Mindfulness at work

Guidance Note

BiteSize Learning Ltd
**Mindfulness at work**

Mindfulness is *the* buzz-word of the moment with good reason. Proven to promote concentration and creativity, reduce stress and anxiety, promote well-being and improve resilience, it is increasingly used in settings, ranging from Transport for London to Google, from primary schools to Harvard, and from the US military to the British National Health Service.

It is growing in popularity because it works. These notes are designed to cover some of the basics of mindfulness, including:

**Background and benefits**
What mindfulness is, and what it isn’t, including who uses it, and why

**Brain/body science**
Understanding how the brain and body work and how we can use this knowledge to maximise performance through mindful awareness

**Mindfulness basics**
Some of the principles of mindfulness including simple, mindful practices designed for easy use and maximum benefit

**Mindfulness at work**
How to manage yourself, others, and your work mindfully; reducing stress, maximising well-being, and promoting productivity
Background and benefits

Mindfulness, what is it?

Actually, let’s start with what it is NOT...

It is NOT about
- living in an idealised world where we all float about, being serene, spending hours in a zoned out state,
- being permanently, annoyingly positive,
- tree hugging and alternative nor is it a religion,
- something that someone “does” to you and nor is it time consuming,
- relaxation (although this is one of its by-products),
- removing your sharpness, or your focus (it actually does the opposite)
- something that needs years of practise before you see positive results, (most mindfulness courses are run over an 8 week period, and positive results can be seen after one session).

It IS
- a method of mental training, rather like fitness training for the brain,
- about cultivating mindful understanding and attitudes, and it utilises mindful practices including formal and informal focussing exercises,
- about developing self-awareness and the ability to non-judgementally, deliberately pay attention, in the present moment.

We like to describe the *practice* as a form of western meditation BUT it is more than that, it is about learning to deal with, and accept, life, others, and ourselves, in all their forms; living in the present moment, whatever that may entail.

As Jon Kabat Zin points out, it is about, “showing up fully in our lives” and living them, “as if they really mattered in the only moment we ever get, which is this one.”
Where did it come from and who is currently using it?

Derived from Eastern meditation practices, the forms most commonly used were initially devised by Jon Kabat Zin. He developed “mindfulness based stress reduction” (MBSR) in the 1970s. His ideas were researched and developed further by Zindel Segal, John Teasdale and Mark Williams in the 1990s. Techniques have continued to be developed and adapted and mindfulness based cognitive therapy (MBCT), which is a mixture of mindfulness and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), is now the intervention of choice for depression and anxiety in the National Health Service and has greater success than anti-depressants.

Its benefits are recognised globally; large corporations such as Google, ebay, Apple, Virgin, IKEA, Sony and Transport for London use it with their staff: educational establishments are implementing it and rarely a week goes by when it is not mentioned in the press, or when further research articles do not appear, singing its praises. Negative articles are few and far between, and so far, no contra-indications have been scientifically proven.

So what is all the fuss about? Why use it in the workplace and at home?

The fuss is because it works! It has been proven to boost your feel-good factor, enable you to cope with life, increase resilience, balance, stability, peace, contentment, bounce-back-ability and emotional intelligence. It can help to improve relationships, creativity, awareness, clarity of thought, focus, concentration, memory, control: the list goes on and on. AND it is not just a list made up of wishful thinking; it is a list that has years of scientific research and evidence behind it.
Statistical evidence – a couple of case studies

Transport for London

Transport for London implemented mindfulness training with the following results:

- Days off for stress/anxiety/depression fell by 70% over 3 years
- 80% reported relationships improved
- 79% reported being more able to relax
- 53% reported being happier in job
The American Marines

A clinical trial with American Marines being deployed to Iraq found that after just eight weeks of mindfulness training, which they called Stress Inoculation Training:

- Working memory under stress improved
- Focus/clarity of thinking improved
- Emotional reactivity decreased – clever decisions under pressure made
- Post traumatic stress reduced

Why it works

It works because it enables you to understand how your personal mental programming works. It stops you simply operating, as most of us do, on automatic pilot. It shows you how thoughts, emotions and physiology impact the way you respond to life. With this understanding and awareness, you have choices and are able to respond rather than react as situations arise.

