is your team or is it, 'each one for themselves'? What impact do you notice when teams avoid sharing and working together?
4. How do you feel when the word 'emotion' or the question, 'how do you feel' is asked? How in tune are you with other people and what they are experiencing/feeling on a day to day basis?
5. How optimistic would you say you are, generally? Are you a cup half full or empty type of person? How often do you notice yourself being grateful for the things around you? How much do you appreciate the people who live and work around you?
6. How many daily activities do you engage in that have clear and meaningful purpose? How many tasks are simply habitual transactions, completed out of obligation, guilt or compliance? How many of those activities actually bring you happiness and satisfaction?

3.2 MINDFULNESS VERSUS RUTHLESSNESS

Many high profile business owners have professed ruthlessness as an approach to success. The TV programme 'Dragons' Den', where entrepreneurs pitch for a financial investment from a panel of wealthy business people, is one such example. When the programme aired in UK some thirteen series ago, even the way the panel were projected as Dragons; fierce, fiery and taking no nonsense, sets up a skewed stereotype of leadership. Whilst today, the programme offers a more varied style of Dragon, the media projection is still conditioned within us; ruthless wins the day.

Lord Alan Sugar is another example. Profiled through his UK TV series, 'The Apprentice', Lord Sugar is known for his value of 'bold and brash'. His philosophy is shaped around him attending the school of hard knocks and his mentoring is based on being good at sales, negotiating and winning. Whilst these are valid business principles, leaving them alone in our leadership tool kit could be dangerous.

We may argue that these individuals promote ruthlessness, given their titles, position and wealth. And that may be true, although is this a style that works across the board and that we want to continue promoting as a healthy brand of leadership?

How about if we pitched Virgin's Richard Branson against some of the more scary Dragons or Lord Sugar? What differences would we experience in their styles and how it feels to work with these individuals? I suspect it would be a world apart.

In my consultancy days, I worked for eight years with an engineering firm. Now if the stereotypes are correct, by rights this organisation should have a very masculine feel to it, be run by measured, matrix-driven managers who are influenced by a results-driven culture. Whilst this was true, to some degree, the General Manager's style was far beyond this mechanistic approach to business. He was a warm, engaging, inclusive leader, who took time to develop his own skills, talk to his team, encourage training and reward people with a simple 'thank you' and respect. He was not what I would call *ruthless* in any way. He was passionate about his organisation and its reputation. Moreover, he cared about the people in his team. The feel of the organisation was one of *family*, where I felt part of the team and valued for my contribution, even as a relative outsider.

And so the bigger question to ask here is not whether ruthless works as an approach, it is more about:

How do people feel working for a ruthless leader?

If your answer to this question is...

- | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|
| - Fearful/worried/anxious | - Compliant | - Small | - Unappreciated |
| - Guilty | - Passive | - Under-valued | - Insecure |
| - Under-utilised | - Isolated | - Unmotivated | - Misunderstood |
| - Lost | - Unfulfilled | - Limited | - Exhausted |

...then ruthlessness doesn't work. In today's fast paced, change oriented, innovative world, a new approach is needed if we collectively want to have a positive experience. **Cue *Mindfulness*.**

"Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens."

Carl Jung

4 THE ART OF MINDFUL LEADERSHIP

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

Victor Frankl

We have laid a very positive foundation on which a *Mindfulness* approach to leadership has great credence in the modern business world. An opportunity for us as leaders of our precious human resource is to explore a new way of doing business in a cut-throat environment that no longer dishonours our integrity and helps us create a greater life balance. Now we need to be totally clear about what this art looks and sounds like in the real world.

Building on the core elements of our *Mindfulness* Philosophy, cited in the last chapter, we can now more confidently navigate our way to understanding what actions, words and mindsets we need to adopt if we are going to make this transition.

4.1 MINDFUL APPLICATION FOR LEADERS

Here are a collection of *Mindfulness* approaches that will help enhance leadership effectiveness.

4.1.1 A MINDFUL APPROACH – STARTS WITH YOU

True, effective leadership must start within. It is only with a strong sense of self-awareness, understanding of our beliefs, philosophy and values and a huge dose of self-respect that we can really begin to master helping others excel.

