

FOLLOW US | | | | |

**Bringing home the**  ?

Let our unique **ValueMyCV** tool tell you what you should be earning. You might get a nice surprise.

 **adzuna**  
Your new job starts here

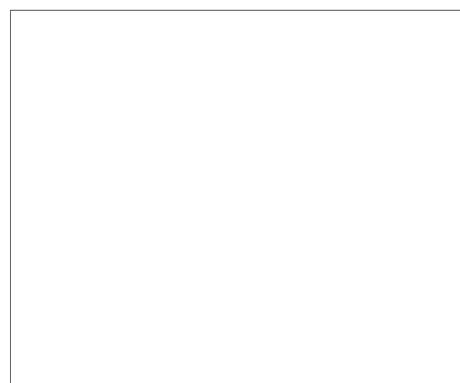
[Home](#) > [Management](#) > [Professional Development](#)

# Mindfulness in the workplace: have we had a gutful?

Nigel Bowen Dec 16 2015



SHARE



Advertisement

Serenity now: mindfulness is not as simple as doing a single meditation class. Photo: iStock

The news from the home of mindfulness – that's California, not the exotic east – is grim.

Both erstwhile true believers and long-time sceptics have begun questioning whether corporate mindfulness programs are unarguably A Good Thing.

---

#### SEE ALSO

[Can we treat employees like grown-ups?](#)

[The years are taking their toll. Now what?](#)

[Aussie grooming gear that's a cut above](#)

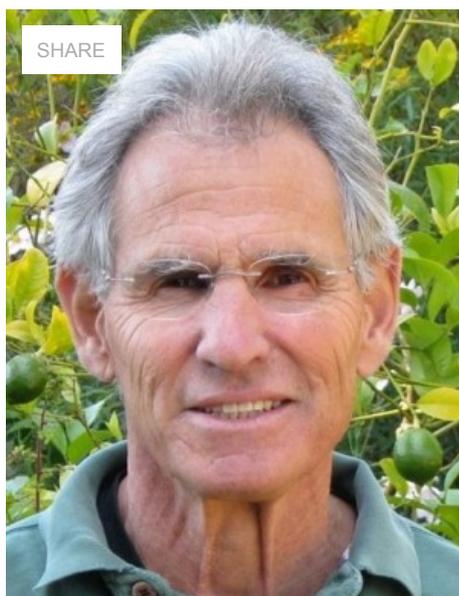
---

In the US, think pieces about the mindfulness backlash are now appearing in the same publications that five minutes ago were

breathlessly reporting on widespread calm, concentration, co-operation and lunchtime positive visualisation classes springing up at multi-nationals.

In the hope of saving HR departments any further expense, and long-suffering wage slaves from being forced to engage in Sufi dancing, please allow me to pile on.

Here are just some of the issues with ripping mindfulness away from its religious underpinnings and attempting to refashion it as a stress-reducing, productivity-increasing tool.



Mindfulness guru and molecular biologist Jon Kabat-Zinn. Photo: Twitter

## All in the mind

Mindfulness is hard work. All those scientific studies about meditation reducing anxiety, depression and stress and bolstering your focus, self-esteem and immune system are, on paper, accurate enough.

But there's a catch. Just like going to the gym or learning the piano, you've got to keep investing significant amounts of time and energy to see significant results. To enjoy any noticeable, ongoing benefit from meditation you'll probably need to commit at least 30 minutes a day, pretty much every day, *for the rest of your life*.

If you really want to dial up the serenity, you're going to have to attend long meditation retreats. There, you can look forward to getting up before dawn and spending the next 16-odd hours sitting cross-legged facing a wall.

And there will be no sex, social interaction, alcohol or even television or to distract you from your throbbing knees. Or mental states ranging from epic boredom, to distressing flashbacks, to long-suppressed anger.

