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# How to Implement a Mindfulness Program in Your Company

White Paper and Best Practices Guide

## Executive Summary

This White Paper and Best Practices Guide was compiled over six months in conversations with fifty six companies, including thirty Fortune 500 brands. It is intended for professionals considering how to best implement a mindfulness meditation and awareness training program throughout their company.

**Mindfulness training is being met with incredible interest over the last several years. With an explosion of scientific studies showing the many benefits of mindfulness, particularly as a tool for stress resilience and performance, it's quickly proving to be the tool of choice for companies around the globe. But how you implement a training program will determine its success or failure.**

This guide shares learnings from professionals in Employee Benefits, Health & Wellness, Human Resources, Procurement, and Talent Development & Training.

Respondents include professionals from the following industries: aerospace, advertising, airlines, automotive, beverages, broadcasting, consulting, CPG, fast food, financial services, healthcare, oil & gas, retail, pharmaceuticals, technology, telecom, universities and utilities.

Special thanks to Mark Coleman, a mindfulness trainer with over two decades of live training experience with top companies, and Dr. Paul Friga, Clinical Associate Professor at the Kenan-Flagler School of Business at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Following our survey, both were invaluable in additional research and insights into respondent data and best practices.

Any company information noted herein is also available in the public domain and does not necessarily indicate participation in the survey or endorsement of a particular approach or product.

Mindfulness is meditation and awareness training to reduce stress and anxiety, enabling the trainee to focus and perform in the moment.

The best practices included here apply to any digital or live training that you may be considering.

Respondents reported the primary goals for launching mindfulness programs were stress reduction (96%), focus and performance improvement (89%), and lowering healthcare costs (84%). 64% of respondents were interested in creating more compassionate cultures. Others were interested in specific skills not included in our survey (focused selling skills, retail customer service, compassionate caregiving, etc.).

Based on the results of our research, when it comes to helping employees create sustainable mindfulness habits, we recommend the following **Top 10 Best Practices**:

1. Keep it Relevant & Adopt Early
2. Enroll Leadership
3. Be Clear About Your Goals
4. Share the Science
5. Measure the Impact in Real Time / (ROI)
6. Give it a Name
7. Make it Routine
8. Find Your Champions
9. Don't Assume Employees Will Just "Get it"
10. Keep it Secular

## Detailed findings

Findings below are the result of conversations with professionals in Employee Benefits, Health & Wellness, Human Resources, Procurement, and Talent Development & Training.

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Following are the best practices shared by fifty six companies, including thirty Fortune 500 brands, that have experience in running mindfulness meditation and awareness training.

Respondent percentages have been shared where relevant.

# Top 10 Best Practices

## 01 **Keep It Relevant & Adopt Early**

84% of respondents felt mindfulness programs that serve specific community needs are more impactful than generic compassion and mindful awareness courses. A modern workforce needs programs with intentions that serve the corporate world. This includes training in areas like forgiveness, multitasking, dealing with difficult people, etc. Employees need coping and resiliency tools in the moment. Providing new employees the chance to immerse themselves in relevant company training and cultural values helps build an environment to support their professional growth. As with any program, the sooner you integrate something into your company's culture, the longer you have to enjoy the benefits and the more intrinsic it becomes to your employees.

## 02 **Enroll Leadership**

Employees look to their leadership team's endorsement ... and actions. If executives are openly committed to the health and happiness of employees (including themselves), then the team has a reason to participate and aspire to live up to that level of commitment. 80% of respondents felt you should invite your leaders to participate in the design and delivery of training programs and connect them to the new ways of working.

*Tip: Create credible ambassadors.*

### 03 **Be Clear About Your Goals**

Are you trying to reduce stress and anxiety? Change your organization's culture? Reduce absenteeism and healthcare costs? Be clear about your goals and understand how the training will help your employees. If that happens, the company will meet its goals. This will help you to focus the program, pick the right providers, and measure results.

### 04 **Share the Science**

Before employees can master a new skill effectively, they must be convinced it will help improve their organization's performance. Different people will be enticed by different proof points. For experienced respondents, their favorite proof point is that when people try mindfulness training, they'll find that it works. There's a reason the world is talking. 70% of respondents wanted to understand the science; data driven proof points.

100% of respondents wanted data-driven programs that can automatically track training data, and APIs to export that data for the company to analyze it against the KPIs they care most about.

