

Mindfulness at work

What are the benefits of mindfulness at work and how can we train ourselves to be more mindful in the workplace?

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. focus
2. your mind wanders
3. to become conscious of something
4. inefficient
5. multiple
6. productivity
7. thankful
8. to shift your attention from/to something

Definition

- a. you start thinking about something other than what you're doing
- b. the ability to concentrate on something
- c. to become aware of or start to notice a particular thing
- d. having many or different types
- e. grateful and glad about something
- f. to move your attention from one thing to another
- g. the rate at which a person produces useful work
- h. working in a way that wastes time, money or other resources

Mindfulness at work

Have you ever missed important information in a meeting because you were thinking about something else? Or eaten your lunch at your desk without even noticing what it tasted like?

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone. Research has shown that 47 per cent of the time, people are thinking about something other than what they're doing. People's minds wander, whether they are trying to read important emails, speaking to clients, updating the sales figures, or talking to colleagues. Interestingly, it was also found that people were less happy when their minds were wandering than when they were not. Being mindful and paying attention to the present can not only improve our focus, but it can also help us reduce stress, improve relationships and allow us to feel more connected with the present moment.

But what exactly is mindfulness?

According to *Psychology Today*, mindfulness is a state of active, open attention to the present. When one is mindful, one observes one's feelings and thoughts from a distance without judging them as good or bad. Being mindful means living in the moment and actually

experiencing what life has to offer. There are different ways that we can train our minds to do this. One easy and effective way is through meditation and mindfulness exercises.

So, how can we learn to be more mindful at work?

1. Make time for short mindfulness exercises.

You might not have time to sit down to do long mindfulness meditations every day, but you can take a moment to focus on your breathing and become conscious of your senses. In *A Monk's Guide to Happiness*, Gelong Thubten recommends practising micro moments of mindfulness. One way to do this is by sitting with a good posture and becoming aware of the sounds you can hear. Through exercises such as this one, you can learn to focus your attention and train yourself to become more mindful.

2. Be aware of what you're doing.

Mindfulness is about being present and consciously experiencing every moment.

When you're talking to your colleagues, pay attention to their body language, their intonation and what they're really saying. When you're sitting at your desk, be aware of the sensation of contact between your body and the chair. If you find your mind wandering from what you're doing, notice those thoughts and bring your attention back to the present.

3. Make a list of things you are grateful for.

In our busy day-to-day lives, it's easy to only focus on things that have gone wrong and be negative about the people and the things around us. By making a list of things we're thankful for, we can have a more balanced view of our reality. Being mindful of the things that are going well can also help improve our motivation, creativity and productivity.

4. Avoid multitasking.

Do you sometimes try to reply to emails while attending a meeting? Or look through your work chats while having your lunch? Doing multiple things at a time might make you feel more productive, but it often means you are not concentrating fully on any of the things you are trying to do. This makes you inefficient, more likely to make mistakes and worse at ignoring things that are not important. It can also make you unhappier as you lose connection with the present moment. So the next time you find yourself shifting your attention between multiple things, allow yourself a moment to decide what you really need to focus on and try to give that your full attention.

The more we practise doing these four things regularly, the more we can train ourselves to be more mindful at work and the more we see its benefits. So, bring your mind back from whatever you're thinking about and turn your attention to the here and now.

Sources:

- https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/does_mind_wandering_make_you_unhappy
- <https://www.mindful.org/10-ways-mindful-work/>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/well/be-more-mindful-at-work>
- <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ashleystahl/2017/09/14/how-to-practice-mindfulness-at-work/#482e90114d57>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/mindfulness>

Tasks

Task 1

Circle the best answer.

1. Having a wandering mind ...
 - a. is common.
 - b. has no negative side effects.
 - c. can't be helped.
 - d. makes people happier.
2. Mindfulness can help you ...
 - a. become more intelligent.
 - b. do several things at once.
 - c. get physically fit.
 - d. improve your social relationships.
3. Mindfulness is ...
 - a. another word for meditation.
 - b. paying attention to the present.
 - c. a kind of positive thinking.
 - d. getting better at deciding if things are good or bad.
4. The author recommends becoming more mindful by ...
 - a. paying attention to your breath and senses.
 - b. dedicating an hour a day to meditation.
 - c. trying to think nothing at all for very short moments.
 - d. sitting in a comfortable chair.

5. Being mindful at work means ...
- being positive with your colleagues.
 - changing tasks often so you don't get bored.
 - focusing on whatever you're doing at that moment.
 - sometimes doing two tasks at once to be more efficient.
6. Being grateful for things helps us to ...
- recognise our own strengths and weaknesses.
 - see the good things as well as the bad things.
 - be organised and use lists.
 - shut out negative thoughts.
7. Multitasking is ...
- good for productivity but bad for your mental health.
 - useful but only for short amounts of time.
 - fine for people who have a certain type of brain.
 - bad for productivity, concentration and happiness.
8. The author finishes the article by encouraging the reader to ...
- take a deep breath and notice how they feel.
 - start turning their dreams into reality.
 - try to accept that uncertainty is part of life.
 - focus their attention on the present moment.

Task 2

Complete the sentences with words from the box.

unhappier	attention	minds	productivity
conscious	multitasking	grateful	benefits

- In our busy modern lives, it is common for our to wander, even when we're doing something important.
- We often try to do several things at once, but research shows that makes us less productive and more stressed.
- Mindfulness is paying to the present moment.

4. Being mindful helps us become more of what we're doing and the people around us.
5. Writing lists of what we are thankful or for helps us to achieve a more balanced view of reality.
6. When we improve motivation and concentration, we also find that we improve
7. When we multitask or get distracted, we're likely to feel
8. The more we practise mindfulness, the more we see its

Discussion

What do you do to help yourself be more mindful at work?

Answers

Preparation task

1. b
2. a
3. c
4. h
5. d
6. g
7. e
8. f

Task 1

1. a
2. d
3. b
4. a
5. c
6. b
7. d
8. d

Task 2

1. minds
2. multitasking
3. attention
4. conscious
5. grateful
6. productivity
7. unhappier
8. benefits