With self-awareness comes the ability to self-regulate and be authentic. How can we possibly look to lead others, when we are unable to develop our own self-discipline? Without insight into self, we simply become managers, deluded by an external motivation, focused on getting a job done, regardless of the emotional intelligence behind it and driven by internal noise that distracts from the right place to be. An effective leader is able to fully appreciate others through their own self-value, and with this come *respect* and *relationship building*, which are core strengths in today’s business.

Leadership today is about authenticity – adopting a style that is transparent, trustworthy and respected. Without authenticity, we become transactional generals who hide behind walls of defence. This means that we need to find our authentic leadership voice, without all the noise of our fears, anxieties and past influences that drive our behaviour. When we begin to unravel the source of all this noise, we finally begin to create the space to behave more authentically, more compassionately and effectively. When we lead from an authentic space rather than a noisy space, then we become clearer, more focused and more sensitive to ourselves and the people around us. Self-awareness and self-compassion lead to a far stronger leader who is willing to act from the heart and has the strength of character to make decisions from a value-based and ethical position.

When we recognise the opportunity to learn about ourselves more intrinsically, we are then well on the path to a more Mindful leadership style. Let me be clear what this looks like and give you some pointers about how to uncover the inner workings of our personalities and natures. You can read more about this in my Assertive Trilogy written for Bookboon.

There is a really interesting exercise, that highlights what happens for us, when we remain blind or unaware to our intrinsic nature – called The Nine Dots exercise.

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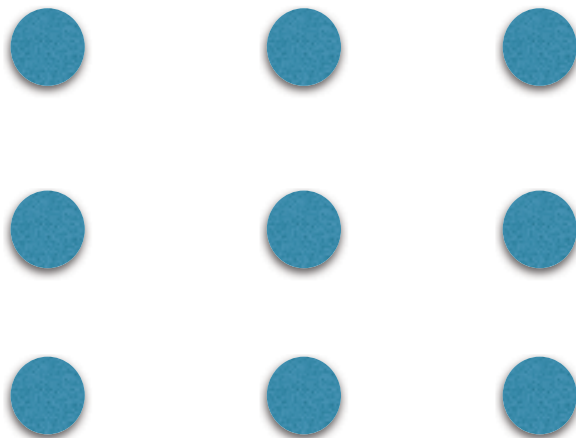
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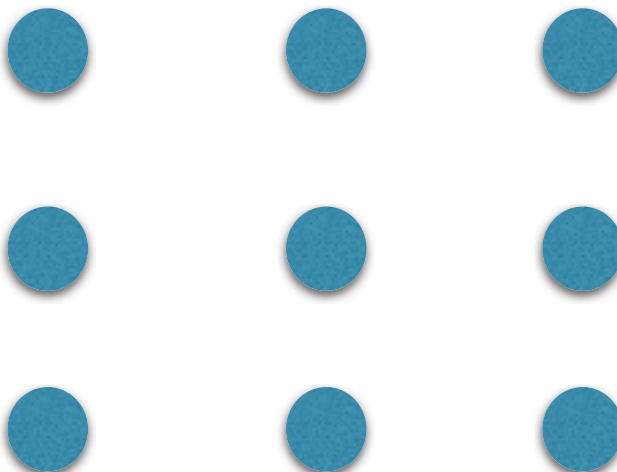
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The Nine Dots Exercise

Over the next couple of minutes and using the first set of dots below, take a pencil and **without** taking it off the paper, pass through each of these nine dots with **four** straight and continuous lines. Be mindful whilst carrying out these instructions and think about how you feel during the exercise.

