

Chapter 6



MAINSTREAM MINDFULNESS



What's the Trend?

Meditation, yoga and quiet contemplation overcome their incense-burning reputations to become powerful tools for individuals and organizations to improve performance, health and motivation.

In August of 2013 *ESPN* magazine published a story about the rise of mindfulness, meditation and yoga as training strategies in an unlikely place: the NFL.

The story went inside the unusual summer training camp activities of a team whose coach had decided that spirituality and well-being were going to be part of his team's pre-season preparation.

To prove his commitment, he hired staff dedicated to player well-being, including a life-skills counselor and a director of player development. In a sport defined by drill-sergeant coaching styles and "walk it off" toughness, even the team's coaching philosophy was different.

Instead of berating players for making mistakes, coaches used encouragement to help them learn and get better. The team even changed its philosophy on player recruitment, actively searching for players with a positive attitude, and even trading away superstar players if they weren't also committed to being great teammates.

In September, this was the ultimate forgettable, feel-good NFL story, written to fill empty magazine pages before the actual season started. Six months later, the story received a lot more attention, thanks to a stunning Super Bowl victory from the team it profiled: the Seattle Seahawks.

After that first victory, *The New York Times* published a follow-up article to the ESPN piece with the headline “Title for the Seahawks Is a Triumph for the Profile of Yoga.” A year later, the Seahawks returned to the Super Bowl.

Thanks to the high profile of the sport, it certainly was a major victory for yoga and mindfulness in an unexpected place, but it is only one symbol of the major attention mindfulness is starting to get from multiple places.

The Silicon Valley Yogis

Mindfulness is widely understood and described as the state of being more conscious about yourself, your surroundings and those you interact with.

Being more mindful typically includes having more empathy for others, appreciating moments of quiet reflection and gaining a perspective that better allows you to manage stress or conflict when it comes.

Based on this definition, it is not surprising to learn mindfulness is often connected with yoga.

The growth of yoga in western culture over the past several decades has been dramatic. A November 2014 IBISWorld research report on Pilates and yoga studios, one of the few “recession-proof industries” of the year, projected an annual growth rate of 4.2% to 34,343 studios nationwide by 2019.

In California over the past year, Silicon Valley has also seen an explosion in meditation, yoga and mindfulness as a part of the daily work routine at tech companies of all sizes.

The one person who gets much of the attention for this growth is Google’s head of mindfulness training Chade-Meng Tan. His official title is Google’s Jolly Good Fellow.

A longtime Google employee (number 107), he spent many years trying to convince the company to implement more mindfulness training

and exercises for team members. It took time, but they are finally listening. As Tan recently told *The Guardian*:

If you are a company leader who says employees should be encouraged to exercise, nobody looks at you funny. The same thing is happening to meditation and mindfulness, because now that it's become scientific, it has been demystified. It's going to be seen as fitness for the mind.

Over a thousand Google employees have gone through programs as part of Tan's Search Inside Yourself training and the waitlist is hundreds long for others who want to get into courses. With topics like "Neural Self Hacking" and "Leading with Compassion," all this focus on inner reflection led a *Wired* journalist to conclude that across the Valley, "quiet is the new caffeine."

If that's true, its current barista may be Soren Goldhamer.

Seeking Wisdom

Every year Goldhamer hosts the popular Wisdom 2.0 Conference, which has a flagship event in San Francisco that routinely attracts over 2000 attendees from around the world interested in all aspects of mindfulness at work and in daily living.

The event has become a who's-who gathering of the tech industry mindfulness movement, with attendees from nearly every large tech company sending multiple employees to attend and partake in the combination of learning, meditation and conversations.

It is not the only large tech event to focus on the topic either. The World Economic Forum in Davos this past year featured 25 sold out sessions on the topic of mindful leadership, and Europe's largest tech event Le Web in Paris this past December featured discussions on the "Future of the Mind" as one of its top trends.

Given the popularity of mindfulness as a corporate philosophy in the tech industry, it is not surprising that there are a suite of new products designed to help take the sometimes elite promise of mindfulness and extend it more broadly.

Mindfulness Tech

Arturo Bejar builds social tools to help people be more mindful of each other and though he may not be a household name, it is almost certain that you interact with the results of his efforts on a daily basis. Bejar is a director of engineering at Facebook and is charged with what some have described as the toughest job anyone could have—to convince people online to be nice to one another.

In 2014, a *New York Times* profile dubbed him “Facebook’s Mr. Nice,” a job title that seemed to make sense given his work experimenting with tools to help reduce cyberbullying, and rewriting the network’s alerts to be more compassionate.

Outside of Facebook, there is plenty of other innovation to create more mindful technology and products as well.

Thync, for example, is a startup with a solution *BusinessWeek* described as “Silicon Valley’s strangest new product in years,” a Bluetooth-enabled “neurosignalling device” which uses electrical pulses administered directly to the forehead to create focus, instill calm and inspire creativity.

In other words, it is a device to let customers program their state of mind.

Thanks to advances in neuroscience and wearable technology, this type of innovation is becoming more and more commonplace. Outside of technology and Silicon Valley, the place where this mindfulness may be most promising is when it comes to the fields of media, education and learning.

Mindful Learning & Education

Andy Puddicombe has the kind of startup founder’s story that you can’t help sharing.

Longing for something different in his 20s, he became a monk and lived for 10 years in the Himalayas, Burma, India and Nepal. He came back with a mission to help demystify meditation and make it more accessible for people across the world.

