

LEARNING MADE EASY



Career Development

ALL-IN-ONE

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Career Development

ALL-IN-ONE

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Career Development All-in-One For Dummies®

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, www.wiley.com

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Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2017934011

ISBN 978-1-119-36308-8 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-119-36309-5 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-119-36317-0 (ebk)

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents at a Glance

Introduction	1
Book 1: Mindfulness	3
CHAPTER 1: Exploring Mindfulness in the Workplace	5
CHAPTER 2: Discovering the Benefits of Mindfulness	27
CHAPTER 3: Applying Mindfulness in the Workplace	47
CHAPTER 4: Practicing Mindfulness in the Digital Age	73
Book 2: Project Management	93
CHAPTER 1: Achieving Results	95
CHAPTER 2: Knowing Your Project's Audiences	113
CHAPTER 3: Clarifying Your Project	133
CHAPTER 4: Developing a Game Plan	157
CHAPTER 5: Keeping Everyone Informed	183
Book 3: Leadership	203
CHAPTER 1: Building Your Leadership Muscles	205
CHAPTER 2: Managing as a Leader	223
CHAPTER 3: Creating a Vision	243
CHAPTER 4: Leading across Cultures	267
Book 4: Time Management	277
CHAPTER 1: Organizing Yourself	279
CHAPTER 2: Setting Yourself Up for Success	285
CHAPTER 3: Valuing Your Time	297
CHAPTER 4: Focusing, Prioritizing, and Time-Blocking	307
CHAPTER 5: Controlling Email Overload	327
Book 5: Business Writing	335
CHAPTER 1: Planning Your Message	337
CHAPTER 2: Making Your Writing Work	359
CHAPTER 3: Improving Your Work	381
CHAPTER 4: Troubleshooting Your Writing	403
CHAPTER 5: Writing Emails That Get Results	425

Book 6: Presentations	447
CHAPTER 1: Creating Compelling Content	449
CHAPTER 2: Honing Your Platform Skills	463
CHAPTER 3: Captivating Your Audience	487
CHAPTER 4: Keeping Your Audience Captivated	503
CHAPTER 5: Ending on a High Note	517
 Book 7: Negotiation	533
CHAPTER 1: Negotiating for Life	535
CHAPTER 2: Knowing What You Want	547
CHAPTER 3: Setting Goals	567
CHAPTER 4: Asking the Right Questions	577
CHAPTER 5: Closing the Deal	593
 Index	617

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
About This Book	1
Foolish Assumptions	1
Icons Used in This Book	2
Beyond the Book	2
BOOK 1: MINDFULNESS	3
CHAPTER 1: Exploring Mindfulness in the Workplace	5
Becoming More Mindful at Work	6
Clarifying what mindfulness is	6
Taking a look at the background	7
Recognizing what mindfulness isn't	9
Finding Out Why Your Brain Needs Mindfulness	12
Evolving from lizard to spaceman	13
Discovering your brain's hidden rules	14
Recognizing that you are what you think	15
Exploring your brain at work	18
Starting Your Mindful Journey	21
Being mindful at work yourself	22
Overcoming common challenges	23
Creating a mindful workplace	24
Living the dream: Mindfulness at work	26
CHAPTER 2: Discovering the Benefits of Mindfulness	27
Discovering the Benefits for Employees	27
Increased mental resilience	28
Improved relationships	31
Honed mental clarity and focus	33
Mindful leadership	35
Looking at the Organizational Benefits of Mindfulness	37
Happier, more engaged employees	38
Greater creativity	39
Increased productivity	41
Improved decision making	43
Reducing staff turnover	45
CHAPTER 3: Applying Mindfulness in the Workplace	47
Gaining Perspective in the Modern-Day Workplace	47
Engaging with a VUCA world	48
Applying mindfulness in changing times	49

Employing mindfulness for new ways of working	51
Building resilience	53
Adjusting Your Mental Mind-Set	55
Focusing on the present moment.	55
Treating thoughts as mental processes.	56
Approaching rather than avoiding difficulties.	58
Rewiring Your Brain	60
Resculpting your brain to become more productive	61
Increasing your present-moment circuitry	62
Developing Mindfulness at Work	63
Examining intentions and attitudes	63
Remembering that practice makes perfect.	67
Experimenting with mindfulness	68
Acting ethically for the organization and its people.	69
Living life mindfully	70
CHAPTER 4: Practicing Mindfulness in the Digital Age	73
Choosing When to Use Technology	73
Recognizing the pros and cons of technology.	74
Rebalancing your use of technology.	76
Communicating Mindfully	78
Emailing mindfully.	81
Phoning mindfully	82
Using a smartphone mindfully	83
Engaging with social media mindfully	85
Writing mindfully.	85
Using Technology Mindfully.	88
Focusing on one task	89
Discovering technology that enhances focus	90
BOOK 2: PROJECT MANAGEMENT.	93
CHAPTER 1: Achieving Results	95
Determining What Makes a Project a Project	95
Understanding the three main components that define a project	96
Recognizing the diversity of projects	97
Describing the four stages of a project	98
Defining Project Management.	100
Starting with the initiating processes	101
Outlining the planning processes	104
Examining the executing processes	105
Surveying the monitoring and controlling processes	106
Ending with the closing processes	107

Knowing the Project Manager's Role	107
Looking at the project manager's tasks	107
Staving off excuses for not following a structured project-management approach	108
Avoiding "shortcuts"	109
Staying aware of other potential challenges	110
Do You Have What It Takes to Be an Effective Project Manager?.....	111
Questions	111
Answer key	112
CHAPTER 2: Knowing Your Project's Audiences	113
Understanding Your Project's Audiences.....	114
Developing an Audience List	114
Starting your audience list	114
Ensuring a complete and up-to-date audience list.....	118
Using an audience list template	121
Considering the Drivers, Supporters, and Observers	122
Deciding when to involve your audiences	124
Using different methods to involve your audiences	127
Making the most of your audiences' involvement	128
Displaying Your Audience List	128
Confirming Your Audience's Authority.....	129
Assessing Your Audience's Power and Interest	131
CHAPTER 3: Clarifying Your Project.....	133
Defining Your Project with a Scope Statement	133
Looking at the Big Picture: Explaining the Need for Your Project ...	136
Figuring out why you're doing the project.....	136
Drawing the line: Where your project starts and stops.....	146
Stating your project's objectives	147
Marking Boundaries: Project Constraints	151
Working within limitations.....	152
Dealing with needs	154
Documenting Your Assumptions	155
Presenting Your Scope Statement	155
CHAPTER 4: Developing a Game Plan	157
Breaking Your Project into Manageable Chunks	157
Thinking in detail	158
Identifying necessary project work with a work breakdown structure	159
Dealing with special situations	167
Creating and Displaying a WBS	170
Considering different schemes	170
Developing your WBS	171

	Categorizing your project's work	173
	Labeling your WBS entries	174
	Displaying your WBS in different formats	176
	Improving the quality of your WBS	178
	Using templates	179
	Identifying Risks While Detailing Your Work	180
	Documenting Your Planned Project Work	182
CHAPTER 5:	Keeping Everyone Informed	183
	Successful Communication Basics	184
	Breaking down the communication process	184
	Distinguishing one-way and two-way communication	185
	Can you hear me? Listening actively	186
	Choosing the Appropriate Medium for Project Communication	188
	Just the facts: Written reports	188
	Move it along: Meetings that work	190
	Preparing a Written Project-Progress Report	193
	Making a list and checking it twice	193
	Knowing what's hot (and what's not) in your report	194
	Earning a Pulitzer, or at least writing an interesting report	194
	Holding Key Project Meetings	198
	Regularly scheduled team meetings	199
	Ad hoc team meetings	199
	Upper-management progress reviews	200
	Preparing a Project Communications Management Plan	201
	BOOK 3: LEADERSHIP	203
CHAPTER 1:	Building Your Leadership Muscles	205
	Putting Your Brain to Work	206
	Using what you have	206
	Responding to situations flexibly	207
	Taking advantage of fortuitous circumstances	208
	Making sense of ambiguous or contradictory messages	209
	Ranking the importance of different elements	209
	Finding similarities in apparently different situations	210
	Drawing distinctions between seemingly similar situations	211
	Putting concepts together in new ways	212
	Coming up with novel ideas	212
	Communicating Effectively	213
	Speaking begins with listening	214
	Eliciting the cooperation of others	215
	Driving Yourself	215
	Developing a Sense of Urgency	216

Don't wait	216
Form a "kitchen cabinet"	217
Being Honest and Searching for the Truth	218
Displaying Good Judgment	218
Being Dependable and Consistent	218
Creating an Atmosphere of Trust	219
Encouraging a Learning Environment	220
Looking for Common Ground: The Type O Personality	221
CHAPTER 2: Managing as a Leader	223
Setting Reasonable Goals	223
Delegating to Your Team	225
Knowing how to delegate	225
Knowing what to delegate	229
Settling Disputes in Your Team	232
Allowing Your Team to Find Its Own Path	233
Leading When You Aren't Really the Leader	234
Leading as a follower	235
Leading when your position is honorary	238
Leading when you're not expected to succeed	240
CHAPTER 3: Creating a Vision	243
Where Do Visions Come From?	243
Experience lets you visualize from the way you live	244
Knowledge lets you visualize from what you've learned	244
Imagination helps turn randomness into a vision	245
Supplying the Human Element	246
A vision is a reminder of why you joined the group	246
A vision attracts commitment and energizes people	247
Establishing a Standard of Excellence	248
Helping You Stay Ahead of the Game	248
Becoming a visionary	249
Benchmarking everything	250
A Vision Links the Present to the Future	251
Building on the present	252
Envisioning the future	252
A Vision Is a Doable Dream	253
Understanding what is doable	253
Keeping the vision simple	255
A Vision Is Not Just an Idea	255
A vision depends on your ability to create a team	255
A vision depends on the ability to create a plan	257
A Vision Is Based on Reality	258
Thinking beyond available resources	259
Responding to diminishing resources	260

A Vision Helps You Harness Opportunities	260
Spotting an opportunity	261
Searching out an opportunity	261
Creating an atmosphere in which ideas flourish	262
Moving from an idea to a plan	263
A Vision Is Dynamic	265
CHAPTER 4: Leading across Cultures	267
Leading in a Diverse World	267
Putting the diverse needs of your group first	269
Listening to voices very different from your own	269
Eliciting cooperation from a diverse group	270
Emerging as a Leader from a Cultural Group	271
Strive to want more	272
Toleration is a dirty word	272
Leading across International Divides	273
Commit your brightest and best	274
Use the de minimus rule in making decisions	274
Understand that capital doesn't make right	274
Leading in the Virtual Age	275
BOOK 4: TIME MANAGEMENT	277
CHAPTER 1: Organizing Yourself	279
Planning	279
Achieving peace of mind	280
Activating your subconscious mind	280
The 1,000 percent return	281
Assemble what you need	281
Handle everything — once	282
Grabbing the Three Keys to Personal Organization	282
Stepping back to evaluate	283
Developing neatness habits	283
Refusing to excuse	284
CHAPTER 2: Setting Yourself Up for Success	285
Getting to Know Yourself	286
Assessing your strengths and weaknesses	286
Naming goals to give you direction	287
Assigning a monetary worth to your time	287
Identifying your rhythm to get in the zone	288
Following a System	289
Scheduling your time and creating a routine	290
Organizing your surroundings	290

Overcoming Time-Management Obstacles	291
Communicating effectively	292
Circumventing interruptions	292
Getting procrastination under control	292
Making decisions: Just do it	293
Garnering Support While Establishing Your Boundaries	293
Balancing work and time with family and friends	294
Streamlining interactions with co-workers and customers	294
Keeping Motivation High	295
CHAPTER 3: Valuing Your Time	297
Getting a Good Grip on the Time-Equals-Money Concept	298
Calculating Your Hourly Income	299
Boosting Your Hourly Value through Your Work Efforts	301
Making Value-Based Time Decisions in Your Personal Life	302
Deciding whether to buy time: Chores and responsibilities	303
Making time-spending decisions: Leisure activities	303
Looking at rewards	304
Factoring in monetary and time costs	304
Staying open to experiences and using time wisely	306
CHAPTER 4: Focusing, Prioritizing, and Time-Blocking	307
Focusing Your Energy with the 80/20 Theory of Everything	308
Matching time investment to return	308
The vital 20 percent: Figuring out where to focus your energy at work	311
Personal essentials: Channeling efforts in your personal life	312
Getting Down to Specifics: Daily Prioritization	315
Blocking Off Your Time and Plugging in Your To-Do Items	318
Step 1: Dividing your day	319
Step 2: Scheduling your personal activities	320
Step 3: Factoring in your work activities	320
Step 4: Accounting for weekly self-evaluation and planning time	321
Step 5: Building in flextime	321
Assessing Your Progress and Adjusting Your Plan as Needed	322
Surveying your results	322
Tweaking your system	324
CHAPTER 5: Controlling Email Overload	327
Managing Email Effectively	327
Setting up filtering systems	328
Separating Your Work and Private Life	329
Managing multiple email addresses	329
Organizing and storing email	329