As you practice mindfulness the brain literally reboots and rewrites. Areas of the brain implicit in concentration and reactivity to stress gain more grey matter, becoming more balanced. The amygdala, a part of the brain connected to emotions and stress becomes less sensitised, and less likely to be triggered unnecessarily, the capacity of the working memory increases, the left prefrontal cortex, associated with happiness and balance becomes more active.

So, it can be useful to discover just how mindful you are... complete the following quiz to discover the answer.
How mindful are you?

Score yourself on a scale of 6 where: 1 = Almost always and 6 = Almost never

1. I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until sometime later.
2. I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.
3. I find it difficult to stay focused on what’s happening in the present.
4. I tend to walk quickly to get where I’m going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.
5. I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.
6. I forget a person’s name almost as soon as I’ve been told it for the first time.
8. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.
9. I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I’m doing right now to get there.
10. I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I’m doing.
11. I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.
12. I drive places on ‘automatic pilot’ and then wonder why I went there.
13. I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.
15. I snack without being aware that I’m eating.

Add up your score. The higher the score, the more mindful you are. This is just for information, remember, you can alter your score, if you wish, by engaging with the information in this handout!
The science

To understand a little more about why mindfulness works it is useful to understand a little about how your brain/body operates.

Your body and brain are part of one organism, so what happens in one part has an impact on what happens in the other.

Your brain

... is amazing and is divided into different areas, with different responsibilities.
The Reptilian brain

This is the oldest part of the brain. It operates unconscious automatic functions such as breathing, heart rate, temperature regulation etc. It is concerned with survival, and is the fastest most reactive part of the brain.

The Limbic brain

... is the middle part of the brain, it records memories, creates feelings and emotions and also has the ability to act and react quickly.

The Neo-cortex

This part is considered to be what makes us human, it creates abstract thought, imagination and consciousness. Known as the higher brain, it is logical, responsible for clever, lateral and strategic thinking, future planning and decision-making.

These former two parts, are often referred to as the primitive brain, are relatively inflexible, operate unconsciously, automatically and faster than the higher brain.

Brain chemicals

These are crucial to how we feel, and how we experience the world around us.

Feel good brain chemicals

- **Endorphins** – are neurotransmitters, part of your survival reward system, activated when you carry out behaviours that promote your survival, (eating, having sex etc.), they also reduce pain, stress and self-criticism *and* they are literally addictive, we get hooked on them.
- **Serotonin** – boosts positivity. If we don’t have enough we feel low and depressed, our sleep, digestion and energy is negatively impacted. SSRI anti-depressant drugs work by maintaining healthy levels of serotonin.
• **Dopamine** – drives us, and motivates us to achieve reward. It is activated when we are about to get something we want. (Think Jimmy Choo shoes, the new car, or that contract we have been working towards). High achievers have this in bucket loads. Like endorphins it is addictive because it makes us feel good, but it has a down side because it can lead us to drive ourselves on beyond our limits.

• **Oxytocin** – also known as the cuddle chemical, helps us bond with others.

• **Vasopressin** – makes you feel balanced, and attached to others and also helps with bonding.

**Feel bad brain chemicals**

• **Adrenalin** – is a key component of the fight/flight/freeze/fold mechanism.

• **Noradrenalin** – in small amounts it provides you with your “get up and go”, in larger amounts it is a key component of the fight/flight/freeze/fold mechanism, responsible for making your heart beat faster and your blood pressure rise.

• **Cortisol** – is a stress chemical, which suppresses the immune system, reduces memory capacity, shifts focus to previous negative experiences, and suppresses sex drive and digestion.

Together, adrenalin, nor-adrenalin and cortisol degrade the immune system, impact the production of serotonin, stop effective sleep, prevent proper digestion, make muscles tense, increase blood pressure, reduce neuron production, reduce the ability to learn, and think laterally, make you feel anxious, stressed, negative and low, make thoughts loop, and make you view things around you as increasingly threatening and problematic. Long term activation leads to illness and/or burn out.
Survival of the fittest

When you perceive a threat, real or imagined, your primitive brain quickly, unconsciously and automatically swings into action, activating the sympathetic nervous system and the fight/flight/freeze/fold mechanism and triggering a cascade of chemicals including adrenalin, nor-adrenalin and cortisol, jumping in and switching off your higher brain, stopping your ability to think rationally, before you have a chance to.

The primitive brain is programmed for survival. It is designed to look for, recognise, focus and act upon any perceived threat, to your survival and well-being.

