



## Mindfulness in Our Workplace



As many of us return from vacation to overflowing inboxes, meeting requests and looming deadlines, that post-holiday afterglow can be quick to fade.

Our expertise in juggling multiple tasks, work relationships, not to mention hectic home lives, allows us to pick up where we left off, barely noticing how our body and mind are adapting to the change.

But what if there was a way to continue tapping into that relaxed holiday feeling even when your mind and body couldn't be farther away?

The practice of mindfulness offers the possibility to step off the proverbial treadmill and observe how we respond to the stress induced by an ever-increasing workload.

But before you (understandably) roll your eyes at another wellness buzzword – our culture certainly has a way of reducing ancient, scientifically endorsed practices to, well, McMindfulness – consider this oft-cited quote by the Dalai Lama:

***‘The more I have to do, the more I meditate.’***

We might not want to take this literally, but it is a simple yet powerful countercultural message. Taking that pause when things get overwhelming to check in with our mind and body can help us recognise the signs of work-related stress. This will not make our stress disappear – nor our workload unfortunately – but creating a certain distance gives us space to make choices that support our well-being in that moment, such as prioritising what is important and getting comfortable with the ‘no’ word when necessary!



## The mindfulness movement

I write from my personal experience with mindfulness – I am no neuroscientist and the enlightened ‘no’ is still a work in progress – but the benefit of having a regular practice is now backed up by solid scientific evidence.

Rooted in Buddhism, mindfulness has developed widely as an evidence-based approach to well-being. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a molecular biologist and one of the pioneers of mindfulness as a secular practice in the West, defines it as ‘the awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally’ (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). He developed the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) eight-week programme in the late 1970s with a view to helping hospital patients manage chronic pain and illness. Since then, the MBSR has flourished and given way to other mindfulness-based programmes delivered in multiple settings, such as schools, prisons and the workplace.

Based on 91 studies, Michaelsen *et al.* (2023) found that mindfulness-based programmes in diverse sectors and professions significantly improved well-being, mental health, stress, resilience and physical health among employees.

## Just do it

But attractive as it sounds, mindfulness is no quick-win solution. The research is unanimous: the only way to bring about change is through consistent and regular practice. This involves setting an intention, finding a slot in your daily agenda for mindful meditation practice, and sticking to it.

As my teacher often says, **‘You don’t have to like it, you just have to do it!’**

Daily meditation builds the mindfulness muscle, but there are multiple opportunities to flex this muscle as you go about your workday: the three-step breathing [space](#) when workload-related panic sets in; mindful [listening](#) during that Friday evening Zoom meeting; mindful [self-compassion](#) when you’re not feeling up to a task, and so on. Online resources abound and it is easy to get lost in that mix, so I have added a few resources below that inspired me.

Practising mindfulness may not eliminate the post-vacation blues, but it can help us connect with that inner balance that came so naturally on holiday.

Bonne rentrée !

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## References:

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). *Full Catastrophe Living. How to cope with stress, pain, and illness using mindfulness meditation*. London: Piatkus.

Michaelsen, M.M., Graser, J., Onescheit, M., Tuma, M.P., Werdecker, L., Pierper, D. and Esch, T. (2023). Mindfulness-Based and Mindfulness-Informed Interventions at the Workplace: A Systematic Review and Meta-



**Further resources:**

Online courses:

<https://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/>

Books:

André, C. (2011). *Méditer jour après jour*. Paris, l'Iconoclaste.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York, Hyperion.

Podcast (mindfulness in the workplace):

<https://www.tenpercent.com/tph/podcast-episode/lindsey-cameron-577>

Videos:

TedX | The Power of Mindfulness: What You Practice Grows Stronger, Dr Shauna Shapiro:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leblJdB2-Vo>

Atención Plena (Mindfulness) en el trabajo:

<https://youtu.be/u-hdHBXvMLM>

Taller Iniciación al Mindfulness y programa MBSR:

<https://youtu.be/gw8NHAIbh9g>