Responding to Email More Quickly	330
Employing an email response system	331
Automating your responses.	333
BOOK 5: BUSINESS WRITING	335
CHAPTER 1: Planning Your Message	337
Adopting the Plan-Draft-Edit Principle	337
Fine-Tuning Your Plan: Your Goals and Audience	338
Defining your goal: Know what you want	338
Defining your audience: Know your reader.	340
Brainstorming the best content for your purpose	344
Writing to groups and strangers	345
Imagining your readers	345
Making People Care	347
Connecting instantly with your reader	347
Focusing on WIIFM	348
Highlighting benefits, not features	349
Finding the concrete and limiting the abstract	350
Choosing Your Written Voice: Tone	351
Being appropriate to the occasion, relationship, and culture	352
Writing as your authentic self	353
Being relentlessly respectful	353
Smiling when you say it	354
Using Relationship-Building Techniques	355
Personalizing what you write.	356
Framing messages with <i>you</i> not <i>I</i>	356
CHAPTER 2: Making Your Writing Work.	359
Stepping into a Twenty-First-Century Writing Style	359
Aiming for a clear, simple style	360
Applying readability guidelines	361
Finding the right rhythm.	364
Achieving a conversational tone	366
Enlivening Your Language	368
Relying on everyday words and phrasing	368
Choosing reader-friendly words	369
Focusing on the real and concrete	370
Finding action verbs	372
Crafting comparisons to help readers	373
Using Reader-Friendly Graphic Techniques	375
Building in white space.	375
Toying with type.	376

Keeping colors simple	377
Adding effective graphics	378
Breaking space up with sidebars, boxes, and lists	378
CHAPTER 3: Improving Your Work	381
Changing Hats: Going from Writer to Editor	381
Choosing a way to edit	382
Distancing yourself from what you write	384
Reviewing the Big and Small Pictures	385
Assessing content success	385
Assessing the effectiveness of your language	386
Avoiding telltale up-down-up inflection	388
Looking for repeat word endings	389
Pruning prepositions	392
Cutting all non-contributing words	392
Moving from Passive to Active	395
Thinking <i>action</i>	395
Trimming <i>there is</i> and <i>there are</i>	396
Cutting the <i>haves</i> and <i>have nots</i>	397
Using the passive deliberately	397
Sidestepping Jargon, Clichés, and Extra Modifiers	398
Reining in jargon	398
Cooling the clichés	400
Minimizing modifiers	401
CHAPTER 4: Troubleshooting Your Writing	403
Organizing Your Document	403
Paragraphing for logic	404
Building with subheads	405
Working with transitions	406
Working in lists: Numbers and bulleting	408
Catching Common Mistakes	411
Using comma sense	412
Using <i>however</i> correctly	413
Matching nouns and pronouns	414
Weighing <i>which</i> versus <i>that</i>	415
Pondering <i>who</i> versus <i>that</i>	416
Choosing <i>who</i> versus <i>whom</i>	416
Beginning with <i>and</i> or <i>but</i>	418
Ending with prepositions	418
Reviewing and Proofreading: The Final Check	419
Checking the big picture	419
Proofreading your work	420
Creating your very own writing improvement guide	422

CHAPTER 5: Writing Emails That Get Results	425
Fast-Forwarding Your Agenda In-House and Out-of-House	426
Getting Off to a Great Start	428
Writing subject lines that get your message read	428
Using salutations that suit	430
Drafting a strong email lead	431
Building Messages That Achieve Your Goals	433
Clarifying your own goals	433
Assessing what matters about your audience	434
Determining the best content for emails	437
Structuring Your Middle Ground	438
Closing Strong	440
Perfecting Your Writing for Email	441
Monitoring length and breadth	441
Styling it right	442
Going short: Words, sentences, paragraphs	443
Using graphic techniques to promote clarity	443
Using the signature block	445
 BOOK 6: PRESENTATIONS	 447
CHAPTER 1: Creating Compelling Content	449
Getting Your Content Up to Par	450
Determining your content's purpose	450
Covering your points in priority order	451
Navigating content	451
Adding Variety and Impact	452
Using facts	453
Giving examples	453
Citing references	454
Telling stories	454
Going by the numbers	455
Quoting experts	456
Contrasting and comparing	456
Giving demonstrations	457
Defining terms	458
Answering rhetorical questions	458
Explaining yourself	459
Making assumptions	460
Showing testimonials	461
Making analogies	461

CHAPTER 2: Honing Your Platform Skills	463
Using Your Voice to Command Attention	464
Rule 1: Speak out loud	464
Rule 2: Project your voice — without shouting	466
Rule 3: Vary your volume	467
Speaking softly	468
Adjusting your rate	468
Adding a solid punch to a statement	470
Pausing eloquently	470
Captivating Audiences with Your Eyes	472
Understanding the importance of eye contact	473
Speaking with your eyes	474
Keeping eye contact with a large audience	475
Finding the Right Posture	475
Giving a bad impression with the wrong posture	475
Standing tall	477
Rocking and rolling	479
Moving gracefully and purposefully	480
Making the Right Facial Expressions	481
Gesturing Creatively	482
Exploring gesture types	482
Making a grand gesture	484
Eliminating distracting gestures	485
CHAPTER 3: Captivating Your Audience	487
Touching on the Laws of Communication Impact	488
Starting with the Law of Primacy	489
Starting Off on the Right Foot	491
Making a dynamic first impression	491
Using mild-to-wild creativity	492
Building Your Introduction	496
Sticking with tradition	496
Spicing it up	497
Engaging the audience with questions	498
Adding a little humor	499
Setting the stage	500
Starting out bold and interesting	501
Phrasing transitions	502
CHAPTER 4: Keeping Your Audience Captivated	503
Standing and Shouting Out: The Law of Emphasis and Intensity	504
Comparing and contrasting	505
Changing your voice	506
Adding pizzazz	506
Highlighting specific aspects	508

Using special effects	509
Telling a story	509
Demonstrating your point	509
Propping up	510
Tech-ing out	510
Involving Your Audience: The Law of Exercise and Engagement . . .	511
Involving the audience	511
Encouraging interaction	512
Hitting Their Hot Buttons: The Law of Interest	513
Facing the Consequences: The Law of Effect	515
CHAPTER 5: Ending on a High Note	517
Concluding Effectively: The Law of Recency	518
Affecting Your Audience Right to the End	519
Conclude, don't include	519
Signal that the end is near	519
End it already	520
Be neither meek nor weak	520
Leave with a strong message	520
Giving a Tactical Conclusion	521
Repeating a theme (with a twist)	521
Leaving them smiling	521
Offering impressive incentives	522
Engineering Your Conclusion with Building Blocks	524
Ending with motivation and inspiration	525
Advocating a new strategic approach and direction	526
Giving the audience a happy ending	528
Offering an informational conclusion	529
BOOK 7: NEGOTIATION	533
CHAPTER 1: Negotiating for Life	535
When Am I Negotiating?	535
The Six Basic Skills of Negotiating	536
Preparing	537
Setting goals and limits	539
Listening	539
Being clear	540
Pushing the pause button	542
Closing the deal	542
Handling All Sorts of Negotiations	543
When negotiations get complicated	544
International negotiations	544
Negotiations between men and women	545
Negotiation on the phone and via the Internet	545

CHAPTER 2: Knowing What You Want	547
Creating Your Vision	548
Envisioning your future	549
Making a commitment	553
Identifying your values	555
Deciding How You Are Going to Achieve Your Vision	555
The three-year plan	556
Putting your plan into action	558
Preparing Yourself for Negotiation	559
A is for alert	559
Dressing for success	560
Walking through the door	561
Leaving enough time	563
Defining Your Space	563
Negotiating on your home turf	563
Seating with purpose	564
Planning the environment far in advance	565
CHAPTER 3: Setting Goals	567
Setting a Good Goal	568
Getting active participation from every team member	570
Keeping the goals on course	571
Setting the right number of goals	571
Setting specific rather than general goals	572
Setting challenging yet attainable goals	572
Prioritizing your goals	573
Separating Long-Range Goals from Short-Range Goals	574
Setting the Opening Offer	574
Breaking the Stone Tablet	575
CHAPTER 4: Asking the Right Questions	577
Tickle It Out: The Art of Coaxing Out Information	577
Battling the jargon	578
Clarifying relativity	579
Asking Good Questions: A Real Power Tool	580
Avoid intimidation	582
Ask, don't tell	583
Avoid leading questions	584
Don't assume anything	585
Ask open-ended questions	587
Ask again	588
Use your asks wisely	589
Accept no substitutes	589

Dealing with Unacceptable Responses	590
Don't tolerate the dodge	590
Don't accept an assertion for the answer	590
Don't allow too many pronouns	591
Look for Evidence of Listening.	591
CHAPTER 5: Closing the Deal.	593
Good Deals, Bad Deals, and Win-Win Negotiating	594
Assessing the deal	595
Creating win-win deals	597
Concessions versus Conditions.	599
What It Means to Close a Deal.	601
Understanding the Letter of the Law	602
Legal definition of a closed deal	602
Offers and counteroffers	603
Written versus oral contracts.	603
Legal protection before the contract	604
Recognizing When to Close	604
Knowing How to Close	605
The good closer	605
The only three closing strategies you'll ever need	606
Using linkage to close	607
Barriers to Closing.	609
Overcoming fears	609
Overcoming objections.	611
Closing When It's All in the Family.	613
When the Deal Is Done.	614
Review the process	614
Set up systems for checking the system	615
Remember to celebrate!	616
INDEX.	617

Introduction

When was the last time you received an email and cringed at the muddled organization and horrible grammar? Or you felt so overwhelmed that your productivity plummeted? Or how about the last time you or a colleague were so nervous during a presentation that you came across as unprepared or worse — unprofessional?

Unfortunately, business professionals in all stages of their careers encounter these situations at one point or another. Although these instances may seem benign on the surface, they harm your professional reputation, which is hard to reverse. Would you want to do business with someone who is so unorganized that he constantly misses deadlines or turns in shoddy work because he's rushed? Of course not! Time management and having a solid organizational system are just a couple of the secrets to success that we discuss in this book.

About This Book

This book provides you with detailed information on topics that will help you gain the confidence needed to grow and advance in your professional life. You'll read about how practicing mindfulness can make you a more effective manager, how to craft the perfect written document that gets results, how to present like a pro, and more.

Foolish Assumptions

There's a time and a place for just about everything and assumptions are no different. First, we assume that you are a business professional and you're ready, willing, and able to devote some time and energy into your professional development.

We also assume that you have at least a general knowledge of the major software packages that businesses use and are interested in utilizing them to advance in your professional activities. If that's the case, this is the book for you!

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, you'll find special icons to call attention to important information. Here's what to expect.



TIP

"If you see people falling asleep during your presentations, bang a book against the table to wake them up." Kidding!

This icon is used for helpful suggestions and things you may find useful at some point. No worries, though: No one will be falling asleep during your presentations if you take to heart the tip written here!



REMEMBER

This icon is used when something is essential and bears repeating. Again, this icon is used when something is essential and bears repeating. (See what we did there?)



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The little Dummies Man is information to share with the people who handle the technical aspect of things. You can skip technical-oriented information without derailing any of the hard work you're putting toward achieving your best professional self.



WARNING

Pay attention to these warnings to avoid potential pitfalls. Nothing suggested will get you fired or arrested (unless you do something like practice mindfulness *so well* that you start to nod off while driving or during meetings with the CEO — we can't help you there). If you see this icon, slow down and proceed with caution.

Beyond the Book

Although this book is a one-stop shop for your professional development, we can cover only so much in a set number of pages! If you find yourself at the end of this book thinking, "This was an amazing book! Where can I learn more about how to advance my career by working on my professional development?" head over to www.dummies.com for more resources.

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1

Mindfulness

Contents at a Glance

CHAPTER 1:	Exploring Mindfulness in the Workplace.....	5
	Becoming More Mindful at Work	6
	Finding Out Why Your Brain Needs Mindfulness	12
	Starting Your Mindful Journey	21
CHAPTER 2:	Discovering the Benefits of Mindfulness.....	27
	Discovering the Benefits for Employees	27
	Looking at the Organizational Benefits of Mindfulness.....	37
CHAPTER 3:	Applying Mindfulness in the Workplace.....	47
	Gaining Perspective in the Modern-Day Workplace.....	47
	Adjusting Your Mental Mind-Set	55
	Rewiring Your Brain	60
	Developing Mindfulness at Work	63
CHAPTER 4:	Practicing Mindfulness in the Digital Age.....	73
	Choosing When to Use Technology	73
	Communicating Mindfully	78
	Using Technology Mindfully.....	88

- » Identifying what mindfulness is and is not
- » Retraining your brain
- » Getting started

Chapter **1**

Exploring Mindfulness in the Workplace

In tough economic times, many organizations look for new ways to deliver better products and services to customers while reducing costs. Carrying on as normal isn't an option. Leaders must engage staff, and everyone needs to become more resilient in the face of ongoing change. For these reasons, more and more organizations offer staff training in mindfulness.

Major corporations, such as General Mills, have offered staff mindfulness training in recent years. Google and eBay are among the many companies that now provide rooms for staff to practice mindfulness during work time. Business schools such as Harvard Business School now include mindfulness principles in their leadership programs.

So what is mindfulness, and why are so many leading organizations investing in it?

