

"By focusing mindfully, a leader can develop his/her thought processes to give each part of her undivided attention. The commitment the leader makes to utilizing mindfulness as a reflection and learning can provide dividends later in the form of a clear vision."

Mindfulness and Leadership

Insights and Benefits

By Tina Thompson

Leadership practices continue to evolve. Our society is becoming more welcoming of spirituality, self-awareness, and behaviors that encourage expressions of one's inner self. Leaders need strategies to help them balance demands of their time, bodies, and resources. Often leaders look to routines that assist in gaining and maintaining a level of balance. Many use stress-relieving practices such as exercise, yoga, or meditation. Mindfulness is another useful practice that is becoming more popular than ever in leadership circles. Mindfulness is characterized by one's ability to cultivate awareness of the body and mind in the present (Dhiman, 2009). It allows one to pause, be calm, and reflect on what the present is offering. This article will provide insights into the use of mindfulness practices, and discuss the value and benefits leaders derive from using mindfulness in the workplace and in their work.

Insights into Practices

Leaders often reflect on their work, projects, strategies, and solutions. The ability to use mindfulness as a reflection tool links knowledge, application, and action (Tuleja, 2014). Mindful reflection allows

one's thought processes to be clear, calm, and purposeful. As leaders are faced with frequent decision-making requests, the leader can also use mindfulness as a learning tool. By focusing mindfully, a leader can devote his/her thought process to one task and give it undivided attention. The commitment the leader makes to utilizing mindfulness in reflection and learning can provide dividends later in the form of a clear vision.

Mindfulness is a process requiring effort on the part of leaders. As with any new practice, developing the skills and competencies are necessary for skillful usage and results. Leaders must be willing to cultivate, integrate, and balance mindfulness with their authority and leadership to be a role model to their followers (Parks, 2005). Mindfulness and mastery go hand in hand (Santorelli, 2011).

Sinclair's (2015) insights into the practice of mindfulness are:

- » prioritize people and their happiness;
- » it is not just another form of thinking;
- » don't get lost in neuroscience;
- » you don't need to be in a cave or retreat to be mindful;
- » use mindfulness with purpose; and
- » be cautious of ego.

Sinclair's insights help leaders focus on the practice of mindfulness rather than merely advocating for it. This increases effectiveness in workflow and performance management.

Leaders are repeatedly asked to solve problems and frequently use their imagination and creativity. By deploying mindfulness, a leader can link a flexible solution to problem-solving and decision making. Flexibility and resiliency are essential qualities that leaders are expected to have and offer their colleagues. Mindful leaders also employ several other features likely to positively benefit the workplace including self-discipline, motivation, concentration, patience, and perseverance, which cement the connection between mindfulness and mastery (Raney, 2014).

According to Kabat-Zinn (1990) there are seven attitudinal qualities that serve as a foundation of mindfulness practice: (1) withholding judgement, (2) the use of patience, (3) using a beginner's mind (or a fresh, new, or unique approach to witness each interaction or situation faced), (4) trust, (5) non-striving (attuned to the present state), (6) acceptance, and (7) the ability to let go. When leaders attempt to balance more than their capacity or operate from a place of pressure and prioritization, their ability to maneuver through their decision-making process is clouded. With mindfulness, their ability to create and build upon a higher skill level of attitudinal qualities and their aptitude is then increased (Dhiman, 2009).

Values and Benefits

A leader's use of mindfulness can offer an alternative approach to center one's self and focus on the current priority. This present-oriented, humanistic approach or reflective stance is likely to cultivate uncertainty without judgment (Raney, 2014). As leaders search for and build their leadership capacities, they are often pressured to perform higher, reduce expenses, and manage teams of employees—all resulting in an enormous amount of stress. A mindful approach helps manage such stress.

Dane (2011) reported a particular benefit from increased awareness. Mindfulness allows leaders to reach a broader layer within their mind, heightening awareness and attentiveness (Dhiman, 2009). The result supports managing multiple external, effective, and intuitive stimuli, empowering leaders with high task expertise in dynamic, high-velocity environments. Such skills are not only critical in the workplace but sought after as well.

When leaders employ mindfulness, they create leadership that supports healthy stress and change management (Pipe, 2009). Leaders act as role models and their followers witness their behaviors daily. By modeling mindfulness to conquer stress and deal with change management, other leadership techniques are positively affected. Communication styles and patterns are also influenced as mindfulness alters the ways in which followers recognize and process information (Eisenbeiss & Knippenberg, 2015). Mindfulness promotes self-control resulting in respect from the follower. Mindful leaders hold crucial conversations that foster resilience and flexibility necessary for change and growth to occur (Raney, 2014). Higher levels of thought and analysis inspire mindful leaders to deploy both knowledge and wisdom (Tuleja, 2014).

Conclusion

Organizations that strive to succeed in the current business environments must employ leaders who work to establish healthy and interactive communication and performance-influenced leader-follower relationships, along with strategic planning and change management.

References

Dane, E. (2011). Focusing attention to mindfulness and its effects on task performance in the workplace. *Journal of Management*, 37(4), 997-1018.

Dhiman, S. (2009). Mindfulness in life and leadership: An exploratory survey. *Interbeing*, 3(1), 55-80.

Tina Thompson, DBA, works in the higher education community supervising a team of 50 remote tutors. She has 19 years of experience as an educator, coach, and business leader in higher education, for-profit, nonprofit, and government. Thompson earned a Doctorate of Business Administration in Leadership from Capella University. She can be reached at tinthompson265@hotmail.com.

Dhiman, S. (2008). Cultivating mindfulness: The Buddhist art of paying attention to attention. *Interbeing*, 2(2), 35.

Eisenbeiss, S. A., & Knippenberg, D. (2015). On ethical leadership impact: The role of follower mindfulness and moral emotions. *Journal Of Organizational Behavior*, 36(2), 182-195.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophic living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, anxiety and depression*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Pipe, T. B. (2009). Nurse leader mindfulness meditation program for stress management: a randomized controlled trial. *The Journal of Nursing Administration*, 39(3), 130.

Raney, A. F. (2014). Agility in adversity: Integrating mindfulness and principles of adaptive leadership in the administration of a community mental health center. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 42(3), 312.

Santorelli, S. F. (2011). "Enjoy your death": leadership lessons forged in the crucible of organizational death and rebirth infused with mindfulness and mastery. *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12(1), 199.

Sinclair, A. (2015). Possibilities, purpose and pitfalls: Insights from introducing mindfulness to leaders. *Journal of Spirituality, Leadership and Management*, 8(1), 3.

Tuleja, E. A. (2014). Developing cultural intelligence for global leadership through mindfulness. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 25(1), 5.

Copyright of OD Practitioner is the property of Organization Development Network and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.