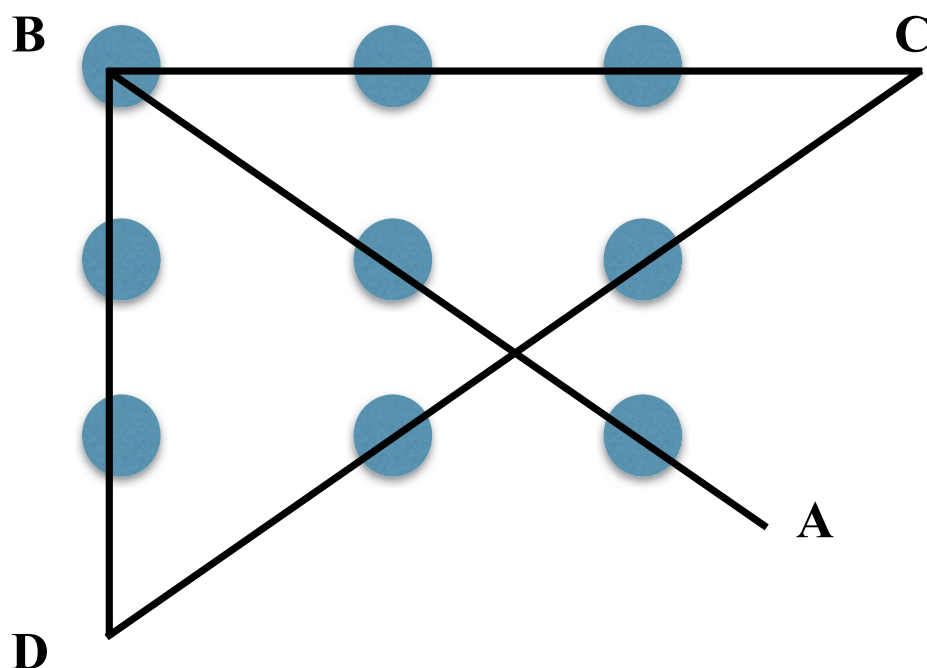


How did you get on? Are you struggling? Ok, so using the set of dots below, follow the same exercise, except this time, use the old, yet perhaps helpful cliché, **think outside of the box** and see if this helps you solve the puzzle. If you continue to struggle turn over, where the solution is presented to you.



The Nine Dots – Solution

Starting at point A, draw a line to B, then over to C, down to D and finally, up to B.



What does this exercise show us? It helps us to see that in order to achieve the goal, we have to look outside of the box and move beyond the imaginary boundaries that our mind naturally places around the collection of dots. If we restrict our perspective to this imaginary context, then our ability to succeed is severely limited. And yet when we move ‘outside of the box’ we have created, then our opportunities increase dramatically. We had to remove the obstacles of our thinking in order to achieve the puzzle instructions.

This exercise has many applications for us in Mindful leadership:

- When we have a limited view or understanding of ourselves or a situation, then our potential for success and happiness is restricted.
- Our inner dialogue of limitation can often frustrate us and limit our capability.
- We set ourselves ‘rules’ to follow that may not exist in reality and those rules hinder our success and hold back our creative ability.
- The rules we apply to an example like this, are the same rules that we apply to ourselves. Those boundaries are often beliefs and internal dialogue that influences how we carry out an interaction or problem solving activity.
- To triumph, we need to challenge our assumptions and see the world from a different angle.
- When we see things *as they truly* are rather than *how we think they are*, then we experience something very different.

Mindfulness – Starts with You

- 1. Explore the jigsaw that is YOU.** At our core, sits a highly influential colony of factors that shape how we think, feel and behave. The complex interaction of conditioning, beliefs, values, needs and drivers, all contribute to our personal identity and make-up, shaping how we interact with the world. When this colony is harnessed by our awareness, we can begin to respond to life more proactively and wisely. Untamed, they can wreak havoc with our leadership, leaving behind a trail of destruction and unhappy team members. Take time to investigate what your core beliefs, values and needs are and how they shape your decisions and actions and you can begin to alter the way you interact.
- 2. Uncover the virtues you value most.** When you understand the values you unconsciously hold in the highest esteem, such as honesty, integrity, love, freedom then you can learn about why you react to some situations the way you do. This unravelling can be enlightening when partnered with Mindfulness, as you begin to change with the way you experience situations where those virtues are strained and in conflict.
- 3. Learn what beliefs are key to your self-identity.** Beliefs are the thoughts we think repeatedly, which are predominantly formed by the age of seven. Our childhood environment has a significant influence on our experiences and the thoughts and beliefs we develop. Recognising the positive and negative conditioning that has become our adult bedrock is key to unlocking our self-esteem. Listen closely to your inner dialogue and the self-criticism that you shower upon yourself, especially in conflicting or difficult situations. Then you can use your rational mind to reset your irrational beliefs by realising how little evidence there is supporting them. You can then begin to develop more positive thoughts that, when repeated consistently, can start to form new, supportive beliefs.
- 4. Identify your signature strengths.** When we play to our strengths, actively, we are able to deliver a higher performance. Left to their own devices, our strengths may interplay with our weakness to dilute our impact. Examine the seven core strengths that are key to your profile and acknowledge their role in your leadership. Play to them daily.

