

## Are you 'mindfulness literate'?

Often when working with leaders in a coaching or team situation, we will find ourselves in a room and I will ask them if they are computer literate. They usually look at me a bit puzzled and their response is a unanimous 'yes'. When asked how they might have responded 20 years ago, their response is very different.

So what would happen if something as paradigm-shifting came into their lives in the next five years and had the same impact as the digital revolution?

That something is here now, and it is mindfulness.

After this introduction I hit them with this contentious statement:

**"Because of the speed of change and growth in mainstream mindfulness in business, if you do not have a regular daily practice (of at least 20 minutes per day), I predict that by the year 2020, you will be like a computer illiterate person in the room today. Just imagine if that person was you!"**

One illustration of this is the growing number of Fortune 500 leaders recognising the power of mindfulness:

**"Meditation more than anything in my life was the biggest ingredient of whatever success I've had." – Ray Dalio, the billionaire founder of Bridgewater Associates.**

Therefore I predict that for those of you who are in a leadership position, mindfulness will become an imperative within the next four or five years. So, if you want to become a successful, values-centred leader that others wish to follow, maybe it's time to pay attention?



## Mindfulness is an essential leadership and life skill and it's here to stay.

In this article I would like to present this point of view and why in the business world the early adoption of a mindfulness practice will strongly influence the difference between business success and failure.

To paint the picture I will look briefly at the state of play of the Mindfulness Revolution as we move towards 2016, discuss some key features of Mindful Leadership and provide a few examples of it in practice, both from my own experience as well as the experiences of Rasmus Hougaard, the Global Leader in Corporate Based Mindfulness Programmes at Potential Project.

## Leading from the eye of the hurricane

**"Being a leader can often feel like battling a hurricane every day. Things never stand still. Everything is in movement. The two options we are left with are to either tame the hurricane, or to tame ourselves. As we know, hurricanes can't be tamed. But our minds can. Taming our minds to have greater focus, calm and clarity, even in the midst of daily busy-ness, is the essence of mindful leadership. It is the starting point for significant change in how you manage yourself and others" – Rasmus Hougaard, Founder and CEO Potential Project**

Let's first look briefly at the state of play of mindfulness.

2014 was described as "The Year of Mindfulness". Suddenly Mindfulness meditation had become mainstream, making its way into schools, corporations, prisons, and government agencies, including the U.S. military. Then 2015 opened with the publication of David Gelles' book *Mindful Work*. In this book, Gelles, a business reporter for the New York Times, articulates clearly how the Mindfulness Revolution is reshaping the workplace. He presents case study after case study illustrating how the most dynamic leaders are using mindfulness to become happier, more fulfilled AND more successful at work. *Mindful Work* is an inspirational and convincing guide to the upsurge in mindfulness across companies like Google, Facebook and General Mills.

In the UK in October this year we had the publication of *Mindful Nation*, a comprehensive all-party government report looking at the explosion of mindfulness across Health, Education, Criminal Justice and Business.

Millions of people are receiving tangible benefits from their mindfulness practice: less stress, better concentration, perhaps a little more empathy. Needless to say, this is an important development to be welcomed – but it has a shadow.

Bridget Delaney recently wrote in the Guardian:

**"Meditation and Mindfulness have gone the same way; from contemplation of this world's impermanence, to yet another productivity tool in a world where impermanence is more often used to describe your job security.**

**To resist this trend, we're better off investigating and overcoming the reasons why we are flocking to meditation, rather than debunking meditation itself. What is**

**the communal Om except a cry for help in a competitive, atomised and hyper-connected world where anxiety is a given?"**<sup>1</sup>

The key issue is that, over and above the benefits of productivity and focus, and even above those of better well-being, Mindful Leadership also has a responsibility to deliver benefits at the deeper human level.

### The imperative for values-centred authentic leadership

Values-centred authentic leadership can offer an essential component of leadership ethos. We need leaders with integrity who are equipped to help rebuild the trust of society in a world that increasingly is becoming disillusioned with the degenerating ethical practices of business, politics, and human behaviour across a widening sphere.

