**10 Ways to Bring Mindfulness to Your Work Day** NOVEMBER 11, 2010

**** ***Tools – give me tools****.*

That’s what most of the people we meet in the workplace want – tools. Tools to be more efficient, productive, effective and less stressed. Often what they want are solutions to complex problems – more often what they want is out of their control.

 So the question becomes – *is there a master tool?*  If so much of what people want at work is control – is there a “tool” to help them?

Well – there is no tool or formula or magic to control other people – or events that can often feel random and overwhelming.  However, there is one tool we have that is within our domain to control – and its power is being explored and revealed by an[**ever-growing body of research**](http://marc.ucla.edu/)– and that is **mindfulness.**

[**Mindfulness**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mindfulness_%28Buddhism%29), a concept and practice inherited from Buddhist traditions, has found its way into mainstream psychology and medicine – and *slowly* into the workplace.

The benefits of mindfulness are many – and the list keeps getting longer: help with depression, alleviation of pain, quicker recovery from surgery, relationship issues, help with sleep problems, eating disorders, anxiety and phobia issues and overall stress management.

The “magic” of mindfulness is that it rearranges neural networks.  Cutting edge science continues to prove this in powerful ways.   And the truly exciting news is that power comes from us. **We are the tool**.

**What is Mindfulness?**

As earlier stated – mindfulness is a concept and [**a practice**](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/soren-gordhamer/meditation-practice-the-r_b_195224.html).  While there is no set definition it can best be described as:

***Paying focused attention*
*On purpose*
*Without judgment*
*To the experience of the present moment***

This definition comes from mindfulness pioneer,[**Jon Kabat-Zinn,**](http://www.umassmed.edu/Content.aspx?id=43102)a Western Buddhist practitioner who founded the renowned Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

According to Kabat-Zinn, at its essence, mindfulness is the **“confluence of intention, attention and present time experience.”** **It is the awareness of awareness.**

Daniel Stern, author of [**The Present Moment in Psychology and Everyday Life**](http://www.amazon.com/Present-Moment-Psychotherapy-Everyday-Life/dp/0393704297/ref%3Dntt_at_ep_dpi_9), defines the present moment as *“being approximately three seconds – between three and ten.* And in describing Stern’s work, author Ruth Cohn explains, *“many functions in nature and culture that occupy such intervals of time: an exchange of communication between infant and caregiver, a cycle of breath inhaled and exhaled, a musical phrase, a conversational “turn.” Perhaps the moment of now is an essential ingredient in the operating system of our design.”*

**Bringing the Benefits of Mindfulness to Our Work**

Developing mindfulness in everyday life takes effort. Many related practices (meditation, yoga, some martial arts, time spent away from media and technology, time spent in the natural world) will help to cultivate mindfulness. But the mind needs the focus and consistency of a regular practice if it is to undo old neural patterns and learn new ones.

For many, the workplace is one of the most stressful places in their lives. Pressures are constant. Differences, even non-conflictual ones, among people requires lots of neural energy to manage.  Most people in this culture work too many hours, often without any breaks.  Many workers operate in a low – level flight or fight mode. Out of touch with feelings and the thinking patterns that reinforce stress and anxiety, many people constantly “re-trigger” those negative habits throughout the day. Mindfulness practice offers the possibilities of mental and emotional rest, despite the events that surface in the average workday.

**10 Ways to Practice**

**Make a commitment to practice. The first step is to become more aware of being aware.  Essentially mindfulness is the art of being an observer of *your self* – your thoughts, feelings and your behaviors. As the definition above states – without judgment)**

1. **Start slowly *– today I will become more aware of* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and practice by placing your attention on that.**
2. **Start each day with a few minutes of conscious awareness.**[**Breathing is the key to opening up your awareness**](http://wp.me/pxJUg-9u)**. Instead of jumping right out of bed into your routine, take a few minutes to notice how you feel and consciously set your intentions for the day.**
3. **If your tendency is to move at a very quick pace while getting your day started, focus on slowing yourself down.  Even if you have to get many things done in a short time frame – you can control the racing to-do list in your mind. This will help regulate your energy in a different way.**
4. **In the course of your work, practice *really listening* to others. This requires you to shift your energy to the other person and take the focus off you and your mental to-do list, even for a few minutes.**
5. **Consider ways to recognize other’s accomplishments, needs, difficulties and practice small, simple acts of empathy and kindness that may lighten their load. They have loads too!**
6. **Pay close attention to your body language. The way we use our body has a powerful effect on closing our attention down – or opening it up. We can’t stress enough the value and importance of being aware of how you breathe.**
7. **Watch your language – the words you use cue your physiology. When you tell a colleague that you are “slammed” in terms of work – you are signaling your brain that it is having or about to have an unpleasant experience.**
8. **Take a few minutes to identify**[**what you would like your outcome to be**](http://wp.me/pxJUg-9S)**in certain interactions – an important call, email or meeting. Most of us find ourselves in the midst of interpersonal situations with no idea of what we really want. In other words – know your intention.**
9. **Find some time, at the end of your workday or in the evening for self-reflection.  It’s challenging to do this without judgment. Discernment and judgment are very different.  Practice noticing without judging.**

I didn’t say this was easy.  That’s why it’s called a practice. We get the chance to do it over and over until we can perceive the little shifts and changes that evolve into habits.  There is a power in mindfulness that you can tap into. It’s all up to you.