



Creating a Culture of Mindfulness

Employees are struggling like never before with an experience that's shared amongst us all and yet uniquely individual. One of the most pressing challenges companies face right now is how to best support a workforce reeling from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest.

This is the time for companies to broaden their approach to employee wellness; to go beyond step challenges and offering healthy recipes to an expanded emphasis on mental and emotional health – a whole-person approach that addresses not only the physical, but also the emotional, mental, and social dimensions of health.

In this time of social distancing, the workplace – whether onsite or remote – is a primary point of connection. Connectedness is a key determinant of overall health, inseparable from mental and emotional wellbeing. The quality of connectedness is profoundly influenced by company culture: the way people feel about their work, what they think and believe, and how they act. Culture impacts how employees respond to change, to challenge, how they treat customers and one another, and how well they take care of themselves. A culture of mindfulness supports employees in all of these ways.

The capacities developed through mindfulness training – like the ability to focus one’s attention, embrace change, and regulate one’s emotional state – are foundational to mental health. These kinds of skills impact employees’ work performance and help them make healthier choices around eating and activity, substance use, sleep, and the ways they manage their stress. Capacities like acceptance, empathy and compassion build connectedness.

We’ve recently conducted two pulse surveys to better understand:

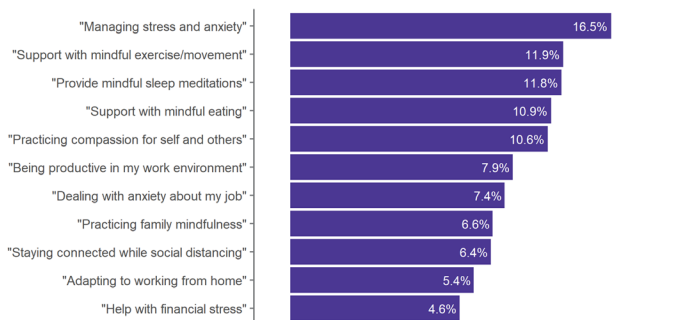
1. The reasons people choose to take part in the mindfulness trainings offered by eMindful.
2. The benefits experienced as a result of participating.

Respondents said they are motivated to participate by the need to better manage stress and anxiety, to develop and support healthier lifestyle habits, and to develop the skills of mindfulness – skills such as focus, patience, and acceptance.

They reported the benefits they’ve experienced, sharing that they’re better able to manage stress and anxiety, sleep better, be more physically active, and make healthier choices around eating. They also shared that mindfulness training helps them practice self-compassion and compassion for others. All of these benefits connect with and contribute to emotional wellbeing.

Here’s a more detailed breakdown of the pulse survey results (below).

Help me with...



A More Mindful Culture

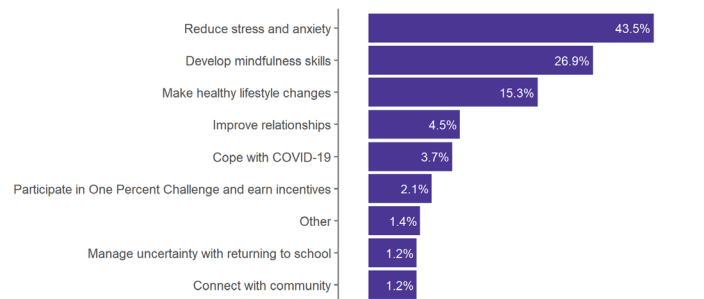
Culture is described by Forbes as a living thing – something we cultivate. When tended, a culture grows over time. By cultivating a culture of mindfulness, we extend the practices and benefits – including greater emotional wellbeing – to a larger population.

For employees who are new to mindfulness, a culture of mindfulness provides inspiration and opportunities to try it for themselves. For those already on board, it offers continued opportunities to learn and grow and share with others. A culture of mindfulness reminds all of us of our interconnection with one another.