Becoming More Mindful at Work

In this section, you discover what mindfulness is. More importantly, you also discover what mindfulness is not! You find out how mindfulness evolved and why it's become so important in the modern-day workplace.

Clarifying what mindfulness is

Have you ever driven somewhere and arrived at your destination remembering nothing about your journey? Or grabbed a snack and noticed a few moments later that all you have left is an empty wrapper? Most people have! These examples are common ones of *mindlessness*, or going on autopilot.

Like many humans, you're probably not present for much of your own life. You may fail to notice the good things in your life or hear what your body is telling you. You probably also make your life harder than it needs to be by poisoning yourself with toxic self-criticism.

Mindfulness can help you to become more aware of your thoughts, feelings, and sensations in a way that suspends judgment and self-criticism. Developing the ability to pay attention to and see clearly whatever is happening moment by moment doesn't eliminate life's pressures, but it can help you respond to them in a more productive, calmer manner.

Learning and practicing mindfulness can help you to recognize and step away from habitual, often unconscious emotional and physiological reactions to everyday events. Practicing mindfulness allows you to be fully present in your life and work and improves your quality of life.

Mindfulness can help you to

- » Recognize, slow down, or stop automatic and habitual reactions
- » Respond more effectively to complex or difficult situations
- » See situations with greater focus and clarity
- » Become more creative
- » Achieve balance and resilience at both work and home



REMEMBER

Mindfulness at work is all about developing awareness of thoughts, emotions, and physiology and how they interact with one another. Mindfulness is also about being aware of your surroundings, helping you better understand the needs of those around you.

Mindfulness training is like going to the gym. In the same way as training a muscle, you can train your brain to direct your attention to where you want it to be. In simple terms, mindfulness is all about managing your mind.

Taking a look at the background

Mindfulness has its origins in ancient Eastern meditation practices. In the late 1970s, Jon Kabat-Zinn developed Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which became the foundation for modern-day mindfulness. Figure 1-1 shows how it developed.

FIGURE 1-1:
Mindfulness
timeline.



In the 1990s Mark Williams, John Teasdale, and Zindel Segal further developed MBSR to help people suffering from depression. Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) combined cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) with mindfulness.

Since the late 1970s, research into the benefits of mindfulness has steadily increased. Recent studies have examined, for example, the effect of practicing mindfulness on the immune system and on those working in high-pressure environments.

Advances in brain-scanning technology have demonstrated that as little as eight weeks of mindfulness training can positively alter brain structures, including the amygdala (the fear center) and the left prefrontal cortex (an area associated with happiness and well-being). Other studies show benefits in even shorter periods of time.

Busy leaders who practice mindfulness have long extolled its virtues, but little research has existed to back up their claims. Fortunately, researchers are now increasingly focusing their attention on the benefits of mindfulness from a workplace perspective.

MBSR and MBCT are taught using a standard eight-week curriculum, and all teachers follow a formalized development route. The core techniques are the same for both courses. Most workplace mindfulness courses are based around MBCT or MBSR but tailored to meet the needs of the workplace.

Although MBSR and MBCT were first developed to help treat a range of physical and mental health conditions, new applications for the techniques have been established. Mindfulness is now being taught in schools and universities, and has even been introduced to prisoners. Many professional education programs, such as MBAs, now include mindfulness training.

Researchers have linked the practice of mindfulness to skills that are highly valuable in the workplace. Research suggests that practicing mindfulness can enhance

- » Emotional intelligence
- » Creativity and innovation
- » Employee engagement
- » Interpersonal relationships
- » Ability to see the bigger picture
- » Resilience
- » Self-management
- » Problem solving
- » Decision making
- » Focus and concentration

In addition, mindfulness is valuable in the workplace because it has a positive effect on immunity and general well-being. It has been demonstrated to relieve the symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress.

ACT

In the late 1980s, research began by Steven Hayes and colleagues for another form of training called Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). ACT combines mindfulness and acceptance with action-based strategies. In the last few years, ACT has begun to be adapted to meet the modern workplace, sometimes called Acceptance and Commitment Training.

Recognizing what mindfulness isn't

Misleading myths about mindfulness abound. Here are a few:

Myth 1: I will need to visit a Buddhist center, go on a retreat, or travel to the Far East to learn mindfulness.

Experienced mindfulness instructors are operating all over the world. Many teachers now teach mindfulness to groups of staff in the workplace. One-to-one mindfulness teaching can be delivered in the office, in hotel meeting rooms, or even on the web. Some people do attend retreats after learning mindfulness if they want to deepen their knowledge, experience peace and quiet, or gain further tuition, but doing so isn't essential.

Myth 2: Practicing mindfulness will conflict with my religious beliefs.

Mindfulness isn't a religion. For example, MBSR and MBCT are entirely secular — as are most workplace programs. No religious belief of any kind is necessary. Mindfulness can help you step back from your mental noise and tune into your own innate wisdom. Mindfulness is practiced by people of all faiths and by those with no spiritual beliefs. Practicing mindfulness won't turn you into a hemp-clad tofu eater, a tree-hugging hippie, or a monk sitting on top of a mountain — unless you want to be one of these people, of course!

Myth 3: I'm too busy to sit and be quiet for any length of time.

When you're busy, the thought of sitting and doing nothing may seem like the last thing you want to do. In 2010, researchers at Harvard University gathered evidence from a quarter of a million people suggesting that, on average, the mind wanders for 47 percent of the working day. Just 15 minutes a day spent practicing mindfulness can help you to become more productive and less distracted. Then you'll be able to make the most of your busy day and get more done in less time. When you first start practicing mindfulness, you'll almost certainly experience mental distractions, but if you persevere you'll find it easier to tune out distractions and to manage your mind. As time goes on, your ability to concentrate increases as does your sense of well-being and a feeling of control over your life.

Myth 4: Practicing mindfulness will reduce my ambition and drive.

Practicing mindfulness can help you become more focused on your goals and better able to achieve them. It can help you become more creative and gain new perspectives on life. If your approach to work is chaotic, mindfulness can make you more focused and centered, which in turn enables you to channel your energy more productively. Coupled with an improved sense of well-being, this ability to focus helps you achieve your career ambitions and goals.

Myth 5: If I practice mindfulness, people will take me less seriously and my career prospects will be damaged.

Some of the most successful and influential people in the world practice mindfulness. Senator Tim Ryan and Goldie Hawn, for example, are keen advocates of mindfulness. Practicing mindfulness doesn't involve sitting cross-legged on the floor — an office chair is fine. If you find it impossible to sit quietly and focus because you work in an open-plan office, or you're concerned about what others think, plenty of other everyday activities can become opportunities to practice mindfulness that nobody will notice. Walking, eating, waiting for your computer to boot up, or even exercising at the gym are all good opportunities to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness can be practicing with your eyes open, while you're moving around during the day.

Myth 6: Mindfulness and meditation are one and the same. Mindfulness is just a trendy new name.

Fact: Mindfulness often involves specific meditation practices. **Fiction:** All meditation is the same. Many popular forms of meditation are all about relaxation — leaving your troubles behind and imagining yourself in a calm and tranquil special place. Mindfulness helps you to find out how to live with your life in the present moment — warts and all — rather than run away from it. Mindfulness is about approaching life and things that you find difficult and exploring them with openness, rather than avoiding them. Most people find that practicing mindfulness does help them to relax, but that this relaxation is a welcome by-product, not the objective!

Training your attention: The power of focus

Are you one of the millions of workers who routinely put in long hours, often for little or no extra pay? In the current climate of cutbacks, job losses, and business efficiencies, many people feel the need to work longer hours just to keep on top of their workload. However, research shows that working longer hours does not mean that you get more done. Actually, if you continue to work when past your peak, your performance slackens and continues to do so as time goes on.

Imagine your job is to chop logs. After a while, your axe needs sharpening and your muscles need resting. If you keep going, you'll become inefficient and are more likely to have an accident. By taking a break and sharpening your axe, you can return to the job and get more done in less time. You'll probably enjoy the job more too. Mindfulness practice is like taking that break — you reenergize and sharpen your mind, ready for your next activity.



REMEMBER

Discovering how to focus and concentrate better is the key to maintaining peak performance. Recognizing when you've slipped past peak performance and then taking steps to bring yourself back to peak are also vital. Mindfulness comes in at this point. Over time, it helps you focus your attention to where you want it to be.

Focusing your attention may sound easy, but try thinking of just one thing for 90 seconds. It could be an object on your desk, a specific sound, or the sensation of your own breathing. Focus your full attention on your chosen object, sound, or sensation and nothing else. Then consider these questions:

- » Did you manage to focus your complete attention for the full 90 seconds, or did your mind wander and random thoughts arise?
- » Did you become distracted by a bodily pain or ache?
- » Did you find yourself getting annoyed with yourself, or annoyed with a sound such as a ticking clock or traffic?

You're not alone! Most people find this activity difficult at first. In truth, you're unlikely to ever be able to shut out all your mental chatter, but you can turn the volume down. Doing so enables you to see things more clearly, reduce time wasted on duplicated work, and stop your mind from wandering. Mindfulness offers you a way of getting more done in less time without burning yourself out.

Applying mindful attitudes

Practicing mindfulness involves more than just training your brain to focus. It also teaches you some alternative mindful attitudes to life's challenges. You discover the links between your thoughts, emotions, and physiology. You find out that what's important isn't what happens to you but how you choose to respond. This statement may sound simple, but most people respond to situations based on their mental programming (past experiences and predictions of what will happen next). Practicing mindfulness makes you more aware of how your thoughts, emotions, and physiology affect your responses to people and situations. This awareness then enables you to choose how to respond rather than react on autopilot. You may well find that you respond in a different manner.

By gaining a better understanding of your brain's response to life events, you can use mindfulness techniques to reduce your fight-or-flight response and regain your body's rest-and-relaxation state. You will see things more clearly and get more done.

Mindfulness also brings you face to face with your inner bully — the voice in your head that says you're not talented enough, not smart enough, or not good enough. By learning to treat thoughts like these as mental processes and not facts, the inner bully loses its grip on your life and you become free to reach your full potential.

These examples are just a few of the many ways that a mindful attitude can have a positive effect on your life and career prospects.

Finding Out Why Your Brain Needs Mindfulness

Recent advances in brain-scanning technology are helping us understand why our brain needs mindfulness. In this section, you discover powerful things about your brain: its evolution, its hidden rules, how thoughts shape your brain structure, and the basics of how your brain operates at work.



FACTS AND FIGURES

Size:

- Around 1,300 grams — that's over three times the size of a chimpanzee's, our closest animal relative.
- The human brain accounts for 2 percent of the body's weight but uses around 20 percent of its energy.

Energy consumption:

- A typical adult human brain runs on around 12 watts — a fifth of the power required by a standard 60 watt light bulb.
- Compared with most other organs, the brain is energy-hungry; but compared to manmade electronics, the brain is extremely efficient. IBM's Watson supercomputer depends on 90 IBM Power 750 servers, each of which requires around 1,000 watts.

Operating system:

- Energy travels to the brain via blood vessels in the form of glucose.
- The brain contains billions of nerve cells that send and receive information around the body.
- The brain never sleeps! It provides instant access to information on demand.

Performance:

- Neurons (brain cells that process and transmit information through electrical and chemical signals) fire around 5 to 50 times a second (or faster).
- Signals cross your brain in a tenth or hundredth of a second.

Evolving from lizard to spaceman

To understand how mindfulness works, you need to know some basics about the human brain. Over millions of years, the human brain has evolved to become the most sophisticated on the planet (see Figure 1-2).

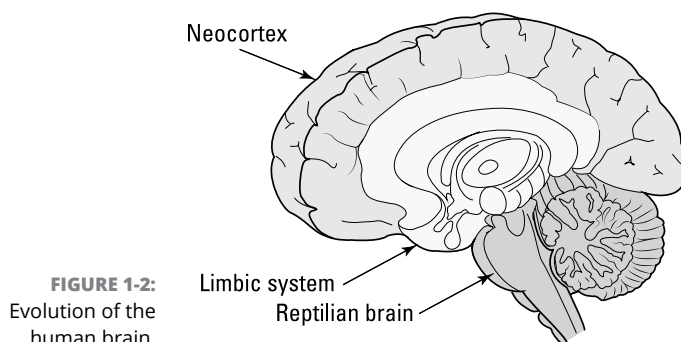


FIGURE 1-2:
Evolution of the
human brain.

The oldest part of the brain is known as the *reptilian brain*. It controls your body's vital functions such as heart rate, breathing, body temperature, and balance. Your reptilian brain includes the main structures found in a reptile's brain: the brain-stem and the cerebellum.

The middle part of your brain is known as the *limbic brain*. It emerged in the first mammals. It records memories of behaviors that produced agreeable and disagreeable experiences for you. The limbic system is responsible for your emotions and value judgments. The reptilian brain and limbic system are rigid and inflexible in how they operate. We call these two areas the *primitive brain*.

The newest part of our brain consists is the neocortex. It has deep grooves and wrinkles that allow the surface area to increase far beyond what could otherwise fit in the same size skull. It accounts for around 85 percent of the human brain's total mass. Some say that the neocortex is what makes us human. The neocortex is responsible for your abstract thoughts, imagination, and consciousness. For simplicity, we call it the *higher brain*. The higher brain is highly flexible and has an almost infinite ability to learn.

