

Employee's Health Predicts Company's Health

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We ask one of our psychologists, Dr. Justin Ross, his insight on the impact of stress in the workplace and what can be done to prevent stress-related conditions.

Based off the article [Mindfulness, Meditation, Wellness and Their Connection to Corporate America's Bottom Line](#)

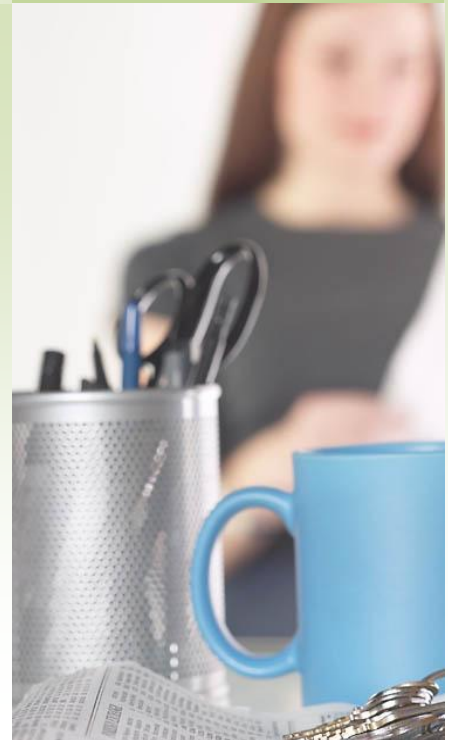
"The CDC estimates that 75 percent of all health care spending is on chronic illnesses such as stress that can be prevented and according to the American Academy of Family Physicians, two-thirds of visits to the doctor's office are for stress-related conditions."

QUESTION: How is mindfulness an antidote to burnout?

ANSWER: I think of mindfulness helping prevent burnout in two ways. First, mindfulness is a proactive behavior that helps redirect attention from being overwhelmed or from stressful stimuli to a neutral or positive place. This level of focus is a reminder that we have constant influence in regards to where we allow our attention to reside.

Secondly, the process of mindful redirection works physiologically on the body to slow heart rate, calm breathing, and reduce the stress induced fight or flight response. There have been a number of studies showing the positive physiological effects of mindfulness, including slowing/interrupting cortisol production. Mindfulness is a simple and effective strategy that helps interrupt the physiological effects of long term exposure to stress and burnout.

"If you can work on being conscious and present in each and every moment of your life, then recognizing needs becomes much more readily apparent. We become imbalanced by losing sight of our own needs and operating under beliefs and assumptions of what we 'should' be doing rather than following our own intuition."
– Dr. Ross



“Stress-reduction and mindfulness don't just make us happier and healthier; they're a proven competitive advantage for any business that wants one.”

QUESTION: What are some of the most effective ways to build useful mental habits?

ANSWER: There is a saying that mindfulness in-and-of-itself is not difficult. What is difficult, is remembering to be mindful. The most effective way to build useful mental habits in the form of implementing mindfulness is to practice. And the truth is there is never a moment in life that you can't practice - preparing children for the day, driving to work, preparing dinner, washing dishes, brushing your teeth - these are common activities that most of us engage in daily, and yet often with only half attention or awareness. Committing to one daily, routine activity to engage in mindfully, with full attention, focus, and non-judgment is a great place to start.

The other recommendation is to take time each and every day to engage in a mindfulness meditation practice. The practice does not need to be long, it can be as simple as a few minutes. A three minute breathing space exercise is outlined below.

“One of the best – and cheapest – ways to become healthier and happier is through mindfulness exercises like meditation.”

Mindfulness reduces 20% of your daily stress

Academic research has shown that through mindfulness 'one is able to arrive again in a given moment. When one is working, one is working, completely. When one is home, then one is home, completely. This simple training reduces daily stress with 20%.'

(Mindfulness Based Treatment Approaches, Dr. Ruth Bear, 2009).

QUESTION: What self-care practices do you refer patients to who are undergoing a significant amount of stress? When and how often?

ANSWER: I teach a 3 minute breathing space exercise to almost everyone I work with. It is simple and effective.

1. The first minute is simply called **Awareness**. Bring awareness to the physical sensations of your body and thoughts as they arise in the mind. Notice the contact points of your legs and back as they rest on the chair that you are sitting. Notice thoughts in the mind, but do not attach to the content of the thoughts. In this first minute, simply be aware of the mind and body as you gently ask yourself - “What is my experience in this moment? In my body. And in my mind.” Be aware of that experience, even if it is not particularly comfortable or pleasant.
2. The second minute is called **Gathering**. Switch focus to the physical sensations of breathing. Notice the breath as it naturally arises on the inbreath and leaves on the outbreath. Notice the rise of the lungs and chest on the inbreath, the gentle deflation of the lungs and chest on the outbreath. Be aware of the natural rate, rhythm and pace of breathing. Connect to the temperature sensations of each breath. In this minute, be aware that the breath is ever present, and can be utilized as an anchor to present experiencing.
3. The third and final minute is called **Expansion**. Expand your field of awareness to include a sense of the body, the mind and the breath all available in this minute. Notice the ability to hold each in your awareness, and to shift the spotlight of your focus to each of these areas as you see fit.

I often recommend that people use the top of each and every hour, specifically while at work as a reminder to be mindfully present by engaging in this 3 minute practice. It can also be a nice way to begin and end each day.