These four cornerstones will give us amazing insights into how we tick, giving us a robust foundation for leading mindfully. When we understand more about ourselves, it opens up a whole new arena for understanding others more empathically and a whole new source of information to help us lead more successfully. Invest in this self-study and your leadership effectiveness will blossom.

4.1.2 A MINDFUL APPROACH TO RELATIONSHIPS

Modern management models talk often about the importance of IQ (Intelligence Quotient), yet in today's new holistic, people-driven paradigm, it is EQ (Emotional Quotient) that really matters. How clever or intellectual we are, is not commensurate with our ability to build strong relationships. If only it were. All the qualifications in the world do not make us a good 'people person' or help us navigate difficult interactions with heart and soul.

When we consider our EQ levels, then we can begin to see the links between our emotional connection with someone and our *mindful* leadership. When we have developed a knowingness about ourselves, we naturally generate an empathy for others and their life situations. Like a ripple on a pond, our emotional self-awareness sets us in a strong position to building compassionate and soulful relationships that make a real difference in a commercial world, despite what some managers might have you believe. My belief is that relationships can be the trickiest interactions to navigate in a leadership context and our ability to be sensitive to other's needs and reactions, is paramount for an all-round high performing team.

We know, with traditional and well-embedded models such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, that each one of us has our own unique make up, intrinsic needs and behavioural influences. A wise leader, will tune into these at any given moment, acknowledge their team member's individuality and adapt to those needs, effortlessly. With a *mindful* approach, a leader's ability to see beyond the facade of the masks we wear, gives them the key to unlocking our potential, helping us to perform at our best.

All too often an 'unmindful' manager will focus on the end result and the external factors influencing success, rather than the intricacies presented to them by their most precious resource. Whereas a *Mindful* leader, who has the presence of mind to understand themselves and therefore the insight to understand human behaviour, is able to really explore the people and situations facing them and have the space to know how to respond in the most appropriate way. They become a coach not an instructor; a supporter not a critic and an observer not a judge. *Mindful* leaders use a high degree of emotional intelligence to really tune into what's going on, rather than allow judgement and perception to be their guides. They will act from compassion and not fear.

In the event of a tricky situation or altercation, a *Mindful* leader will ask questions like:

- What is the story going on underneath this interaction?
- How are you really feeling?
- How am I feeling (if I have a part to play in it)?
- What is going on for you right now?
- What triggered this?
- What do we need to do to resolve this?
- What is motivating these behaviours?
- When I move beyond my judgement of this situation, what could be happening?
- What is going through your mind right now?
- What is the best outcome we could achieve right now?
- What do you need to feel more confident in or comfortable about at this moment?

When the *Mindful* leader takes this reflective approach to relationships, it builds and strengthens their relationships, from the inside-out. Judgement and perception are what make most relationships toxic and lead to misunderstanding. When we step back and stay in the moment, we are much more capable of responding to what is really happening, rather than what we think is happening, shaped by our own insecurities, fears and internal noise.

4.1.3 A MINDFUL APPROACH TO STRESS

This is a much written about topic and books on it could cover the world over. Is this just a symptom of our modern professional world or is there a deep-rooted cause that we need to uncover? Perhaps this is too complex a matter for our deliberations here, although the fact of the matter is that stress, whether we like it or not, is a common feature of our lives. Finding a way of identifying when it strikes, what triggers it and, more importantly, what is happening to create it in the first place, are vital strategies for the successful leader, if we are not to let stress define us.

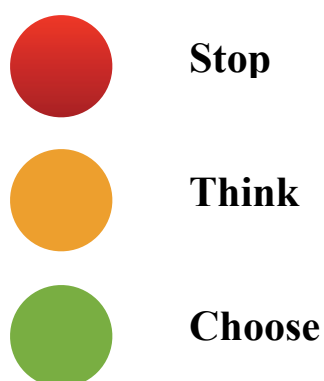
My position on stress, having experienced it first hand, is that it is a symptom of our conditioning. How we have been conditioned to see the world is key to our unique experience of stress. The same tricky situation faced by two people, from different backgrounds and upbringings, is likely to produce two very different stress responses. Our conditioning dictates whether we are able to sail through that scenario or whether we become anxious, self-deprecating and insecure. I believe that stress feeds off our self-imposed doubts and when we allow those doubts to become patterns and habitual mind-sets, then we are easy targets for the cultivation of stress.

