



MMI MINDFUL PRESENTS

BE MORE RESILIENT DURING THE PANDEMIC (or anytime) WITH MINDFULNESS

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BOUNCE

Resilience is one's capacity to recover quickly from difficulties or setbacks

Executive Summary

It's not only an essential skill for dealing with a minor setback – such as hearing bad news or not getting a call back after an interview - it's essential for recovery from a major setback – such as losing a job, getting a divorce, or recovering from a pandemic.

According to Psychology Today, resilience is *“that ineffable quality that allows some people to be knocked down by life and come back stronger than ever. Rather than letting failure overcome them and drain their resolve, they find a way to rise from the ashes.”*

One way to establish more resilience is through the adoption and practice of mindfulness. Research shows that mindfulness helps to create more resiliency as well as to maintain a positive stance, both of which are essential during these unprecedented challenging times.

In this white paper, you'll find evidence-based research and cited articles that demonstrate how the adoption of mindfulness in the workplace helps people increase equilibrium, reduce stress, and enhance wellbeing, as well as develop skills essential to mental health and productivity.

In a recent article on Entrepreneur.com, Malachi Thompson states that mindfulness is *“finally starting to receive recognition for its effectiveness in creating a peak performance mindset. Widely used by elite athletes, it is increasingly being adopted by C-suite managers as a contemplative skill to increase resilience, reduce stress, and regain clarity and focus.”*

The time is now for a new approach so you and your organization can flourish.



“Mindfulness is the practice of observing the body’s physical and mental state. Recognizing your state and making intentional responses to situations is an invaluable skill. A leadership team that uses this skill is better able to assess the competitive landscape, make necessary business change, and set effective goals.”

Nathan Klarer, CEO of Bridgecrest Medical

In this unprecedented global crisis, business experts have repeatedly said that new skills and new mindsets are needed to adapt to the “new normal”. And this requires resilience – an ability to manage stress while navigating the current reality with hopefulness, compassion, and clear thinking.

“Research into resilient employees found that what makes them stand out is the ability to manage stress by actively engaging in self-care and nurturing themselves after a stressful incident... Recent studies have supported the role of mindfulness training on psychological resilience.” Training Journal, Oct. 2019.

Today, stress levels are as high as they’ve ever been, and mindfulness

has been identified as one of the best antidotes for stress.

Mindfulness has no negative side effects

Mindfulness in the workplace has increased in popularity over the years. It is a secular practice comprised of several techniques aimed at helping the practitioner develop essential skills including increased mental focus, increased emotional intelligence, ability to remain calm under pressure, increased empathy, and increased creativity.



BACKGROUND

Employee burnout was a serious issue even before the pandemic, one which costs companies money and lost productivity. It also can have a devastating effect on an employee's health. But today, with the looming uncertainties due to the COVID 19, along with the confinement, the monetary losses, and additional responsibilities, the chances of burning out or experiencing chronic stress are off the charts.

Organizations are facing an employee burnout crisis.

A 2018 Gallup study of nearly 7,500 full-time employees found that “23% of employees reported feeling burned out at work very often or always... the hard organizational cost of burnout is substantial: Burned-out employees are 63% more likely to take a sick day and 2.6 times as likely to be actively seeking a different job.”

Some employees such as those in healthcare, retail, and grocery stores, are having to work longer and harder just to keep up. Some are facing higher levels of stress than normal, including those who are afraid of getting sick or losing their job.

And we can only imagine that burnout has increased with the varying circumstances and their impacts on workers including telecommuting, increased responsibilities, homeschooling while working, unemployment of spouse or partner, sickness, or being a caregiver for someone who is sick.

Finally, employees can become bored or disengaged while working from home, as they miss human contact, or their supervisor is not as supportive as they could be, or they are not getting enough challenging work.

