

Our World Needs Mindful Leaders

“Our world needs mindful leaders, people who embody leadership presence. We need leaders who not only understand themselves but who are not afraid to be open-hearted and who have the strength of character to make ethical choices. The problems we see all around us are not insurmountable, but they do require a new kind of leadership. As you continue to practice, and find more and more ways to actually be here for your life, you are also likely to encounter more and different ways to influence the lives of others, in your team, in your organization, in your families and in your community. One small step changes the dance, and one small change has the potential to create a better world. The choice is yours. Enjoy the journey.”

Excerpt from *Finding the Space to Lead: A Practical Guide to Mindful Leadership*, by Janice Marturano, Founder of the Institute for Mindful Leadership.

Mindfulness practices are useful because they help you become aware of, and then to rewire, how you interpret and react to what happens. You then have a much greater capacity for fresh, creative thinking on all fronts, from product development to hiring policies to creating a workable daily schedule. (Read more on [managing stressful thoughts and beliefs](#).)

To be creative in this way, you absolutely must reclaim mental and emotional territory from the stress of overwork and hyperconnection, as well as the other factors that burn you out personally and organizationally — difficult colleague relationships, failed ventures, the demands of family and work, economic uncertainty.

Being a Mindful Leader

[Harvard University](#) professor [Ellen Langer](#), an expert in mindfulness research, has found that mindfulness helps leaders reframe any potential crisis.

“Mindfulness is the process of actively noticing new things. [It] helps you realize that there are no positive or negative outcomes,” she said in an excellent [recent Harvard Business Review interview](#). “There’s A, B, C, D, and more, each with its challenges and opportunities... You can be mindful, you can be mindless. You can win, you can lose. The worst case is to be mindless and lose. So when you’re doing anything, be mindful, notice new things, make it meaningful to you, and you’ll prosper.”

To boost mindful leadership, Langer first recommends imagining that your thoughts are totally transparent to those around you. If they were, she says, you'd bring much more awareness to each thought. You'd be more inclined to perceive people and their actions with a fresh perspective, rather than stay mindlessly stuck in negative assumptions and judgements.

When you practice and model mindfulness, and find ways to encourage mindfulness at work, you and your employees build greater individual resilience. In turn, your organization becomes more supple, creative, and resilient, too.

One of the most poignant realizations of the need to have boundaries with technology came on a mindful leadership retreat I led a few years ago. Participants were asked to put away their smartphones for the evening. At a loss as to what to do without his phone, the president of a large organization took a walk outside and looked up at the night sky. He later admitted that he was shocked to realize that he hadn't seen the stars in 20 years. He asked himself what else he had been missing while he was staring at his phone.

Becoming a mindful leader isn't easy. There are no five easy steps to do so. A few years ago when I asked the Dalai Lama how we can develop a new generation of compassionate, mindful leaders, he replied simply, "Develop a daily habit of introspection."

Today many more companies are promoting mindful practices to improve the health and decision-making of their leaders. Google, under the tutelage of Chade-Meng Tan, trains 2,000 engineers in meditation each year. When I visited Google this spring, it was evident that mindfulness is one of the key reasons behind Google's innovative and harmonious culture. Leading financial services firms like Blackrock and Goldman Sachs offer mindfulness courses for their employees. At General Mills Janice Marturano was so successful in mindfulness training that she founded the Institute for Mindful Leadership.

The Science of Mindfulness
Mind training, of which meditation is one form, can change the composition of your mind. Research by Wisconsin's Richard Davidson demonstrated direct correlation between mindfulness and changes in the brain - away from anger and anxiety and toward a sense of calm and well-being. UCLA's Mindful Awareness Research Center found meditation can improve executive functions (sustaining attention, diminishing distractibility) better than medication in many cases.

Daniel Goleman, the father of emotional intelligence, describes the effect of

mindfulness for focusing the mind's cognitive abilities. As Goleman says in his new book, *Focus*, "One way to boost our will power and focus is to manage our distractions instead of letting them manage us."

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