

# Mindful Work

## What is mindfulness and what do you actually do?

Mindfulness has become known as a 'technique' for getting a calm and clear head. It is effective at that, and thousands of research studies show that it works. It's also been shown to help people stay more focused and relate better to others.

However, we'd like to state right away that mindfulness is much more than that. It becomes an approach to living that makes life far richer and deeper. And to get the most out of it, takes commitment and training (like anything else worth working towards).

So what is it, in a nutshell? Let's go to the grandfather of current, secular mindfulness, Jon Kabat-Zinn – founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center Studies:

*“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”*

Here's what you do in a mindfulness course:

- learn to develop calm awareness in the present moment, whatever is going on
- learn to tune into your body as a way to directly experience emotions
- recognise your habits and patterns of reaction to stress and difficulties
- develop your emotional intelligence and responding to stressful stimuli in a more considered and less self-orientated way
- practice being kind to ourselves and others

Research shows that just eight weeks of training brings a significant increase in the ability for sustained attention, emotional regulation and perspective taking. There have even been studies that show an increase in brain density.

With mindfulness training, one can expect to:

- remain more calm and focused in the face of multiple demands
- communicate more clearly and with empathy
- work better within teams, with clients and with other stakeholders
- show improved focus and working memory
- exhibit less stress, anxiety, and depression
- be more productive and positive about work

## Definitions of mindfulness

‘My working definition of mindfulness is the awareness that arises through paying attention on purpose in the present moment — non-judgmentally. And the non-judgmental part is the kicker, because we’ve got ideas and opinions about virtually everything. Our consciousness is almost always colored by our likes and dislikes. All highly conditioned, habitual behaviors really comes down to this: do I like it or not, do I want more or do I want to escape? That’s all going on below the surface of awareness and it runs our lives.’

*Jon Kabatt-Zinn*

‘Mindfulness describes a moment-to-moment awareness of your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. It’s a state of being attuned to what’s going on in your body and in the surrounding environment—being in the present moment without thinking about the future or what happened in the past. An essential component of mindfulness is acceptance. Whatever you’re thinking and feeling at that moment is neither right nor wrong. You notice it, and accept it, and move onto the next moment without getting caught up in judging what you’re thinking or feeling.’ *Jason Marsh director of programs for the Greater Good Science Center (GGSC) at UC Berkeley*

‘Mindfulness is about observation without criticism; being compassionate with yourself. When unhappiness or stress hover overhead, rather than taking it personally, you learn to treat them as if they were black clouds in the sky, and to observe them with friendly curiosity and they drift past. In essence, Mindfulness allows you to catch negative thought patterns before they tip you into a downward spiral. It begins the process of putting you back in control of your life.’

*Mark Williams and Danny Pearman in ‘Mindfulness, a Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World’*