

## Meditating Instead of Medicating: Worksite Wellness Programs and MBSR

The costs of healthcare are skyrocketing. Currently, they increase at twice the rate of regular societal inflation. As a result, projected healthcare spending in the United States may soon consume 20% of the nation's gross national product (Chenowith, 1998). Armed with knowledge, and the fact that decreased health and well-being has been continually linked with



Organizational contexts provide unique benefits for MBSR programs. Employees have access to large spaces such as conference rooms, and easy half-hour time slots can be scheduled for program implementation.

workplace stress, organizations are motivated to respond. Decreased health, due to workplace stress as well as various other contributors, has been linked to increased absenteeism and decreased productivity. Additionally, the enhancement of well-being at work has been described by some as "one of the most important issues of modern times" (Flaxman & Bond, 2006). With these pressing needs quickly becoming part of daily living, organizations have begun to take a preventative model approach with regards to healthcare options. One new avenue for increasing health and wellness in the workplace includes the concept of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programs for employees.

Under these programs, health is viewed as not only the absence of disease, but as the harmonious functioning of many dimensions of wellness recognized by a person, including physical, emotional, social, and environmental demands, to name a few. By examining the impact stress has on the lives of valuable employees, these programs recognize that daily workplace life comes with stressors and frustrations. [MBSR programs utilize employee self-responsibility and provide models of effective ways to handle stress, such as body scanning, yoga practice, or breathing exercises to reduce the tension and strain that can contribute to increased absenteeism and decreased productivity and performance.] The goal of MBSR programs is to focus on cultivating inner resources to produce a calmness of mind and a larger perspective on the difficulties of life. This distinction allows for an employee to respond effectively to stress instead of reacting hastily in a challenging situation, not by changing personal employee attributes, but by capitalizing on strengths already present within the employee.

~Referenced from: Williams, K. (2006). Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) In a Worksite Wellness Program; Chenowith, 1998; and Flaxman and Bond, 2006. *For more information on MBSR programs, please contact Kelly or LauraLee*

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**“ Look at a day when you are supremely satisfied at the end. It's not a day when you lounge around doing nothing; it's when you've had everything to do, and you've done it.”**

**~Lord Acton**

## Weather and Mood

During the rainy season, many people may experience dips in their otherwise cheery dispositions. Prior research has been somewhat unsuccessful at demonstrating the impact weather has on our moods and thoughts, simply because people in industrialized countries, on average, spend 93 percent of their time indoors, making them largely disconnected from the impact of changing weather outside. However, more recent research uncovered two variables that confirmed the relationship between weather and mood: **how much time you spend**

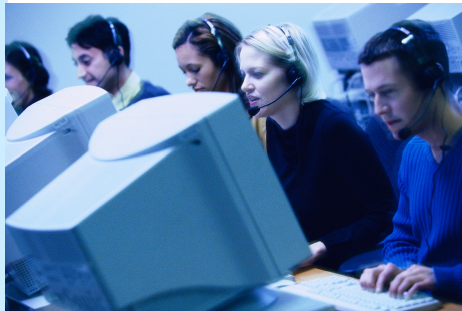
**outside and what the season is.** This study found that for weather to improve mood, subjects needed to spend at least 30 minutes outside in warm, sunny weather. Contrary to their initial expectations, researchers found that spending time indoors when the weather outside was pleasant actually decreased mood and narrowed cognitive style. They suspected this was perhaps because people resent being cooped-up indoors when weather becomes better in the spring or perhaps because improved weather can make normal indoor activities feel bor-



ing or irritating. So, with the less-than-inviting Portland rainy season upon us, spending time inside at work may not be so bad...

~Referenced from Dr. Keller's work on weather and mood research and the University of Michigan

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### **What is Mindfulness?**

Businesses have turned to the concept of mindfulness as a way to increase health and wellness in the work place. Mindfulness has been described as a state of conscious awareness of the present moment with a nonjudgmental acceptance. A mindful approach to situations provides a person with many benefits, including an openness to novelty and a sensitivity to both context and perspective. This can benefit the workplace in several ways.

**Did You Know:** Mindfulness brought to situations of discrimination within the workplace has been found to

## Mindfulness Benefits!

reduce the double standard women in managerial positions face? These women were able to reduce the negative effects of double standards, such as decreased femininity and reduced positive regard associated with managerial positions. It was also found to decrease the idea that femininity is associated with a lack of capability.

**Did You Know:** Mindfulness based practices can increase worker productivity in computer related interactions? By attending to computers as a-social beings, rather than socially cued agents, we can improve our computer interactions.

**Did You Know:** Mindfulness concepts can provide insight into workplace communication improvements in several ways. First, supervisors and subordinates tend to process

negative feedback mindlessly, and positive feedback mindfully. Researchers hypothesized this may be a defense mechanism. Second, supervisors often mindlessly communicate “special” relationships to their subordinates, which can become problematic in the future. Finally, candidates who exhibit stronger degrees of mindfulness in job interviews are more adept at procuring positions than those who are not.

~Based off of Work by Burgoon, Berger and Waldron (2000); Demick (2000); and Kazakami, White, and Langer (2000).