### 05 **Measure the Impact in Real-Time / (ROI)**

100% of respondents indicated that proving ROI is important. But only 25% reported they track ROI in their other training programs. Don't think of corporate training as an expenditure. Think of it as an investment that should prove top or bottom line impact. Companies want hard proof, but McKinsey research found that only 50% of organizations track even basic feedback about training programs (like if employees "liked" the training ... a fairly useless measure). Track the impact of your programs against

the hard business metric they are meant to improve like absenteeism, evaluations, turnover and cost of healthcare.

Even modest swings can be game changers. Try starting with a 1-day decrease in absenteeism, a 1% increase in productivity and a 1% decrease in healthcare costs. Do the math. You'd drive tremendous financial impact with modest improvements.

*Tip: Choose a provider that leverages APIs to track current employees, eliminate former employees and do so seamlessly.*

Quantify modest goals to achieve ROI of 100%, then set out to get results that are 3-5X better.

## 06

### **Give it a Name**

Mindfulness training has been called attention training, resiliency training, brain training, situational awareness, and emotional intelligence training. It's important to launch a program that fits with what's important to your culture. The famous Search Inside Yourself program, born at Google, calls it "Emotional Intelligence" and "Attention Training." Utility companies call it "Safety Awareness Training." Insurance companies call it "Stress Resiliency Training." Less than half of the respondents called it "Meditation." The brain training practices are the same, but using lingo that's right for your company will make it easier for employees to understand your intentions.

## 07 Make it Routine

Mindfulness is about creating a healthy habit for the individual. But creating routines are just as helpful at work as they are at home. They create reliability and consistency. They give employees something to look forward to. 39% of respondents went beyond basic training to incorporate some element of mindfulness into their work routines.

Here are some of our favorite mindfulness routines:

- i. Start meetings with a one-minute mindfulness practice. Settle the room. Meetings across Google begin with one minute of mindfulness practice and clarifying intention for the meeting so it stays on track.
- ii. Encourage employees to take an afternoon break. Even a 5-10 minute session can energize and refocus the team for the afternoon.
- iii. Set aside a “quiet room” to encourage employees to train. Think of it as a ‘mental training gym’. Adobe has a daily mindfulness sit at 3 p.m. to help create community. Google has purpose built rooms for mental breaks
- iv. Make it part of your customer experience. British Airways offers nervous flyers short mindfulness practices as part of their flying experience.

## 08 **Find Your Champions**

80% of respondents reported their programs started with an internal mindfulness champion(s); key players that had enough experience to help mindfulness take root. SAP's internal champion actually ended up in a newly created role, Director of Mindfulness Programs.

Conversely, also ask who are those most likely to ignore or be cynical of the program. It's worth spending the time (mindful even) to allow potential cynics to air their concerns ... it may actually help get them on board.

## 09 **Don't Assume Employees will Just "Get it"**

Only 18% of respondents reported any ongoing support for employees to remain in a mindfulness practice. Adults learn in predictable steps. It helps if they can recognize that their own performance is weak in a particular area, and then actually choose to learn to improve. Live corporate training programs overlook these prerequisites and just assume that employees will "get it." This approach allows normal patterns of skepticism to become barriers to learning. Instead of approaching training as active learners, many employees will end up behaving like prisoners ("I'm doing it because I have to"), vacationers ("It's a nice break from doing real work"), or professors ("Everybody else is here to learn; I can just share my wisdom").

# 10

## Keep it secular

Meditation and other contemplative practices (prayer, sitting in silence, etc.) have been around for thousands of years. They are proven to quiet and focus the mind. However, there's nothing inherently spiritual about mindfulness meditation. It's attention training, plain and simple.

"Meditation" suffers from a few thousand years of bad PR. 100% of respondents said they would avoid spiritual or religious approaches. Avoid any providers that appear new-age-y or spiritual. Your employees aren't looking for sandals, gongs or incense at work. The production quality of any training program should meet your company standards (and good common sense).

If you're into hipster monks, that's great. But a large percentage of your employees are not. Mindfulness and awareness training in the workplace should NOT be related to spiritual or religious practices.

*Tip: Avoid Webex training featuring woo-woo teachers in their pajamas and you'll also avoid the "What were you thinking?" conversation.*

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Mindfulness is about as religious as red wine. Red wine also played a starring role in major spiritual traditions for thousands of years. But it's also pretty darn good on its own. No religion needed.

## A Few More Tips

In addition to the above best practices, the following themes came out of our interviews:

**Mobile First:** One of the biggest opportunities that mindfulness training offers is to help your company live up to its cultural values. Live meditation sessions are great (and we recommend them), but respondents shared that most on-site programs draw only 1-3% of employees in a particular location. 91% of respondents shared that mobile training is a priority. Modern training should be mobile, go at your own pace, accessible to all employees and “always-on”, just like your company. Anytime. Anywhere.

