

EXECUTIVE VITALITY™: WORK SAFER—PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

What could air traffic controllers, the Mayo Clinic, Google, the United States Marine Corps, nuclear power plant operators, Caterpillar, and Florida Power & Light have in common with each other? The link is mindfulness—these organizations and occupations represent a sampling of some of the high stress/risk/danger industries that have utilized mindfulness training to improve safety performance—amongst other things.

Do you know anyone who has ever hurt themselves while their mind was “elsewhere”? I do! Take the example of Maria, who slid down the stairs using her derriere as a Flexible Flyer (sled) while her mind was elsewhere. Or what about Sam, who took a covered baking dish out of the oven and then (mindlessly) attempted to lift the lid without the benefit of oven mitts. And then there are people who text and drive! There are endless examples of people who hurt themselves while they are not being mindful.

Here’s my point: if you have a high stakes occupation, your ability to concentrate, focus, and maintain awareness of your environment can greatly affect safety and level of risk to your own well-being and to that of others.

Practicing mindfulness has been shown to actually change the physiology of the brain. In a study summarized on the [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\) website](#), the parts of the brain that control learning, memory, and emotional control were changed in those who practiced mindfulness as compared to a control group; differences were also seen within individuals in comparisons of before and after periods of mindfulness training.¹

The benefits of practicing mindfulness have been shown to include boosting creativity, increasing emotional intelligence, and contributing to an improved ability to manage conflict, focus, and to perform.²

The basic mindfulness technique is to take 10 minutes per day and just observe your breath; don’t change it—just observe it going in and going out. If your mind wanders (which it will!), just bring it back.³

It sounds easy. But the thing we are trying to “cure” is the very thing that gets in the way of doing it—frantic time schedules, competing demands, too much on our plates...

Try this:

- Start with 2 minutes rather than 10. Jot down any differences you notice 24 hours later, before you sit down to do this again—or, better yet—as soon as you notice a difference that you attribute to mindfulness.
- Increase to 5 minutes. Again, note the effects and also differences compared to doing it for a shorter period.
- Work your way up to 10 minutes in that manner.
- Don’t limit your mindfulness exercises to sitting and focusing on your breathing. Practice being more mindful while exercising, eating, reading, and any other part of your daily activities.
- Remember to track progress—both in effort and outcomes.
- Decrease multitasking.

How many ways can you block out distractions and become more mindful at work? In your daily activities?

¹ <https://nccih.nih.gov/research/results/spotlight/012311.htm>

² <https://hbr.org/2016/11/mindfulness-works-but-only-if-you-work-at-it>

³ <https://hbr.org/2017/08/can-10-minutes-of-meditation-make-you-more-creative>