

Five Common Work Challenges Mindfulness Can Improveⁱ

Mindfulness may seem like a luxury work perk, but in reality taking time to pause can make or break your work day.

Mindfulness can easily be thought of as a retreat from the outsized challenges leaders often face. But when things get tough, that's when your mindfulness practice actually shines. Here's how taking the time to ask yourself what's actually happening can make or break your work day.

1) Things get hot in a meeting and emotions take over

Response: If you ask yourself, "What outcome do I truly want here?" you may be able to see your true aim more clearly and defuse the excess emotion that may be getting in the way. It's not about doing away with passion and emotion; it's about assessing how to spend the precious resource of your—and everyone else's—mental energy.

2) Distraction keeps you from accomplishing important things

Response: When you have that feeling of being lost, you can inquire, "Where is the most important place for my focus and energy to be right now?" To help promote deep focus, try creating a 90-minute block on your calendar (say in the form of a faux doctor's appointment)—that is your untouchable focus time.

3) A negative mindsets shut down situations

Response: Ask questions of yourself and others that lead to solutions or at least greater understanding, not blame and recrimination: "What can we learn? What's possible here? What are our strengths? What can we build on? What can we leave behind?"

4) You take over too much—perhaps because you want to be the hero who fixes everything

Response: This is a prescription for burning yourself out while undermining others' opportunities to learn and become empowered. You need to ask, "Why am I really doing this? Does 'helping' make me feel important?"

You may come to see that you're less overwhelmed and the team is more capable when you delegate authority to others.

5) You regularly interrupt people

Response: Oops! There goes that hair trigger again. See if you can use your bodily senses as an early warning system to interrupt hasty outbursts. Ask yourself, “What happens in my body the moment before I interject?”

See if you can step back and ride out the impulse to interrupt.

Learning to be present with ourselves may not seem like it directly influences efforts to create change, but it can deepen our awareness and impact how we speak out.

Have you ever wondered about the societal impact of your personal mindfulness practice—especially now, in this moment we are collectively facing? How does sitting in individual meditation have an impact on your family, community, country, or the human race? Many meditations, such as loving-kindness meditation, focus on how you feel about yourself and others. Learning to be present with yourself during a moment of societal turmoil may not seem like it is directly influencing efforts to create societal change, but it absolutely impacts *how* you show up, speak out, and protest.

The recent protests about police brutality against Black bodies have erupted in an already tumultuous social moment as we reckon with the public health and emotional effects of COVID-19. Taking the time to care for yourself in the midst of advocating for justice is not simply a form of self-indulgence but a vehicle to improve efforts in supporting social justice.

The practice of mindfulness has a lot to contribute to help you prepare for, be present for, and understand the significance your efforts have in creating change through protesting. Meditating on and about the subject you are protesting can deepen your awareness and experience of the subject.

ⁱ J. Hunter (Oct. 29, 2019). Five common work challenges mindfulness can improve. Attained August 15, 2020 from Mindful. Healthy Mind, Healthy Life Magazine, <https://www.mindful.org/five-common-work-challenges-mindfulness-can-improve/>