Think about it... who would be more likely to survive and pass on their genetic material, the person who skipped through the tiger filled forest, humming to themselves and looking at nothing but the flowers and the trees, or the person who listened for, and jumped, at every sound, looking for potential tiger tracks, and constantly on the alert for danger?

As humans we have therefore developed what is known as a negativity bias; we are literally programmed to look for and focus on potential problems. Part of the brain called the amygdala allocates 2/3 rds of its neurons to processing negative experiences, and stress chemicals are faster acting and more powerful than feel-good chemicals. Dr. Rick Hanson describes it well when he talks of the brain being like Velcro for negative experiences and Teflon for good ones. As a result our brains, whilst brilliant, are regularly running a number on us!
The stress system is good for protecting us from harm and getting us out of real, *physical* danger, but in modern life it can be activated unnecessarily as a result of *psychological pressure* e.g. when we are stressed, anxious, have a row with a colleague, miss a deadline, lose a contract etc.

**Prolonged stress rewires our brain**

If we keep operating at a level of high stress we reboot at this level. This becomes our norm, and our default position, meaning we are likely to react more quickly to stressors and fly off the handle more easily. We can use mindfulness to reverse this.

**Rest and digest**

Relaxation is the natural, balanced state the body and mind operates in, when we stop getting in the way and creating stress and tension. We can consciously and deliberately, use mindfulness to turn off the stress reaction and activate the pre-frontal cortex. When we do this we feel good, we relax and operate in balance and think clearly, laterally and rationally. We activate the *parasympathetic* nervous system, also referred to as the rest and digest system. We release feel good neurotransmitters including oxytocin and dopamine, making us feel valued. We release vasopressin, reducing blood pressure and activating the immune system. We automatically trigger positivity, feel-good thoughts and emotions and can think laterally and creatively, with full access to our higher brain functions.

What’s there not to like?
**Useful brain facts**

**Thoughts impact feelings**

How we think has a significant impact on how we feel. If we think something is difficult and stressful we automatically trigger the sympathetic nervous system. If we think something is easy, or a fascinating challenge we automatically trigger the parasympathetic nervous system.

**Feelings impact thoughts, impact behaviour**

Think of this:

1. You have just heard you have got that bonus you wanted and you are in line for promotion. A colleague walks past you in the corridor, you say “Hello” and they brush you off with a snappy response. What are you likely to think? How are you likely to feel/behave?

2. You have just got into work late, having had a blazing row with your partner, you are tired and stressed, and have a pile of work to get through and a tight deadline to meet. A colleague walks past you in the corridor, you say “Hello” and they brush you off with a snappy response. What are you likely to think? How are you likely to feel/behave?

Our state of mind, dictates our reactions. If you are tired and stressed, the guy that cuts you up in traffic is likely to be on the receiving end of your wrath. Chilled and relaxed, looking forward to the day, the same incident is likely to elicit a very different response.

**We make stuff up!**

We should all be awarded degrees in *making stuff up!* The brain likes to make meaning, and make sense of situations and experiences, so it creates stories and fills in gaps. It is important to realise that we therefore often get it wrong and state things as fact when our ideas are based on flawed or incomplete information and suppositions.
Automatic pilot

The brain likes to make things unconscious and automatic as quickly as possible. (Think just how easy it is after a while to send text messages on your phone, or to type on your computer, and just how tricky it is when you change for a different model!) The brain does this because it takes less energy and frees up our minds to concentrate on other things. We therefore form habitual behaviours and thought patterns quickly and easily.

This is a double-edged sword. Many of the things we do unconsciously and automatically (typing, driving, tying our shoe-laces) are useful, however if we live too much of our lives on automatic pilot we will not be sharp, we will be unaware of the little signals that tell us a colleague, of friend, is not operating effectively, or that unless we act we may lose a deal. We will also not be aware of unconscious and automatic unhelpful thought patterns (We all have them!). Mindfulness creates awareness and gives us choices.

We use memory to inform behaviours

The brain uses past experience to inform present behaviours and expectations. If the last time we gave a pitch we stumbled over our words and felt uncomfortable and lacking in confidence, the next time we are about to give a pitch, the brain will expect we will react in the same way. In effect, in this situation, the brain sets us up to feel bad. With mindfulness practices, we can teach the brain not to respond in the same way, reducing its stress response and maximising our ability to deal with the situation.

