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ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Why Google, Target, and General Mills Are Investing in Mindfulness

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When was the last time you sat quietly at your desk and did nothing but think? How would you react if you observed a peer, employee, or manager doing so? Encouraging employees to slow down to focus on the present can seem at odds with a corporate culture of speed and goal attainment. But in today's hyper-paced

work environment, mindfulness practitioners know the importance of recharging in order to regain productivity. And mindfulness research is convincing many managers that investing in reflection, openness, and thoughtfulness will have a positive impact on employees and on the bottom line.

As a leadership strategy, mindfulness helps people to be more effective by directing focus to the most pertinent task at hand. Deprogramming multitasking tendencies and intentionally focusing with full attention results in higher quality interactions and decisions. Mindful decision makers take the time to consider all of their options, and therefore make more-informed decisions. Managers who model and promote mindful practices with their teams create an environment of engagement.

Several well-known and respected organizations have long recognized the benefits that mindfulness brings. Here are some specific examples of the types of programs these forward-thinking companies are implementing:

Google prides itself on being socially conscious, offering employees substantial benefits and perks, including more than a dozen mindfulness courses. Google's most popular mindfulness course, "Search Inside Yourself," offered since 2007, has thousands of alumni. Google believes that these mindfulness programs teach emotional intelligence, which helps people better understand their colleagues' motivations. They also boost resilience to stress and improve mental focus. Participants of the "Search Inside Yourself" program report being calmer, more patient, and better able to listen. They also say the program helped them better handle stress and defuse emotions.

YOU AND YOUR TEAM

Mindfulness

How to bring calm and focus to your work routine.

Aetna developed, launched, and studied two mindfulness programs in 2010 – Viniyoga Stress Reduction and Mindfulness at Work – in collaboration

with Duke University, eMindful, and the American Viniyoga Institute. The goals of the programs were to help reduce stress and to improve reactions to stress. Aetna liked the outcome of its study on mindfulness so much that it now offers its mindfulness programs to customers. Participants in both programs showed significant improvement in perceived stress levels and various heart rate measurements, demonstrating that their bodies were better able to manage stress. In addition, the study found that these improvements could be realized regardless of whether the programs are presented in person or online, as there were statistically equivalent results between the delivery methods.

General Mills has offered mindfulness programs to its employees in its Minneapolis headquarters since 2006. The courses are designed to improve employee focus, clarity, and creativity. The company also offers weekly meditation sessions and yoga classes, and it has a dedicated meditation room in every building on its campus.

Intel began offering its Awake@Intel mindfulness program in 2012. On average, participants report a two-point decrease (on a scale of 1 to 10) in stress and feeling overwhelmed, a three-point increase in overall happiness and well-being, and a two-point increase in new ideas, insights, mental clarity, creativity, ability to focus, quality of relationships at work, and level of engagement in meetings, projects, and team efforts – all articulated goals of the program.

Target also offers mindfulness meditation training. Its “Meditating Merchants” network began in 2010 at the retail chain’s Minneapolis headquarters. The mindfulness training is open to all employees at several company locations.

Green Mountain Coffee Roasters has also embraced mindfulness. The company offers monthly daylong mindfulness retreats to its employees, their families and friends, and the community at large.

As many organizations can attest, bringing mindfulness to the workplace has decreased people's stress levels while improving focus and clarity, listening and decision-making skills, and overall well-being. Perhaps most importantly from a management perspective, mindfulness gives employees permission to think. Mindfulness is the essence of engagement. Being fully present – and allowing your team to be fully in the moment – will reap rewards on a personal and professional level.



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