

Mindfulness is receiving much attention as a key behaviour to cultivate in the area of optimal functioning: organisations, employees, leaders, and managers. Here are some excerpts from a longer paper I co-wrote with my Positive Workplace colleagues.

Resonant Leadership

Resonant Leadership (2005) is the latest book by Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, who co-wrote Primal Leadership with Daniel Goleman. Their three keys to resonance are: mindfulness, compassion and hope.

“Mindfulness is the capacity to be fully aware of all that one experiences inside the self – body, mind heart, spirit – and to pay full attention to what is happening around us – people, the natural world, our surroundings, and events”

Boyatzis and McKee draw on two traditions: cognitive psychology and Buddhist philosophy. They refer to Ellen Langer (“mindfulness is a healthy state of cognitive openness, curiosity and awareness”) and Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn, University of Massachusetts, who bases his work on Buddhist traditions as well as modern psychology, neuropsychology and medicine (“mindfulness is moment to moment awareness”). Their other points on mindfulness include: catching problems before they become serious; tuning in, listening, noticing; self awareness; multitasking; connecting; risk of narrowed attention and training the mind not to notice; mental habitual patterns “even smart rational adults can fall prey to outdated categories”.

Ellen Langer

Ellen Langer, Harvard University Professor, spoke at the 2005 Positive Psychology Summit in Washington and has written extensively on mindfulness. Mindfulness is the continual creation of new categories, being open to new information and other views, having an awareness of more than one perspective. Langer considers mindlessness as: clinging to rules and categories and a single perspective; being locked in rigid mindsets; and having a single-minded pursuit of an outcome / goal, rather than on the process. Mindfulness leads to feelings of control, greater freedom of action, and less burnout, and "may increase flexibility, productivity, innovation, leadership ability, and satisfaction [at work]".

Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn

In “Healing Emotions: Conversations with the Dalai Lama on Mindfulness, Emotions and Health”(1997), Kabat-Zinn comments on the frantic pace of life we lead, always ‘doing’; exhausted; we often don’t know who’s doing the doing; feeling cut off from feelings and experiences; feeling foggy; the body is affected.

Just a few ways to cultivate mindfulness

- remain energised, alert, prevent burnout and reduce stress
- change and reframe contexts and seek newness and variety
- allow time for reflection and contemplation
- get very clear about your core beliefs
- listen, watch, scan the environment and attend to how and what other people think

My friends at Anecdote (Mark, Shawn and Andrew) help organisations to be mindful. Anecdote is a consulting firm that specialises in helping clients to tackle complex problems like organisational change, learning and project evaluation. Shawn Callahan, Founding Director: “we’re finding that helping people to see new patterns, to be become more aware, helps to see a different reality. People have become so awash with experience, working too fast...they become mindless. But to have new eyes, new frameworks, new combinations and to see and consider new patterns....this is where clients do great things. And we find that this results in increased authentic dialogue in organisations”. See www.anecdote.com.au

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