



# Ten Keys for Starting a Mindfulness Program at Work

## Executive Summary

Mindfulness, the practice of focusing on your awareness in the present moment, is rapidly gaining acceptance among employers. A recent research report from Fidelity and the National Business Group on Health predicted that 22 percent of Fortune 500 companies will roll out mindfulness programs in 2016, and that in 2017 the adoption could double that.

Mindfulness is quickly becoming a new catalyst for productivity and holistic well-being among employers and employees. This simple practice not only helps

reduce stress, it improves performance, and promotes more engaged team collaboration.

eMindful has implemented programs with well over 100 employers, with employees in 135 countries.

This paper shares lessons learned from those implementations. Key takeaways include how to drive adoption, promote engagement, and increase sustained participation.

# Lesson 1

## Senior Leadership Commitment

Senior leadership commitment is the number one requirement for a successful mindfulness program in the workplace. Employees must feel supported and encouraged to participate in a program of this magnitude. Senior leadership buy-in is the precursor to everything else that follows. Without it, the program simply will not take root.

Within a global law firm (whose billing rate was between \$600 and \$700 per hour), HR leaders struggled to gain traction among the firm's

professionals. When getting the firm's partners engaged in setting the tone was suggested, the HR representative said she couldn't imagine that happening in their firm. Predictably, the firm's lawyers and staff followed the lead of their partners. And there was no traction.

The key to effective implementation of a mindfulness program—like any aspect of corporate culture—is strong, visible leadership.

Like any initiative to change your organization, bringing mindfulness programs to employees requires careful consideration, attention to detail, and dedicated leadership.

Follow these ten steps to ensure you get the best possible employee engagement and results.

# Lesson 2

## Corporate Culture

Mindfulness or any well-being initiative is not "bolted on." It must be "built in" to the corporate culture. And that culture must permeate the entire organization. A genuine commitment to employee well-being has to be at the heart of an organization's culture for this to work.

And culture, along with strategy and brand, is one of the primary business pillars of executive leadership. At some of the companies we've been involved with, it's

not uncommon to see someone start their meetings with a 2 to 4 minute mindfulness practice. At lunch employees talk about their mindfulness practices and eat more mindfully. Mindfulness becomes their culture, a part of all they're doing. Set up mindfulness meditation rooms, or schedule short mindfulness breaks in meeting rooms during the day. Brainstorm with your teams about how you can saturate your specific culture with more mindful ways of living at work.

## Lesson 3

### Geography & Quality

Another major concern for global employers is how to consistently reach a distributed population. From our experience, most companies view online delivery as the most viable option for ensuring consistent quality

in a geographically disbursed workforce. It allows for far easier administration, and gives employers an immediate way to scale up their new offering.



## Lesson 4

### Mindfulness... On Whose Time?

One of the best ways to have employees positively receive a mindfulness program is to allow them to attend classes on company time. As it turns out, that time investment pays back many times over.

eMindful has gathered pre- and post-training measurements and evaluated productivity gains from participants dating back to 2010. That data and thousands of participants later, a scientifically validated instrument called the Work Limitations

Questionnaire shows a gain in productivity of 47 minutes per week after completing the course.

After one year, the initial investment of ten class sessions of less than an hour has been recovered nearly three times. Research on a sub-group of participants found that productivity continued to improve three months and 12 months after the program ended.

## The Missing Link

Senior managements' support is not the only requirement in implementing a corporate mindfulness program. Middle management is often the pivotal link to the program's success.

Senior managements' job is to create a mindful corporate culture. However, middle managers are critical to the support and sustainability of that culture.

In companies where middle management isn't involved, frustrated employees express concerns such as, "My boss won't let me take the time off." Or "I really

wanted to take this course, but every time I tried to go to class there was some major project that had to be done in the next hour."

Mindfulness programs fail in environments where there is inconsistent adoption, discouragement, and disengagement. Both senior leadership and middle management need be involved because they are the ones who must give their employees time off. Middle managers are the first to be encouraged to attend the classes because once they see the benefits, they typically want their employees to attend.

