



 LEADERSHIP
LANDING

INTRO TO MINDFULNESS FOR GREAT LEADERS

by Joanna Adler





**“Imagine the power of our actions, if each one contained one hundred percent of our attention.”
–Thich Nhat Hanh**

Work.

Work is a lot of things. It’s fun and rewarding, challenging and exciting. It’s also hard a lot of the time and for most of us it can be a place of real struggle.

In order to thrive, today’s leaders need to develop many different kinds of tools. Trainings around things like presentation skills and strategic planning are relatively accessible. The real differentiator though is less about these kinds of visible skills and more about something that might be described as invisible: Mindfulness.

What can we access for help? We believe the key to transforming your work life as a leader lies in the concept of Mindfulness.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness has its roots in Buddhism, although it lies at the root of most meditation and awareness practices across all cultures and traditions. Mindfulness is a process of maintaining a moment by moment, gentle awareness of our thoughts, feelings, sensations and environment, through a kind and nurturing lens. This involves practices that help you tune into your body, your emotional state, and your mind in a kind and accepting way.

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Embedded in Mindfulness is the understanding that it is important to pay attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them as right or



wrong. We are sensing what is happening in the present moment, without rehashing the past, and without planning the future. We are simply here, paying gentle attention.

The challenges leaders face today and the number of decisions that have to be made in a limited period of time can be daunting. Leaders need to be able to think clearly and rationally, and this depends on having a calm mind.

As the Dalai Lama says in *The Leader's Way*, "The purpose of training the mind is to be calm, collected, and concentrated".

In other words, cultivating the ability to be aware of what is happening in the moment is likely to lead to more clarity, more focus, and the ability to respond to situations in a grounded way. Mindfulness allows you to respond, rather than react, minimizing the chance that you will behave in an impulsive or unproductive manner. Being calm enables the mind to analyze decisions quickly and from many perspectives. Then, when difficulties arise, one is able to respond in a thoughtful way.

So how do you develop Mindfulness?

It is very simple and also very challenging. Developing Mindfulness requires that whatever you do, you do with your whole being. You have to invest one hundred percent of yourself in doing even very simple things. Mindfulness helps us to come back to ourselves, look deeply into our situation, and be present with all that is happening. This allows us to use all of our inner resources to address the problems at hand.

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Mindfulness Benefits

Many studies have been completed on the benefits of Mindfulness for leaders. Let's talk about a few of their findings.

Studies have found that managers trained in Mindfulness practices report



lowered anxiety, and more ease with decision making. They report having a better frame of reference from which to make decisions, being better able to deal with crises and conflicts, and more able to be patient with employee related issues. Managers trained in Mindfulness report they can focus better in meetings as they can give undivided attention, and as a result are able to hold fewer meetings overall. Managers practicing Mindfulness also report a higher level of enthusiasm for their jobs, more creativity, and that their negative emotions have decreased.

Knowing all of this, it is not surprising that Mindful leaders are better listeners. If a leader truly listens, it makes those he/she leads feel valued and important, and in turn inspires them to engage challenges at their highest level.

Training the Mind - What Does that Mean?

Mindfulness practice allows us to train our minds to focus in productive ways. This means that, with practice, we are able to hold everything that is happening (employee reactions, market changes, irrational supervision, etc.) in a calm and non-reactive way. It is the act of holding non-judgmental, caring awareness that allows us to be present and grounded when difficult circumstances arise.

Working in Difficult Circumstances

Difficult circumstances come in layers. First, there is an original problem, maybe its a budget issue or a demanding boss, and then there is your reaction to the problematic issue. Do you get angry? Do you retreat? Do you blame yourself or others?

While we can't always control the situations that will arise at work, we can cultivate our relationship to what is happening. Mindfulness teaches us to hold all phenomena with compassion, with loving

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awareness. As this becomes more second nature, we are less likely to react negatively to a problem, and more likely to be able to respond productively.

Why is this? As the Dalai Lama tells us, “If your mind is influenced by anger, jealousy, fear, or lack of self-confidence, you become disturbed and inefficient, and you cannot see reality”.

When you are reacting negatively to circumstances, your mind becomes disorganized, and negative emotions can get out of control. It is important to be careful – this is not the time to make important decisions, as your mind is not clear!

Mindfulness practice allows you to begin to see when a negative emotion is starting to take hold and gives you the space to orient differently. If you are able to notice a negative reaction arising in you, then you have the ability to choose to meet that reaction with kindness and openness. To wonder what this reaction might be trying to tell you. You can actually train your mind over time to respond with kindness to whatever is arising – externally or internally.

If you tend to get angry and defensive as soon as you are criticized, you’re missing out on an important opportunity to learn from the feedback. With Mindfulness training you can condition yourself to listen attentively and remain curious.

If we can hold critical feedback with kindness and compassion, rather than with defensiveness and anger, we can save ourselves from a great deal of pain and distress as our suffering is actually generated by our reactions to circumstances, not by circumstances themselves. And if we can deliver criticism with kindness and compassion, we increase the chances that the person on the receiving end of the criticism will actually hear our feedback and maybe learn something from it.