**Include Physical Activity in Your Program:** 84% of respondents were interested in mindfulness programs that encourage employees to take care of their minds AND their bodies. This can be accomplished by 1) including yoga or other mindful movement programs into your curriculum; physical activity that is specifically designed to incorporate focus and attention training into the physical activity and 2) incorporating mindful eating into your curriculum.

Although only 7% of respondents reported using activity measurement devices (FitBit, Jawbone, etc.) to help get their employees into a more active lifestyle, the majority were interested in the mind/body connection. For those respondents using measurement devices, they consistently shared the desire for such devices to move beyond “expensive pedometers” and show value by connecting to specific company programs.

Happiness begins at home. When choosing a program, consider options that help employees improve their happiness, relationships and communication at home (like with their teenaged children) as well as in the office. Because stress also begins at home.

**Personalization is Key:** Respondents are looking for the right partner to provide personalization to give individual employees what they need in the moment, allow them to track their progress, and provide recommendations for future training based on their specific needs.

**Promote continuous learning:** Participants rarely leave a training program entirely prepared to put new skills into practice. They generally have to figure out for themselves how to incorporate what they've learned into their day-to-day activities. Never cram everything into a single, long session. It's physically and mentally exhausting to learn new skills all at once. McKinsey recommends dividing training into smaller sessions to help ease the learning process and help employees build a strong skill base that promotes continuous learning. Tip: We recommend a tiered learning system, where employees train at their own pace and each experience builds on the last.

**Community matters:** Entering into any new habit is difficult. It's like going to the gym. If you have a friend or community involved in your training, you're more likely to do it. They'll support you to do it. And remind you when you're not doing it. We recommend that you find providers that understand the power of community and build it into the digital training.

Most live training ends the same way. "Bye. Bye." Employees need the opportunity to apply new skills coupled with continuous learning.

When you're trying to relieve stress for your employees, be sure not to create data-stress for your HR team.

When you launch, invite your mindfulness power users in early to help spread the word. They can help others maximize tools and learning and take weight off of the HR team. They can share tips and shortcuts to other employee users, as well as help new employees get into a practice.

*Tip: Consider a mix of live and digital approaches to cover off both community building and the mobile convenience required by employees. A mix of community and convenience can increase your results in creating sustainable and supported habits.*

**Variety Drives Engagement:** Variety is a key ingredient in maintaining ongoing employee engagement levels, especially in digital training experiences. 77% of respondents felt it important to have a mixture of male and female trainers. 61% also desired ethnic diversity so that trainers were relatable and representative of their own work force. Not every trainer will resonate with every employee. But if they find a mindfulness trainer they like, they'll be more likely to be open to others. If they have just one, they tend to get bored.

*Tip: Maintain variety in trainer backgrounds, teaching approaches and corporate experience.*

**Work with corporate training experts:** 91% of respondents preferred trainers that specialize in working with companies. A common theme is that the best mindfulness training programs follow a "for us, by us" approach. Officers train troops in the military. Teachers train students in school systems. And company programs should have trainers with corporate expertise. In each case, they have street cred - they get the lingo, the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and the community's culture.

**Prepare for Compliance:** Although mindfulness is not currently required to be compliant with major data privacy laws, this is of growing interest and concern for respondents. There's an increasing trend of medical providers "prescribing" meditation as part of a modern health regiment. Insurance companies like Aetna and Kaiser Permanente are increasingly recommending mindfulness training to their insured members. 89% of respondents felt that "data privacy" was an important issue. 0% reported specific programs to ensure data privacy, including in digital programs.

In our opinion, mindfulness solutions should be compliant with data privacy requirements including The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA), and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (for university students).

Individuals must be in charge of their personal data at all times. If they opt-in to share their data, they must also be able to opt-out of sharing. It's also important to know that providers track and share data at the appropriate level. For example, it might be appropriate for an employer to know an employee did 20 sessions of mindfulness training last month (for example, as part of an employer health & wellness reward program). It would not be appropriate for an employer to know the training related to stress, anxiety, and sleep issues.

**No Cult of Personality:** A number of respondents started mindfulness programs with well intentioned employees leading the training, only to abandon the programs later. When you're dealing with the emotional resiliency and well-being of employees, asking other employees to manage their training builds the foundation on shaky ground.