## The other side

Once you process it all and come out the other side, you may achieve a profound tranquillity; maybe even enlightenment. But even in cultures suffused with Buddhism or Hinduism, there just aren't that many people interested in doing the introspective grunt

## Most Popular Articles



**Steve Jobs: an unconventional leader**



**Ten tips to negotiate a pay rise**



**You know you're middle-aged when ...**



**How to assemble a winning work look**

SPONSORED



**50 rules for doing business in Australia**



**Ten work-life hacks for smart travellers**

SPONSORED



**How to assemble a winning work look**

SPONSORED



**Ten suits that spell career success**

SPONSORED

work required for the imperturbability pay-off.

On the above point, it's worth noting the dearth of Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Singaporean, South Korean or Thai companies that have jumped on the mindfulness bandwagon. Could it be people in those countries see bringing mindfulness practices into the workplace as being as incongruous as westerners would find holding office prayer sessions to petition God for a good performance review and rising share price?

Mindfulness is bastardised Buddhism. Yes, I know that bouncy young woman from the People and Change department assured you mindfulness can be practised by people of all faiths and none. But here is its origin story.

## Prototype for peace

In the 1970s, an American molecular biologist called Jon Kabat-Zinn developed the prototypical mindfulness program and called it called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Though he downplayed its provenance, it was based on the meditation techniques he'd learned while studying at the feet of Buddhist teachers such as Thich Nhat Hahn.

To be fair to Kabat-Zinn, his program was originally developed with the entirely noble aim of easing the suffering of hospital patients in chronic pain.

Nonetheless, his admirable innovation opened the door to watered-down forms of Buddhist meditation - sorry, mindfulness - being embraced by, well, just about everyone.

It has now been taken up by demographics ranging from dieters seeking to be more conscious of emotional eating, to prisoners with anger management issues, to thrusting middle management types hoping to remain unflappable in the face of long hours, overflowing inboxes, impossible deadlines and office politics.

## Mind the risks

Earlier this year David Brendel, a high-profile executive coach and long-time mindfulness advocate, [penned an article](#) for the *Harvard Business Review* warning mindfulness wasn't all upside for corporations.

He reported that, "One of my clients spent so much time meditating and 'mindfully' accepting her life 'on its own terms' that she failed to confront underperforming workers ... she required significant reminders and reassurance from me that embracing Buddhist meditation does not entail tolerating sub-standard performance from her employees."

In that statement lies the inevitable collision between warm and

## In Pictures



### Success

#### The short man's guide to success

Stature shouldn't determine success, but all too often it's a very big deal indeed.



### Management

#### How you work is about to change

A new era dawns that will change everything about the way you do business.



### Professional Development

#### Think you're average? No, you're not

The danger in a stereotype is that no one ever conforms to it exactly.



### Leadership

#### What books are our top CEOs reading?

The cream of the 2015 leadership crop nominate the books that inspire them.

Advertisement

fuzzy mindfulness and cold, sharp corporate realities. There's now a burgeoning Mindfulness-Industrial complex made up of business school academics, psychologists, life coaches and self-help gurus.

SHARE

Its members make lots of money promising corporations they can help wring some extra productivity out of workforces by

Men's Style **Management** Fitness Self Luxury Cars Business Travel Watches & Jewellery Culture Food & Drink



Friends (at work) with benefits



The most awesome jobs in the world



Think you're average? No, you're not



Have we had a gutful of being mindful?

absenteeism, distractions and worker's comp stress claims.

Which is a realisation that can really upset your mental equilibrium if you contemplate it for too long.

**Do you practise mindfulness in the workplace? Has it improved your outlook or productivity?**

Family Q BBQ...	60"(150cm) U...	M30 Men's Sh...
Galaxy Tab A...	Cordless Slim...	DC45 Stick Va...

Like Page 30K likes

## Recommended



10 exercises to get great abs without sit-ups



The swimsuit trend that's also good for you

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD



Want to get a shredded eight pack? You should read this...

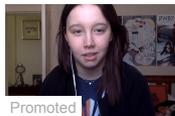


Mean machine: This top-of-the-line road bike is not for the...



Let's banish prudishness and start talking about our...