The primitive brain deals with routine tasks and needs little energy to operate quickly. The higher brain is incredibly powerful but requires a lot of energy to run and operates more slowly than the primitive brain. These differences explain why you often experience strong emotions or take action long before logic starts to kick in. It also explains the human tendency to work on autopilot (based on responses stored in the primitive brain) for much of the time.

Because you spend much of your time working on autopilot, you're often unaware of your thoughts, emotions, and physiology in the present moment. The following short activity is designed to help you recognize your routine responses and how changing them just slightly can make you more aware of them:

1. **Sit in a different chair from usual in a meeting, park in a different spot in the car park, sleep on the other side of the bed, or use a different hand to write with.**
2. **Observe your thoughts, emotions, and bodily responses.**
3. **Identify how you felt. Did you find changing your behavior difficult? Did you feel awkward?**



REMEMBER

Doing things differently can be hard because your mental programming is probably screaming, "You've got it wrong; that's not how you do it." Carrying out an activity in a new way involves conscious thought and thus engages your higher brain, which needs more energy to function. This explains why even small changes can feel difficult or uncomfortable.

Discovering your brain's hidden rules

Imagine yourself as one of your ancient ancestors — a cave dweller. In ancient times, you had to make life-or-death decisions every day. You had to decide whether it was best to approach a reward (such as killing a deer) or avoid a threat (such as a fierce predator charging at you). If you failed to gain your reward, in this example a deer to eat, you'd probably live to hunt another day. But if you failed to avoid the threat, you'd be dead, never to hunt again.

As a result of facing these daily dangers, your brain has evolved to minimize threat. Unfortunately, this has led to the brain spending much more time looking for potential risks and problems than seeking rewards and embracing new opportunities. This tendency is called the *human negativity bias*.

Try the following:

1. **Think of six bad things that have happened recently.**
2. **Think of six good things that have happened recently.**
3. **Identify which task you found easiest.**

Most people readily conjure up six bad things but struggle to think of six good things. The bad things dominate because the brain is primed to expend more energy looking for potential threats (bad things) than looking for opportunities (good things).

When your brain detects a potential threat, it floods your system with powerful hormones designed to help you evade mortal danger. The sudden flood of dozens of hormones into your body results in your heart rate speeding up, blood pressure increasing, pupils dilating, and veins in skin constricting to send more blood to major muscle groups to help you sprint away from danger. More oxygen is pumped into your lungs, and non-essential systems (such as digestion, the immune system, and routine body repair and maintenance) shut down to provide more energy for emergency functions. Your brain starts to have trouble focusing on small tasks because it's trying to maintain focus on the big picture to anticipate and avoid further threat.

Threat or risk avoidance is controlled by the primitive areas of your brain, which operate fast. This speed explains why, when you unexpectedly encounter a snake in the woods, your primitive brain decides on the best way to keep you safe from harm with no conscious thought, and you jump out of the way long before your higher brain engages to find a rational solution.

This process is great from an evolutionary perspective but can be bad news in modern-day life. Many people routinely overestimate the potential threat involved in everyday work such as a critical boss, a failed presentation, or social humiliation. The brain treats these modern-day “threats” in exactly the same way as your ancestor’s response to mortal danger. This fight-or-flight response was designed to be used for short periods of time. Unfortunately, when under pressure at work, it can remain activated for long periods. This activation can lead to poor concentration, an inability to focus, low immunity, and even serious illness.

Mindfulness training helps you to recognize when you’re in this heightened state of arousal and then reduce or even switch off the fight-or-flight response. It also helps you develop the skill to trigger at will your rest-and-relaxation response, bringing your body back to normal, allowing it to repair itself and increasing both your sense of well-being and your ability to focus on work.

Recognizing that you are what you think

For many years, it was thought that your brain became fixed once you reached a certain age. We now know that the adult brain retains impressive powers of *neuroplasticity*, the ability to change its structure and function in response to experience. It was also believed that, if you damaged certain areas of the brain (as a result of a stroke or other brain injury), you’d no longer be capable of performing certain brain functions. We now know that in some cases the brain can rewire itself and train a different area to undertake the functions that the damaged part previously carried out. The brain’s hard wiring (neural pathways) change constantly in response to thoughts and experiences.

Neuroplasticity offers amazing opportunities to reinvent yourself and change the way you do and think about things. Your unique brain wiring is a result of your thoughts and experiences in life. Blaming your genes or upbringing; saying “It’s not my fault; that’s how I was born” is no longer a good excuse!

To take advantage of this knowledge, you need to develop awareness of your thoughts, and the effect that these thoughts have on your emotions and physiology. The problem is that, if you’re like most people, you’re probably rarely aware of the majority of your thoughts. Let’s face it — you’d be exhausted if you were! Mindfulness helps you to develop the ability to passively observe your thoughts as mental processes. In turn, this allows you to observe patterns of thought and decide whether these patterns are appropriate and serve you well. If you decide that they’re not, your awareness of them gives you the opportunity to replace them with better ways of thinking and behaving.

For example, if you arrive at work and think, “Oh no, I’ve got so many tasks on my to-do list. I’m never going to get them all done! I’m so inefficient.” and so on, your brain is on a negative thought stream. Mindfulness helps you to catch yourself doing that and, instead, simply and more calmly move your attention to the first priority on your list of things to do.

Another common problem you may encounter is that you may *think* that your decisions and actions are always based on present-moment facts, but in reality they rarely are. Making decisions based on your brain’s prediction of the future (which is usually based on your past experiences and unique brain wiring) is common. In addition, you see with your brain; in other words, your brain acts as a filter to incoming information from the eyes and chooses what it thinks is important. The problem is that you routinely make decisions and act without full possession of the facts. What happened in the past will not necessarily happen now; your predictions about the future could be inaccurate, leading to inappropriate responses and actions.

So, going back to the example of the long to-do list, if you’re mindful, you can choose to do what’s most important, rather than just automatically reacting to the last email you received.



REMEMBER

Practicing mindfulness helps you to see the bigger picture and make decisions based on present-moment facts rather than self-generated assumptions and fiction.

Here’s another example. When you’re under pressure, it’s all too easy to fall into a thought spiral, with one thought driving the next. In the process, you develop your own story of what’s going on around you, which can be wildly different from

reality. For example, if you fail to get an invitation to a meeting at work you think you should attend, your thoughts might follow this pattern:

Why haven't they invited me?

They obviously think that my team and I have nothing to contribute.

Maybe they're discussing redundancies.

Maybe they haven't invited me because they're discussing making me redundant!

At my age, I'll never get another job!

How will I pay off the remainder of the mortgage?

This may mean my son has to drop out of college.

I'll ruin my son's life. I'm a dreadful father. I'm such a loser.

In reality, the failure to invite you was an administrative error, but your mind has created a detailed story, which your brain has treated as reality. As a result, your brain has triggered emotions (anger or fear), your body has become tense, and your heart rate has speeded up. Your emotions and physiology have a further effect on your thoughts and behavior, and so on.

Many people fall into this trap. Mindfulness helps you notice when your thoughts begin to spiral and take action to stop them spiraling down even further. You can observe what's going on in the present moment, and separate present-moment facts from self-created fiction. This ability gives you choices and a world of new possibilities.

Think of a person or situation that triggers your primitive brain's threat system. (Don't choose anything too scary or threatening!) Then:

1. **Observe what's going on in your head.** Identify patterns of thoughts, as if you were a spectator observing from the outside. What is it specifically that has triggered your primitive brain?
2. **Acknowledge your emotional response without judgment or self-blame.** Try to observe from a distance and see if you can reduce or prevent a strong emotional reaction by observing the interplay of your thoughts and emotions as if you were a bystander.
3. **Be kind to yourself.** You're human and just responding according to your mental wiring. Observe both your thoughts and emotions as simply mental processes, without the need to respond to them. Regarding them as thoughts not facts and being kind to yourself help to encourage your primitive brain to let go of the steering wheel and allow your higher brain to become the driver once more.



When developing new neural pathways, practice makes perfect. Changing your behavior or learning to do something new takes awareness, intention, action, and practice — no shortcuts exist! Understanding a few simple facts about how your brain works and making small adjustments to your responses can help you to create new and more productive neural pathways.

Exploring your brain at work

Before diving into more detail about mindfulness and how it could be of benefit to your work, you need to discover a little more about how your brain processes everyday work tasks.

Let's look at a real-life example. Jen is a senior manager working in a police training organization, where she is responsible for leading a team who develop doctrine (guidance and standards) for police forces across the country. Her job description includes the following desirable characteristics:

- » Organizational skills
- » Communication skills
- » Ability to manage conflicting priorities
- » Problem-solving skills
- » Decision-making skills
- » Relationship-building skills
- » Ability to manage change

One of the most challenging aspects of Jen's work is managing multiple and often conflicting demands. Because her role is national, she is responsible to multiple stakeholders working in different police forces and affiliate organizations. Problems sometimes arise when stakeholders think that their project is more important than other projects, and completion of that project by a certain date takes on an almost life-or-death importance in their minds. This elevated importance is often compounded by senior stakeholders taking sides and applying pressure. When this situation arises, Jen uses negotiation skills to try to resolve the issue. She gives the stakeholders a reality check, often along the lines of, "If I prioritize this, then I can't do that" or "If I do this first, that will be late."

At times like these, Jen notices her body tensing. She sometimes wakes at 2 a.m. trying to find a solution that resolves the conflict for all concerned. She sometimes experiences irritation and frustration at the inability of others to see the bigger picture. Her thoughts run along the following lines: "Either I'm not explaining it right or they're being obtuse"; "We're all supposed to be professionals, so why

can't they behave as such?"; "No one will die if we're a few days late with this project"; and "Why are they acting so selfishly?"

What Jen is unaware of is the effect of one of the foundations of mindfulness training: non-judgmental observation of the interplay between her thoughts, emotions, and physiology. Her thoughts are triggering emotions, which are triggering a bodily response. Her bodily response (which she is largely unaware of) is having a tangible effect on her thoughts and decisions. Although she thinks that she's fully rational and in control when making decisions, in reality her emotions are also affecting her thoughts. If Jen were practicing mindfulness, she'd be much more aware of what's going on and able to choose alternative strategies that were better for her well-being and that might lead to wiser decisions.

Despite the fact that Jen is an experienced leader, calm, organized, and highly intelligent, her primitive brain has detected a possible threat to her social and professional status. Status — your place in the pecking order — is important to humans. Jen's amygdala (part of the limbic system in her primitive brain) triggers a fight-or-flight response. Her primitive brain is now in charge. Hijacked by emotions, her higher brain becomes helpless. In an attempt to keep her safe from harm, her primitive brain hijacks the driver's seat and she is reduced to being a passenger in the back seat, hanging on for dear life. Jen is in this position because her primitive brain switches off her higher brain, including the prefrontal cortex (PFC), shown in Figure 1-3. This vital part of your brain plays a huge role in decision making. The prefrontal cortex allows you to plan, create strategies, pay attention, learn, and focus on goals.

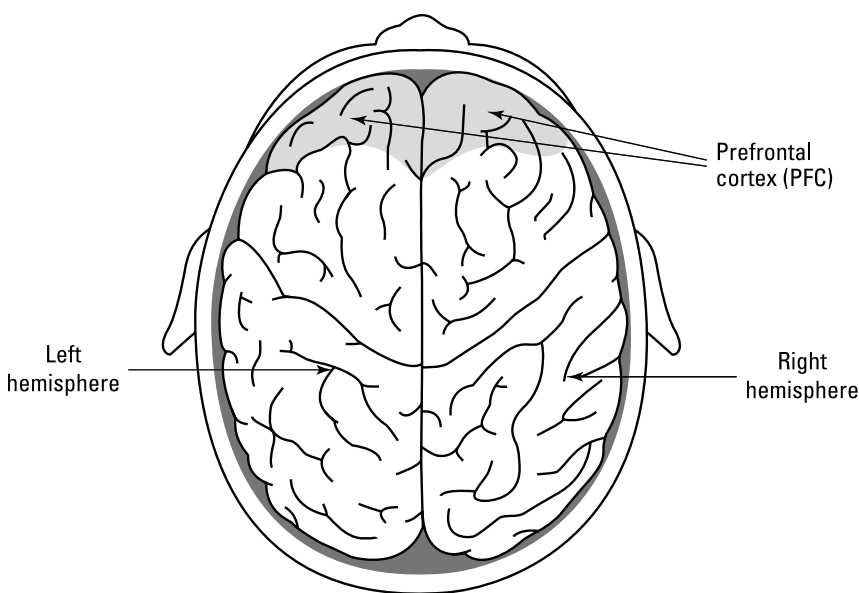


FIGURE 1-3:
Image of the
brain showing the
prefrontal cortex.



REMEMBER

When finding out about mindfulness, you discover the interplay between your primitive brain's desire to keep you safe from harm and the effect of your sympathetic nervous system (which mobilizes your parasympathetic fight-or-flight response) on both your body and your ability to think clearly.

