

Calm down, everyone: Mindful practices for a mellower office



When Teresa Walsh started looking for a new job, she spent five minutes a day meditating. “It helped me to stay calm, present and focused on the task ahead of me during a long, stressful process,” she says. Now a marketing executive at Cazana.com, she continues to meditate daily to reap those same benefits.

Fast-paced, constantly changing modern workplaces can be a breeding ground for distraction and tension. Mindfulness practices keep people in the moment, engaged in the activity at hand, and able to approach demands with greater clarity.

“I run a business, and much of the stress comes from the fact that there is so much that is out of your control,” says Beth Brodovsky, president of Iris Creative Group, Inc. “Meditation alleviates that in so many ways. It is a tool for focusing on now and letting go of before or after. Even taking a few moments to do that can be helpful.”

Scientific studies show that regular meditation can help individuals in numerous ways, including:

- Reducing anxiety, depression, and pain.
- Boosting the immune system and ability to manage stress.
- Increasing emotional intelligence, compassion and self-control.
- Improving memory, focus, attention, decision-making and creativity.

Sound like the kind of changes you’d like to see in your employees (and yourself)? Follow the lead of companies such as Google, Target, General Mills and Aetna and introduce your staff to mindfulness.

Getting Started

Yes, some workers will be skeptical or not interested. Presenting meditation as part of an overall wellness or stress-reduction initiative may make it better received.

“Forming a group that meets weekly and practices meditation can be helpful to generate interest among staff,”

says Joseph Croskey, assistant professor and director of the University Advising Services Center at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. “Listening to instruction together from an app is one way to get started with a personal or group practice of meditation. There are several apps —Insight Timer, Simple Habit, Calm, and others — that can help people learn to meditate.”

Other businesses have opted to participate in retreats, attend events such as the Mindful Leader Summit or bring certified instructors into the workplace for presentations. Managers also might purchase books such as *10% Happier* by Dan Harris, *Mindful Work* by David Gelles and *Search Inside Yourself* by Chade-Meng Tan for employees to borrow from the office as they desire.

Or consider simply starting each staff gathering with a minute of mindfulness practice where people sit quietly and pay attention to their breathing. If calmer, more productive meetings follow, you may find a room of enthusiasts!

Can new software put more ‘human’ in HR?

The former head of Google’s HR function has launched a start-up aimed at recreating some of the success he drove at the search engine giant and bringing it to other HR departments.

Laszlo Bock left Google in 2016 after a decade of helping the company earn accolades as a “best place to work.” Bock’s innovative, data-driven “people analytics” system was lauded as breakthrough technology.

Now he and two other former Google execs are rolling out Humu, a similar concept they contend may be just the thing every HR department needs to facilitate employee engagement.

Investors seem to agree, having recently provided \$40 million in funding.

Humu claims to use behavioral science and machine learning to “nudge managers and employees toward behavior change with time-based alerts” to get everyone to act more “human” at work.

How does it work? The software, still being refined, takes input from a number of sources, including a company’s HR data, productivity information for individuals and groups of employees and company surveys. The software then sends a series of targeted emails and text messages to managers.

The goal: To inspire them to take action that makes work better.

For example, a text might remind a manager to send out thank you notes to their team after it meets a productivity goal. It might even provide suggested language to use as what Humu calls a “nudge.”

The software will then determine whether the supervisor followed through. “Learning” what works, the program might send the suggestion another way the next time until the supervisor follows through.

According to Humu data, the results can be dramatic. In pilot testing, some companies reported as much as a 250% increase in the likelihood of managers using engagement tools and tactics.