

# SOURCE LINES

## Mindfulness @ Work

Author's note: This is the first of a three part series introducing the benefits of mindfulness meditation in the workplace. The second newsletter will discuss how mindfulness can help us manage 'worrying and troubling' thoughts from taking over our lives. Simple exercises and ways to incorporate mindfulness into daily life will be provided. The third newsletter will discuss how mindfulness enhances emotional intelligence by helping you increase awareness of your own and others emotions.

**M**any workplace settings today are endorsing the training of Mindfulness Meditation for all their employees. Research shows that increases in mindfulness are associated with increased creativity, decreased burnouts and fewer on-the-job accidents. Some of the health benefits include lower blood pressure, a reduction of insomnia and improved memory. Mindfulness Meditation not only reduces the ill effects of stress but can increase your energy, productivity and enjoyment of everyday life.

### *What is Mindfulness Meditation?*

Mindfulness Meditation is a method of self-awareness training. To be 'mindful' is to be aware of what is happening in the 'moment' without making judgements about what we are experiencing. It is about developing the capacity to 'notice' thoughts, feelings and sensations without assumptions about what the experience says about us or others. Imagine being able to 'notice' an anxious or angry thought without losing our-

selves to the often strong emotions that frequently accompany such a thought. The thought becomes just a thought. You notice having an angry thought but you don't judge yourself as a 'bad' or 'weak' person for having the thought. You also can let the angry thought go, as if you were standing on a bridge and watching it float past you in the river below.

Imagine the calm and peacefulness this could bring to your life. Imagine being able to let go of some of the stress that has robbed you of enjoying the simple things in your life.

**"Most of us all walk around as if we're sleepwalking. We really don't experience the world fully, because we're half-asleep, doing things we automatically think we have to do."** Mitch Albom, Tuesdays with Morrie.

### *Why does Mindfulness require 'training' and 'practice'?*

We have become very good at 'multi-tasking' and operating on 'automatic pilot' in

our lives. Think about how we eat at our desks, while answering phones and checking e-mails and trying to remember to stop for milk on the way home. We drive, listen to the radio and organize 'to do' lists in our heads all at the same time. Sometimes we arrive at our destinations before we know it. We convince ourselves that all this multi-tasking is making us more efficient when in fact it makes us less efficient, causes us to feel stressed and over-reactive to our environment. Learning how to pay attention to only one thing in the moment requires patience, redirection of wandering thoughts and a lot of practice.

### *How can I begin to become more 'Mindful'?*

Mindfulness is a skill that can be learned like any other. If you ever learned to ride a bike or play a musical instrument you will remember that it took some time before you were able to master it. You can begin with trying the following 'Body Scan' exercise.

#### The Body Scan Exercise

This exercise helps you enter a deep state of relaxation and mindfulness. The object is to direct your attention on one part of your body at a time, noticing signs of stress and then the sensations of letting go of the tensions.

- Lie down on your back or sit comfortably in a warm place
- Gently close your eyes and become aware of

your breathing. Notice how your stomach rises and falls with each breath.

- Direct your attention to how your body feels as a whole, from the top of your head to your toes. Slowly, notice the sensations of the floor/bed/chair touching your skin.
- Bring your attention to the toes on one of your feet. Imagine directing your breathing to your toes. Visualize your breath travelling from your nose to your toes and back again.
- Allow yourself to feel any and all sensations from your toes. If you don't feel anything, that is okay. Don't judge, just let yourself feel nothing. Stay with this part of your body for awhile before slowly moving your attention to the soles of your feet, ankle, calf, knee, thigh, lower stomach, back etc. all the way to the top of your head.
- If you find your mind wandering during this exercise, try paying attention to your breathing for a minute (you can even say to yourself 'breathing in', 'breathing out'). Try and practice this Body Scan for 10 minutes once each day.

For an excellent introduction to mindfulness read Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life by Jon Kabat-Zinn.

Make sure to read next month's *Source Lines Newsletter* to learn how mindfulness can help us manage 'worrying and troubling' thoughts from taking over our lives. You will also learn some simple exercises and ways to incorporate mindfulness into your daily life.

Article written by Anne Secord-Houston, ECE, BSW, RSW.

**'Meditation practice isn't about trying to throw ourselves away and become something better; it's about befriending who we are already.'** Pema Chodron

SOURCE LINE, INC.

94 CUMBERLAND STREET, SUITE 604, TORONTO, ONTARIO, M5R 1A3

416-234-1316 / 1-800-394-8015

Email: reachus@sourceline.ca Web Site: www.sourceline.ca

Offices in Toronto, Mississauga, Woodbridge, Newmarket and Cambridge with Associates Across Canada