

Meditating alone won't make you mindful

Mindfulness is on everyone's lips, and it is gaining more ground in the business world. That's good. In most cases mindfulness is associated with meditation practice and is taught by it. That's not wrong, neither – it's just too absolute in my opinion. In the age of commerce you can find value propositions that are so absurd that the fact that these offerings find buyers can really make you worry: „Learn composure and inner calmness“, „resolve inner blockades“ and so on, and all in one day – all that's missing is the meditation playmate. Don't believe a word. Two things are clear:

Putting mindfulness quickly in your toolbox and using it when needed won't work. You can get to know mindfulness in tow hours, in a day, or in five days, no problem. But that doesn't mean you have „learned“ mindfulness. It is accessible only by constant practice over a longer period. Some things just can't be accelerated. If you look for an example, just watch the Monty Python sketch about summarizing Marcel Proust in thirty seconds. Short formats for getting a glimpse at mindfulness absolutely do make sense, as long as you aren't promised instant enlightenment. Such a first glimpse can help you determine wheather you feel like going more into it or not.

Using meditation as a pure technique and waiting for it to make you a better person – won't work either. Mindfulness appears only when a suitable technique is combined with a corresponding stance and value system. Meditation as a pure technique will help you to cope with stress – no less, but no more, either. Meditation will teach you decide where you focus your attention, and to pause the constant chatter in your head. What you do with the space that is then created is a completely other story. At this point active transfer work is needed. Maybe you even need the company of somebody who ideally is a few steps ahead of you on this path.

Quite a common version time and again: meditation as a decoration medal, as one more confirmation of one's greatness („look how mindful I am“) – just to be back at the office next day, ploughing through the organisation like a steamroller. The inner reactions of your environment will most likely be somewhat like „that was still missing...“. As a rule of thumb: people fostering true mindfulness don't make a big deal fuss about it.

Mindfulness can pave the way for personal growth in an excellent way. It can allow you to develop an attitude based on acceptance and appreciation and a quality of connectedness – both towards yourself and towards you fellow people, at the same time. That makes it different from egocentricity. And that is of inestimable value for leaders, when it comes to reaching other people at the emotional level, staying firm when facing temptations of power and of short term profit, making prudent decisions, and maintaining personal integrity in highly demanding and complex situations.

And last but not least, mindfulness does not necessarily equate meditation. Combined with constant work on your personal growth with a corresponding attitude, there are other ways to access mindfulness: Aikido offers an access, the Feldenkrais method, a bodily approach basically relying on physics, offers an access – and maybe you might experience mindfulness when you go fishing, who knows.

Mindfulness? Yes, it is worth the effort, both on a personal level and on management level: dropping absence rates, better collaboration, more effective leadership, higher innovation rate are some things that can result from it. Just don't take the lurid short version – it is worthwhile to keep to it.