*Tip: The part-time employee that's into yoga and took a weekend mindfulness seminar is not qualified to train your employees.*

**Rewards Work:** 25% of respondents reported offering rewards to employees for taking better care of themselves (lower healthcare premiums, days off, prizes, etc.). This is driven by a mountain of evidence showing that good health results in lower absenteeism and healthcare costs. Many companies find out later that they don't have the right systems to track actual usage. When launching a program, ensure that you have automated access to the data you'll need to reward employees.

**Test Before You Buy:** We live in the age of "prove it". Before selecting a provider, large organizations recommended a trial that maps against the company's key performance indicators (KPIs). A 30-90 day trial should be run with a community sample large enough to be significant in your organization and provide the proof points you need to launch. A recommendation from one employee is good. An endorsement from hundreds is better. As the Chief Learning Officer at SAP wrote, "Test it out, and share research that demonstrates how this program can improve employee output and satisfaction at your company."

## About the Authors:



**Dr. Paul Friga** is a Clinical Associate Professor at the Kenan-Flagler School of Business at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He teaches courses in management consulting and strategy and serves as Director of the S.T.A.R. and GBP Programs - overseeing 35 semester long consulting projects with Undergraduate and MBA students. Dr. Friga researches strategic decision-making, knowledge transfer, intuition, management consulting processes and entrepreneurship. He presents and consults around the world and is the author of *The McKinsey Mind* and *The McKinsey Engagement*.



**Mark Coleman** has a master's degree in clinical psychology. He's an author, mindfulness consultant, and executive coach working with Fortune 500 companies including Google, Facebook, Gucci, Prana, Procter & Gamble, and British Airways. He's a senior meditation teacher at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and a master teacher of compassionate leadership and emotional intelligence at the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute. He supports the nonprofit sector, working with Trust for Public Land, Center for Whole Communities, Vallecitos Mountain Refuge, and healthcare providers.



**Joe Burton** is the founder and CEO of Whil.com. He's an entrepreneur and investor in the digital health & wellness industry, former President of *Headspace*, and spent fifteen years as a global C-level executive running some of the world's largest advertising agency networks. Joe is an alumnus of Harvard Business School and an advisor to nonprofits including Holistic Life Foundation, iBme, and the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute. He discovered mindfulness as a super stressed executive after dismissing it as "definitely not for me" and it changed his life.

## Who is Whil?

**Whil is the leader** in digital training in mindfulness meditation, yoga and leadership for individuals and schools. We work with the world's best trainers and leverage the latest research in neuroscience and behavioural science. Our teen programs were developed with two of the leading charities serving schools. All training is accessible on any computer or mobile device. Anytime. Anywhere.

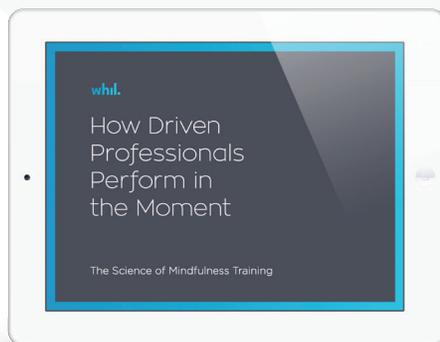
**We're a team** of developers, business leaders, yogis, data junkies, and creative geeks in search of happier and healthier lives for ourselves and the people we serve. Like you.

**We're building solutions** for people like us. We like science. We want proof and use data to drive better products to help people live healthier, happier, and more engaged lives.

**Because teachers and students are stressed.** And we're here to help.

**Where + Will = Whil.**

Where are you in  
life, and what will  
you create?



For more on the science of mindfulness training, please download our eBook *"How Driven Professionals Perform in the Moment"*.

[DOWNLOAD EBOOK](#)

## Current programs include:



450+ mindfulness and yoga training sessions for adults.



450+ mindfulness training sessions for teens. Because it's tough to be a teen these days.



The famous emotional intelligence and compassionate leadership training program born at Google.

## Looking for live training?



Although we're a digital training company, we're equally excited about the growth in live on-site mindfulness training programs. So much so, that we invested in *Refresh*, a company specializing in on-site, on-demand training.

Our partners at [RefreshBody.com](https://RefreshBody.com) provide live on-site, on-demand training for mindfulness, yoga and massage. Their app takes the weight out of delivering in-person wellness and leadership programming. Anytime. Anywhere. Simply select the live training you want and the Refresh app handles the rest. That includes booking Whil master trainers for your executive training needs.