When we apply a dose of *Mindfulness* to this equation, we have the potential for handling stress in a very different way. When we use the space that *Mindfulness* creates to observe, non-judgementally, what is going on for us, in any given moment, then we can begin to catch the effects of stress much earlier. So potentially we have ourselves a great mechanism for interrupting the stress patterns that we have generated over the years. Imagine how much energy, heart-ache and dis-ease we can save if we can avoid looking back at the after-effects of a stressful situation and catch it before it takes hold.

When we build our *Mindfulness* muscle, it gives us a unique insight into what we are thinking, feeling and experiencing at that moment. If we start to notice a racing heart, sweaty palms, brain fog, shortness of breath – then we know that stress is building. Allowing ourselves to ‘take five’ and just breathe into those physical symptoms and accept their presence, gives us a chance to regain control.

Stress is primal and is rarely something we consciously choose to engage with. So when we can recognise our physical symptoms and practise a moment of *Mindfulness*, we initiate a healthier response that puts us firmly back in charge. This awareness and control not only become more healthy for us (as we see stress manifesting itself in dis-ease over time), it also has the potential for changing the mood we unconsciously present to others. This has a huge impact on our leadership effectiveness – because just like animals – people pick up subtle cues about how we are feeling, irrespective of the behaviour we are conveying.

One of the strategies I like using most, as I build *my Mindful* muscle, is the Traffic Light System, that I talk a lot about in my Assertive Trilogy eBooks. Here is a snapshot of that model, which will help us develop a *mindful* strategy for stress.



STOP – When we learn to tune into our body’s physical stress symptoms, we begin to notice an increase in heart-rate, shallow breathing, erratic thinking or other features that are unique to our own handling of stress. It is at this point that we need to STOP and notice what is going on around us. Simply acknowledging these physical reactions is all we need to do, to start with.

THINK – Give attention to what specifically has triggered our stress. Look for a situation, what someone may have said to us or an event that has created this stress reaction. Once we have found that trigger, we are one step closer to interrupting the habitual pattern that leads us down the anxiety path. Then we need to explore, more specifically, what happened and why we have reacted in this way. What is it that deep-down has been provoked. Is it a feeling of:

- insecurity or fear
- vulnerability
- loss of control
- letting someone down
- needing to please someone
- anger or defensiveness
- helplessness or being overwhelmed
- lack of inclusion?

When we identify the source of our stress reaction, then our awareness helps us to become more *mindful* of future trigger events and enables us to develop coping mechanisms. This process may need some time to explore and unravel, although interrupting our stress patterns is crucial if we are to become successful and effective leaders and motivate our teams authentically.

CHOOSE – After following the first two steps, we have brought ourselves into a state of awareness. This enables us to make some active decisions from the pre-frontal cortex part of our brain, responsible for rational thought and choice. So, either we choose to disengage from the emotion that the event has created for us and rationalise its effect on us, talk to someone about how we are feeling or allow ourselves to relax into this moment, let it pass and then return to a healthier path. We are now back in control rather than the primal, reptilian brain being in charge. Done regularly, we can build a more resilient muscle that helps us deal with our own personal stress reactions.

4.1.4 A MINDFUL APPROACH TO CONFLICT

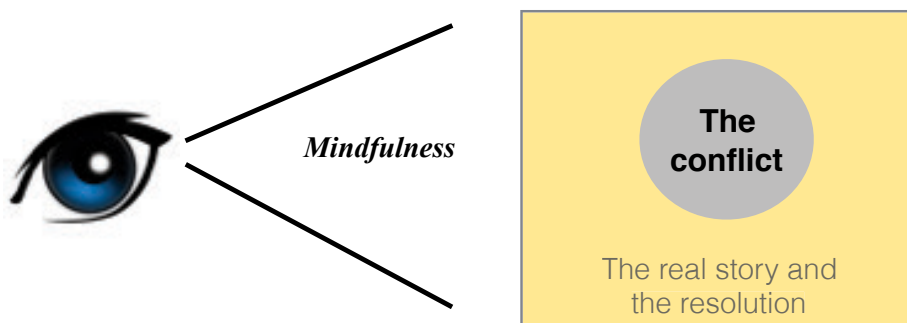
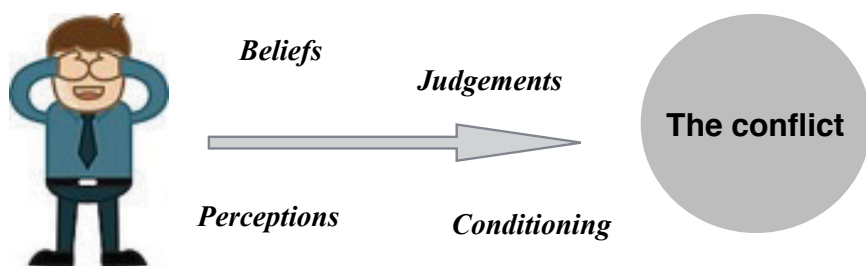
The principle of *Mindfulness* is about ‘seeing things just the way they are’ and not having them coloured by our prejudice, beliefs and dislikes. Although, when we are in the heart of a conflict, our *mindfulness* becomes incredibly challenged.