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challenge is to recognize a negative state in the mind as it arises, and address it with a tender touch so that we are able to return to a collected state of mental calm.

A Roadmap for Right Action

When we practice Mindfulness, we are actually cultivating good. What does this mean? In Buddhism, cultivating good comes from taking Right View, which the Dalai Lama tells us arises ease-fully in the peaceful, focused, calm mind we have been talking about. Taking Right View orients us by aligning our intentions and our conduct. Right Intention means that your intention is to benefit everyone that a decision affects. It takes into account the well being of everyone involved. This gives you a road map for action.

The decisions a leader makes should serve all that are involved, from the individual workers to the whole organization, as well as the customers, vendors and investors. This is Right Conduct. It is important to say, however, that it is not easy to apply Right View and Right Conduct consistently. The point is to take into account all the ramifications of a decision, as much as possible, and at a minimum, your actions should not result in harm to others.

With these principles in mind, a good leader strives to lead by example. This is helpful for several reasons. A leader with a trained mind becomes one that others want to emulate. This kind of leader is generally fair as well as kind, which allows other people to feel respected and appreciated. If workers feel an organization is run fairly, they generally will do their best work. If the leader at the top is not choosing the right path, others will not either. Therefore, all of a leader's actions should take into consideration their effect on others. A leader's enthusiasm is contagious, and greatly influences others' motivation and

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effort to reach goals. So, for all these reasons, it is important to be curious about your own motivation and cultivate a helpful state of mind.

With Mindfulness training, the motivation behind a leader's desire for power becomes clear. When leaders are clear about their motivation, their actions are much more powerful because they can do them with 100% of their intention.

Some people will mistakenly live to cultivate wealth, influence, and recognition for no other reason than their own gratification. In the long run, this sort of self-serving approach will fail. A leader who wants to have absolute power and to take all the credit for success destroys others' motivation. It is important instead to be humble in the face of success. No success is ever solely attributable to one person, as every success depends on the work of many people. Focusing your consideration on the well-being of others will always serve you well. Kindness counteracts many of the problems that plague modern work settings: indifference, hostility, irritability and ill will, for example.

Simple Techniques for Busy Leaders

We know that leaders today are busier than ever before. But really, anyone, even a busy executive can find 5 minutes to practice during the day. For example, you can use your delays: waiting for a taxi, or at the airport; walking between meetings, or commuting to work or waiting in line. These times are all opportunities to focus and calm your mind and observe your breath.

If you are walking on your commute, or between meetings, you can use the time to practice walking meditation. Mindfulness in this context is simply observing the rise and fall of thoughts and emotions, the sensations of your feet on the floor, and the coordination of your arms swinging. Here you can use your physical body to bring you into greater awareness. Walk evenly and naturally and walk with your body and mind. In other words, let your mind be aware and focused on the walking - the physical act. Just notice what is happening in your body and in your mind. As you walk, bring loving kindness to all you are experiencing.



If you are sitting—in your commute, or as you settle into your day at your desk—you have an opportunity to practice sitting meditation. With sitting, it is easier to turn off external distractions and focus on the process of mediating. Sit on a firm chair. Let yourself be comfortable and stable but not leaning on anything, which could give rise to sleepiness. Breathe in deeply and breathe out a long slow breath. Allow your breath to be natural and focus your mind on following your breath. Be aware of your sitting body, and of inhalation and exhalation. If your mind wanders to thoughts, as soon as you are aware of the thought, let it go and return to being mindful of your breath. Watch your breath for several minutes.

As you watch your breath, whether sitting or walking, hold all you are experiencing in a gentle way. Notice what it is like to hold your own thoughts and feelings and sensations tenderly, like a small child that you love deeply. Allow yourself to be compassionate with all that arises, notice any places that you are not willing to be compassionate, and then hold that with compassion as well.

Leadership Development

Mindfulness is often the missing piece in leadership development, as it gives leaders the space and time they need to reflect, put ideas together, and make the best decisions for their organizations.

Remember true bravery only arises from loving-kindness. Give it a try! We think you'll find Mindfulness is helpful for you too.

The Five Attributes of Great Leaders

By integrating Mindfulness into daily life, leaders can create work environments that are challenging, enjoyable and rewarding—both personally and for the bottom line. At Leadership Landing we incorporate Mindfulness into all of our work, whether in executive coaching, organizational consulting or leadership training. We do this through teaching and orienting leaders to the Mindfulness skills embedded in



the Five Attributes of Great Leaders: Self-Awareness, Bravery, Kindness, Innovation and Inspiration.

Studies have shown that 75% of a leader’s success is not about what they know but about how they behave and communicate. The ability to be aware enough of your intentions to be able to communicate in honest and respectful ways differentiates the good leaders from the great ones, resulting in a more inspired organization with more fulfilled workers and increased bottom line success.

Mindfulness is a great leader’s most important tool for success.

Further Reading

This white paper references two favorite books referenced heavily. If you read this far and wish there was more, you’ll be interested in these two seminal books:

