4 Steps To Improve Your Focus With Mindfulness

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Mindfulness at the workplace

While the benefits of working from home are multiple, one of the downsides is not being able to focus, probably because of sharing the...
room with others or having so many more distractions than in your regular office.

A practice that I embraced and helped me deal with focus and negative thoughts was mindfulness. One of the most important skills a leader can develop is paying close attention to team members' needs. Still, when a leader is distracted or worried, this is a challenging task to accomplish; we all have been there.

Like the neuroscientist Dr. Amishi Jha director of contemplative neuroscience for the mindfulness research and practice initiative, and an associate professor of psychology at the University of Miami says in her publications that “Wherever it is that attention goes, the rest of the brain follows. It means that where you pay attention, makes up the moments of your life, it actually makes up your life’s experience.”

When we get anxious, our brain is bringing issues to our mind, something we did in the past, something that did not happen, or something we need to accomplish in the future. And for some reason, it keeps looping in our mind, stressing us, and preventing us from thinking about the present or the good things we do have. The worst part is that leaders’ moods and feelings are contagious and infect others, whether for good or bad.

Mindfulness training helps us direct attention to where we want to focus instead of leaving our brain to control us. Richard Boyatzis, in his book *Helping people change*, confirms that the antidote to stressful experiences is doing activities of renewal, such as exercise, meditation, even playing with your kids, or mindfulness.
Mindfulness of breathing is a focused-attention practice that we can get to work out, just like a body workout. These are the steps:

1) **Sit in an upright, stable, and alert posture.** Focus your attention on the sensations of breathing, and be very specific about how you pay attention to the breath.

2) **Tune into the breath-related sensations.** To maintain your focus, Dr. Amishi Jha suggests, “Once you get settled, with your eyes comfortably lowered or closed, you’re going to focus in on the sensation that’s most prominent to you tied to your breathing. Perhaps it’s the coolness of the air in and out of your nostrils, or the abdomen moving up
or down.”

3) **Pay attention to what arises in your mind.** What usually happens is that our brain always goes back to negative thinking, it is more powerful than positive, but we can practice staying more focused on positive things. That is, what we like, what we are proud of, what went well. During this exercise, Dr Jha recommends to “notice when mind wandering occurs, and your attention is moved off of the target for where your attention should be.

4) **Always return to focus on breathing.** When your mind wonders, “simply return your attention back to the breath-related sensations.” Her research shows that mind wandering happens 50 percent of our waking moments, but we can train our minds to focus on what we want, like the present moment.

Dr. Amishi Jha call this sequence the push-up of mindfulness of breathing exercise: focus, sustain attention, notice, and redirect attention back. If you can do this for 10 to 20-minute every day, she says “you may actually not only engage attention but strengthen it.” You can also organize shared sessions with your co-workers to help others focus better too.

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