Studies with police officers and firefighters found that mindfulness-based programs help decrease emotional reactivity, anxiety and mood disorders. Organizations like Google, Aetna, Mayo Clinic and the United States Marine Corps have embraced mindfulness, with the understanding that on-going training in mindfulness doesn’t just enhance productivity; it builds resilience and the capacities needed in uncertain and challenging times.

Building a mindful culture begins with harnessing the energy that is already present. Leaders can model mindful presence and share their own stories. They can allow and invite employees to take part and share their experiences in an atmosphere of openness, inclusivity, and shared learning. Creating a widespread cultural shift is never easy, however, a more mindful culture can be implemented one step at a time.

What is your motivation for participating with eM Life?



Steps to Creating a Culture of Mindfulness

1. Be the Change

Mindful presence is a way of being that is attentive, open and curious; accepting of what is and open to possibilities. It supports clarity – the ability to see things clearly, just as they are. U.S. Army Lieutenant General Walter Piatt, describes presence as being “on point.”

When leaders themselves are under intense pressure, it’s especially difficult to help employees deal with their own stress. Mindful leadership presence begins with one’s self, noticing stressful thoughts or emotional reactivity, and engaging practices to support greater calmness, openness and acceptance.

This creates the space to respond skillfully; to more deeply understand the experiences of employees. It builds trust and conveys a sense of caring and support.

By modeling mindful presence, leaders lay the groundwork for a culture of mindfulness. Mindfulness training helps leaders develop the skills needed to lead others through these unprecedented times

Here’s a simple practice for strengthening presence; one that can be practiced anytime, including in the midst of a tense meeting or when making tough decisions.

Strengthening presence:

Bring attention to the body, feeling the body as an anchor to the present moment. Feel the connection with the ground.

With the breath, silently say,
“I am present” (on the inbreath)
“I am calm” (on the outbreath)

You can choose the words that best fit, such as:

“I am present. I am focused”
“I am present. I am open”
“I am present. I am energized.”
“I am present. I am prepared.”

2. Allow time and space for employees

Leaders need to be diligent in reaching out to employees with sensitivity and compassion, cultivating a trusting environment where employees feel safe to share what’s on their minds. Connectedness is vital to mental and emotional health. It can save lives.

The eMindful pulse surveys show stress management as the number one reason for taking part in mindfulness programs – and the top benefit from participating.

One of the most effective ways of helping employees manage their stress is to make it possible for them to weave moments of renewal into their work day.

We know from research that stress management can’t be relegated just to weekends. To be effective, moments of renewal need to be woven into daily life. And, renewal doesn’t come naturally. Researcher Richard Boyatzis says “Stress will happen, but renewal will only occur if you make it happen.”

Leaders can encourage employees to take mindful breaks during the day. Mindful breaks are about restoring and renewing one’s energy and focus – balancing the demands of work and supporting employees’ mental and physical wellbeing.

What does a mindful break look like? It depends on what employees most need.

For example, in a job that requires a lot of sitting, a break might include movement. On the other hand, if the job involves a lot of standing and moving, employees may find that putting their feet up offers needed relaxation and balance. It’s all about finding activities that provide a true break – a counterbalance to the work.

Here are just a few examples of activities that bring renewal into the work day:

- Mindful movement, such as walking, running, or stretching.
- Engaging the senses by getting outside, listening to music, etc.
- Guided mindfulness practices such as the

Mindful Daily sessions offered by eMindful.

- Connecting with a coworker.
- Laughter – a powerful tonic for reducing stress.
- Breathing – slowing and lengthening the breath.

Here's a tool for easing stress that can practiced even in the midst of a busy day:

Purposeful Pause

1. Take a few moments to check in with your body. Bring attention to your posture. Notice the sensations felt in the body, such as pressure or warmth.
2. Take a few mindful breaths and then proceed with your day.