Burned-out employees are 63% more likely to take a sick day



BEING IN THE FLOW

Mindfulness can help people get back into the zone and experience flow

There is a middle ground between being stressed out and not feeling stressed at all. It's called being in the flow. In his book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi says that being in the flow happens when you are being challenged enough to stay engaged, but not so much that you burn out.

While the reality is more complex, being in the flow is a path. It's when you are engaged in an activity where you just want to keep on going and going and going. Any slight deviation – such as too many uncertainties or too many distractions can quickly move the needle from being in the flow to feeling anxious and overwhelmed. Also, a lack of challenge may drive people to boredom and disengagement.

COVID-19 has the potential to throw off the balance in either direction.

The good news is that the practice of mindfulness, along with the right amount of challenge, can help people get back into the zone and experience flow.



THE HABIT OF DISTRACTION

Another challenge accentuated by the pandemic is an increase in an already increasing world of information overload.

It has become increasingly difficult to concentrate on the tasks at hand. Distractions not only include those from the external environment such as the kids at home or the chatter on social media, but those internal ones, from our own mind, regurgitating the news, attempting to find solutions to problems that do not exist, inventing and trying out all kinds of scenarios, and imagined conversations with people who are not in the room.

This causes a distracted and wandering mind. Where does your concentration go? You might be reminiscing about the way life used to be? Or processing the new information on the novel virus, or wishing you had made other choices? Information overload causes stress and stress reduces one's ability to focus.

If your mind is wandering more often, you are not alone. A 2010 study from Dan Gilbert and Matthew A. Killingsworth, shows that people's minds wander 47% of the time, almost half the time. Mind-wandering means that instead of paying attention to the task at hand, your mind starts an inner narrative which can take different forms, such as thinking about your next task or meeting, daydreaming about your vacation, having an interior dialogue with people who are not in the room, making plans for dinner, and so on...

Besides the staggering amount of time the mind wanders off task, it is important to know that a wandering mind has a penchant for negativity. Dan Gilbert's conclusion is that "a human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind. The ability to think about what is not happening is a cognitive achievement that comes at an emotional cost."

"A wandering mind is an unhappy mind."



The Antidote to a Wandering Mind

A recent article from Harvard Business Review on how to increase focus during the pandemic, lists practical ways to deal with distraction. It suggests that one's greatest challenge is one's ability to control their thoughts. This is where mindfulness comes in.

"Practicing attention management is about maintaining control of where your attention goes, and recognizing when it's being stolen, either by external distractions or internal errant thoughts, rumination, or anxiety..."

Focused attention practice, one of the several techniques used in mindfulness, has been scientifically studied. It has been shown to increase the ability to observe and control one's thoughts. Just as exercising helps one to stay in good physical shape, numerous case studies and research have shown that a formal

daily mindfulness practice trains the brain, builds focus, and increases awareness.

Mindfulness isn't a training to stop the mind from wandering. Instead, it's a practice that trains one's ability to maintain their focus longer, and increases one's self-awareness so they are able to realize when their mind has started to wander, so they can bring it back to attention.

When a mind wanders regularly, it becomes habituated to being distracted. But with mindfulness, you become more self-aware. You begin to notice that it has wandered, so you easily bring it back to the task at hand. By doing this, again and again, you create a new attentional habit, breaking the habit of distraction.

Mindfulness helps.

THE MINDFULNESS SOLUTION

Mindfulness develops the parts of the brain needed for increased focus, emotional control, and empathy

Mindfulness is loosely translated as *paying attention to what you are doing while you are doing it, in the present moment, with a non-judgmental attitude.*

Mindfulness is also called *pleine conscience* in French, *atención plena* in Spanish, and *consapevolezza* in Italian which roughly translate into *full attention* or *full consciousness.*

Mindfulness includes simple behavioral modifications as well as contemplative practices which will help to develop the parts of the brain needed for increased focus, emotional control, and empathy. It helps maintain a restful awareness and a resilient mind and body. In the workplace, mindfulness practices cultivate increased engagement, self-awareness, better communication skills, and more creative problem-solving.