At times like this, Jen would benefit from a mindfulness exercise. She should focus her full attention on taking slow, deep breaths for a few minutes. Focusing her attention fully on the sensation of breathing will slow down or stop her mental chatter, which in turn will reduce the feeling of threat and trigger a lessening of her fight-or-flight response. In addition, her brain's PFC will get the oxygen it needs to regain control, and her primitive brain will hand back control to her PFC.

Of course, the rational PFC can't always prevent the primitive brain from engaging. This inability is because the primitive brain is more evolved and responds much more quickly than the highly powerful but slower and less-evolved higher brain. Mindfulness does not stop your rational higher brain from getting hijacked by your primitive brain, but it does make you much more aware of what's going on, much earlier. This awareness gives you choices in how to respond. You won't be forced to unconsciously default to primitive brain autopilot responses and actions. You have a choice!

Now we need to look at other elements of the brain that effect Jen's work and explore how mindfulness could be beneficial.

At times Jen feels as if she's hitting a brick wall when she's trying to find new solutions to old problems. When under pressure, defaulting to well-used, comfortable ways of doing things stored in the primitive brain is all too easy. Giving stock answers to questions may result. Mindfulness teaches you the benefits of taking time out to calm your mind and center yourself. Doing so can take as little as three minutes and can produce dramatic results. Allowing the brain to relax and let go of its frantic activity to solve the problem can deactivate the primitive brain's grip, and allow the higher brain to apply creativity and innovation to the problem.

Jen often multitasks, flitting from one project to another and juggling project work with phone calls and emails as they arise. She often finds herself becoming tired and having difficulty concentrating. The ability to multitask is a myth. Many research studies show that regular multitaskers get less done than those who focus on one thing at a time — even the people who think they're good at multitasking. Multitasking means that the brain is switching backward and forward from task to task, which wastes a huge amount of valuable energy. In addition, details are invariably lost with each switch. No wonder that Jen feels tired! She's making her life much harder than it needs to be.

Mindfulness shows you how to mentally stand back and observe what's going on around you and in your brain. It also helps you develop different approaches to

life that are kinder to you and usually more productive. Mindfulness helps you observe and reduce the mental chatter that distracts you from your work, allowing you to focus on it more fully. By intentionally taking steps to recognize and avoid distractions and focusing your full attention on one task at a time, you can get things done more quickly, with fewer mistakes and less repetition. Using mindfulness techniques when you feel your attention waning can help you to restart work feeling refreshed and focused.

Mindfulness can also be useful in high-level meetings when emotions can sometimes be charged. Training in mindfulness would help Jen to observe the dynamics at play in such meetings more clearly. She'd probably recognize that in this situation, people are commonly motivated by the need to avoid potential threat (to status and social standing) and are unlikely to approach the task with an open mind and look for the best possible solution. Jen would also be aware of the two possible states of mind that people could be operating in.

In *avoidance mode*, people are motivated by the desire to avoid something happening. With their threat system activated, they may fail to see the bigger picture, be less able to think clearly, and be less creative in their ideas and solutions. Avoidance mode tends to be associated with increased activation of the right PFC. Excessive right-brain PFC activation is associated with depression and anxiety. Mindfulness cultivates an approach state of mind. Often the effort taken to avoid something happening is disproportionate to dealing with the thing you seek to avoid. An *approach mode* of mind is associated with increased left-brain PFC activation, which is connected with positivity and an upbeat approach to life. In approach mode, you're able to explore new possibilities and opportunities with an open mind.

When working in avoidance mode, cognitive thinking resources are diminished, making it harder to think and work things through. You're also likely to feel less positive and engaged. If Jen applied mindfulness to her work life, she'd be able to better manage her own emotions and subtly take steps to help reduce the sense of threat often permeating business meetings.

The brain can have a significant effect on how you work. Finding out about and practicing mindfulness gives you the tools you need to harness this knowledge to manage your mind better.

Starting Your Mindful Journey

Congratulations! The fact that you've picked up this book and started reading it means that you've already started your mindful journey. A good book is a great starting point, but nothing can replace experiencing mindfulness for yourself. As

with learning anything new, you may find it difficult to know where to start. Learning mindfulness from an experienced teacher who can help you overcome obstacles and guide your development is advisable. The idea behind this book is to demonstrate *how* and *why* mindfulness can benefit you at work, and provide suggestions of how to apply simple mindfulness techniques to everyday work challenges.

Being mindful at work yourself

Getting caught up in the manic pace of everyday work life is common. You, like many workers, may feel under pressure to deliver more with fewer resources. You may also be keen to demonstrate what an asset you are to your company by working longer and longer hours, and being contactable round the clock.

Being mindful at work can involve as little or as much change as you're able to accommodate at this moment in time. At one end of the scale, you may simply apply knowledge of how the brain works and some mindful principles to your work. To gain maximum benefit, you need to practice mindfulness regularly and apply quick mindfulness techniques in the workplace when you need to regain focus or encounter difficulties. The choice is yours! The benefits you gain increase in line with the effort you put in. You should see a real difference after practicing mindfulness for as little as ten minutes a day for about six weeks.

At times, being mindful at work can involve an act of bravery — swimming against the tide by doing things differently. If the way you're currently working is leading to stress, anxiety, tiredness, or exhaustion, maybe you need to try something different. If you're tasked with being innovative and finding new ways of doing things, what makes you think that carrying on as you've always done will make this creativity possible? Humans dislike uncertainty and crave certainty. Defaulting to doing things as you've always done them is always easier, especially if they've become stored as habits in the primitive brain and can be repeated with little or no conscious thought.

Changing habits takes time and effort. For this reason, most mindfulness courses are taught weekly, over a five- to eight-week period. Each week you learn something new, practice it for a week, and then build new knowledge onto it the following week. When first learning to be mindful, most people find it easier to practice at home than at work. Practicing at home is simpler because controlling noise and disturbances at home is easier.

Following these initial practice sessions, most people then introduce a few short mindfulness techniques at work. Over time, as mindfulness becomes second nature to you, you'll develop the ability to practice wherever and whenever the opportunity arises. As your confidence builds and you apply mindfulness to your

work further, others will probably notice changes in you. You may appear calmer, more poised, and better focused. Possibly your work relationships have improved. If you're lucky enough to be offered mindfulness sessions in work time, don't be surprised if people are curious, and ask you for tips and techniques to try out for themselves. Organizations that offer mindfulness classes often have a long waiting list of staff eager to attend.

Overcoming common challenges

Probably the most common challenges you face when learning mindfulness are concerns about what others think; finding the right time and place to practice; and breaking down habits and mind-sets to do things differently.

You now need to address each of these challenges in turn.

Dealing with concerns about what others think

In the past, mindfulness was often associated with Buddhism, spirituality, and new age ideas. This association was compounded by the fact that mindfulness was often taught only in Buddhist centers or local village halls. And, although MBSR had existed for over 40 years, and MBCT and ACT for about 20, they were used only in clinical settings and the general public was unaware of them. In addition, the media often confused mindfulness with other forms of meditation. Articles about mindfulness were often accompanied by pictures of people sitting cross-legged in the lotus position, their hands in prayer. This misleading image was almost certainly one of the reasons behind professionals' reluctance to come out of the mindfulness closet.

In recent years, mindfulness has been discussed in the White House, sampled at the World Economic Forum, and taught by major business schools. The press now feature mindfulness on a regular basis, and the pictures that accompany the articles are slowly becoming more representative of real-life mindfulness practice! As a result, more and more people are giving mindfulness a try, and integrating it into their workday.

Finding the right time and place to practice

If you're lucky enough to be offered mindfulness training by your organization, you quickly discover that mindfulness is unlike any other courses you've attended. Unlike most courses that employers routinely offer to staff, simply attending isn't enough. Classes help you understand the principles that underpin mindfulness and how mindfulness techniques work. They also provide you with a safe environment and guidance to try out different mindfulness techniques. However, the real learning usually happens outside work, as you practice it. You can't get fit without

exercising, can you? The same applies to mindfulness. Think of mindfulness as a good workout for your brain; the more you practice, the easier it becomes.

On a typical workplace mindfulness course, you're taught a different technique each week, which you need to practice for at least six days before moving on to the next one. This process can prove to be one of the most challenging aspects of learning mindfulness. For many busy workers, their entire workday is scheduled, and this scheduling sometimes extends into their home life. With a mind-set of "so much to do and so little time," even finding 15 minutes a day can feel daunting. The question to ask yourself is, "Why am I doing this?" For many people, the answer is "because I cannot continue working in the way I do." If this is your reply, rearranging your life to make time for mindfulness is worthwhile.



TIP

Try not to think about mindfulness as just another thing that needs to be fitted into your busy life. Rather, view it as a new way to live your life. Think of the time you spend practicing mindfulness as "me time" — after all, this time is one of the rare moments in which you have nothing to do but focus on yourself.

Breaking down habits and mind-sets to do things differently

Habits are formed when you repeat the same thoughts or behaviors many times. Habits are highly efficient from a brain perspective because they're stored in the primitive brain, which can repeat them quickly without any conscious thought, using very little energy.



REMEMBER

Learning mindfulness may take effort, especially if you start to challenge your habits and patterns of thinking. Just as it takes time to form habits, so it takes time to replace old habits with different ways of thinking and being. With a little time and perseverance, you can find new ways of working that are more productive and better for your health and sense of well-being.

Creating a mindful workplace

Every great journey starts with just one step. A young single mother of three was once given the opportunity to climb Mount Everest. Three-quarters of the way up the mountain she became exhausted, felt overwhelmed by the whole journey, and declared that she could go no further. The trek leader calmly stood in front of her and asked whether she could see his footsteps in the snow ahead. She nodded in agreement. He told her that all she needed to do was put one foot in front of another, following his footsteps. By focusing on the present moment action of her feet, she was able to avoid worrying about the remainder of the journey. She made it to the summit — one of the greatest achievements of her life.

YOUR FIRST TASTE OF MINDFULNESS

If you're new to mindfulness, perhaps now is a good time to try the following little mindfulness exercise:

1. Sit on a chair in a comfortable posture. Try to sit upright rather than slouching, but you don't need to be tense or rigid.
2. Allow your eyes to close. If that's uncomfortable for you at the moment, simply cast your gaze downward.
3. Take three deep in and out breaths. As you breathe in, feel the sensation of your breath through your nose and into your body. As you breathe out, again feel the sensation of your breath leaving your body through your nose.
4. Now focus your attention on the sounds that surround you. They might be sounds in the room, elsewhere in the building, or outside the building. Try to treat them simply as sounds, using them as an anchor for your attention. There is no need to judge or categorize them; they are simply sounds.
5. Each time you notice that your mind has wandered off on a train of thought, which will certainly happen, turn your attention back to focusing your attention on sounds. It's important not to criticize or judge yourself for having a wandering mind — everyone has a wild mind! Just accept mind wandering as part and parcel of the process of mindfulness.
6. After a few minutes, focus your attention on any thoughts that may be going round your head. See if you can observe your thoughts simply as mental processes that come and go.
7. Finish with another three deep breaths — again, let those breaths be mindful by feeling each breath as it enters and leaves your body.
8. Slowly open your eyes if they've been closed and take a few moments to reflect on your experience. Notice how you feel having done this mindfulness exercise.

Mindfulness exercises like this can be difficult at first. Don't worry if you did not end the exercise relaxed and calm; everyone's experience is different. Like anything worth doing, mindfulness takes a little effort, but regular practice will pay dividends.

Getting caught up in planning the journey ahead is common, and at times you may feel overwhelmed by all the things you need to do and think about. When finding out about and practicing mindfulness for the first time, focus only on the next footstep, rather than the journey as a whole, is often the best approach. Try to let your mindful journey unfold, day by day, moment by moment. If you truly want your organization to become more mindful, you need to start by focusing on

yourself. As you gain a deeper understanding of what mindfulness is, and start to experiment with integrating mindfulness into your life and work, you discover for yourself what works and what doesn't. Only then are you equipped to make a difference to your organization. The building blocks of a mindful organization are mindful employees who start to transform their organizations one step at a time.

Living the dream: Mindfulness at work

Sometimes the hardest part of a journey is taking the first step. In this book, you can find a wealth of information about mindfulness. You also discover mindful techniques for different situations that you may encounter at work and for different occupations.

The potential of mindfulness to transform the way you work and live your life is immense. The extent to which you benefit from it is entirely up to you and the effort that you're able to put into it.



REMEMBER

When discovering how to become more mindful, remember ABC:

- » **A** is for **awareness** — becoming more aware of what you're thinking and doing and what's going on in your mind and body.
- » **B** is for just **being** with your experiences — avoiding the tendency to respond on autopilot and feed problems by creating your own story.
- » **C** is for **choice** — by seeing things as they are you can **choose** to respond more wisely — by creating a gap between an experience and your reaction you can step out of autopilot and open up a world of new possibilities.

As with all new skills, the more you practice mindfulness, the easier it becomes. Canadian psychologist Donald Hebb coined the phrase “neurons that fire together, wire together.” In other words, the more you practice mindfulness, the more you develop the neural pathways in the brain associated with being mindful.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Looking at mindfulness from the employees' perspective
- » Discovering how mindfulness is good for your organization
- » Making employees happier and more productive

Chapter 2

Discovering the Benefits of Mindfulness

Mindfulness may appear to be the “in thing” at the moment, but does it have any substance? What are the actual benefits of mindfulness at work?

