



COOPERATIVE
STRATEGIES

Mindfulness at Work

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How Does Mindfulness Link to Emotional Intelligence?

We are what we do. Our brains and bodies are affected positively by mindfulness as we are also positively affected by exercise, sleep, community, love, faith and eating well. Placing our open and alert minds to our presence and the present, we literally become mindful of our responses to the world during our meditation and thereafter. From there our actions are more in harmony with our intentions. Dr. Daniel Goleman, is a man who has led thinking and useful action for thousands in business and home in the understanding of emotional intelligence. The core of his work, presented in his book *Working With Emotional Intelligence*, can be summarized in five basic emotional and social competencies:

- 1. SELF-AWARENESS:** Knowing what we are feeling in the moment, and using those preferences to guide our decision making; having a realistic assessment of our own abilities and a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.
- 2. SELF-REGULATION:** Handling our emotions so that they facilitate rather than interfere with the task at hand; being conscientious and delaying gratification to pursue goals; recovering well from emotional distress.
- 3. MOTIVATION:** Using our deepest preferences to move and guide us toward our goals, to help us take initiative and strive to improve; to persevere in the face of setbacks and frustrations.
- 4. EMPATHY:** Sensing what people are feeling; being able to take their perspective; cultivating rapport and attunement with a broad diversity of people.
- 5. SOCIAL SKILLS:** Handling emotions in relationships well and accurately reading social situations and networks; interacting smoothly; using these skills to persuade and lead; negotiate and settle disputes for cooperation and teamwork.



The Neuroscience

It's impossible to define the complexity and infiniteness of the brain. It's a bit like studying the solar system or the ocean. Yet, scientists try. In the past decade thousands of hours of research have been devoted to measuring the impact of mindfulness practice on the brain and human action. If you are experientially curious, open and empirically-oriented, there is no more fascinating study. Many of us trust the practice of mindfulness and see the results without the science. Yet, that's not enough for most of us. Scientific study and testing is showing us that the brain is constantly changing, potentially strengthening in power and mass in a practice-aided process that is called "neuroplasticity." Mindfulness helps your brain stay strong, become flexible and carry you through your life along with the rest of your healthy body. As for that proof, brain study has increased exponentially in accuracy thanks to the use of magnetic resonance imagery (MRI). For a definitive recent study which tapped 47 science-based endeavors, please see "The Meditative Mind: A Comprehensive Meta-Analysis of MRI Studies" by Boccia, et al, at the University of Rome.

There are hundreds of respected scientists who are making their life's work the balanced study of mindfulness linked to neuroscience. One who stands out is Dr. Richard J. Davidson of the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Davidson writes in his book co-authored with Sharon Begley, *The Emotional Life of Your Brain*, "The brain can change as a result of two distinct inputs. It can change as a result of the experiences we have in the world – how we move and behave, and what sensory signals arrive in our cortex. The brain can also change in response to purely mental activity, ranging from meditation to cognitive-behavior therapy, with the result that activity in specific circuits can increase or decrease." Note that mindfulness is one of many useful practices. Another dean of research linked to mindfulness is Dr. Sara Lazar at Harvard. She and her team will be referenced in a few paragraphs.

As an author, I am a lay person who has carefully studied the science. It would be inappropriate for us to write of "absolute truth." Yet, the studies are in, gathering scientific momentum and credibility. Time after time the body of research-based data supports the empirical validity of mindfulness-based emotional intelligence. For those of you who are



skeptics, please study and be informed. Scientific studies compiled by The Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute have revealed that mindfulness meditation:

- Aids stress reduction.
- Speeds healing.
- Increases “gray matter”, the ability to flow (stay in the zone) and concentrate.
- Yields freshness and accuracy in decision-making.
- Reduces the aging of the brain.
- Strengthens memory.
- Empowers empathy and emotional intelligence.
- Promotes self-awareness and self-regulation

The Science of the “Amygdala Hijack”

Neuroscience points to the fact that meditation builds gray matter in the hippocampus where memory and the activation of its use interconnect. The pre-frontal cortex and the anterior cingulate cortex, the executive centers of the brain, our decision-making core, grow in mass and flexibility with mindfulness practice. The insula, which links emotions and feelings to appropriate action, is strengthened.

To dive a little deeper, an abundance of clinically-based research aided by MRI reveals that the most primitive part of our brain, sometimes called our “reptilian brain”, the amygdala, can be brought to better control through mindfulness based emotional intelligence. The amygdala is where our “Fight – Flight – Freeze” response resides. Think about the last time someone treated you very thoughtlessly on the road or the last time you or someone else steamed into a boil-over of anger. Remember the last time you needed to make a difficult decision and couldn’t do it. Or, what about in a moment of truth, you couldn’t bring yourself to act? We’re all deeply human and no amount of practice will make us perfect! Yet as stressors come, with the help of mindfulness practice, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills we can navigate far more efficiency as we tame the lizard brain! For validation, please refer to the neuroimaging work of Julie Brefczynski-Lewis and her colleagues.