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD



Video: Meet six Year 12s preparing for exams

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY



Monk straps are the hottest trend in men's shoes



Using PowerPoint? Try these out instead

INTHEBLACK



Eight reasons to absolutely love getting older



How to pick shares

COMMSEC

powered by plista

## Comments

5 Comments

Sort by Oldest



Add a comment...

**Nathaniel Muller** · Worker at BIG Hearted YOGA Castlemaine

thank you nigel for getting to the heart of the problem with mindfulness - bastardised buddhism. i agree, the hard consistent work required for profound 'change' is beyond the premise of most mindfulness programs. they are aimed for short term and specific gains, not what meditation actually offers the novice prepared to put in the work. Thank you again.

Like · Reply · 2 · Dec 16, 2015 12:45pm

**David Turner** · Sydney, Australia

Can't say I agree with the author's interupation of mindfulness. This article seems to project the idea that mediation is mindfulness. Having taken part in a number of workplace wellness programs. The one element I got from all of them was to just be present in the moment. To consider what is happening around you and the things you really want to focus on. A practice which is important to everyone in business and life.

Like · Reply · 4 · Dec 16, 2015 1:16pm · Edited

**Annie Mari** · Sydney, Australia

ooh. Sound like someone has their cranky pants on. Would a bit of meditation help maybe?

Sure. Nothing is a cure-all but that doesn't make a bit of mindfulness bad. Being incorrectly marketed by people who have no idea of what meditation is about - sure that is a problem. BUT.... isn't there is a middle ground that will bring people who would never develop a full meditation pratice some benefit? Does it have to be either or? Can't it just be done better?

And yes, after 20 something years of meditating, (so I know what I difficult road it is) in addition to mindfulness I do lock myself... [See More](#)

Like · Reply · 5 · Dec 16, 2015 3:23pm

**Glaucio Alves** · Works at Tribunal de Justiça de São Paulo

Thank you for such a lucid comment Annemarie. You're right, there's nothing wrong taking a few minutes to sit and look inside even in the workplace. I'm not an experient mediator and there are days when I just set 10 minutes apart to focus on my breath and my body and sensations in general, and that makes me feel calmer and better. Simple as that. Of course my goal is not to be as enlightened as a Buddha: I set apart that few minutes because I know they're good for me. I don't get how someone may find something wrong with that.

Like · Reply · 2 · Dec 16, 2015 9:37pm

**James Rochester**

There is 100% acceptance of the need to exercise or maintain the body. By contrast, our poor minds are mostly neglected and this leads to depression, anxiety, and stress which has been shown to lead to more serious health problems, including cancer.

Deep down, everyone knows that we could benefit from being calmer and repsonding more wisely to stress and difficult situations. Mindfulness shows you how to do this. Like anything, the more you practice and the deeper you do it, the better you get.

Also, there's a huge amount of research evidence about the health benefits of mindfulness meditati... [See More](#)

Like · Reply · 2 · Dec 16, 2015 10:38pm · Edited

**Elena Gold** · Works at MarkLogic

sounds like a war on mindfulness and one of its tools, meditation. maybe it is not the best tool to achieve productivity in a corporate or any environments where actions leading to measurable results are valued and required. maybe it is not the only tool. but it may certainly help hone concentration, ability to discern and think critically, ability to see/process reality with a sharp yet accepting and open mind, it also opens the soul channel that connects one to life. the measurable outcome for corporations? as a result of meditating and some spiritual training, one may become a more engaged ... [See More](#)

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · Dec 17, 2015 11:41am

 Facebook Comments Plugin

FOLLOW US

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER

Explore all our sites covering travel, food, fashion and lifestyle

[About us](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Newsletter](#) | [Advertise with us](#) | [Privacy statement](#) | [Terms of use](#) | [Sitemap](#)

| [The Sydney Morning Herald](#) | [The Age](#) | [Drive](#) | [Essential Kids](#) | [Essential Baby](#) | [Domain](#) | [APM](#) | [RSVP](#) | [Adzuna](#) | [Weatherzone](#) | [Commercial Real Estate](#)

Copyright © 2016 Fairfax Media