



With the likes of Apple, Google, IBM and Virgin publicly turning to this new concept called Mindfulness to support their Businesses, will Channel Island Companies do the same?

What is this new concept and how could it help Channel Island Business?

Mark shields talks to Mindfulness Expert Tracey Baum to find out

Tracey Explains - These days you cant go very far without hearing the word mindfulness being banded about, its all over the place, In the media, on TV its on every ones lips.

Paul Dolan, Professor of Behaviour Sciences, at the London School of Economics believes that to achieve happiness at work we should all focus on having the right balance of focus and purpose in our every working lives. He talks of this in some depth in his best selling book happiness by design. Mindfulness is mentioned a lot.

As the Channel Islands is renowned as one of Europe's leading financial centres, employee stress is likely to be high.

2014 saw employee wellbeing cost the economy 6.5 million GBP

It is not hard to miss the headlines that the mental health wellbeing of employees is having a detrimental effect on the productivity, profitability and success of many companies and businesses. The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) estimated that the cost to the economy in 2014 was £6.5 Billion. This is based on sickness days lost, estimated at 10.4million days and presenteesism; where employees are at work but are disengaged, tired, unmotivated, unproductive and too stressed to work.

What is Corporate Wellness?

Corporate Wellness, defined as any workplace health promotion activity or organizational policy designed to support healthy

behaviour in the workplace and to improve health outcomes is now becoming entrenched in the minds of many CEO's, Managing Directors and those responsible for implementing policies and procedures. In fact those guys at Apple, Google, IBM, Virgin, The NHS and Transport for London to name but a few are well along the way with initiatives aimed at improving their employee's mental wellness at work.

Corporate Wellness Initiatives

Corporate Wellness initiatives used can include; access to fitness and exercise classes, education seminars aimed at skill improvement, employee incentive programs, nutritional support for instance providing healthy option for drinks and snacks and removing the unhealthier options and most importantly focus on mental health, which I will go into more in a moment.

But, I can hear you ask, what is the benefit to me or my company in spending time and money investing in various programs and initiatives to make it 'nice, fluffy, eating organically' at work? It is after all a place of employment, a business venture, a corporation, not a holiday camp.

Well, consider the impact on your business of staff absenteeism, of conflict and aggression amongst staff, of increased and prolonged pressure on work staff and how this affects productivity and performance. How this in turn may have a detrimental effect on external customer relationships and service.

The mental health aspect of corporate wellness has in recent

years been of much interest. The presence of employee assistance programs, of 'buddy' partnerships and manager awareness courses are in increasing in numbers.

Banks and Financial Institutions Implement Wellness Programs

More recently and in more and more instances the corporate world is embracing the practice of Mindfulness and bringing this practice in to the workplace. Google have mindfulness stations situated around their HQ so that their employees can take time out whenever they feel the need to do so. Yahoo, Deutsche Bank, Procter & Gamble, Apple, Astra Zeneca GlaxoSmithKline, General Mills, the Home Office, the Cabinet Office, KPMG, and PricewaterhouseCoopers have also successfully incorporated Mindfulness practice in to their workplaces.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a focused level of attention and awareness with an emphasis on acceptance; being non-judgemental, non-reactive and non-critical of the thoughts, feelings and sensations we all experience during our day. Mindfulness is about being in the present moment and not allowing the past or the future to affect or influence us. Mindfulness encourages qualities of compassion, kindness and warmth to our experiences.

How can Mindfulness Help?

It has been scientifically shown that Mindfulness if practiced on a regular basis will improve mood and quality of life. It can improve memory, increase creativity and reaction times as well as increase and improve mental and physical stamina. Mindfulness has been evidenced in reducing stress, anxiety, depression, fatigue, insomnia, exhaustion and irritability. It has also been shown to have a beneficial effect on coronary, circulatory and immune system health.

In the workplace, Mindfulness can lead to:

- Greater well being
- Clearer thinking
- More effective communication
- More creativity and stronger leadership skills
- Greater teamwork
- Improved ability to address conflict
- More awareness of personal stress and how to prevent it
- Increased stability during periods of change
- The ability to respond rather than react by breaking habitual patterns of behaviour
- Fewer somatic illnesses

Due to the demands on us in both our work and private lives, we are all increasingly working on autopilot, that state of mind where we zone out, where our minds are racing from one thought to another, one idea to another, thinking we're being productive when in fact all we are doing is making ourselves exhausted, and the antithesis of our aim, being unproductive. Common examples of working on autopilot include:-

- Being Unable to remember what others have said during conversations?
- Having no recollection of the daily commute?
- Eating at the desk without tasting your food?
- Paying more attention to the iPhone / iPad than to the family?
- Dwelling on past events or dreading what the future holds?

By being aware, by being present and by being focused, it is possible to avoid acting on auto pilot providing all the benefits already outlined.

The Impact of Mindfulness in the Workplace - Results

There has not been a large amount of empirical data about the benefits of Mindfulness in the workplace as it is relatively new practice but on researching this article I did find the following information established by General Mills which shows the effect this practice has had on their business:

After a seven-week courses, 83 per cent of participants said they were "taking time each day to optimise their personal productivity" – up from 23 per cent before the course. Eighty-two per cent said they now make time to eliminate tasks with limited productivity value – up from 32 per cent before the course. And among senior executives who took the course, 80 per cent reported a positive change in their ability to make better decisions, while 89 per cent said they became better listeners.

Practicing Mindfulness is like exercising, with a use or lose it approach required. The more you use it the better the effect will be.

What Can Employers do?

So how can your business stop becoming a statistic? Start incorporating Corporate Wellness in to the workplace. Hire a Mindfulness/Business Coach to teach your managers and staff the benefits of Mindfulness, reduce the stresses of work life and join the Mindfulness revolution.

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