Anecdotally, one of my best friends in credit unions and an esteemed CEO said to me, “I need to chill the heck out!” Well yes, we all do. Yet, my pal is now a meditator and quite a bit more chill. Her mantra is “kindness” to self and others. Along with her SIYLI training and this mindset, her team lives and is motivated by clear values both independently and, more importantly, together. How to tame the amygdala? At SIYLI, we learned to “stop-breathe-notice-reflect-respond,” with an emphasis on “*breathe*”!

CASE STUDIES

DECISION MAKING: How to move past what has been previously tried but failed yet continues because of “sunk-cost bias”? Research at Penn led by Sisal Barksdale explored how short meditation sessions can reduce the likelihood that decisions will be made based on information from the past that should have no bearing on the choice at hand. [“Making a Big (or Small) Decision? How Meditation Can Help,” *Knowledge@Wharton*, May 2014.]

AN ESSENTIAL IN THE C SUITE: Dr. Sara Lazar and her team, after reviewing a compilation of neuroscience studies from the University of British Columbia, wrote, “Mindfulness should no longer be considered a ‘nice-to-have’ for executives. It’s a ‘must-have’; a way to keep our brains healthy, to support self-regulation and effective decision-making capabilities, and to protect ourselves from toxic stress.” [“Mindfulness Can Change Your Brain”, *Harvard Business Review*, January 18, 2015.]

EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY: “More than one-quarter of (Aetna’s) work force of 50,000 have participated in at least one (meditation or yoga) class and those who have report, on average, a 28 percent reduction in their stress levels, a 20 percent improvement in sleep quality and a 19% reduction in pain. They also become more effective on the job, gaining an average of 62 minutes per week of productivity each, which Aetna estimates is worth \$3,000 per employee per year. [“A CEO’s Management by Mantra”, David Gelles, *New York Times*, March 1, 2015.]



STRATEGIC PLANNING: “The opportunity to test the concept of mindful strategy with mid and senior level executives gave us a clearer practical understanding of what works when it comes to integrating mindfulness practice into strategy retreats:

1. TAKE MINDFUL MOMENTS. It’s possible to integrate simple practices of focus and awareness throughout a workday.

2. EXPLORE ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS. The practice of non-judgementally assessing different plausible futures is a practical way of shining light on old unexamined thought patterns and making room for new ideas.

3. VISUALIZE POSITIVE OUTCOME. If everything works out perfectly for our organization, what would we be doing in ten years?”

[“Mindfulness Can Improve Strategy, Too,” *Harvard Business Review*, May 2, 2016.]

DON’T FORCE MINDFULNESS: “Mindfulness isn’t for everyone nor is it a panacea. We must consider:

The avoidance risk. Getting ‘lost’ in meditation at work to avoid taking on necessary stresses like under-performing colleagues, failing business initiatives or pure hard work can sabotage a career as quickly as drinking on the job, falsifying information or bullying. Mindfulness is literally a balancing act.

The groupthink risk. Top-down mindfulness initiatives can take on the same forced ‘be like me’ ways that are similar to the idea that excessive work is the only way or that visiting the company gym is absolutely essential. Meditation is simply not for everyone.

Yet mindfulness practices should never be imposed on other people, especially in the workplace. At its very core, mindfulness culture will be a huge step forward for Western cultures if it stays focused on creating opportunities for individuals to discover their own personalized strategies for taming anxieties, managing stress, optimizing work performance, and reaching genuine happiness and fulfillment.”

[“There Are Risks to Mindfulness at Work,” *Harvard Business Review*, February 11, 2015.]



REDUCING STRESS: Bringing mindfulness into high-stress work environments is effective. Dan Harris is the co-anchor of *Nightline* and the weekend anchor of *Good Morning America*. In his very enjoyable and insightful book, *10% Happier*, he writes of how he integrates mindfulness meditation into his hyper-competitive industry. Riffing on the samurai “Way of the The Warrior,” he writes of “The Way of the Worrier” [See right.]

LEADERSHIP: “Does mindfulness training develop leaders?”

Yes, because our study suggests that mindfulness training produces an improvement in three capacities that are key for successful leadership in the 21st century: resilience, the capacity for collaboration, and the ability to lead in complex conditions.

No, because development depends on the level of practice that the leader does. Simply attending one or more workshops might help strengthen reliance by sharing some useful tools and techniques, but other improvements require practice. The more practice the better. In our study, the leaders who practiced for at least 10 minutes every day progressed more than others who did not.”

[“How to Bring Mindfulness to your Company’s Leadership,” Megan Reitz and Michael Chaskalson, *Harvard Business Review*, December 1, 2016.]

DAN HARRIS' THE WAY OF THE WORRIER

1. Don't Be a Jerk
2. (And, But...) When Necessary, Hide the Zen
3. Meditate
4. The Price of Security Is Insecurity (Until It's Not Useful)
5. Equanimity is Not the Enemy of Creativity
6. Don't Force It
7. Humility Prevents Humiliation
8. Go Easy with the Internal Cattle Prod
9. Non-Attachment to Results
10. What Matters Most?



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