

*"One's action ought to come out of an achieved stillness: not to be mere rushing on."*

D.H. Lawrence

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### Sit and Be Still.

Seems simple. It's not. So much of our focus is on how we can achieve more, do more, be more - and do it all better and faster.

But does this really help us achieve more of our goals more often and get the results we want? Psychologist Daniel Goleman, an authority on emotional intelligence in organizations, calls this the leadership paradox in *Primal Leadership*:

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*"For leaders, the first task in management has nothing to do with leading others; step one poses the challenge of knowing and managing oneself."*

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Self management is about...

- Connecting with deep values that guide
- Imbuing actions with meaning
- Aligning emotions with goals
- Keeping motivated, focused and on task

Honing these skills of awareness leads to mindfulness — becoming aware of what's going on inside and around us on several levels. Mindfulness is living in a state of full, conscious awareness of one's whole self, other people and the context in which we live and work.

Recent studies in management science, psychology and neuroscience point to the importance of developing mindfulness – to sit and be still.

Mindfulness has long been practiced by those seeking greater calm and peace of mind. A Buddhist-trained HR executive, Michael Carroll encourages business leaders to take time to sit and be still. Stressed-out executives, he maintains, need a way to reconnect with themselves to become more open and, consequently, more effective.

In his new book, *The Mindful Leader: Awakening Your Natural Management Skills Through Mindfulness Meditation* (2008), Carroll explores the key principles of mindfulness and how they apply to leading organizations.

Mindfulness meditation addresses a wide range of topics, including:

- How to heal toxic workplace cultures where anxiety and stress impede creativity and performance
- How to cultivate courage and confidence in spite of workplace difficulties and economic recession
- How to pursue organizational goals without neglecting what's happening here and now
- How to lead with wisdom and gentleness, not only with ambition, relentless drive and power
- How a personal mindfulness practice develops your innate leadership talents

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*"Some people get lost in thought because it's such unfamiliar territory."*

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G. Behn

Many organizations and individuals have adopted this practice. Companies like Raytheon, Procter & Gamble, Unilever, Nortel Networks, Comcast and prominent law firms have offered employees classes in mindfulness.

Executives like Bill Ford Jr., chairman of Ford Motor Company; Michael Stephen, former chairman of Aetna International; Robert Shapiro, ex-CEO of Monsanto; and Michael Rennie, managing partner of McKinsey & Co., consider the practice of mindfulness beneficial to running a corporation. Some of these benefits include:

- Repaired immune systems
- Heightened emotional intelligence
- Reduced anxiety and depression
- Sustained levels of joy and satisfaction
- Greater career resilience
- Improved cardiovascular health
- Fewer days lost to illness and stress

But practicing mindfulness requires much...well, practice. It demands vulnerability and heart, rather than ambition and achievement—a tall order for hard-driving, results-oriented executives.



**What Is Mindfulness?**

In short, it's a friendly gesture toward ourselves, in which we take time to sit and be still for 10–15 minutes or longer. When was the last time you did that? Give it try - in your office, sitting in your chair... (no one is watching, so it's OK)

- Sit upright—relaxed, yet alert.
- Open your eyes and maintain a soft, relaxed, downward gaze.
- Place hands palms down, resting gently.
- Tuck in your chin.
- Breathe normally.
- Observe your thoughts gently, without judgment.
- Label your thoughts as “thinking” and dismiss them. Let them go.
- Return your focus to your being, breathing and bodily sensations.
- Be still.
- Experience being you in the moment—in the now.

*“Never be afraid to sit awhile and think.”*

*Lorraine Hansberry, A Raisin in the Sun*

**The Restlessness Experience**

When we are still and quiet, we experience our mind's restlessness—a strong desire to be somewhere else, doing other things.

When you experience this, you'll come to realize how you shut down your sense of “here and now”—your own presence in the world as it really exists. It's easy to become distracted, yet hard to sit and be still with ourselves.

This is when we begin to discover how we interact in the world: by shutting off the here and now, distorting our sense of purpose and missing opportunities to appreciate our true environment. The ensuing anxiety prevents us from being open.

**Being You**

To become a mindful leader, you must understand the distinction between trying to improve yourself versus experiencing who you already are:

- As a mindful leader, you acknowledge you're already open (not trying to be more open).
- You acknowledge the wisdom and kindness you hold within (not trying to be more wise or compassionate).
- You don't strive to achieve a better, improved you. Rather, you get in touch with who you already are and discover your basic sanity and true qualities, as they already exist within you. You turn off the inner judge and critic.

*“No problem can withstand the assault of sustained thinking.”*

Voltaire

**The Art of Nonachievement**

Practice mindfulness with nonachievement in mind. The benefits are found by exercising unseen “leadership muscles” as you sit still. Carroll presents ten leadership talents developed through mindfulness:

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|------------|--------------|
| Simplicity | Enthusiasm   |
| Poise      | Patience     |
| Respect    | Awareness    |
| Courage    | Skillfulness |
| Confidence | Humility     |

These skills develop with practice and can then be applied with a natural ease and familiarity. As you know from experience, leading others is no small task, requiring a poised, courageous, down-to-earth acknowledgment of reality. When you slow down, you gain a realistic picture of what's going on instead of speeding through your day—or worse, speeding through your life.

*“Few people think more than two or three times a year; I have made an international reputation for myself by thinking once a week.”*

George Bernard Shaw

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*“Thoughts and action, aligned fearlessly to purpose, become crowning achievement.”*