Conflict, often pushes some very deep buttons of fear or insecurity – especially if we are people-pleasers. Any hope of *being in the moment* and clear thinking is a distant hope. We find ourselves caught up in a swarm of emotion, overwhelmed by the noise of our internal dialogue and consumed by a knee-jerk behaviour that is released like a caged tiger before we have even had time to think things through. Then, in the aftermath of the conflict, we recoil in turmoil, regret or guilt as we try to mop up the wreckage. If this is a reality for you, then your leadership could really benefit from a *Mindfulness* practice.

So what’s the golden panacea to handling conflict? In truth, there isn’t one. *Mindfulness* is not a skill, it is a practice. It is like a muscle that needs to be strengthened, which means that a regular practice applied to our daily tasks will ensure that when we do encounter conflict, our *Mindful* muscle can be exercised more easily. Feel your emotions, make space for them and take a breath. This then creates the space for seeing the conflict as it is, rather than how your judgements perceive them.

When we learn to become more aware of our reactions to situations, we put ourselves in a much stronger position to interrupt our habitual reactions. When looking specifically at conflict, with a strong *mindful* muscle, we begin to notice how we feel as the situation intensifies and our *mindful* practice then allows us to recognise what is going on for us and the other person.

Conflict then becomes less about two people disagreeing and more about understanding someone’s passion for something, understanding their story and meeting them in this space to resolve the issue. Mindfulness helps us see more than just the conflict – it helps us see the story that led up to the conflict, its context and, therefore, the solution. It helps us see the full picture of the problem and not just the way we are feeling about it, which creates more space for empathy, compassion, understanding and resolution.



4.1.5 MINDFULNESS AND RESILIENCE, COMPASSION AND CLARITY

Leadership calls for a certain type of inner strength to handle the complexity of business, customer and staff issues that weave their way through our days. It takes a robust character to stand back, not get dragged into the detail and resist putting out the many fires that burn. This leadership character needs to be dominated by an unerring resilience, compassion and clarity that sets us apart from the day to day managers who skilfully get things done themselves with the efficiency of a military operation.

Leaders need something more. They need the ability to be strong, yet flexible; warm and yet assertive and visionary without being dictatorial. These subtleties are just some of the aspects that I believe sets leadership apart from management and, developing a *mindful* practice allows leaders to find that fine balance and deliver the ultimate in competitive advantage. Here is a simple summary that shares the essence of these core characteristics

Resilience	An inner strength that enables us to handle diversity and remain grounded despite external pressures. <i>Mindfulness</i> helps to develop this through breathing, stilling the mind and seeing things as they are.
Compassion	Developing an authentic concern for others and how they are feeling is cultivated through mindfulness and awareness of self. Leaders who operate from the heart with sensitivity, create humanistic styles that others respect.
Clarity	Having a clear vision, uncoloured by emotion or prejudice ensures a leader can motivate teams to great performance. Mindful stillness helps us detach from emotional webs and grounds us in the <i>here and now</i> , presenting clear thinking strategies that give teams direction and comfort.

So the simple practice of noticing what we are thinking, feeling and doing at any given moment and tuning into the space between our thoughts, offers us such a rich array of capabilities that help navigate life and business. Imagine the impact that this simple practice, this mindful muscle could offer our leadership. It could change the whole way we guide our teams, coach our people and inspire our companies. And it is all in a breath, an awareness and a lightness of touch.

4.2 MAKING THE TRANSITION

I feel like this last section needs to offer some more confidence in how to develop this *Mindful* muscle, as it seems like such a fantastic leadership tool that providing a defined and helpful strategy for developing it, seems essential.