In this chapter, you uncover the positive effects of mindfulness for yourself. You discover the many positive changes that take place in your brain as a result of mindfulness practice. You find out why so many organizations are training their leaders and employees in mindfulness, and explore organizational ways of integrating mindfulness into the workplace to increase staff performance and well-being.

Discovering the Benefits for Employees

Being a mindful employee has many benefits. In this section, you find out how mindfulness changes your brain and how those changes make you more resilient, emotionally intelligent, and focused. If you're in a leadership position, you discover how mindfulness can make you more effective in your work, too.

Increased mental resilience

Resilience is the process of adapting well when you experience adversity, trauma, or a major source of stress. Resilience is sometimes described as the ability to bounce back from difficult experiences.

In the average workplace, mental resilience is essential. If you're resilient, you're able to deal with rapid changes and serious challenges rather than spiraling downward when faced with difficulties.

Resilience isn't a trait. You're not born with a certain amount of resilience and stuck with it. Instead, resilience involves a combination of thoughts, behaviors, and actions that you can learn. That's what makes resilience such an exciting concept.

Let's imagine you've been working on securing a bid for a huge project. You've been developing the presentation and report for months. You're under tremendous pressure to succeed and, when the day comes, your nerves get the better of you. You struggle to answer questions, as your mind goes blank. You lose the contract and your manager shouts at you in frustration and may even fire you. How would you feel? What would you think?

The following thoughts might arise from such a situation: "I failed. I'm so stupid. I messed up. What if I get fired? How will I pay my bills? I should have practiced more. What's wrong with me? I'm pathetic."

These thoughts emerge from the soup of emotions that's ignited by the stress you experienced. If you're unmindful, these thoughts persist and you're less able to bounce back from the experience. You feel increasingly worse and things can spiral downward.

From a mindful perspective, you notice that you're having these self-judgmental thoughts. You're then able to step back from them and see that, yes, the presentation didn't go well, but all the other things you're telling yourself are just thoughts arising from your negative feelings about the event — they aren't necessarily true. By acknowledging that feelings affect your thoughts, you can avoid reacting to the imagined threat and deal with the situation in a reasoned manner. You may choose to talk to your boss, explain what happened, and ask how to proceed — maybe you can give a presentation for a smaller project, or shift into a different role for the time being, or attend training in presentation skills. Over time, practicing mindfulness builds up your resilience to such workplace experiences and you'll be better able to deal with them.

Even the US army is using mindfulness to help build resilience in its recruits. Initial studies show that mindfulness helps to develop soldiers' mental fitness so that they're more able to make good decisions in stressful situations and less likely to suffer post-traumatic stress disorder.

Some people mistakenly think that resilient people don't experience distress — that's not true. When adversity strikes, experiencing mental and emotional pain is normal. Developing resilience, however, ensures that, over time, you're able to rebuild your life.

But, you may be wondering, how does mindfulness increase resilience in your brain? Research by Professor Richard Davidson and colleagues has discovered how mindfulness may help build resilience. They looked at people's brains when faced with a stressor and found that their amygdala (the part of the brain responsible for processing emotions and responding to fear) became activated, releasing stress hormones. The research participants also experienced negative, cyclical thoughts long after the stressor had passed. In those participants who practiced mindfulness, however, the activity of the amygdala reduced soon after the stressor was removed. Davidson states that better control of the amygdala may be the key to resilience.

Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson believes that mindfulness offers other ways to build resilience too:

- » **Acceptance:** You have the capacity to see what you can change and what you can't. In the preceding example, you can't change your presentation, but you can change your relationship to your thoughts that follow.
- » **Self-compassion:** You can be kind to yourself in the face of adversity. You find out how to be your own best friend rather than harshly criticize yourself. You see your difficulties as part and parcel of humanity's struggle with life's challenges, rather than a sense of you suffering alone. More than 200 studies show the positive benefits of self-compassion alone.
- » **Growth:** You are open to seeing difficulties as opportunities to learn and grow. Your mindset is open rather than fixed.
- » **Creativity:** In a more mindful state, the part of your brain geared toward creative thinking is active. You can come up with more novel solutions by visualizing different choices you could make, with consequent positive outcomes.

So, following an unsuccessful outcome to months of hard work, you may say to yourself, "Beating myself up is pointless. I worked hard, but I wasn't successful this time. I'm sure there are things I can discover from this experience. Perhaps

I could ask for feedback and tips from others. Then, after a few days of well-deserved rest, I can work on a different project.”

Working in a resilient way isn’t just for challenging circumstances. Mindfulness is a different way of being with your everyday experiences. You discover ways of living with awareness no matter what you’re doing, seeking new challenges and looking forward to learning that may arise from them and drawing upon your insights for everything you do.

Here are five actions you can take to use mindfulness to help build your resilience:

- » **Help others.** Be mindful of the needs of others rather than just yourself. By seeking ways to help others when you’re not so busy, you’re more likely to be supported when going through difficulties yourself. For example, help John with his report, Michelle with her difficult team, or Jane with moving house over the weekend.
- » **Look after yourself.** In addition to helping others, help yourself too! Be mindful of how much sleep you’re getting, how much exercise you’re doing, and whether you’re taking regular breaks. Muscles strengthen only if they have time to rest between activities. Your brain is the same.
- » **Nudge your mindset.** In any given moment, your brain receives far more information than it can actively be conscious of. So, rather than focusing the spotlight of your attention on what’s not going well, focus it on the positives. What went well today? What are you grateful for? Think about it, make a note of it, or email someone close to you and share your appreciation. Your brain will thank you for it.
- » **Expect change.** If you practice mindfulness, you know that change is the only constant. When you try to focus on your breathing, your mind comes up with all sorts of thoughts. (See the nearby “Mindfulness of breath” sidebar.) If you can see that the nature of the world is change, and you seek to adapt to the change rather than avoid or run away from it, you’re being more mindful and more resilient.
- » **Seek meaning.** When adversity strikes, after the initial period of sadness or anger, you do have a choice. You can sink into feeling sorry for yourself or look for an opportunity for growth. Post-traumatic growth obviously takes time but does usually happen. Look out for what you can discover from the challenges you’re currently facing. For example, losing your job isn’t nice but may allow you to decide on a new career path. Be mindful of the opportunities that arise for you.

MINDFULNESS OF BREATH

The mindfulness of breath exercise uses the breath as an anchor point on which to focus your attention. In this exercise, make sure that you do not try to *control* your breath — just *observe* it. The exercise isn't about relaxing (although many people do find it so). Rather, the exercise is about *falling awake*, becoming more aware of what's happening in your mind. Think of yourself as a kind scientist, inquisitively observing everything that's going on without judging or categorizing it.

Find somewhere quiet where you won't be disturbed. Read the following instructions, set a timer for 10 to 15 minutes, and guide yourself through the exercise. If possible, select a gentle alarm tone so that you don't jump out of your seat at the end of the exercise.

1. Settle yourself in a chair where you can sit in a comfortable upright position.

Both feet should be firmly planted on the floor, with your shoulders relaxed and your head facing forward.

2. Pay attention to the contact points between your body and the chair and floor.

Spend a few minutes exploring how your feet, legs, bottom, and any other areas in contact with the chair and floor feel.

3. Notice how feelings arise and disappear.

If you notice nothing, that's fine. The important thing is checking in with yourself and just observing what's there.

4. Now focus your attention on your breathing.

Notice how your chest and abdomen feel as the breath enters, pauses, and leaves your body. Observe how the air feels as it enters your nostrils, and leaves them.

If your mind wanders, that's fine — minds do wander! Give yourself a pat on the back for having recognized that your mind has wandered and bring your attention back to where you want it to be. It doesn't matter if your mind wanders 100 times; the act of recognizing that your mind has wandered and bringing it back is what's important.

5. Continue to use your breath as anchor within you for as long as you have time.

When your timer sounds, gently stretch your fingers and toes, and open your eyes, ready to start work again.

Improved relationships

You've probably had to work with people who are difficult to get along with. Maybe they are rude, critical, and rarely offer praise. They say the wrong thing at the wrong time. You wonder how they managed to get promoted in the company in the first place. You may even think that you're better off avoiding certain colleagues.

Relationships matter. A lot. In fact, the human brain is designed to be social. Learning, emotional processing, creativity, and insight are often enhanced when in conversation with others. If that's the case, why are workplace relationships so often fraught with difficulty? And how does mindfulness improve workplace relationships?

When you're mindful, you're better able to regulate your emotions. For example, Frank works for a large oil company and is responsible for the refining division. He talks to Samantha about her recent lateness at work. She starts giving excuses. This pattern repeats over several days. Eventually, in a fit of anger, Frank starts shouting at her. She shouts back. In the weeks that follow, Samantha does come into work early but refuses to do more than the minimum that's required of her. Behind Frank's back, she gossips about his ineffectiveness as a manager. Frank does the same to her. How could mindfulness have helped?

If Frank were more mindful, he'd have noticed the anger building up in him. As a result, he could have used mindfulness to acknowledge the feeling and make a choice. He could have chosen to speak to Samantha later in the day when he was more composed. At that time, he could go over the issue and explain why the company needs Samantha to be at work on time and the consequences of lateness. Listening to Samantha's reasons, he may discover a bigger underlying issue — maybe she's been working late on a particular project and feels she deserves a rest, or perhaps the pressure of deadlines makes it harder for her to both fall asleep at night and wake up in the morning. Seen in this bigger context, Frank is less likely to react with anger next time and more likely to develop positive working relationships with colleagues.

The second way that mindfulness improves relationships is by enhancing the ability to listen both to the words being said and the emotions behind them. Good communication is the very heart of relationships. With greater levels of mindful awareness, you become more adept at listening to both the words being spoken and how the person is feeling. You can also pick up someone's emotional signals by observing that person's body posture. If you're checking your text messages while someone's talking to you, you're multitasking — you're effectively saying to the other person that what he or she has to say isn't important and, as a result, the relationship slightly deteriorates. If you give that person your full attention, the relationship can develop instead.

Consider someone you know who is mindful. How does that person listen, talk, and move about? When you're in his or her company, do you feel comfortable? Most of us enjoy being with mindful people because they give us the time to speak. They listen non-judgmentally to our views and don't criticize. They understand the challenges we face. Being with someone like that makes us more mindful — mindfulness spreads.

You're better able to listen because mindfulness enhances focus. Research shows that the more you practice mindful exercises, the better your brain becomes at

focusing on whatever it chooses to. Being better able to focus has obvious benefits when you're trying to listen to someone at work.

Mindfulness also helps you to step outside yourself. Rather than just thinking about yourself and what you need, you think about others more. For example, one corporate executive's brain was so frantically busy that his life was a blur. He had no chance of caring for others because he could hardly pay attention to what he had to do to look after himself. His relentless streams of thought made him see the world through cloudy glasses. Mindfulness helped him to step back from those thoughts, a bit like removing those glasses. The thoughts were still there, but they weren't as close and relentless. He was then better able to offer attention and care to his colleagues. He now finds colleagues often come to see him for personal advice. He's better able to see things from the perspective of other people — a vital skill in all relationships.



TIP

Use the following tips to be more mindful in your workplace relationships:

- » **Really connect.** Make a conscious effort to look people in the eye when they're speaking to you. Listen to their words and try to pick up on their emotions too. If you have the tendency to interrupt, resist it. Listen more and ask questions to clarify what the other people are saying.
- » **Take a mindful pause.** Stop and think before speaking to someone you find difficult. Notice whether you react emotionally to that person and, if you do, try to step back from your habitual emotions and thoughts. If you carry on doing what you've always done, you carry on getting what you've always got. Use the mindful pause and see what effect it has on the relationship.
- » **See things from their viewpoint.** Use mindful awareness to step back and see things from the other person's point of view. Maybe the person you're dealing with doesn't have the necessary social skills to cope with her staff. Possibly she makes rash decisions because she's anxious. Seen in this way, her behavior appears far less threatening and you may feel sorry for her rather than annoyed.
- » **Wish them well.** As you walk about in your workplace, rather than negatively judging people, or even being neutral toward them, you can wish them well. As you encounter people, think, "May you be well, may you be happy." After all, they're human beings just like you, and they want to be happy just like you. By wishing others well, you shift your attention away from your own worries and toward a more positive and mindful mindset. This may sound like a strange exercise to do, but it is certainly worth trying.

Honed mental clarity and focus

Imagine lying in a darkened room and shining a torch around. What you can see is whatever that spotlight is shining on.

Your mind works in the same way. Your attention is like a spotlight, and in a moment of mindfulness you can decide where to shine it. You can focus within yourself, on a particular part of your body, or even on your body as a whole. You can focus on your thoughts or emotions.

Focus is one of the most overlooked skills that humans possess. Most people think that focus is something they do or don't have. But that's not true. Your attention is like a muscle — the more you flex that brain muscle, the stronger it gets. With time and effort, the regions of your brain responsible for maintaining focus grow. And these changes happen within days, not years. Mindfulness offers a way to train that muscle in your brain so you can decide where you want to focus and stay focused for longer periods of time.

