

Mindfulness - from spiritual temples to “business temples”



Mindfulness is a word which has been uttered increasingly often, in a lot of diverse and unexpected places. Not too long ago it was something that was whispered and reluctantly received by westerners, due to its association with the practice of meditation. But now it is spoken out loud and without fear in the British Parliament, at the Global Forum in Davos or in the open spaces of Google and Intel. And while until recently it was written about only in magazines with a spiritual theme, we now have a steady stream of articles in Harvard Business Review and The Economist. And in February of 2014 on the cover of TIME, written in big bold letters, we could read: *The Mindfulness Revolution*. Moreover, mindfulness can be found, in one form or another, in the curriculums of prestigious learning institutions such as INSEAD, IMD, Harvard and Stanford.

Simply put, mindfulness means living fully in the moment and paying attention in a conscious way to what we are thinking and feeling. The concept is deeply rooted in oriental traditions and it represents more than just focused meditation, also known as *mindfulness meditation*.

Mindfulness is an eastern tool for western results, someone once said. Along with the 24/7 rhythm, which characterizes the way in which high performing organizations work, we also have the stress of finding ourselves, among the millions and millions of other voices and minds. An increasing number of companies, from various fields and with different organizational cultures, encourage their employees to adopt a mindful way of working. Far from being a thorough one, here is a list of some of the companies which have successfully integrated mindfulness practices: Google, Intel, Aetna International, Facebook, Twitter, eBay, General Mills, Ford Motor Company, Cargill, Hearst Publications and so on.

In these past years, more and more business leaders have started to mix and adapt age old spiritual traditions with the most recent results from psychological and neuroscientific research, with the purpose of creating a simple but powerful way of ecologically and sustainably increasing long-term employee performance.

In short, here are a couple of benefits that mindfulness can offer businesses:

A substantial increase in your ability to focus

Traditionally, the greatest enemy we have when trying to focus is multitasking – a practice which is wrongly seen and appreciated today as being evidence of superior performance and efficiency. According to neurological studies, multitasking diminishes memory capacity, impacts analytical functions and reduces blood flow to the

right cerebral hemisphere (the place where creativity is expressed and developed). This at a time when creativity is unanimously seen as a critical element in innovation, decision making, problem solving and the development of leadership skills. Mindfulness meditation is an excellent way to increase concentration and helps us push against the tendency to fall back into the routine of multitasking.

Fuel for the brain

A deep focus on breathing can also yield physical benefits. By their very nature, people breath in a superficial way. As plainly as possible, we are not helping our brain receive the oxygen it needs. More oxygen in the brain brings immediate benefits related to our capacity to learn new things, develop new skills and improve our memory. An oxygenated brain is an optimized brain. A strategic advantage for any leader and business.

Stress reduction

Stress, without getting to scientific, is about the perception of control or to put it better, about the lack of it. When we don't have control, we become restless and then stress manifests itself. Business leaders who understand this will do everything that is possible to create a level of autonomy and control which reduces stress. When priorities are unclear or change often, then employees invariably and frantically slip towards ... multitasking!

Integrating mindfulness practices in daily activities, even though it is not part of the company culture, can eliminate multitasking, reduce stress and increase productivity.

The three general benefits we discussed above form the basis of numerous other advantages which derive from them: clarity in thinking, presence of mind, ability to focus in critical situations and a better balance between your personal and professional life. It also leads to increased creativity due to accessing mental resources which have been previously hidden, a higher long-term performance, empathy (due to an increase in emotional intelligence), intuitive thinking, agility and increased mental adaptability. And last but not least a more efficient management of your emotions.

An authentic leader will always perceive himself or herself as a *work in progress* and will try to optimize, always looking to get closer to an ideal. Practicing mindfulness is definitely a powerful instrument which can help us in this journey.