Old dogs, new tricks

It is a relatively recent discovery that our brains are not fixed after a certain age. Neural plasticity means that the brain is constantly rewiring and creating different neurological pathways. This is good news because it means we can train our brain to do what we want it to. The old adage that says, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks”, has been proven not to hold true.
Mindfulness principles and practices

The ABC of mindful principles is a useful way to remember some of the key components of mindfulness.

A = Awareness, acceptance, approach
B = Being
C = Compassion, curiosity and kindness (OK! We know “kindness” doesn’t start with “C” but it works here.)
Awareness

If we are aware of ourselves and how we are operating then we have a choice about what we do next. Most of us don’t choose our actions and simply react to circumstance.

Awareness of body

Having an awareness of your body and how it is feeling is important. Your body reflects your mind; your mind reflects your body. It acts like an operational barometer. Most of us only pay attention when things go wrong; when we notice we ache, our back hurts, our neck is tense, or when we suddenly notice we are desperate to go to the loo. Most of us rarely stop and properly take care of ourselves until our body yells at us in some way.

Mindful awareness enables us to be more conscious of our body’s signals and take action early to so we can maximize productivity and maintain our well-being whilst doing so. If we are aware we can continue to operate at peak performance throughout the day – ie at top of Yerkes Dodson curve, recognise when we have flipped into unhelpful patterns of stress/overwhelm and take appropriate action and in the process build up our resilience.

Practicing the body scan (as shown on the course, and as available to listen to again on the download) is a useful way to do this.

Awareness of thoughts

How focused are you at work? How aware are you of your unconscious automatic negative thinking patterns? How aware are you of when you are thinking in a way that is reactive and destructive, rather than reflective and helpful?

Most of us rarely notice how we are thinking. What happened when you did the “90 second challenge” on the course? Did you notice how your thoughts come and go and rarely stayed completely focused on one thing for long?

Thoughts as mental events

Mindfulness allows us to see that thoughts are just thoughts. They are simply mental events. They happen. Like clouds on a sunny summer day, they come and go. They are not solid. They are influenced by external and internal factors and as a result they are often flawed. Our thoughts are dependent on the chemical balance of the body. If we are in a low mood our thoughts will reinforce this. We will search for (and find) all the negative stuff. We will interpret
others’ behaviour in a negative way, AND crucially, we are designed to take these types of thoughts very, very, seriously. If our mood were good, we would automatically be searching for (and finding) all the positive stuff and would interpret the behaviour of others in a completely different way.

When we start to become aware of our thoughts and thinking patterns we are able to see things as they really are in that moment and are not caught out by the stories we tell ourselves.

**Unhelpful, habitual, automatic, thinking patterns**

Most people run unhelpful, habitual, automatic, thinking patterns. We catastrophise, make up worst case scenarios, star in our own disaster movies, judge ourselves and others and, finding all wanting, are negative. We become critical, driven, perfectionists, apportion blame, believe we are being victimised and are negative... the list goes on. These thought patterns fuel our stress levels, triggering the sympathetic nervous system. The mind also has a tendency to flit about and the higher the stress level, the more it does this.

Which of the above are your personal favourites? Being aware of them means you can choose whether you take them seriously and engage with them or not.

Practicing mindful meditation, and practicing focusing, in the moment, as illustrated on the course, enables you to:

1. Notice that thoughts are just thoughts. Wait a while and another one will come along
2. Notice that the way you are thinking impacts your emotions and your emotions impact your thoughts
3. Notice that you have the choice about whether you engage with your thoughts or not.
4. Become aware of old, automatic, unhelpful thought patterns
5. Improve your ability to deliberately focus and concentrate

**Awareness of behaviour**

We often find ourselves rushing; rushing to get the kids to school, to get to work, to get to the next job or meeting AND at the same time juggling clients, colleagues, managers and staff in a whirlwind of activity. In amongst all this, we are often completely unaware of how we are feeling emotionally, and how we are behaving. Then when we get home, our partner asks, “How was your day?” and we explode into a tirade about how stressful it all was and how exhausted we are!
As with our thinking patterns, we also run unconscious and automatic behavioural patterns, some useful, some not. Key ones that get us into trouble, especially if we are alpha personality types, are driving forwards, and perfectionism. (Both of these behaviours are fuelled by dopamine and endorphins). These are fine traits as long as we manage them and use them to our advantage. If we rebalance throughout the day, we are able to maintain optimum performance levels and work cleverer rather than longer.

