



Gympass

**How to experience mindful
leadership at work**

Index

1. Introduction	03
2. Why is mindfulness so crucial in the workplace?	04
3. How to bring mindfulness into the work environment	10
4. Conclusion	14
5. Become a Gympass partner	15

1. Introduction

Mindfulness has become one of the most trending words of the decade, and there is a reason for it. The stress levels we face daily due to work, family and personal issues were boosted by coronavirus. This uncertainty the pandemic brings to all aspects of our lives has been driving people to search for different types of wellbeing strategies.

Mindfulness has its origins in the Buddhist philosophy and gained relevance in the corporate world thanks to its potential to promote a more responsible, attentive and empathic relationship with work. It has never been so important to incorporate the principles of mindful leadership. Whether to combat chronic anxiety or to stimulate a more creative and innovative workplace, mindful

leaders can promote positive transformations for themselves and the group. There is no appreciation for outdated characteristics such as holding the stereotype of an authoritarian, stressed, arrogant and workaholic leader anymore. While it is clear that leadership has been continually changing, and the development of new management skills are a differentiator. Mindfulness can promote a considerable transformation in the work environment, increasing productivity and resilience in a much healthier way.

This ebook aims to present an uncomplicated yet effective overview to help you integrate mindfulness into your workplace and help employees feel the real benefits of another type of wellbeing approach.



2. Why is mindfulness so crucial in the workplace?

Mindfulness is the experience of awareness without judgement. It is a state and not a trait, often promoted by certain practices or activities, such as meditation, but it is not equivalent to them. Mindfulness involves the awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally.

Why does it seem everybody is doing it? And why has it become such an essential topic for corporations? Though the origin of mindfulness is taught firmly in Buddhism, the effects of it may impact any other contexts - religious or not. Especially in challenging moments, mindfulness can help to reduce stress and anxiety while increasing emotional intelligence and improving communication in the workplace. This is all we ever asked for, right?



Health, education or financial workers adopting mindful practices are after the same benefits: bring awareness and concentration to everyday tasks and important decisions. When that happens, employees pay attention to harmful patterns and help to build an empathic environment wherever they are. Mindful leadership is not about promoting individualistic leadership, but instead, creating a sense of collectiveness, that values relationships with other people.

Rather than just promoting mindful habits at work, let's all take a step back and understand when the practice becomes more of a need than just a desire. Mental health talks have been trending for a while - especially in corporate environments. However, when it comes to something so present in the corporate life as high anxiety levels, it takes a lot more sensibility for leaders to identify, properly suggest and adopt a mindful attitude.

How an anxious person acts like:

- ▶ Demonstrates difficulty to keep up the appearance and dress appropriately at work
- ▶ Has mood swings and abnormal behavior
- ▶ More episodes of irritation, anger or extreme frustration
- ▶ Often needs a lot of time off
- ▶ Adopts radical diet changes
- ▶ Mentions unhealthy sleeping behavior
- ▶ Present moments of confusion or an inability to solve a problem
- ▶ Has unnecessary worries even with minor issues
- ▶ Decreases productivity
- ▶ Avoids social situations
- ▶ Might abuse drugs, alcohol or other vicious habits



Anxiety is a natural human emotion, especially now, and its impact could reduce if we all learned how to properly deal with it. Morra Aarons-Mele, host of [The Anxious Achiever](#), a podcast about mental health in the workplace, believes that: *“the fear and vulnerability we experience are normal. The key is understanding what sets people off and how to react.”* It is not easy to control anxiety, but we can learn to manage it by building a supportive infrastructure with focus on available solutions. This technique makes it easier for individuals to beat the idea that anxiety is always a weakness, putting us on the front foot, and in control of our reactions.

Aarons-Mele reinforces this statement: *“People who understand what motivates and triggers them can be more effective leaders. The process of managing anxiety can make a leader stronger and more empathetic.”*

While it may seem difficult to practice mindfulness in the current corporate conditions, its effectiveness has never been more obvious. *“Our minds often become distracted by what is considered urgent and we become so preoccupied with yesterday and tomorrow, that we are no longer able to excel at leading in the present”*, says Janice Marturano, Founder and Executive Director of the Institute for Mindful Leadership. Being aware and open to new information, helps us develop a clearer understanding of the context and alternative ways of dealing with challenging situations. *“As leaders, we are responsible for creating environments in which our colleagues are nurtured and energized, our organizations innovate and flourish, and our communities are respected and supported”*, she says.

How a mindful leader looks like:

- ▶ Authentic, emotionally intelligent, self-aware and intuitive
- ▶ Knows how to balance and follow both heart and mind
- ▶ Capable for effective decision-making
- ▶ Seeks to know himself in order to deal with others
- ▶ Brings objective and practical solutions to work, whether they are individual therapies, group dynamics or autonomous projects

Research shows how mindfulness leadership results in significant changes in mental processes. Mindfulness means being in tune with today's demands to avoid future difficulties, it means getting closer to who the leader already is, and intentionally trying to improve.

