Where Mindfulness Meets Warrior Culture

Major General Walter E. Piatt is on a mission to bring mindfulness to our soldiers.

By Elizabeth Russell | February 26, 2016

Consider a job where half a million men and women rely on you daily for their safety and well-being. How would you handle the stress? Major General Walter E. Piatt doesn’t have to wonder. His job at the Pentagon—Director of Operations, Readiness, and Mobilization in the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff—is a nonstop barrage of high stakes decisions that draw on his attention and mental fortitude.

It should be no surprise then, that the man who fills this role is a temple of stress tolerance, handling the demands of his job with such steadiness that his 35-plus years in the Army have taken him from a standard enlistment all the way to the Pentagon. So, how, between high-level assignments and operational deployments, is he able to maintain his composure under such pressure?

To date, stress reduction in the military has been based on theory more than research: If we give time off, if we encourage fun group activities, we can provide stress-free moments to cushion the stressful ones. And while this may work at home, there’s little evidence that these kinds of efforts make an impact for individuals who are handling the extreme stress environments of a military experience.

That’s where Major General Walt Piatt comes in.

When Piatt was deployed, he would use running as a time to be silent and focus on...
nothing. A necessary part of his physical fitness routine, running also became an important part of his mental fitness. And so did writing. A major release and a way to cope, Walt began writing poetry and is now a published author two-times over.

“Poetry, in my mind, was an avenue of release—it was a way to cope.” says Piatt. “I’ve found, since being exposed to mindful practices, that what I was really doing was getting out of that moment, releasing it so I wasn’t stuck in a mental spin. I was able to stay in the moment by different mechanisms of regulating my stress,” he adds. And while Piatt could rely on this to reduce stress, he soon realized that many others couldn’t find similar ways to cope.

To help, Piatt has been advocating for mindfulness in the Army.

He’s working with neuroscientist Dr. Amishi Jha, on research funded by U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command, that is revealing how daily mindfulness meditation can help soldiers thrive under the pressures of active-duty. Known as the STRONG Project (Schofield Barracks Training and Research on Neurobehavioral Growth), the results have been promising, showing that mindfulness may help prevent “mind wandering” as well as help soldiers manage and recover from stress.

Piatt is taking the results of this research to his superiors in hopes that broader mindfulness training can be available for our soldiers. “One of the things I’m most proud of in the Army,” he says, “is that change is our only constant. We are always changing, we are always adapting. We understand change because the environment requires it, our mission requires it. If we stay stagnant, we will fail in our mission to defend this nation.”

Major General Piatt will be speaking at The Mindful Business Conference on the importance of teaching mindfulness and “mental armor” to soldiers in the U.S. Army. The Mindful Business Conference, a collaboration between Mindful, Whil and The Eventful Group, will unite a vibrant community of business professionals to learn how mindful practices can drive peak performance, greater innovation, effective leadership, and a stronger workplace culture. Join us this May 9-10 at the Convene Conference Center in New York City. Register with promo code MindfulMagazine16 to receive 20% off the standard rate.

This article was adapted from The Mindful Business Conference.

Elizabeth Russell is the Content Producer at The Eventful Group.
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Coaching/koučing

The role of Mindfulness among people whose ultimate raison d'etre is to eliminate others - something the US Army has been doing globally with flying colors in the past decades as part of its mission to "defend this nation" - remains a mystery to me.

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Riya Shaylin

Great article you have, I would also want to share my thoughts that Meditation indeed has positive effects not only in the body but also in the mind, a total holistic wellness that brings us to know our inner-self better. It gives us a peace of mind that helps us have a much better perception about our lives. Our advocacy is to promote the positive effects of meditation, yoga and inner wellness.

read this article http://tinyurl.com/cpamv to experience that

Have a great day!

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