We have to ask if the VW debacle would ever have happened had Mindful Leaders been in place.

### The imperative for authentic mindfulness guides and teachers

There are many "teachers" inevitably popping up who have done a few days' mindfulness training and are now offering it to clients. Ask yourself the question, would you really take driving lessons from someone who had only driven a very short while themselves?

How do we as leaders make sure we are receiving training from authentic, legitimate sources? The answer is simple; it is to find an authentic teacher and guide, or an organisation that trains trainers who keep the integrity of the practice and have done the "meditation mileage" as mindfulness practitioners themselves.

The Potential Project, the global leader in mindfulness training in the world operating in 23

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/19/if-2014-was-the-year-of-mindfulness-2015-was-the-year-of-frustratingly-trying-to-debunk-it>

countries, are rigorous in their selection and training of Mindfulness Trainers, recognising the importance of maintaining integrity and authenticity in the mindfulness teaching that they are bringing into the business world.

The power and reach of mindfulness, beyond the very tangible and validated benefits of improved performance and effectiveness, creativity, energy, balance and resilience, are illustrated by this quote from a leader of a Danish company who attended one of the Potential Project programmes:

**"I joined the program expecting I would become more focused and productive and that has happened. I realise a much bigger change I experienced in myself and in my colleagues, was that we are becoming better human beings."** – Thomas Borg, Sales Director

Let's look at Mindful Leadership from the mouths of leaders who have practised it:

**"Mindfulness based tools and practices create new possibilities and foster personal growth and help create vision, clarity, and inspiration for awakening the life you are meant to be leading."** – Petra Meyer, Regional Director, Walgreens Boots Alliance

**"A key part of our coaching relationship has been my own personal development and exploration of the kind of legacy I want to leave, not only in the team and organisation, but also in my life. Learning mindfulness and bringing it into my life has been a major part of this."** – Johann Kotze, General Manager, Africa, Merck Consumer Health Care

This illustrates the real prize above and beyond leadership effectiveness and productivity. It highlights the larger benefits for our society and the world if 'Mindfulness Leadership' can be adopted on a much wider scale than just business.



### Mindful Leadership in practice

My partner Ros and myself work with a range of leaders and their teams across a selection of businesses, both national and international.

For us, from amongst the many major benefits of mindful leadership, we believe that of paramount importance is the power of mindfulness to enhance **Leadership Resilience**, especially in these increasing times of chaos when leaders need every resource at their disposal to keep their heads above the turbulent waves of change.

In addition the need for authentic values-centred leaders with depths of integrity, and the need to consistently inspire and influence, means that **Leadership Presence**, through wisdom and compassion, are non-negotiable in these times when the need for transparency is all pervading.

## Mindful Leadership: choice or imperative?

In summary the key benefits to you as a leader of adopting a mindfulness practice are:

- More focus and concentration, better productivity and success
- More balance and resilience, improved well-being
- Increased presence and influencing power, being a “better” leader
- Improved integrity, authenticity, and becoming a values-centred leader who “walks their talk”
- Enhanced emotional intelligence, self-awareness and mastery, empathy and compassion
- Improved social conscience
- More peace of mind, contentment and happiness

## Where do you start?

If you want to achieve more of your potential as a leader, and in life, the best place to start is with your mind. Why not give it a try?

### About the author

Paul Wielgus,  
Executive Coach, Facilitator and Director of  
Dragonfly Coaching for Life & Social Innovation



Paul is a coach, facilitator and mindfulness teacher and guide. As well as being founder and director of Social Innovation he describes himself as a “portfolio worker” across a wide range of projects including Dragonfly Coaching

For Life, Medicine For A Happy Life, and Back to the Roots. He is also an associate of the Foundation For the Development of Compassion and Wisdom, whose patron is the Dalai Lama, which is an organisation dedicated to bringing Buddhist based education to the secular world.