The payoffs for such efforts are huge. Adopting a mindful leadership will drive you, your employees and your company to a steady emotional intelligence and empathic relationship, among many other advantages like the ones listed below:



More clarity

Knowing what goes on in your mind and focusing on what matters in each moment offers greater clarity to resolve daily challenges. In many situations, decisions made impulsively are not as effective for a business as the ones that are revisited from a clearer point of view. A conscious leadership awakens the serenity so that solutions are found with clarity, and support the achievement of effective results, building trust between employees and their leader.



More creativity

The chances of finding a better and more creative solution are greater when a person is able to focus on the task in hand. The lack of distractions and scattered thoughts allows people to put all their attention on the activity and use full potential. When a leader understands the importance of mindfulness to boost creativity, the whole organization benefits.



More focus

Mindful leaderships are directly associated with an increase in productivity and focus. Managers and teams tend to act with more readiness to deal with internal and external events. Being more conscious of what the team does favors the freedom of thought and connection with tasks. In exchange it promotes more professional behaviour. Besides that, mindfulness also breaks habits done in “automatic mode” and helps bring attention to the present moment.



More satisfaction

Research shows that when a challenging situation arises at work, a mindful employee will see it positively rather than simply react and judge what is happening instantly. That is the reason why mindfulness may also be related to job satisfaction. It increases purposeful behaviour that is consistent with an individual's needs and values.



More engagement

As mindful practices help to decrease burnout indicators, engagement rates increase in business. Employees' become keener to invest in their careers and performance as long as they feel involved with the company. This change leads directly to lower turnover and more culturally aligned behaviors. In this case, employee engagement can and should link to mindfulness, given that these kinds of programs may enable organisation to fight against burnout indicators and foster commitment.

Success cases



3. How to bring mindfulness into the work environment

It is not about gathering your team in a videocall to meditate together for an hour or tell them to breathe deeply in challenging situations. Encouraging mindful habits and owning a mindful leadership demands you to lead by example and focus the mind on one thing at a time with the deserved focus and attention. This state is achievable in many different ways, and we want to present you to some of them.



Start with the basic



Interpret your behaviour

Look over the past events that were particularly stressful and consider your response to each one of them. Mindfulness is the ideal tool to help you develop a better understanding of your thoughts and feelings, allowing greater ability to manage reactions. If you have a choice between getting stressed, avoiding dealing with it or taking the time to analyse it? Which one made you feel more comfortable?

Pay attention to the signs of your body

Be mindful of the fact that our bodies react physically to stress and learn to recognise reactions through muscular pains, insomnia, hunger or high energy periods of the day. According to Lillian Daniels, wellness expert and founder of The Happy Knee – practising mindfulness helps to calm and slow your heart rate. It is also linked to a reduction of blood pressure, a decrease of cortisol levels, and promotion of a clear and relaxed mind to deal with problems in the workplace, for example.

Take a break and a deep breath

Mindfulness is one of the best tools for eliminating real-time anxiety and physical stress responses practised through patience. Instead of reacting to situations right away, sit with the decision. Take a break from it, look at it from a different point of view, breathe and then proceed.

Be the role model



Fill in the pauses

When you have some minutes of break – whether because it is time to or because you identified the need to stop – spend a few minutes paying attention to what goes through your mind and what you feel. Acknowledge that it will pass, but start learning from it.

Move mindfully

Moving your body mindfully can make a fundamental difference in how you work. It involves noticing the moves your body produces, the feeling of your feet on the ground, the velocity you gain or lose. Little perceptions can show so much.