*For further inquiries or more information, contact LauraLee or Kelly at Fifth Avenue Counseling and Consulting*

## Get On Board with Onboarding in the Workplace

**“It is only as we develop others that we permanently succeed.”**

**~ Harvey S. Firestone**

Second chances in this corporate world don't come often. First impressions are heavily relied upon as decision makers or breakers with regards to newly hired employees who present with their best qualities in an interview. While new employees go to great pains to put their “best foot forward” during the hiring process, it makes sense that a company should try to reciprocate the favor. This idea of working with a new employee in order to ease the transition from “new guy on the block” to productive, informed team member is called Onboarding. It is more formally known as the process of new employee orientation and mainstreaming.

By following several simple guidelines, the process of a new hire's adjustment to a particular corporate culture can become a time for enhancing foundational relationships and confidence instead of stressing over the trial-and-error learning process associated with acquiring new job skills. First, keep in mind that familiarity breeds contentment. Give your new hire access to colleagues' names and faces via an online company page so that he or she can figure out just who is helping them with the jammed copier on that first day.

Second, create a new employee orientation process that is simple yet interesting.

The chances of your new employee remembering four to six hours of company policy procedures crammed into a powerpoint presentation are slim. This detracts from the productivity of the company, as well as alienates the employee. Instead, make the orientation process personal. To reduce the angst associated with the first day of work, try making information available in advance by providing online access to forms or posting a frequently-asked-



question flier so the first day can be all about relationship building, not memorization. Consider assigning a mentor to each new employee

on the first day so he or she can immediately get a feel for the personality of the organization. These types of strategies help to produce positive emotions about the organization which make the new team member feel valued, wanted, interested and excited. By engendering these positive emotions from the word “GO”, the new employee will be motivated to do great work and add great value to the organization.

Finally, don't make new employees “learn the hard way”. Each company has its own set of norms, rules, regulations, and proce-

dures, so don't leave new employees in the dark about them. If your company observes a “casual Friday” rule, make sure all new employees know this before they show up at the office on their first Friday in a neatly-pressed suit. Post policies and procedures about important information, such as eligibility for benefits packages, where they can be easily accessed. Verbal reminders during a marathon orientation may go unheard, and stacks of paper are easily lost in the hustle and bustle of first day activities. More effective practices include an easily accessible online resource that is regularly updated with this information.

So, if you're looking to achieve results with the most current tools on the market, get onboard with onboarding, and remember: it's been proven that happy employees are more productive team members.

~Referenced from the work of Brian Platz, 2007.

*For more information, contact Laura-Lee or visit these suggested reading websites:*

[How to Keep the New Employee On Board](http://humanresources.about.com/library/weekly/uc042102a.html): <http://humanresources.about.com/library/weekly/uc042102a.html>  
[New Employee Orientation Vs. Integration](http://humanresources.about.com/od/orientation/a/orientation.html): <http://humanresources.about.com/od/orientation/a/orientation.html>  
[Tips for a Better New Employee Orientation](http://humanresources.about.com/cs/orientation/qt/tipneonew.html): <http://humanresources.about.com/cs/orientation/qt/tipneonew.html>

**“The best preparation for good work tomorrow is to do good work today.”**

**~ Elbert Hubbard**

## Top Ten “Don’ts” of New Employee Orientation

- ◆ Don’t 1: Assign the new employee to a staff person who has a major, career-impacting deadline in three days.
- ◆ Don’t 2: Schedule the new employee to work while her supervisor is on vacation.
- ◆ Don’t 3: Leave the new employee standing in the company reception area for a half hour while reception staff try to figure out what to do with him.
- ◆ Don’t 4: Leave the new employee at her work station, to manage of her own, while other coworkers pair up and head out to lunch.
- ◆ Don’t 5: Provide an hour in a noisy lobby for the new employee to read and sign-off on a 100 page employee handbook.
- ◆ Don’t 6: Show the new employee his office and not introduce him to coworkers or assign him a mentor.
- ◆ Don’t 7: Assign the new employee to (fill in the blank), your most unhappy, negative, company-bashing staff member.
- ◆ Don’t 8: Leave an employee without a designated work space, place him in the hall, or require that he temporarily share a cube with another employee.
  - ◆ Don’t 9: Assign the employee busy work that has nothing to do with her core job description because you have a challenging week.
  - ◆ Don’t 10: Start the new employee with a one or two day new employee orientation during which Human Resources personnel make presentation after presentation after presentation....

~Guidelines suggested by Colleen Clarke, Career Specialist and Corporate Trainer

*For more information, contact LauraLee at Fifth Avenue Counseling and Consulting*

## Work Got You Down? Use it, Don’t Lose it!

Feeling grumpy on the job may facilitate a head start in the creativity department among employees. When situations arise that decrease employee moods from the pleasant, happy-go-lucky to the less-than-content, this may be the time to capitalize on the creative powers that be. Happy people may not be motivated to problem solve in the same ways as their less-content colleagues, for several reasons. People who are slightly less content with their work situation usually seek ways to alleviate the negative feelings. In short, they are motivated to try several approaches before finding what works. Those employees who are extremely content, although productive, are not seeking solutions to problems because there just isn’t any need to! So, the next time work gets you a little down, remember that it may be just the extra boost you need to trouble-shoot that challenging project hurdle.

~Referenced from L.M. Sixel’s Houston Chronicle News Service, 2007

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**“A positive attitude may not solve every problem but it makes solving any problem a more pleasant experience.”**

**~ Grant Fairley**