

LEADERSHIP BEGINS IN THE MIND

Today we need a new kind of leader. As we enter the fourth Industrial Revolution, we need leaders with the wisdom to address new ways of working, to make positive change in the world.

One of the key premises of Mindfulness-Based Leadership is that leadership is about *being*, not *becoming*. We make a bigger difference by looking within ourselves than by striving to become what we are not. While mindfulness has often been perceived as a solitary activity, this book reveals how it is applicable on a wider scale – in teams, businesses and the community at large, where action and performance are important objectives for leaders.

Mindfulness expert Kathirasan K presents here a unique 8-week course on Mindfulness-Based Leadership. Each day introduces a new facet of mindfulness, illuminating the ways in which you can unlock the leader within yourself.



Kathirasan K is an established mindfulness teacher with a background in organisational development, leadership and education. He is Director of the Centre for Mindfulness, which delivers tailored training programmes to individuals and organisations.

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KATHIRASAN K MINDFULNESS-BASED LEADERSHIP

Marshall Cavendish Business 

KATHIRASAN K

Author of Mindfulness in 8 Days



MINDFULNESS BASED LEADERSHIP

THE ART OF *BEING* A LEADER
– NOT *BECOMING* ONE

For Review Only

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KATHIRASAN K

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INTRODUCTION

This is a book on mindfulness. Yes, another one.

I am certain that this book you are holding is going to add to the growing list of mindfulness and mindfulness-based business books that have become very popular in recent years. Yet I have good reasons for writing this book, and I believe you have good reasons to read it, whether you are new to mindfulness, or have already explored some of the existing literature.

The world today is filled with uncertainty. We are on the cusp of a fourth industrial revolution, which will see the merging of physical, digital and biological worlds. Businesses, organisations and nation-states are struggling to keep up with the rapid changes taking place as we accelerate towards this unknown frontier.

In the world of work, as Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z enter the global workforce, under the charge of leaders belonging to older generations, we are witnessing a clash in working styles and beliefs about leadership. A shift in the way leaders lead is urgently needed.

This book addresses that need, by looking at Mindfulness-Based Leadership as a wisdom that can permeate any leadership style,

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model or belief. At its core is the belief that we create value from within, rather than by forcing you to change your leadership style or beliefs. This is what I call the art of *being* a leader, not *becoming* one.

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

I would like to begin by telling you a bit about myself. On the one hand, I hope that by sharing my journey, you will find points of connection that will help you better appreciate the value of what I have written. But more importantly, I want you to meet me as a person – as a fellow human being – rather than as a teacher, mentor, coach or leadership consultant.

I was born in Singapore and grew up in a small family in a two-bedroom apartment. In the early years, it was just my dad, my mom, my sister, and me. A little later, my parents decided to foster a distant relative of my dad's who had been orphaned as a very young child.

From an early age, my parents drilled into me the image of success as being either an engineer, a doctor or a lawyer. But what I wanted to be was a fighter pilot. I collected the military magazines that my father brought home from his work at the British Navy's base in Singapore. At age 12, I could tell you the maximum speed of the F-14 Tomcat, the F-15 Eagle and the famous Blackbird.

And then, when I was 13, my dad passed away suddenly. His death affected my family terribly. Those were the dark ages of my life.

Despite that, I managed to pass my high school exams and joined a tertiary institution, where I spent three years, obtaining a diploma in electrical engineering.

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I then enlisted in National Service. After serving the mandatory 30 months, I started my first job – in the military. I never became the engineer, lawyer or doctor that my parents always wanted me to be.

Nine months into the job, however, I realised that I could not fit in. This was in 1996, and by then I had already encountered mindfulness philosophies (not the practices) two years prior. These had a tremendous effect on me, especially in my worldview and how I looked at people. The culture of the military is one in which hierarchy and authority are key to its effectiveness. I was a non-uniformed officer, equivalent in rank to a lieutenant, but I could not deal with the fact that respect and value were given to my decisions just because I was an officer. I felt that respect should be earned. My views have changed in some ways since, but at that time, I could not reconcile this apparent conflict. After working in the job for close to a year, I left.

I joined a relatively young IT company as a facilities manager. This was probably the most rewarding experience of my career, and I stayed on at the company for more than a decade. During this time, I watched the company grow from 700 staff to around 10,000. The external stakeholders I worked with included successful business owners, startups and small-medium enterprises from diverse industries. I got to work directly with the senior leaders of these companies.

The most important thing I learned in this role was the value of relationships. A healthy relationship is vital to project management and leadership, and a healthy relationship requires adaptation to whatever situations arise. While my preferred style of leadership was egalitarian, there were times I had to temporarily play the role of an authoritarian, when directive behaviour was called for.

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Thereafter I made another switch, this time to join one of Singapore's largest telco companies, where I had the opportunity to lead projects that involved a larger pool of stakeholders. Again, I was working with senior leaders and this time working across borders with colleagues in different time zones. This was my last stint in the business world as an employee.