Now, having read this book so far, you might be left feeling that much of what I have described, you already do in some way. If that is the case, I am delighted for you. What I would love for you now is to embed those techniques into a practice that you can label as *mindful*, as it will give it a stronger sense of worthiness.

If staying grounded, taking a breath, navigating conflict or self-awareness still seem a bit alien to you, then, that is ok too. There are no judgements about what you are, or are not doing. Although to give you a point from which you can develop your own *mindful* practice, means that you can adapt your practice according to your own needs and current reality.

Stepping into change can bring up a huge amount of uncertainty, fear and trepidation, never mind the cynicism that we may experience. For now, all I ask is for you to notice how you are feeling, right now and just accept it. That in itself is *mindfulness*.

Here is a short guide to making the transition to a more conscious and *mindful* leadership style:

1. Start out by setting three points (I will call them *anchor points*, for ease) during the day when you physically stop what you are doing and just become aware, for perhaps only a minute, of what is around you. Look at your immediate environment – notice the colours, the textures and the items around you. Then listen to the sounds. Just listen, don't start creating a narrative around it. If you notice that you start to do this, then simply return back to the sound and hear it for what it is.
2. After doing this for a week or so, then use those three, daily anchor points to notice what is going on inside of you. How are you feeling? What physical sensations are you experiencing? What is your heart or your breath sounding like? Even become aware of what thoughts and feelings come up for you whilst you are doing this internal exercise. Please remember that these first two points are very private – no-one will notice you doing it, so there is no fear of looking stupid.



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3. After experiencing both the inner and outer focus, you can begin to take your attention towards your breath. During those three daily anchor points, begin now to take the time to simply watch your breathing. You don't need to do anything specific, just observe it. Notice how fast or slow it is. Be aware of the sensation that is created in your nose when you breathe in. Where about in your chest do you breathe? Is it your upper lungs or right down in your tummy? Again just simply observe, do not judge what you find. You can then begin to actively breathe. Of course our breathing is one of those innate physical processes that the body needs no help with – although because it is so primal, it is highly influenced by the stimulus of external events around and within you. So with full attention, place your hand on your belly and breathe into that space. Notice how much deeper a breathe that is than your normal chest breathing. Take a deep, slow breath in through your nose and then out through your mouth. Catch your thoughts at this point and observe their voice. Then return to your breath. Do this for ten breaths during each of your three daily anchor points.

4. Whilst taking the above three steps, you may start to observe how much noise is in your head. It is one of those phenomena that we rarely notice on a moment to moment basis, although our thoughts are incredibly busy and noisy. Given that so many of them tend to be negative in nature, it is no wonder that we struggle to be upbeat and dynamic sometimes. And so the next step in our *mindful* transition, is to start to watch those thoughts and consciously let them go. This is quite a liberating exercise – to realise the nature of thought being a simple electromagnetic impulse that is there one minute and gone the next. It is how we choose to deal with those thoughts that really begins to define our actions and characters. So during our *mindful* practice, we use those three anchor points to simply notice our thoughts and then imagine them floating away in balloons, up into the sky. Let them go. Once you have let them go, it allows you the space to then return to your breathing and really feel the stillness that this practice brings. Each time a thought arises, let it go and return to your breath. This part of the practice, is perhaps the most important. Because the breath is at the heart of *mindfulness*, letting go of our ego and the thoughts that dominate it, is vital to creating space and stillness. So allow yourself plenty of time and scope for this element. It is, I must add very natural for thoughts to 'get in the way'. Be aware of the emotion that this brings up for you and let that go too. We need not hold onto any of these thoughts or emotions, just simply sit with all that is.

5. After these steps, you can begin to increase the anchor points in your day. Sometimes setting an alarm every hour (or whatever time feels right and appropriate to your circumstances.) I often set a timer on my phone to vibrate or ring once to remind me to tune into the *mindful* space. The danger of not doing this is, until our muscle has really strengthened, our busy-ness will consume all of our energy and quite simply – we will forget – and I talk from experience. You might wish to set a mindful timer before a meeting, just so you can focus on your breathing, notice how you are feeling about the meeting and ground yourself in the here and now. This can be a great exercise for getting you out of your emotional head and into a healthier and more productive space. Otherwise we tend to take a whole heap of baggage into a meeting that affects both our energy, our mood and our performance.
6. By now, you will hopefully be gaining some real confidence with your *mindful* practice and find yourself automatically becoming aware of more things, such as on your journey to and from work, when you interact with your family and friends and just generally as you go about your daily chores. If you are not, that is ok too. Just like any form of exercise, the more you practise, the stronger and more confident you become. Keep up your anchor points and perhaps increase their number so you can develop that *mindful* muscle more quickly.
7. Along side this practice, the self-awareness work becomes an important parallel. Invest time by booking it in your schedule, if necessary, to start thinking about yourself and those pointers I gave you earlier on in this chapter. This is such a vital component to the robustness of our *mindfulness* and how we can integrate it into our leadership toolbox.