**How?**

One minute mindfulness techniques are simple, informal, exercises you can do on the way to work, between meetings, or as you stop for a coffee, enabling you to get to the end of the day feeling fine rather than frazzled.

**One-minute mindfulness techniques**

1. **Back in your body**
   If you notice your mind is racing this is a useful exercise.

   Take a deliberate, slow, breath. Shift your focus to your feet. Notice your feet on the floor. Notice how they feel. Are they tired, achy, tingly, comfortable? See if you can notice your toes and how they feel. Can you feel your socks or tights? Just pay attention to any sensations you can observe. Then move your attention around your body observing ankles, calves, thighs, torso, arms, neck, back, head. Notice how your whole body feels, is it tired, energised, buzzy, adrenalised? Notice your breathing rate, is it fast or slow? Now walk and notice how it feels. Observe how your heel hits the floor first. Observe how the rest of the foot follows. Feel how your arms move as you walk. Finally take three, deliberate, slow, breaths, making your out breath slightly longer than your in breath and carry on...

2. **Mindful coffee**
   Make your coffee mindfully. Just how much can you notice? How often do your thoughts wander? When they do, just gently, bring them back to the task in a non-judgmental way.

3. **Name that mood**
   Spend just 60 seconds noticing what you are doing/feeling/how you are behaving and name the actions, feelings and behaviours.
For example, when I was recently stuck in the airport and just wanted to be at home, I spotted I was feeling stressed: I had a tense stomach, tight shoulders and developed ‘annoyed’ thinking. I was huffing and puffing and felt frustrated. I was blaming the officials for being incompetent. I was seriously annoyed at the woman who was invading my personal space... and so it went on. As soon as I became aware, identified and named it, I realised how much I was winding myself up and I could then choose to stop!

Acceptance

If we continue with the example of me at the airport; I was feeling all sorts of stress. However, the fact was that I was in a queue. Feeling stress was not going to make the queue go away. What I was inadvertently doing was adding another layer of difficulty to my experience. As a result of running stress chemicals, I was then tense, my muscles were ready for fight or flight, the chemical balance in my system was fuelling my negative thinking, and feeding my annoyance. When I finally recognised what I was doing I accepted I was in a queue and it would all sort itself out in good time. In accepting primary “suffering”, my body relaxed, I became amused at my behavior and was able to deal with the reality of situation. A whole secondary layer of suffering was therefore averted!

Another situation when this is particularly relevant is sleeping, or more specifically, not sleeping! Most people, who feel under pressure, sleep fitfully. Then, when they wake in the night, instead of accepting it they start to fight with themselves; “I must get back to sleep! I will never cope tomorrow if I don’t. Oh no! I am never going to doze off again!” and so on. If we fight it we never get back to sleep, because we will kick off even more of the stress chemicals designed to make us stay awake and compromise the production of hormones needed for sleep. If we accept it, we stop engaging with the stress loop, the body relaxes, the parasympathetic nervous system re-engages and sleep is then possible.

Approach

We are pre-programmed to avoid problems and difficulty. Approaching and looking directly at difficulties, therefore sounds, and initially feels, counter intuitive. However, as with accepting issues, when we approach things in a calm, accepting way, we increase activation in the left pre frontal cortex, are able to think laterally, flexibly, and intelligently, using the higher brain. The more we practice approach, the more we do so without reactivity, boosting our ability to deal with difficulty.
Being

When we practice being in the present moment we strengthen the brain, build resilient neurology and are able to choose whether we engage in automatic behaviours, or not.

We often spend time ruminating; thinking about the past and projecting into the future. This can get us into trouble if the stories we tell ourselves about the past and future are negative, because again this triggers the sympathetic nervous system, means we are likely to miss crucial facts, not be as sharp as we need and lose the edge over competitors.

Check your automatic pilot

What things do you do at work on automatic pilot?

Think of three things you could do differently. (Maybe sit in a different place at meetings; answer emails at a different time; take a five-minute break every hour).

Doing this will enable you to build stronger neurology, be sharper, and be more present when you choose.

Curiosity

Observe yourself and others with curiosity, without judgment, just observation. When you do this you are dissociated. From this position you are able to see the wood for the trees and act appropriately and usefully.