Today his primary tool is the popular Headspace app, which offers a range of short and long guided meditation sessions from Puddicombe himself. The app has well over 1 million users in 150 countries around the world.

Learning mindfulness has also extended to education. The Mindfulness In Schools Project is a UK-based nonprofit that educates teachers on how to bring mindfulness into the classroom as a way to help students deal with the stresses of schoolwork, activities and bullying.

Last year the Snake River Correctional Institute, Oregon's biggest prison, even started a program inside the solitary confinement wing to use what they call a Blue Room with projected images of open landscapes and soothing outdoor scenes as a way to calm inmates and reduce violent behavior.

The innovation was named to *Time* magazine's "25 Best Inventions of 2014" list.

Why It Matters

Mindfulness and meditation are rapidly being integrated into everything from Silicon Valley tech campuses to Oregon's largest prison. While the popularity of yoga continues to grow, unlikely proponents of yoga and mindfulness like the Seattle Seahawks are encouraging a more mainstream audience to consider learning and practicing mindfulness for themselves.

As mindfulness goes mainstream, it will start to reach unexpected aspects of our lives and interactions with others. Facebook chats may subtly change. Work related brainstorming may be informed by this new perspective. Our relationships with one another may start to shift. In most cases this will be a good thing, as we treat one another with more empathy we can better communicate and understand one another as well.

With the trend, though, will also be the rise of naysayers who see it as foreign or too religious to be introduced into the most basic of institutions—such as government or schools. This debate will continue through 2015, as will the ranks of believers who share their own transformational stories of how mindfulness has changed their lives already.

Who Should Use This Trend?

As mindfulness shifts from an individual aspiration to an institution-based philosophy, anyone responsible for training or learning programs in an organization or company should watch this trend with interest. It has the potential to impact consumer behavior in terms of how we shop and which companies we align ourselves with. It also will impact leadership and team management as the “softer side” of business becomes a focus area. A final audience that may see great value from this trend is anyone in an overworked position or seeking more balance from the things they do for work and their own ability to relax and enjoy their down time with family or alone.

How to Use This Trend

- ✓ **Start with short bursts of mindfulness** – Meditation and yoga can seem intimidating to start. It is not always clear what to do and we can't all hire private instructors or visit yoga studios consistently. The good news is there are more apps and tools like Headspace that can help you start slowly. Another technique gaining popularity is to intentionally take a pause between meetings or activities for a set period of time in silence to reset for the coming activities of the day.
- ✓ **Seek out mindful moments for bonding** – In every team there are activities that relate to your daily work and those that can build a team. Most everyone wants to be part of a great culture, but fostering that type of culture means offering teammates a chance to bond over something other than the work. Conferences (like Wisdom 2.0) or live events can be great ways to inspire this to happen. If members of a team can experience significant mindful or meditative moments together, they are far more likely to connect on a deeper level and build trust in one another.

Chapter 21



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The 2016 Perspective

One of the most popular ideas of the past year was inspired by Japanese organizational consultant Marie Kondo's translated book *The Life Changing Magic Of Tidying Up*. The short book sold more than 2 million copies worldwide and inspired thousands of "Kondos" to share their own photos of themselves using her principles to clean their houses and rooms. Her method, inspired by Eastern philosophy, was seen as a remedy for the chaos that results from accumulating too much "stuff." It was also yet another example of the sort of mindfulness that was once considered the foreign but has rapidly become commonplace.

The past year brought continued signs that this mindset is changing the way high profile business leaders think as well. Another story from Japan gaining international recognition was the unique management principles of 83 year old billionaire, Buddhist priest and entrepreneur Kazuo Inamori. After having built \$64 billion Japanese electronics giant

Kyocera Corp (now known as KDDI Corp), he took over the reigns at struggling Japan Airlines in 2010. The next year, he lifted it out of bankruptcy, turned its fortunes around and relisted it on the Tokyo stock exchange. What was his secret?

“Company leaders should seek to make all their employees happy, both materially and intellectually,” he told Bloomberg News in a recent interview. “If you want eggs, take care of the hen. If you bully or kill the hen, it’s not going to work.”

In another example of this growing focus on Mainstream Mindfulness, the high profile 2015 TED conference incorporated a branded experience from Delta Air Lines which aimed to bring mindfulness to life through an experience it called “Stillness In Motion.” The interactive exhibit allowed participants to enter a room where biometric sensors measured your heartbeat and created a calmer or clearer experience the more you relaxed. Ultimately, you were presented with a glowing orb with data on your lowest recorded heartbeat. Nearly half the Ted attendees visited the experience and shared it online.

The idea of mindfulness also inspired several emerging successes in the world of business, including luxury cosmetics brand Tatcha, a company founded by a Harvard MBA named Vicky Tsai after she encountered and had her skin transformed by the traditional beauty secrets of Geishas from Japan. Those insights led her to create a range of products that offered the same inspired treatments for women on the other side of the world.

Probably the quirkiest example from the past year that *Mainstream Mindfulness* has really taken off was the astronomical rise of adult coloring books as a way for those with overly stressed lives to enjoy a moment of quiet reflection and satisfaction filling in a sketched, often mandala shaped page with color. The craze even inspired Crayola to launch its own line of adult coloring books in late 2015 – along with crayons and colored pencils, of course.

Each of these examples inspired by traditions of mindfulness illustrate that the trend of merging Eastern philosophy with the Western lifestyle is continuing to drive new thinking and inspire unexpected new businesses – and this trend shows no signs of slowing down in 2016.

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