Follow this guide and you will find that your awareness will increase, your ability to relax and remain calm will increase and your intuition to how you feel will intensify. All critical elements for our own sense of well-being as well as our leadership performance.

**"The present moment is filled with joy and happiness.
If you are attentive, you will see it."**

Thich Nhat Hanh

5 CLOSING THOUGHTS

"Stand before the people you fear and speak your mind – even if your voice shakes."

Maggie Kuhn

So there we have it. A new paradigm for leadership success. Not the traditional leadership model that we might expect, although none-the-less a valid one, I hope you will see, having navigated through these pages. A new way of leading for a new way of working in this demanding modern world. Old concepts are being challenged daily and innovative alternatives are being sought by those in command, looking for the competitive edge.

What I love most about the idea of *Mindful* leadership, is that this is a wholesome approach that nourishes the leader, their teams, customers and the business. *Mindfulness* is not just a business skill, its a way of life and one that can bring harmony in so many walks of life.

The wisdom of the East is finally reaching our shores and their practices have served them well over the centuries and now, we too can begin to absorb their sagacity.

As we leave this topic to consider ways to enhance our leadership style, here's a list that may prove useful as a summary of what *mindfulness* can bring our role.

A Mindful leader...

- Creates visions with people, because they intuitively know it is important to see the bigger picture.
- Empowers their teams and colleagues because they have a strong emotional acuity.
- Is awake to the reality that people have a choice about their own destiny and that command/control will never release their potential.
- Collaborates and encourages inclusion, because there is greater power in two than one.
- Is inclusive because deep down they know that people bring their own innate strengths to the party.
- Creates a holistic culture that incorporates everyone and works for the common good and not personal gain.
- Creates a co-operative community that honours the group because of their awareness of group dynamics and the here and now.
- Shapes a culture that supports personal growth.
- Diffuses conflict assertively because they see the whole story.
- Is positive and handles change sensitively because they understand the fears locked in the past and the future.

- Acts with emotional integrity because they are in tune with the emotional waves that influence our behaviour.
- Puts the needs of people before the deadline because they understand how to harness people's energy and passion.
- Makes decisions based on intuition and heart – not the head.
- Create space for reflection rather than rushing to the end post.
- Give people the space to be themselves rather than the stereotypical team player that cultures often generate.
- Is comfortable in their own skin and focuses on today without worrying about the future.
- Creates a calm environment within which to work, because they are calm on the inside.
- Responds to situations rather than reacts and therefore finds more effective resolutions to problems.
- Will let people know how they feel in a calm and assertive manner because they are clear what they are experiencing and have taken time to tune into this.
- Will lead a business to greater success because of their ability to step back, keep calm and honour how other people are feeling.
- Are great change agents because of their sensitivities to other people's stories and fears.
- Make great coaches because they create the space for people to be real.
- Are human 'beings' not human 'doings'.

The time is ripe for a new leadership approach. Businesses are ready for something new and are opening up to the possibilities of this new paradigm. Imagine a corporate world where the health and well-being of its employees is at the centre of their operations. This concept is evolving and as you consider your leadership development, building in *mindfulness*, you have the space to experiment and reap its rewards.

To conclude this fascinating invitation to look differently at leadership, I encourage you to reflect on what you have taken from this meander through *Mindfulness* and identify what this now means to you and the possibilities that it offers your world – professionally and personally.

Personal Commitments

Mindfulness transcends all walks of life and offers a peace and tranquility that, in our turbulent world feels like a necessary enrichment for our lives. When we commit to the practice, we commit to ourselves, our families, our businesses and we contribute to a healthier world in which we can all live and work together.

Namaste

**"We tend to see more through our thoughts and opinions than through our eyes."
Jon Kabat Zinn**

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