Compassion/Kindness

How kind are you to yourself? How often do you tell yourself off, beat yourself up for not meeting your own high standards, make tough rules for yourself: and how often do you question your ability? How often do you say similar things to friends, or to children? Most of us are mean to ourselves and say things to ourselves we wouldn’t dream of saying to others. How would it be if we simply accepted that occasionally we mess up, we do things wrong, we make mistakes. After all, we are human! We are not perfect.
We also drive ourselves forwards, we don’t give ourselves breaks or do things that make us feel good. How would it be if you did nice things for yourself every day?

**Sound too wishy-washy?!**

It is not! There are sound scientific reasons as to why we should notice more about ourselves. When we are kind to ourselves, accept ourselves as we are, and in effect give ourselves a metaphorical hug, we reduce levels of cortisol, increase levels of oxytocin, engage the parasympathetic nervous system, increase our happiness quota, boost our resilience AND increase our ability to deal with work pressures and adversity. We literally build stronger, more resilient neurology and strengthen positive neurological pathways. We also develop emotional intelligence skills and maintain access to our higher brain functions.

**Think about it!**

What 5 things could you do to be kinder to yourself? What 5 things nurture you? What 5 things could you factor into your day to make it easier? What could you do when you are under work pressure to treat yourself with compassion and kindness?

**Mindfulness at work...top tips**
Planes, trains and automobiles – travelling mindfully

Travelling provides the perfect opportunity to put mindful principles and practices into action. Statistically, travelling is rated as being one of the most stressful things we do. Longer commutes have been implicated in higher divorce rates, increased blood pressure, and higher rates of depression. It doesn’t need to be this way. Use the ABCs of mindfulness to experiment with mindful travel. Have some fun with it.

Practice being in the moment as you drive. Become aware of when you are gripping the steering wheel, when you feel your blood-pressure rising, when you want to scream at the person in front, when you have lost your sense of humour. Remember it is your mood, you can choose whether you continue to engage with it or not. Take a mindful minute. Deliberately shift your focus and attention to the actions of driving. Feel the steering wheel in your hands. Notice how your legs and feet move as you change gear. Notice how you are sitting and so on. See what happens!

Travelling by train or bus provides the perfect opportunity to engage in more formal meditation practice, doing a body scan and focusing deliberately on the breath. See if you can stay present from one station, or stop, to the next. Notice how many times your thoughts wander. Kindly bring them back to the task in hand.

At the airport, practice awareness skills. Notice other people. Observe the queues; notice who is “doing” stressed and anxious behaviour and who is “doing” calm and happy behaviour. Become aware of your own body, mind and behaviours. Are you running on automatic pilot? Are you running unhelpful thoughts/behavioural patterns? Are you starring in your own disaster movies based on events from the past and predicting disasters in the future? Could you do things differently, in a more useful way?
Mindfully managing heavy workloads

Many of us find ourselves facing ever-increasing workloads, being on call 24/7, needing to achieve more, in less time, and on smaller budgets. So how do you apply mindfulness in these situations? Employ the ABC of mindfulness to help you.

A – Awareness and acceptance
How are you experiencing the workload? Are you tired, wired, or energised?
What thoughts are you running? Are they negative, and unhelpful? Are you dealing in facts or fiction? Are you running stories about the workload? If so, are the stories helpful, or not?

Accept that you have a period of intense work. Don’t make up stories about it. If you can’t change it, don’t waste energy railing against it.

B – Being
Are you focused and on task, or are you distracted? If distracted, kindly, bring your attention back to the task. Work on one task at a time.

C – Curiosity, compassion and kindness
Be curious about yourself and your actions/reactions to the work pressure. Be curious about others and their actions/reactions. When you are aware, you can then choose how you handle the situation and can manage staff effectively.

Be compassionate and kind. Recognise that during periods of intense work, you need to take regular breaks in order to maintain peak performance. It is about working cleverer, not harder. Stop regularly to mindfully check in with yourself and if necessary ask, “What do I need to do to rebalance, and get back to top performance?” (Or what do I need to do to encourage my staff to rebalance?) Your ability to focus and think effectively deteriorates rapidly, pushing through DOES NOT work!

Think about what you can do to make your life and the lives of your team/colleagues as easy as possible and act on it! Can you delegate? Can you get a partner/friend to cook meals in the evening? Can you order in good food for the team at work? Is it useful to factor in a massage? (A personal favourite!)
Managing meetings

Mindfully managing meetings enables you to spot, and achieve more, promoting clever and lateral thinking, avoiding old habitual behavioural traps and dealing with facts rather than fiction.

