

Putting mindfulness into the boardroom

Extensive scientific research, supporting the personal and professional benefits of a more holistic approach to life and work, has led to a growing respect for mindfulness programmes and practices in the workplace.



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The world's top companies are increasingly introducing mindfulness practices into their organisations to help employees reduce stress and anxiety, increase focus and attention, and ultimately enhance productivity

“South African companies are starting to follow suit,” says Debbie Goodman-Bhyat, author, speaker and CEO of Jack Hammer. “Mindfulness is no longer an opaque concept reserved for yoga retreats and motivational memes. The concept and practice has found grateful and receptive audiences in many of the world's leading companies, including here in South Africa.

“The idea that people who practice mindfulness principles might be on the fringes of society belongs to a past era and there is now enough data, research and scientific information supporting not only the personal, but also commercial benefits of a more in-tune, holistic approach to life and work.

“Mindfulness is a global movement, pioneered by PhD Professor of Medicine Emeritus, Jon Kabat-Zinn. It is increasingly becoming mainstream and a growing number of top leaders are starting to incorporate mindfulness-based practices and principles in their personal and professional lives.”

International adoption

Mindfulness programmes and practices are known to have been introduced at some high-profile organisations, including Google, Intel, Aetna, Keurig Green Mountain and Target.

Global studies conducted on international organisations (including Fortune 500 companies) show a 19% decrease in stress, 37% increase in productivity, 40% increase in focus, 34% increase in emotional control and 37% decrease in being overwhelmed in companies where mindfulness practices have been introduced. In addition, a recent study found that participants in 6-9 week mindfulness courses experience a 42% stress reduction, as well as improvement in productivity,

time management and job satisfaction.

Local publication

Locally, Goodman-Bhyat recently published 'IntheFlow – Taking Mindfulness to Work', the result of her years of research into the impact of implementing mindfulness practices in the workplace. It went into the business best-seller list, with business leaders enthusiastically backing the 6-prompt formula that forms the basis of the guide.

Allon Raiz, CEO of Raizcorp, noted that Goodman-Bhyat had managed to build the bridge between the hectic chaos of everyday business and the clarity and serenity that being present, and in the moment, brings. "The book takes an ethereal concept and makes it practical for people to understand and more importantly, to apply."

Goodman-Bhyat says introducing mindfulness practices in the workplace does not take massive amounts of time, strategising or financial investment. "However, it does take commitment and championing by leaders, who are invested in shifting perspectives and changing the status quo of 'how we do things around here'. When this happens, impact on an organisation's wellness – from individual level to company performance, is indisputable."

Following the lead of their global counterparts, South African organisations are also starting to pay attention to the benefits of incorporating mindfulness-based programmes and principles in their work environments. Large corporations such as Woolworths and Old Mutual, as well as medium-sized and entrepreneurial businesses are investigating options for mindfulness-based training, leadership development or group learning sessions.

"Further, more executive education, MBA and leadership development courses conducted at South Africa's top tertiary institutions are offering mindfulness training, as an integral part of their curricula, so it is inevitable that the concepts will start trickling into the business environment," concludes Goodman-Bhyat.

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