RESILIENCE FOR LEADERS

Today more than ever, leaders need resilience.

Due to the pandemic, the world and the economy are suddenly upside down. Millions of jobs, along with people's life savings, are being lost. Those fortunate enough to still have a job are left with more responsibilities and a lot of uncertainties.

A recent article from Harvard Business Review suggests there is a growing clamor is for more responsible and caring C-suites. *"Perhaps, just perhaps, our future will be shaped by a kind of reverse Darwinism: survival of the kindest and most benevolent, rather than the most ferocious and self-obsessed."*

For most companies, the full effect of the pandemic is still to be experienced. Leadership will have to go through the heartbreaking decisions of laying off some of their staff, knowing how hard it likely will be for them to find a new position during the worst recession of our lifetime.

Leaders will need to rise above the fray and offer hope and genuine concern to those they are letting go. It is by authentically showing appreciation and

empathy that leaders have the power to transform one of the worst moments in someone's life into one they might remember as a rich human interaction, giving them dignity, hope, and courage.

Leaders know that about 90% of communication is non-verbal. Moods and emotions are contagious, so a leader must be able to be emotionally aware, manage their mood, and maintain an upbeat, positive attitude.

Leaders need to be resilient not only for themselves but also for others, including the team members who have kept their jobs and are now filling the gaps and are scrambling to complete the additional tasks left by the people that had to be let go.

A naïve leader will start working longer hours and set the pace, creating a lot of busyness, little productivity, and an environment where people are likely to burnout. A more experienced leader will show empathy and strive to create an environment where the team members can do their best while respecting the fine balance between life and work.



THE BENEFITS ARE UNDENIABLE

Thanks to the advances in neuroscience and the rise of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), numerous studies over the last 15 years have shown the physical changes in the traits of the brain that are the results of the regular practice of mindfulness.

World-renowned Harvard University researcher, Sara Lazar was part of a team who, in 2006, studied the brains of meditators. They found that those who practiced meditation have younger brains, and, specific areas of the brain related to focus, memory, and stress resiliency, were thicker and healthier.

Another study from Sara Lazar published in 2010, showed that people with no previous meditation experience, who practiced 40 minutes a day for 8 weeks, had noticeable changes in gray matter in critical areas of the brain involved in memory, emotion regulation, perspective taking and interoception.

Another neuroscientist, Richard Davidson, Ph.D., who has done extensive research on the effect of meditation shares some of his findings with Dan Goleman (author of *Emotional Intelligence*) in their recent co-authored

book, *Altered Traits*. They looked at the hundreds of studies done in the last two decades and provide an unbiased view of what the research tells us.

“Heavy multitaskers, the Stanford group discovered, are more easily distracted in general. And when multitaskers do try to focus on that one thing they have to get done, their brains activate many more areas than just those relevant to the task at hand— a neural indicator of distraction. Just three 10-minute sessions of breath counting were enough to appreciably increase their attention skills on a battery of tests. And the biggest gains were among the heavy multitaskers, who did more poorly on those tests initially.”

On the benefits of mindfulness practice: *“Beginners also find improvements in attention very early on, including less mind-wandering after just eight minutes of mindfulness practice— a short-lived benefit, to be sure. But even as little as two weeks of practice is sufficient to produce less mind-wandering and better focus and working memory...Still, all such effects are unlikely to persist without sustained practice. Even so, these benefits strike us as surprisingly strong for beginners. Take-home: practicing meditation can pay off quickly in some ways, even if you have just started.”*



A QUICK RECAP

*The benefits of
mindfulness include:*

Increased ability to focus

Staying calm under stress

Better memory and efficiency

Increased self-awareness or
interoception

Enhanced innovation and
creativity

THE BENEFITS



Increased ability to focus.

Being able to stay on task and ward off unwanted distractions – both external and internal – is important for two reasons. First, as mentioned previously, a wandering mind is an unhappy mind. The more able you are to focus on a task, the happier you will be. Focus is the essence of being in the flow.