A – Awareness, acceptance, approach
Before the meeting, check in with yourself. How are you feeling, thinking, behaving? Do you have preconceived ideas about the meeting that could get in the way of achieving the goals? Be aware of any old behavioural blueprints that may be unhelpful. Be aware of others’ patterns.
In the meeting, be aware of emotional, rather than rational responses from yourself and/or others. Be aware of the dynamics; your body language; the body language of others and so on.
Accept people as they are.
Approach difficulties in a calm, balanced way. Is there a metaphorical elephant in the room that needs to be addressed?

B – Be
Be in the present moment, fully engaged. Notice if your thoughts are wandering. Bring your focus back to the moment. Listen mindfully. Ask mindfully aware questions. Notice if you are running automatic thought patterns. Are they helpful, or not?

C – Curiosity
Be curious about yourself and your reactions and about others, their reactions and their agendas. Be curious about their views, stuck positions, stuck thinking, emotionally driven thinking and so on. When you do so, you remain dissociated (so don’t need to take it personally), retain access to higher brain thinking and the meeting is not then hijacked by reptilian thinking patterns.
Managing tricky individuals

We all face them. The heart-sink people we know will be difficult. The ones we have to deal with and really do not want to. The ones who make our stomach tense before we even meet them and who we quietly dread, yet another confrontation with.

Think about that last paragraph. If I was to go into a meeting feeling and thinking that way, what are my expectations? What behavioural patterns am I likely to run? What stories am I telling myself? What might I miss? How in the moment might I be? What behavioural patterns might the other person run as a result?

Before dealing with a “tricky individual,” take a mindful minute to notice how you are feeling, thinking and behaving. Acknowledge and accept this. Then think about it. Are your old, default, actions and reactions helping or hindering? Take time to think about what it is you want to achieve. When you are in the meeting observe any old automatic responses you might be employing. Are they working? Could you try a different approach? Practice being open, non-judgmental, curious and compassionate. Notice their body language, fully listen to their answers and observe whether they are congruent. Observe and listen, not just what is being said, but more importantly, what is NOT being said! Notice what happens.
Managing technology

We are only just beginning to understand the full impact of “new” technology on health and well-being.

The first important thing to know is that emails, text messages, WhatsApp, Facebook, and mobile phones in general, are literally addictive. They trigger dopamine, which drives us to answer messages, and makes us itch to check emails, even when we are on holiday. This in turn triggers the opioid system and gives you a quick chemical high. The problem is, this quickly subsides and we are soon chasing our next fix.

We also know that the light from computer screens stop us from sleeping, by interfering with the production of serotonin and melatonin, necessary for a good night’s rest.

And finally although we like to think we can multi-task, in reality the brain doesn’t work that way. It works at its peak when we focus completely on one thing at a time. It takes valuable time to refocus and get back into the zone every time we are distracted by another email, or message.
So, how do you handle technology mindfully?

1. Take regular mindful breaks
2. Do a body/mind scan every couple of hours
3. Practice NOT automatically answering emails as they appear in your in-box
4. Practice focusing on one task at a time
5. Take breaks away from your desk
6. Turn the ring-tone on the phone off
7. Practice doing it differently! Break some of those old, unconscious, automatic patterns. See what happens when you do!
8. Become aware of your current use of, and response to, technology, accept this, think about it with curiosity and compassion. What do you need to do to make things easier for yourself? As a managerial team, what can you do to promote a more mindfully aware culture within the company?

Recap

Use the mindful ABC to help you remember the basic tenants of mindfulness principles and practices.

Principles

- A = Awareness, acceptance, approach
- B = Being
- C = Curiosity, compassion, kindness

Practices

- Body scan
- Thought scan
- Mindful breathing
- One minute mindfulness techniques
And finally:

What three ways can you start to implement mindful principles and practices into your day?

Mindfulness resources

Books

The Mindful workplace: Developing Resilient Individuals and Resonant Organisations with MBSR – Michael Chakalson

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World – Mark Williams and Danny Penman

Mindfulness at Work for Dummies – Shamash Alidina and Juliet Adams

Mindfulness for Health: A practical guide to relieving pain, reducing stress and restoring well-being – Vidyamala Burch and Danny Penman

Sort your brain out – Dr. Jack Lewis and Adrian Webster

Internet

http://franticworld.com

info@minfulhub.com

http://mindful.org

www.mentalworkout.com/store/programs/mindfulness-meditation