It's sometimes helpful to create a cue – something that helps us remember to be mindful. As one example, handwashing – something we're all doing a lot of right now – can serve as a cue to take a purposeful pause, reminding you to slow down as you bring attention to the sensations of washing and drying your hands.

3. Hack the Back-to-Backs

Psychologist Bryan Robinson describes the “hustle culture” where we're always “on”, pushing ourselves to the max every minute of the day. Losing sleep, forgoing exercise, and missing meals – or practicing what he refers to as “gobble, gulp, and go”.

In a hustle culture, meetings are back-to-back and many of us come to those meetings rushed, distracted, and/or stressed. We're often multi-tasking.

It takes a few minutes to clear the mental and emotional energy from the previous meeting or task. This is something we can do together. Offering a few moments to pause and regroup allows employees the chance to gather themselves. It supports employees in being more attentive, engaged and present.

Introducing a mindful moment can be very simple, for example saying, “I know it's a busy time. Thanks for being here. Let's take a minute to set aside distractions and clear space to be present to ourselves and one another...”

Leaders can invite participants to take a deep breath, or to check-in with themselves. Leaders can check in with themselves as well, asking “On a scale of 1-10, how present am I right now?” This can be followed by a few mindful breaths to become more calm, centered, and open.

Beginning meetings in this way elevates the purpose behind coming together. It sets the tone for the entire meeting. For resources on leading mindful meetings, check out eM Life's [Mindful Meeting Moments practices>>](#).

4. Share Best Practices

It's through sharing that we build connections and create a sense of transparency and trust. Sharing helps buffer against the negative effects of stress.

Employees are looking for ways to manage their stress and improve their lifestyle habits. They can inspire and support one another by sharing their own experiences with mindfulness, including the positive benefits such as improved sleep, less anxiety, and more enjoyment of life's small pleasures.

Stories are especially powerful. Consider the impact of these two approaches: a manager simply reminding employees to take breaks – or, sharing her own personal experience: “For years I powered through the day without breaks, but by the end of the day I was completely deflated. I barely had the energy to be with my family. I realized something needed to change. Now I'm very intentional about breaks – usually a combination of breathing, stretching, and relaxing my mind. I don't check email or return calls. It's a few minutes that I take to myself. It seems like a small thing but it makes a huge difference – especially at the end of the day.”

When leaders share something of themselves – including their own challenges -- it lets employees know that they are not alone. It gives them permission to be more open and non-judgmental with themselves and others.

Personal experiences can inspire us, move us, or make us laugh. We might invite employees to share stories of a time when they were not mindful – the time they came to work with shoes that didn't match, or absent-mindedly poured dog food into their child's cereal bowl. We all have those moments. A mindful culture invites playfulness – and the entire range of emotional experience.

5. Celebrate the wins

One pearl of leadership wisdom is reinforcing the behaviors we want to see more of. Leaders and managers can spot and acknowledge mindfulness in action, highlighting and celebrating mindful behaviors such as:

- Focusing rather than multi-tasking
- Setting aside time for brainstorming
- Being open to diverse viewpoints
- Demonstrating cognitive flexibility
- Taking a moment to pause before responding
- Being courageous in expressing one's own truth
- Allowing and acknowledging emotions
- Accepting the reality of what is
- Maintaining a calm presence

A Mindful Culture Supports Thriving

Employees are seeking ways to cope with these challenging and stressful times. They're turning to mindfulness as a way to manage stress, reduce anxiety, and to make lifestyle choices that support their overall wellbeing.

Creating a more mindful culture builds on the interest that is already there. It extends the benefits of mindfulness to a larger employee base – increasing the wellbeing of individuals and the organization as a whole.

Establishing a widespread cultural shift is never easy, however, it can be implemented in small steps over time. Leaders can lay the groundwork by modeling and celebrating mindfulness in action. They can invite employees to inspire and support one another, connecting with one another in a spirit of openness and trust.

A culture of mindfulness holds the power to help organizations and people come together and thrive together even in challenging and uncertain times.