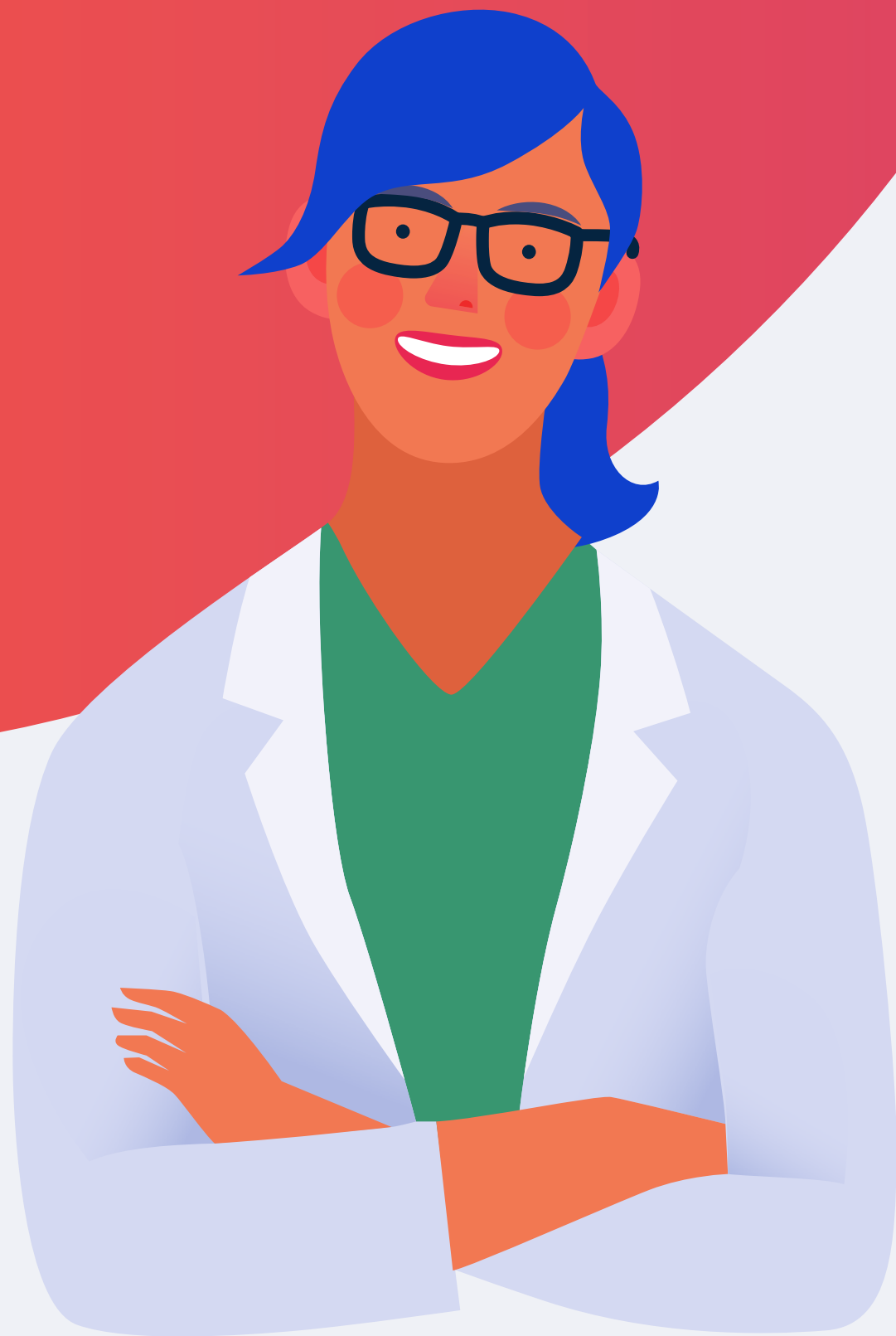
Eat mindfully

Maybe you never noticed it, but every time you feel anxious, you stop chewing correctly, and this affects your digestion and sense of hunger. It might feel obvious, but stop looking at screens or even listening to music while eating. Try starting to taste the food and notice when you are satisfied. The enjoyable experience will not only make you feel more appreciative of your meals but also change your energy levels.

Work mindfully

Whenever you zone out from your tasks or a meeting, that is a sign your body needs fewer distractions. Doing one task at a time can lessen the feeling of pressure and help you perform better. Nonetheless, you will be more self-aware, and this is the peak of mindfulness.

Promote the new culture



Practice mindfulness with others

Mindfulness can be practiced alone or in any group situation. Create a moment of the day when you and your colleagues can share thoughts and experiences you had that day, current feelings, music and movies interpretations. That is an effortless and straightforward way to get people acting and talking mindfully.

Show how important that is

Encouraging mindfulness in the workplace is all about showing that you care and there is a reason for that. So share discoveries of wellness activities, platforms, notes and tips on how to manage their mental presence through the day and give employees the voice to speak about what they want, care and need.

Share results of a mindful culture

Internal communication is vital to spread the word about mindfulness and have employees adopt it. Creating a mindful working culture is not just about practising but also about introducing positive results. Encourage your team to share developments, learnings, and even difficulties of their journeys to become happy, productive and aware.

4. Conclusion

Acting mindfully is changing our focus from distractions to real, objective and present actions. Looking closely at attitudes, mining learnings from them and turning it all into positive thoughts instead of focusing the attention on the body that feels exhausted or the mind that keeps zoning out of the conversation. When a leader starts being mindful, the appreciation of small achievements becomes frequent, almost natural.

Working in an environment that not only “talks the talk” turns the decision making more efficient and stakeholders more present, involved and emotionally intelligent. Mindfulness is an easy triple win: for leaders, employees and businesses.



Gympass

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