## Keys to Getting Initial Adoption

The better you market and promote what you're launching, the more traction it will get. Start talking about the real benefits of this kind of work. Be creative in sharing the message. Use posters, emails, your intranet, mobile device communication, internal videos, and share success stories from other companies. Create employee champions who have experience with mindfulness. Create a positive image for the program. Remind employees this is a gift, an opportunity for self-development, a way to de-stress, and improve their lives.

Have senior leadership mention the program widely. Make sure it's listed on company calendars and

included in your company newsletters. Announce the mindfulness classes like any other company sponsored activity or training. Encourage participation, especially among middle managers. Continue the trickle-down effect so that all department heads share the mindfulness program information with their staff members. Then market the results of that participation--less stress, better sleep, and how much better people are feeling.

That participation will drive more participation. The more people share the positive results they're getting from the classes, the more momentum will continue to build for the program.

## How Can You Maximize Sustained Engagement?

The best way to ensure that happens is to maximize convenience and make access as easy as possible.

eMindful designed live training that can be taken anywhere with an Internet connection or mobile device. eMindful has found that, on average, 80 percent of the people who sign up for our programs attend every class. Live sessions require making a commitment to be there. As an event, it creates pull; people put the classes on their calendars, as opposed

to telling themselves, "I'll listen to that audio session as soon as I get some free time." That free time, of course, often never comes. We have found as well that live courses build a sense of community.

However you choose to implement a mindfulness program, ensure it's convenient for employees. Make sure it's not a 10 minute walk from one building to another.

## Making it Stick

How can you sustain momentum after the class is over?

eMindful has received feedback from thousands of participants saying they want to continue to take courses and participate in a mindfulness community after their initial course is over. However you choose to implement your mindfulness program, it is reasonable to expect the same desire. Here are a few recommendations:

- Continue what's already working best within your organization, like beginning meetings with a short mindful practice.

- Consider offering a continuity program. eMindful's is called eMindful Life. It includes short, live sessions employees can use throughout the day. Most are 14 minutes in length, or about 1 percent of the 1440 minutes in a day. When viewed in that context, most employees realize they can make that time commitment.
- Develop a mindfulness community by holding 10-15 minute sessions in conference rooms on a regular basis. The social connection here creates an even stronger sense of community.

## Measuring Results

To measure effectively, you must first understand your objectives as an organization, such as cutting costs, improving customer support, reducing employee turnover, listening with more acuity to the market, and so on. Then align your mindfulness program with those business drivers.

Measure your results to determine the success of your programs. Bring science into the process as much

as possible. Use scientifically validated instruments whenever possible instead of simply asking the participants subjective questions such as "do you feel better?" The more you can quantify your results around your organization's business drivers, the more successful your efforts should be.

"This class...has been life-changing for me. I know I am a better mother. I know I'm a better wife. I know that I'm a better daughter because of this class. And my goals are to continue using the teachings that I have learned, even without the continued support of everyone else in the class..."



## Another Kind of Data

Finally, listen to the data behind your numbers. Look at all of the data - both statistical and qualitative. In eMindful's post-course surveys people share how

these programs have changed their lives. The richness of these stories should serve as a complement to more traditional quantitative analyses.

## Conclusion

Implementing a mindfulness program can bring tremendous results to an organization. But with any organizational change initiative, steps must be taken to ensure that senior leadership, culture, and employees are aligned with the effort. And careful attention must be paid to execution and ongoing measurement of results that show a contribution and business value.

### About eMindful

eMindful is a leading provider of evidence-based programs targeting the largest healthcare cost drivers today: stress, obesity, chronic pain, stress-related health issues, smoking, diabetes, cancer, and more. Our scalable, online applied mindfulness-based programs target the root causes of chronic conditions that undermine health and productivity. Developed with top universities and luminaries in the field of mindfulness, our online and mobile interactive courses have been delivered to a wide range of individuals, corporations and government institutions.

Our programs are delivered through a live, virtual classroom where participants see, hear, speak to, and interact with an expert instructor as well as other class participants. Participants enjoy the flexibility of joining the classrooms from any location with a broadband internet connection.

eMindful has successfully delivered weekly and monthly programs to participants around the world since 2007. A detailed program catalog is available upon request. For more information about how we can deploy a customized, private platform and begin offering benefits to your employees, contact us at [info@emindful.com](mailto:info@emindful.com).

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