When you lack focus, you feel scattered. Your attention can get caught by another person's conversation, a thought about the event you attended yesterday, or just noise outside. The more your attention snags on other things, the less able you are to complete the tasks in front of you and you begin to feel inefficient. When you practice mindful exercises, your mind gradually shifts from being frazzled to being focused. You then become more efficient and, as a result, have more time to rest and relax.

One of the other benefits of greater focus is experiencing greater levels of happiness. Research suggests that people are at their happiest when they're fully focused on something — that is, not when they're relaxing watching TV at home or eating chocolate. That focus can be on anything: skiing downhill, painting a picture, or writing a sales report. When fully focused, people enter a flow state of mind, which results in a heightened feeling of well-being. As mindfulness develops your ability to focus, you're therefore more likely to be able to enter this flow state when working. And if you're happier, you're immediately more creative, productive, and confident.



TIP

How can you improve your focus in the workplace using mindfulness? Try these tips:

- » **Start the working day with a short mindful exercise.** Try mindfulness of breath (see the “Mindfulness of breath” sidebar in this chapter) or a body scan (see the “Body scan” sidebar in Chapter 4). Even a mindful jog in the morning can help.
- » **Avoid multitasking as much as possible.** If you can, do one task at a time and give it your full attention. Too much multitasking reduces your brain's ability to focus.
- » **Feel your breathing whenever you remember.** Your breath is your anchor to bring you back to the present moment. If you're on the phone and find your mind keeps wandering, feel a few of your breaths to center yourself in the present.
- » **Record your progress.** Keep notes on what you complete in each hour to make you more mindful of your use of time. You can then begin to focus more effectively in each hour that you use.

I PASSED MY TEST, THANKS TO MINDFULNESS!

A study published in 2013 in the *Mindfulness* journal (yes, a scientific journal dedicated to the subject does exist) measured the effect of a short mindfulness exercise on quiz scores following a lecture. One group of university students was taught a six-minute mindfulness exercise and another group wasn't. The mindfulness exercise predicted which students would pass the quiz!

Further analysis found that the mindfulness exercise was even more effective with a group of first-year students, perhaps because more of them were likely to have trouble focusing. The researchers were impressed with the changes that occurred in students following just a short mindfulness exercise and felt that more coaching could result in even bigger improvements in scores.

Mindful leadership

A mindful leader values both inner reflection and outer action. Rather than reacting automatically to everyday challenges, mindful leaders ensure that they're consciously making the right decision with awareness, compassion, and wisdom.

Mindful leadership does not mean that the leader is always practicing mindful exercises and walking around in a Zen-like bubble! A mindful leader is very much a person of action but understands the value of rest, reflection, and renewal.

A mindful leader can make a positive difference to an organization in these changing times. Because they're better able to see the bigger picture rather than just immediate threats or opportunities, an organization with mindful leaders can create solid corporate values and a clear mission statement.

Mindful leadership begins with self-awareness. These leaders are aware of their own thoughts, ideas, opinions, beliefs, and emotional state, from moment to moment. Through this self-awareness, they can challenge their interpretations to discover new solutions. And through this self-awareness, they're better able to relate and communicate with others — they have high levels of emotional intelligence.

For example, say that you're a manager in a medium-sized organization. Weeks ago, a meeting was scheduled in town, but a few hours before the meeting one of your employees says he wants to shift it to a different time. You're annoyed about the last-minute change and are about to send a scathing email to the employee. But then you stop. You take three mindful breaths and check on your inner state. You notice that you haven't had lunch, are in an irritable mood, and are emailing

out of frustration, not to optimize the performance of your team. Instead, you pick up the phone, have a quick chat about meeting times in a calm voice, and all is resolved. You use discipline when necessary, not out of emotional anger.

Mindful leaders use the principles of mindfulness in their leadership approach. They are

- » Physically able to look after themselves and their workforce, understanding that mind and body are not separate.
- » Mentally focused, clear, and flexible. They use mindful exercises to train their brains to be in the moment and able to connect with others.
- » Emotionally intelligent. They're aware of their own emotional state as well as that of their team members. They can sensitively make choices based on these emotional states rather than make decisions without reflection.
- » Values driven. They're aware of their own values and align them with their work in an authentic way. In turn, they appreciate the importance of values in an organization.
- » Able to balance acceptance of what can't be changed and action to implement what can and needs to be changed.
- » Able to make time for stillness and reflection as well as time for activity and serving others.
- » Compassionate. They care for both themselves and their colleagues. They see other members of the team as equals and don't develop a false sense of superiority.
- » Passionate. They're driven by will to make their values real, helping others to fulfill their potential.

Research in mindful leadership is beginning to accelerate as mindfulness rapidly moves to the mainstream. A study by Ashridge Executive Education, ranked as one of the top 20 business schools in the world, looked at the effect of meditation on its members. It discovered that 90 percent of members found some form of benefit resulted from practices such as mindfulness.

Some of the benefits of mindful leadership are hard to measure but easy to see. Mindful leaders are more present, exude a sense of control, and make their employees feel more cared for.

If you're in a leadership position, whether you manage 2 people or 2,000, try the following exercise to help you be more mindful in just a few minutes:

- 1. Practice a short mindful exercise.** Try mindfulness of breath for a few minutes. (See this chapter's "Mindfulness of breath" sidebar.)

2. **Spend a couple of minutes reflecting on your own state of mind.** Consider how you're feeling. What thoughts are popping into your mind?
3. **Think about your staff for a few minutes.** Consider what challenges they may be facing.
4. **Ask yourself: "How can I best look after myself now?"**
5. **Ask yourself: "How can I best look after my staff now?"**

Write down one idea for yourself and your staff, and if appropriate, carry them out. The exercise combines mindfulness and compassion. The mindfulness part helps you to tune into your current state. And the support part is an act of self-compassion. Finally, considering ways of supporting others shows compassion and leads to your staff feeling more valued. Looking after and appreciating your staff can help you get far more from them than a pay rise or promotion. Mindful leadership can develop this mindful, compassionate way of operating.

Looking at the Organizational Benefits of Mindfulness

A mindful organization is aware of and cares for its people, whether they are employees, volunteers, customers, or suppliers — whomever they work with. The organization understands the need to focus on revenue generation but in the long term rather than the short term. The company is based on sound ethical and sustainable values; it aims to make a positive difference to the world. When hard decisions about discipline or redundancy are necessary, the organization can make them but only after considering all other options. The organization encourages physical exercise and good nutrition, mental well-being through mindfulness classes, and emotional well-being through social interaction and training. To get the best out of people, working hours are flexible, as are many of the working practices. The organization celebrates success and fully engages the staff when making major changes and decisions about the organization's future. It helps the staff to do more of what they really enjoy and to find meaning in their work in a way that benefits both the individual and the organization.

An unmindful organization is highly focused on the short term. It may want to increase its profits for this quarter rather than care for its staff or customers. Its products or services may cause harm rather than provide value for its customers. Employees display a low level of interaction, communication, and emotional intelligence because they work in a climate of fear. The wrong people are in the wrong positions and are unclear about their roles and responsibilities. Working hours are long and unsustainable, and the organization frowns upon a healthy

balance between work and home and social life. It does not respond effectively to changes taking place in its sector.

A mindful organization may sound idealistic. However, high levels of workplace stress, burnout, and inequality; a lack of creativity; unethical corporate behavior; and too much short-term focus on profit mean that creating a mindful organization isn't a luxury but an urgent necessity.

Happier, more engaged employees

Tony Hsieh founded a company called Zappos in 1999, which grew to \$1 billion worth of sales in 2009. Hsieh says this success was the result of making customers happy — and he achieved that by making his employees happy. Tony also authored the popular — and worthwhile — business book, *Delivering Happiness: A Path to Profits, Passion, and Purpose* (Writers of the Round Table Press).

Zappos has a set of ten core values that the staff created together. They provide the foundation of the company's culture and are a guide to how to treat customers, suppliers, employees, and sales reps. These values are

- » Deliver WOW through service.
- » Embrace and drive change.
- » Create fun and a little weirdness.
- » Be adventurous, creative, and open-minded.
- » Pursue growth and learning.
- » Build open and honest relationships with communication.
- » Build a positive team and family spirit.
- » Do more with less.
- » Be passionate and determined.
- » Be humble.

Happiness isn't usually a term bandied about in a workplace environment. Traditionally, if you wanted to increase productivity, you made employees work harder or attend a time-management course, or looked for ways to automate tasks.

Mindfulness does make employees happy. So much so that the effects of happiness can be seen in brain scans! Happy people show greater activation in the left prefrontal cortex. Completing an eight-week mindfulness course has resulted in employees demonstrating greater activity in that part of the brain — the mindfulness literally made them feel happier.

But so what, you may ask. It transpires that happiness is linked to a host of benefits in the workplace. Happier staff are more productive and creative, take fewer sick days, and are more likely to be promoted. And greater happiness pays. For every employee, the New Economics Foundation predicts that an organization can save

- » \$300, assuming a conservative 1 percent increase in productivity as a result of increased happiness
- » \$125, assuming a reduction in sickness absence by just one day
- » \$195, assuming a 10 percent reduction in staff turnover

That's \$620 saved for every employee, each year. And that's a conservative estimate. If your organization has 1,000 employees, you can save well over half a million dollars a year!

So good work doesn't make you happy, but being happy creates good work.



TIP

Try the following tips to boost your happiness in the workplace using mindfulness. Share them with your colleagues too!

- » Spend two minutes practicing mindfulness of breath (see the "Mindfulness of breath" sidebar in this chapter), then write down three things about your workplace for which you're grateful.
- » Go for a 15-minute mindful walk for every 1.5 hours of work you do. Master violinists were found to use this balance of work and rest to optimize their performance and well-being. Violinists who worked hard all day with fewer breaks were less successful.
- » Have a mindful conversation with the happiest colleagues at work. Happiness is contagious. If you're consciously present with happy colleagues at lunch, in your break, or over a quick drink after work, you feel happier.
- » Commit to doing at least one task mindfully when at work. Start small and build up from there.
- » Be mindful in the bathroom, if that's the only space available at work! Or ask the company to provide a room dedicated to quiet time and mindfulness.

Greater creativity

How important do you think creativity is in your organization? Is it important to innovate and find new ideas for products or services? Or do you simply keep doing the same thing and hope that your competitors won't catch up? Most people agree that, in the current economy, without innovation your competitors will soon overtake you. So, to be a successful organization, you need your employees' brains

to be as creative as possible. Creative solutions not only help your organization, but also help to meet the needs of your customers.

Take a few moments to consider the stance of a creative brain — open, flexible, attentive, and not too stressed. In fact, when you're in a mindful state, the creative part of your brain is activated.

Mindfulness creates the ideal conditions in your brain for creative thought. When you're unmindful, you're on autopilot, thinking the same old thoughts. When you're mindful, you're more awake, energized, and aware of new ideas as they emerge.

A professor of architecture we know teaches mindfulness online. She finds that the more mindful she is, the more creative her work. She ran mindfulness sessions at a creativity and design conference, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive — the designers loved the new way of using their minds to get the creative juices flowing. Even their designs are beginning to be more mindful — spacious, calming, and sustainable, with areas for individual quiet time.

Think back to the last time you had a creative idea. Were you feeling anxious or relaxed? Were you in the moment or mired in a fog of worries and concerns? Were you feeling happy or sad?

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi draws on 30 years' experience of researching mindfulness to identify the following five stages when engaged in the creative process:

- » **Preparation:** Immersion in an interesting problem that requires a creative solution
- » **Incubation:** A period of inner reflection
- » **Insight:** The "Aha!" moment when the solution begins to emerge
- » **Evaluation:** Deciding whether the solution can work
- » **Elaboration:** Turning the chosen solution into a final product

Mindfulness comes into play in all the different stages but is most important in the second, incubation. When an idea is being incubated, your mind needs to allow the problem to sink into your subconscious. The unconscious mind is far more creative than the slow logic of the conscious mind. Just think how creative and unusual dreams can be!

Mindfulness helps you to gradually step back from your conscious mind so that more creative ideas and solutions can emerge from your unconscious mind. The often creative, unconscious brain struggles to offer you new solutions because of

a busy or negative mind-set. When your mind is more open and calm through mindfulness, creative solutions can rise up into your unconscious brain.

Try the following exercise to boost your own creativity at work. Then share them with your colleagues to help you develop a more mindfully creative team.

1. **Become mindful of the problem.** Be crystal clear about what you're trying to solve. As Einstein said, "If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions."
2. **Incubate.** Go for a mindful walk. Try practicing mindfulness of breath. At home, take a bath and just enjoy the experience. Be in the moment rather than trying hard to solve the problem with your conscious mind. Let go. Allow things to be. Reflect.
3. **Collect solutions.** Come up with as many solutions as possible, no matter how weird or wacky. They may not work, but write them all down nonetheless. Allow ideas to flow from your mind to the sheet of paper. Be utterly non-judgmental as you compile this list.
4. **Evaluate.** Consider each solution in turn and analyze whether it would work. Use mindfulness by being aware of each solution, one at a time. Avoid multitasking or other distractions. Take regular breaks as necessary. Keep your mind in optimal condition so you can make the right choice. Being mindful at this stage means that your brain can work in optimal conditions to achieve success.

