

MINDFULNESS TRAINING IN THE WORKPLACE

Employers wanting to help staff cope with stress, improve focus and productivity are adding mindfulness training to their employee wellness programs. Mindfulness, once the province of Buddhist scholars and yoga retreats, has now gone mainstream.

IBM Australia, NAB and other Australian banks, as well as MBA programs are introducing mindfulness courses - and they are being well-received.

In the US, companies such as General Mills, Intel, Google, EBay, and even the prestigious Goldman-Sachs offer mindfulness programs. Harvard Business Review's March 2014 article on 'Mindfulness in the Age of Complexity' went viral.

There's definitely a need out there.

Why now?

Employers increasingly recognise that workplace stress lowers productivity and can lead to absenteeism, depression, physical ill-health as well as an increase in WorkCover claims.

What is Mindfulness?

It's a form of meditation that helps people focus, eliminate distracting thoughts, and stay in the present moment. It helps with decision-making and emotional control.

By being aware of their cognitive processes, and paying attention to what they are thinking and feeling, practitioners are able to maintain a calmer, more objective perspective.

It's been proven to help with stress, anxiety, depression and even addictive behaviours, and has a positive effect on physical problems like hypertension, heart disease and chronic pain.ⁱ

Just a few minutes a day has been proven to help.

How can it help employees?

Whether it's serving customers or dealing with data, employees frequently encounter high-stress challenges that demand cognitive control, situational awareness, and self-regulation. Mindfulness training helps optimise all of these.

One study in the US Marine Corps found that mindfulness training not only improved mood and working memory, but helped with problem solving and complex thought in stressful situations.ⁱⁱ

Other studies show that it can promote significant improvements in emotional intelligence, perceived stress, and mental health.ⁱⁱⁱ

How to introduce mindfulness training to your workplace

Begin with an introductory program that teaches the basics of mindfulness meditation. You may find greater acceptance if it's part of a stress management program. Short lunchtime classes can be the way to go.

Once employees are familiar with the basics, they might choose to meditate alone or in groups. Having a dedicated 'quiet room' will help to facilitate and promote the practice.

Make sure that the program is vouched for by senior management and is given frequent mention in internal newsletters and blogs.

It's a good idea to promote the scientific validity of mindfulness and, of course, to keep it strictly secular.

Viva Training incorporates a mindfulness component in its *Stress Management* and *Building Resilience* training programs. For further information, contact Pamela Thorne at Viva Training on (02) 9527 6448.

ⁱ Grossman et al: "MBSR and Health Benefits: A Meta-analysis, *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, Gossman et al: 57 (2004) 35-43.

ⁱⁱ "Mindfulness: Foundations of Corporate Citizenship," in J. Andrioff and M. McIntosh (eds.): *Perspectives on Corporate Citizenship* (Sheffield: Greenleaf Publishing, 2001): 26–38. 3

ⁱⁱⁱ "Mindfulness Based Relationship Enhancement", Carson, JW., *Behavior Therapy*, 35, 471–494, 2004