



Mindful Leadership: Harvard Business Review

adapted and developed by Liana Taylor

Mindfulness Helps You Become a Better Leader.

Professor of management practice at Harvard Business School, Bill George, published an article about Mindfulness and Leadership in the Harvard Business Review (Oct 26, 2012). In summary, he said that the fallacies of measuring success in monetary terms were exposed during the Global Financial Crisis and left many leaders with a deep feeling of unease that they had been pulled away from their true values. Too many leaders placed self-interest ahead of their organizations' interests, and ended up disappointing the customers, employees, and shareholders who had trusted them.

You know you're in trouble when you start to judge your self-worth by your net worth, focusing on external factors like impressing others or positioning yourself, rather than looking inward to measure success as a human and as a leader.

Many leaders lose their way. So, rather than viewing success as reaching a certain position or achieving a certain net worth, Harvard Business school are encouraging executives to ground their careers in their beliefs, values and principles - to see success as making a positive difference in the lives of their colleagues, their organizations, their families, and society as a whole. The greater the leadership responsibility, the greater the importance of finding the equilibrium between achieving long term goals and short term financial gains: staying grounded and authentic, facing challenges with humility, and balancing external and internal measures of success. ... And executives of global companies are now heading to Harvard, and to mindfulness meditation training to learn to lead in this way.

The practice of mindful leadership gives you tools to measure and manage your life as you're living it.

Mindfulness teaches you to pay attention to the present moment, recognizing your thoughts and emotions and learning to manage them, especially when faced with highly stressful situations. When you are mindful, you are aware of your own presence, and the ways you impact other people. You are able to both observe and participate in each moment, while recognizing the implications of your actions for the longer term. And that prevents you from slipping into a life that pulls you away from your values.

In order to gain awareness and clarity about the present moment, you must learn to quiet your mind. It is a very simple thing to do, just not easy. Just as they say 'use it or lose it' in reference to our bodies, so too with our minds, we practice meditation daily to develop and maintain the mental muscle of calm and clarity.



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Leaders train in mindfulness meditation for many reasons, mostly to stay calmer and more focused in their leadership, without losing the “edge” that can make them successful.

The trivial worries start to drop away, and clarity about what is really important surfaces. We gradually become more self-aware and more sensitive to the impact we have on others. And this is key to skillful leadership – as well as rewarding personal life!

Recent medical studies show the multitude of health benefits, including: reducing stress; improving attention and sensory processing; protecting against health problems like high blood pressure, arthritis, pain conditions; and with the process of neuroplasticity, physically increasing the grey matter - the part of the brain associated with learning, memory, emotional regulation, self-referential processing and perspective, all critical cognitive skills for leaders attempting to maintain their equilibrium under constant pressure.

While many CEOs and companies are embracing mindfulness meditation, it may not be for everyone. The key factor is dedicating time each day to step out of the intense pressures of leadership in order to reflect on what is happening. In addition to daily formal and informal meditations, journaling, contemplation, engaging in physical activities like sport, walking, hiking or cycling, especially in nature, prayer, and seeking the counsel of a wise friend or mentor are also viewed as valuable ways to develop mindful leadership.

Regardless of the daily introspective practice you choose, the pursuit of mindful leadership will help you achieve clarity about what is important to you, and a deeper understanding of the world around you. Mindfulness will help you clear away the trivia and needless worries about unimportant things, nurture passion for your work and compassion for others, and develop the ability to empower the people in your organization.

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