Second, for knowledge workers, the cost of switching tasks is enormous. When you are working on a problem such as trouble-shooting a spreadsheet or creating a new presentation, switching off for just two minutes will cost you 20 to 30 minutes – the time it takes to get your mind focused back on task. For workers in the farming, manufacturing, construction, or health industries, an increase in focus goes hand and hand with safety. A moment of distraction can cost someone's life.

Staying calm under stress.

Maintaining a level head in the short term when encountering unexpected problems, and in the long term by keeping a positive attitude and being able to see abundance where others see

scarcity, are a result of the practices of mindfulness which help to develop the part of your brain which helps you see clearly and mitigates your reaction to stressful events.

Mindfulness practice mitigates your fight/flight response. Under normal circumstances, any setback such as a new deadline or a change in plans may trigger a fight/flight response. At any sign of threat, real or imagined, the amygdala (the activator of the fight-flight response) takes over and directs your brain and body to pump adrenaline and cortisol into your blood, shutting down access to the executive functioning of the brain (the prefrontal cortex). Evolutionarily, this is a good reaction when you are chased by a tiger, but not so helpful when responding to your boss telling you there is a change of plan. While in fight/flight mode, your IQ lowers down by a few points, and this combined with adrenaline in your blood, can result in reactionary behavior that can affect your reputation.

When you are able to manage stress, you also have the ability to reframe the way you look at things. If you keep replaying a scenario or conversation in your head, or welcome worrying thoughts, you can



over-activate the fight or flight response. This can create more stress and drive you to distraction.

With focused attention training and other mindfulness techniques, you become aware of the thoughts that do not serve you and replace them with those that are more helpful, keeping your mood and your spirit up.

Better memory and efficiency.

Adopting a regular mindfulness practice can strengthen and create more density in the hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for short term memory and learning new things.

Have you ever been introduced to someone and forgotten their name almost instantly? Have you walked into a room and not remembered what you came in for? How about opening your mouth but forgetting what you were going to say? This lapse in memory is a result of the brain being overstimulated by the stress hormone cortisol, which attacks the hippocampus. This part of the brain is like a cache with memory, but with age, it loses its density. Luckily, with the practices of mindfulness, you can reverse the trend, as mindfulness adds to the density.

This is essential in the current climate where you may need to learn new skills while maintaining a clear mind.

Between the chat rooms, emails, social media, and being “on” 24/7 thanks to our phones, there is no respite from the bombardment of information. Focused-attention mindfulness meditation can help you learn to keep distractions at bay and focus on one thing at a time.

One of the most alarming problems for knowledge workers is multitasking. Multitasking is not possible for tasks that require focused thinking – as switching rapidly from one task to the other takes a toll on short-term memory. It has been observed that those who habitually multitask have more difficulties remembering people’s names, a new phone number, or an address. Mindfulness practices not only increase your brain’s capacity to remember, but they also cultivate monotasking and the ability to stay on task.

Increased self-awareness,

is an awareness of one’s emotions, one’s feelings, and moods as well as being aware of one’s thoughts and one’s body. With self-awareness, you know how you are feeling and how it affects your



behavior. You know where your thoughts are and how they affect your mood. Finally, you get a better sense of where your body is and the sensations coming from your body such as being too hot or too cold, being hungry or thirsty, and many other sensations that can affect our moods and how we behave.

Self-awareness is the sine qua non of mindfulness. Without self-awareness, there is no possibility of controlling one's emotions or behaviors. One part of the brain that is affected by the body scan meditation is the insula. The insula is the part of the brain that contains a map of the visceral body and helps us recognize changes in body chemistry. The insula helps us with one's awareness of body sensations such as hunger or being cold and can help us become aware of our emotions such as fear or anger.

Self-Awareness is also knowing one's strengths and one's limitations.