Increased productivity

Productivity isn't just about accomplishing things. Productivity is also about choosing what you need to do and doing those activities at a time of day when your energy levels and focus are highest.

Productivity is about working smarter, not just harder. There's nothing wrong with working hard when at work — being lazy at work doesn't lead to a fulfilling life or an effective organization. Sorry, folks! But working smarter is about learning what you need to do and deciding how, when, and where to do it.

Mindfulness improves focus. One of the direct benefits of greater focus is increased productivity. You stop being distracted by other thoughts, a text message, or sounds in the office. Instead, you're able to keep your attention on whatever requires finishing.

Mindfulness of your own energy levels has a huge effect on productivity. As you become more mindful, you notice the subtle fluctuations in your energy levels. Noticing such things is an important skill. Everyone's energy rises and falls at

different times of the day. When you recognize when your energy is at its peak, you can tackle your most challenging tasks. When your energy levels are naturally lower, you can use that time to chat with colleagues or take a break.

For example, if Gary knows that his energy levels peak in the morning and are lowest between 1 p.m. and 3 p.m., he can make sure that he spends his time writing that important report in the office before anyone else arrives. In the afternoon, satisfied with a productive morning's work, he can call up his managers in New York and catch up with progress over there. Without this knowledge, if Gary made calls and emailed all morning, by afternoon he'd struggle to write that report, end up working late in the office, get home late — and the cycle continues.

Your energy levels also increase because you experience less emotional reactivity. Mindfulness increases your emotional awareness. So when you feel low, frustrated, or angry, negative emotions don't creep up on you. You see the mood coming and accept the feeling. You know that moods coming and going is part of being human. When something happens at work to make you feel upset or angry, you discover how to deal with your emotion before speaking. You discover how to express your emotions without losing control of yourself. This way of behaving is much more energy efficient, which means that you have energy left over to productively complete your work. Mindfulness can also make you less emotional over petty things too — so other people's comments or behavior, which may have irritated you before, no longer do so.

Practicing mindfulness also gives you more energy because you worry less. Your brain uses up 20 percent of your energy even though it comprises only 2 percent of your body weight. Think back to the last time you spent a few minutes worrying — did you feel energized or drained afterwards? Most people feel drained. When you're mindful, you're more focused on the moment and what needs to be done and you don't waste energy worrying. Remember: Worry is like a rocking chair — it gives you something to do but never gets you anywhere. Mindfulness exercises help you to reduce your worrying.

Finally, one of the skills you develop with mindfulness is the ability to step back from whatever you're doing and see the context within which your task fits. How often have you completed a task, only to later discover that you were doing it the long way? Or that you'd already performed the task before? By being mindful, your mind has the flexibility to step back from time to time to see the bird's-eye view. Taking a quick overview means that you don't waste your time doing unnecessary tasks. Productivity isn't just about doing what needs doing; it's also about not doing what doesn't need doing!

The following short exercise helps you to mindfully consider the circumstances that prompted you to be particularly productive. Follow these steps:

1. **Think back to an occasion on which you were really productive.** What time of day was it? Where were you? Try to visualize yourself in that moment in time.
2. **Describe your state of mind.** Were you mindful or unfocused; in the present moment or thinking about the past or the future; judgmental or non-judgmental; curious or bored; calm or excited?
3. **Remember how much effort you put into achieving that level of productivity.**

Your responses to these prompts may help you to be more productive in the future. Try to re-create those conditions and see what happens.



TIP

Here are a few tips for making your organization more productive:

- » Dedicate a room to quiet time, mindfulness, prayer, or meditation. Taking a break in this room gives the staff time to reflect and recharge their batteries.
- » Discourage working late. Working long hours reduces efficiency and productivity and has a negative effect on employees' home life, which inevitably affects their work life too.
- » Encourage all staff to attend a mindfulness workshop and ensure that they have access to online courses, books or e-learning. Even a 1 percent increase in productivity more than pays back the cost of the training and resources.

Improved decision making

All CEOs know that high-quality decisions can make or break their organization. When managers make effective decisions, their staff work more efficiently, they feel more in control, and the results can be seen in sustainable income for long-term growth.

Good decisions lead to

- » Increased opportunities for growth
- » Higher revenue
- » Healthier, happier employees
- » Ability to hire the best employees for each role
- » Improved quality of products and services for customers

You can make good decisions when your brain is functioning optimally. You can read all you like about decision theory, but if your brain isn't working optimally, you fail to take all factors into account and make bad decisions.

Think back to the last time you came home after a tough day at work. What sort of decisions did you make? Did you decide to eat a healthy fruit salad, go for a swim, meditate, and phone a friend who needed cheering up? Or did you eat too much chocolate, slump in front of the TV, and snap at your partner? The latter scenario is more likely — because your brain wasn't able to make good decisions. A brain starved of rest overtook your long-term goals of losing weight or being healthy or socializing more. This situation is called decision fatigue. The more decisions you make, without adequate breaks, the less effective your decisions will be. One way of countering decision fatigue is practicing mindfulness exercises.

Another way in which mindfulness can help with decisions is by switching off the autopilot response in your brain. When operating without mindfulness, all your decisions are automatic and based on previous decisions. They lack freshness and don't have access to any new information. If the employees of an organization are more mindful, they can spot new ideas, see the activities of competitors, notice a need for, say, younger consumers, and make a different decision — and thus move the company forward successfully.

JUDGES ARE SIX TIMES NICER AFTER LUNCH

A study conducted in 2010 by Columbia and Ben-Gurion universities looked at 1,112 judicial rulings over 10 months. The rulings related to granting prisoners parole. An amazing pattern was found. Judges were up to six times more likely to grant parole just after lunch. About 60 percent were granted parole at the start of the day, but this figure gradually declined. Just before lunch, prisoners had by far the lowest chance of being granted parole; and immediately after lunch, the figure went back up to about 60 percent. The break and some food appear to refresh the judges' brains and they were more likely to make the difficult decision to set the post-lunch prisoner free.

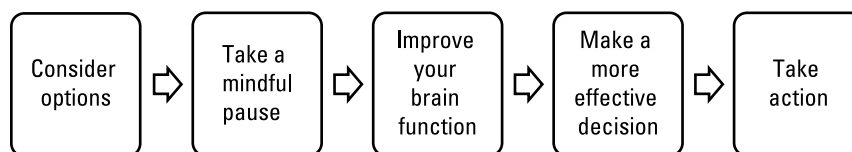
This study demonstrates the effect of taking regular breaks and eating properly on decision-making ability. It also shows how sensitive the decision-making brain is. Through mindfulness, you can energize your brain with a minibreak during the day and improve your decision making too. Mindfulness directly affects the way your brain works, activating the prefrontal cortex. So, when faced with an important decision, take a few moments to be mindful so that your decisions are based on reason rather than emotional reaction.

Kodak provides an example of a company's inability to see beyond habitual ideas. The company went bankrupt, mainly because CEO after CEO decided not to take the plunge into the digital photography market, despite all the signs showing that this was the way to go. Ironically, an engineer at Kodak invented the digital camera, but the company decided not to pursue the concept. Kodak's competitors jumped on the digital bandwagon, and the rest is history.

A more mindful management could have helped Kodak. With a better ability to see the big picture and a willingness to let go of what didn't work, maybe Kodak could have gone on to be a leader in the digital photography market. But because it stuck to its habitual pattern of using chemicals to develop photographs, it lost almost everything.

For day-to-day decisions, try the five-step approach shown in Figure 2-1.

FIGURE 2-1:
The process of
mindful action.



By taking a mindful minute, you can optimize your brain function, reduce decision fatigue, and make better decisions.



TIP

Bear these tips in mind to improve your decision making:

- » Ensure that you schedule meetings at a time of day when people's energy levels are high, making mindful awareness more likely.
- » If you're chairing a meeting, take a mindful pause before you start, to ensure that you're in the right state of mind. End the meeting if you notice people's attention beginning to wane.
- » Remember that you're a human being, not a machine. You can't keep making decisions all day and expect them to be of a high standard. Take a mindful break every 90 minutes, even if just for a minute.

Reducing staff turnover

High employee turnover hits the bottom line. The cost of replacing an employee can cost up to twice that employee's salary. Consider the time involved in recruitment as you screen candidates and the loss of productivity as the new employee learns the ropes. Maybe the new employee won't work out and you have to repeat the process. On top of that, constant staff changes can negatively affect staff morale.

Mindfulness can help lower staff turnover by helping employees to cope better with stress. Stress can lead to illness and ultimately result in people being on long-term sick leave. But even for the staff who aren't overwhelmed by stress, mindfulness can build their resilience and improve their performance, which will make them feel more valued.

Too much stress leads to burnout. According to Professor Marie Asberg, burnout is the end of an exhaustion funnel when you gradually stop doing things that you deem unimportant, such as practicing mindfulness, exercising, and socializing, and instead obsess about your workplace outcomes. Research carried out in 2009 with doctors found that practicing mindfulness decreased burnout rates in this cohort.

Prevention is better than cure. Yet most organizations focus on fixing their staff after they become ill rather than preventing stress-related illness in the first place. Most employers spend 200 to 300 percent more on managing ill health than on prevention.

Research by the iOpener Institute found that increasing employee well-being in one company reduced staff turnover by 46 percent and reduced sickness absence by 19 percent. Mindfulness is one way of increasing well-being and reducing staff turnover.



TIP

Use the following mindful tips to help lower staff turnover:

- » **Measure your staff's well-being and then implement means to improve it.** The University of Pennsylvania's Authentic Happiness website, at www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/, has lots of well-being questionnaires that you could try.
- » **Set up a regular mindfulness group for all staff to attend for free in the workplace.**
- » **Identify those in your staff who may be susceptible to burnout.** Ensure that they have access to more regular mindfulness courses and other forms of help.
- » **Train managers in mindfulness so they're better able to listen to their staff.** Being better listened to makes employees feel more cared for and they're less likely to leave the organization as a result. Not being appreciated and listened to are two causes of high staff turnover.
- » **Help employees to maintain a work/life balance.** A nationwide survey found that 20 percent of employees left their job as a result of poor work/life balance and 20 percent because of workplace stress. Mindfulness can help improve productivity so employees can get home earlier, thus improving their work/life balance and reducing their stress levels.

- » Dealing with uncertainty
- » Changing your mind-set
- » Rewiring your brain
- » Considering ethics in the workplace

Chapter 3

Applying Mindfulness in the Workplace

Mindfulness is all well and good, but how do you apply it effectively in the workplace? That's exactly what you find out in this chapter. You also discover why mindfulness is more important than ever in the modern workplace and discover lots of practical ways to start "mindfulness" within minutes!

Gaining Perspective in the Modern-Day Workplace

Fifty years ago, a sizeable proportion of the population got a job and worked for that organization until they retired. The key benefit resulting from this scenario was a sense of security and stability — they knew what to expect.

For students looking for a job today, things are very different. A recent survey of workers found that one in three remains in a job for less than two years. This massive change in people's working lives is bound to have an effect — sometimes positive but often negative. In this section, you discover how mindfulness can help you deal with uncertainty in the workplace.

Engaging with a VUCA world

To understand the modern workplace and how mindfulness can help you deal with it, consider the VUCA acronym. Originally used by the military, VUCA is now used in business. VUCA stands for

- » **Volatility:** The high speed and complicated dynamics of change in modern organizations and the markets that they work in. The digital revolution, global competition, and connectivity are all contributing to higher levels of volatility.
- » **Uncertainty:** The lack of predictability and the prospect of surprise facing many employees. In uncertain situations, forecasting becomes difficult and decision making becomes more challenging.
- » **Complexity:** The wide range of ideas, information, and systems that cause confusion and chaos in an organization lead to complexity.
- » **Ambiguity:** The lack of clarity about what is actually happening in the organization as well as the environment in which the organization operates.

To give you an idea of the VUCA world, consider the average working day of Kate, a senior executive. Her alarm goes off at 5 a.m. She turns on her phone as she wakes up, and it immediately starts buzzing. She skims through and half-answers emails as she gets dressed, and has a quick cup of coffee and a piece of toast. She jumps into her car and mentally compiles a to-do list on the journey. Half of the emails she read earlier appear urgent, so she wants to deal with them immediately. However, the complexity of the issues makes it almost impossible for her to decide which one to do first. Juggling between phone calls, emails, and routine tasks and meetings, she has no time for lunch. She works till late into the evening, keeping herself going with lots of coffee. To ensure that she remains awake for the journey home, she blasts out music on her iPod. As she travels, her phone keeps buzzing with more emails. Kate grabs a takeout dinner, eats it in front of the television, and then goes to bed. She answers a few more emails before turning off the light and then tries to sleep. Unsurprisingly, sleep eludes her as she tosses and turns, going over everything that's happened during the day and worrying about how she's going to function the next day if she doesn't get to sleep soon.

Kate's working day is certainly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. How can mindfulness help her? Following are a few changes she can make to her day that require almost no time and increase her effectiveness and efficiency:

- » During breakfast, Kate can keep her phone switched off and eat her toast being mindfully aware of its taste, perhaps looking out into her garden as she does so. The meal would be finished a bit quicker (because she isn't simultaneously dealing with emails) and the time saved can be used to check emails later in the office.