It helps make the right decisions. It plays a significant role in taking on the right challenges to keep oneself growing while not getting overwhelmed. Focused

attention practices such as the mindful body scan increase self-awareness.

Enhanced innovation and creativity.

By adopting mindfulness practices, you can change the way you approach challenges and problems, by increasing your ability to creatively think. When you are stressed out, your creativity goes on hold. Luckily, research suggests that people who practice mindfulness have more cognitive flexibility and are better at innovation and solving problems requiring insight.

Rob Walker, the author of a Newsweek article, *The Art of Noticing: How Entrepreneurs Can Crack the Innovation Code*, writes “*The connection between mindfulness and the determined focus that success requires has never been more popular. And research has shown how curiosity benefits decision-making and creativity.*”

Mindfulness facilitates what creativity experts refer to as the incubation and insight stages within the creative process. With mindfulness, the action-oriented left brain gets a reprieve as the intuitive and imaginative right brain is accessed more readily. This is helpful when you need to come up with creative and inspiring solutions.



WHERE IS THE EVIDENCE?

First and foremost, your direct experience will be the evidence that mindfulness works. With it, you'll notice a difference in how you feel, think, and respond. You'll experience an increase in your ability to focus, navigate challenges, come up with creative solutions, and connect and communicate with others. Co-workers and family will notice the difference in you as you show more patience, clarity, attentiveness, balance, and self-confidence.

There is ample science showing that mindfulness and meditation actually physically change the brain and those who have a dedicated mindfulness practice are better at managing stress, managing emotions, and relating to others. Science confirms what people have been saying all along. Mindfulness works. It is not hype – it is real. And it will give you the edge.

Mindfulness works. It is not hype – it is real. And it will give you the edge.

WHAT IS
THE KEY
TO SUCCESS?

CONCLUSION

There is ample evidence that by adopting mindfulness at the workplace employees are better able to manage stress, stay focused on their tasks, and manage their emotions. These competencies are what make people more resilient. Mindfulness helps leaders be more creative, caring, and supportive, creating an environment where everyone can be at their best.

Companies who have invested in mindfulness including Aetna, Google, Salesforce, and others have seen an uptick in:

- Employee engagement (increasing retention and productivity)
- Teamwork, collaboration (increasing productivity and time to market)
- Emotional control and empathy (increasing client satisfaction, sales, and revenue)
- Creativity (increasing problem solving and innovation)

And a downtick in:

- Absenteeism (reducing cost of sick days, lateness, and stress)
- Attrition (reducing hiring costs and onboarding new employees)
- Disengagement (reducing mistakes and dissatisfaction)

Resilience is the key to success as people are asked to go back to work, pick up the pieces, and create a new normal. It will be “all hands on deck” and resilience will make the difference between not only surviving but thriving, as we face many unknowns and challenges.

*Resilience is the
key to success*



FINAL THOUGHTS

Shift existing mindsets, increase resilience, and transform your workplace with mindfulness.

High performing organizations that invest in mindfulness training today will benefit from a workforce that is more engaged and adaptable as the future unfolds. They will be able to pivot quickly and execute their strategy to rebuild after the economic and psychological effects of the pandemic. These companies will benefit from a competitive advantage when facing reconstruction and unforeseen marketplace challenges.

Mindfulness: it is not just changing the culture, it changes the brains and habits of workers, one employee at a time. It will give you and your company the advantage it needs for a flourishing future.

Hire MMI Mindful Training and we'll design an effective training that focuses on the specific outcomes your company wants and tailor it to your company's unique organizational culture.

To find out how you can bring mindfulness into your organization, contact MMI Mindful Training for your free benefits analysis, or call at 805-770-8188.

Training Partners are available worldwide.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Is It Even Possible to Focus on Anything Right Now? Harvard Business Review, Maura Thomas, April 14, 2020, <https://hbr.org/2020/04/is-it-even-possible-to-focus-on-anything-right-now>

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