Having worked in three large organisations and having received a stable income all my life, I started to ask myself if there was some kind of meaning that I could create in my work. I decided to take a sabbatical. This was the beginning of a new stage for me, where my personal life and professional life started to become seamless, which in itself was a great challenge and lesson in mindfulness.

I went back to school to pursue an MBA. At the same time, I started a business with two partners that dealt with Culture Transformation, Organisational Development Consulting and Leadership Development. Soon after, I started the Centre for Mindfulness. I also started working with a global company based out of the USA, delivering performance solutions in the Asia Pacific and Europe-Middle East.

My current businesses and engagements allow me to travel around the world meeting people of different cultures, values, habits and behaviours. The first time I travelled out of Singapore as an adult was in my mid-twenties. My family could not afford holidays to far-away destinations when I was a kid. But since 1998, I have been travelling extensively in the Asia Pacific and the Western hemisphere, primarily for business. These travels give me countless opportunities to develop my cross-cultural competencies.

Alongside all this work, I have volunteered in a local organisation that serves the needs of the community economically, emotionally and spiritually. I started out as a youth volunteer and eventually

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became a board member, steering the organisation's vision and mission for about ten years, before retiring from it. At the time of my departure, the organisation had over 500 members and 100 volunteers. I learned much about the spirit of volunteerism, leadership, management, finances and more importantly the needs of people in different strata of society.

All this while, I have been continuously engaged in learning about mindfulness philosophies. In 1999, I met my teacher for the first time and with him I spent six years studying and learning through source texts in Sanskrit. I started teaching mindfulness as a volunteer at the age of 25 and have never stopped since.

THE ROLES WE PLAY

From my story, and your own experience, it is clear we all play multiple roles in our lives – some sequentially, some concurrently. The mindfulness journey begins with recognising the nature of these roles, and appreciating how they provide clarity in being a mindful leader.

Let me draw on my own life again to illustrate this point. The roles I have taken on have helped me in shaping my purpose.

The first role was being a lecturer at a local tertiary institution. In this role, I met budding young minds, usually in their late teens, who were on the cusp of embarking on their careers. I spent almost a year coaching them in preparation for working life. A little later, I taught them another important subject: contemporary world issues. This class allowed me to delve deep into issues like climate change, politics, war, poverty, discrimination and many others that are relevant to the whole of humanity. While I had been aware of these

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problems prior to teaching the classes, I was not awakened to their urgency until I saw the statistics, research findings and commentaries. This was the first role that inspired me to write this book.

The second role was as a leadership trainer and consultant. I worked with primarily large organisations and MNCs in the area of people development. I had the opportunity to work with supervisors, managers and leaders. One thing that occurred to me was that all of them played similar roles yet they were different. In particular, I noticed that managers and supervisors in large organisations repeatedly felt that they had less control in shaping the organisation's culture. The leaders, on the other hand, expected change in the culture from the managers and supervisors. While the intention was the same, the perceptions were quite different. These were the very feelings I had experienced during my years of employment. Trust appeared to be generally low in such situations. Diverse research and survey findings repeatedly state the need for authenticity, trust building, ethical behaviour and a positive focus in leadership. My experiences and interaction with a diverse range of stakeholders repeatedly confirmed these needs.

The third role was working in "dead-end" jobs. During my school vacations I took on a series of jobs so that I could buy things I wanted without depending on my mother, who was widowed by then. My first job was as a production line worker in a factory that manufactured cans for aerated drinks. Later I worked in a moving services company. Then I worked in another factory, doing the night shift from 11 pm till 7 am. It was one of most routine and boring jobs I've ever done. I discovered with a shock that there were many co-workers who lived in Malaysia and crossed the border each day to come to work. They spent five hours commuting daily and a few of them worked 12-hour shifts for six days a week. During my tertiary education days, I worked as a technician during the weekends

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for a mobile disco company, where I set up and dismantled equipment for events.

These experiences allowed me to gain insights on the lives of people that we often see as the "others". We do not know what it's like to stand in their shoes, or work with them shoulder to shoulder. I was fortunate to have that experience, which helped shape my leadership and management skills.

The fourth role is that of a mindfulness teacher and practitioner, which really inspired me to look at leadership from a mindfulness perspective. I discovered mindfulness through spirituality, but as I practised it, I realised that it can be presented stripped of its religious and spiritual roots. It has gained greater credibility with scientific research, and offers benefits to anyone, regardless of their religious or philosophical subscription. I still continue to this day living my life with awareness, attention and acceptance to the best I can. I don't presume to have achieved mastery; rather, I consider myself always a work in progress.

One other role in my life has led me to this point, and that is as an inter-faith facilitator in a multi-cultural society. In Singapore, we experience the best that many cultures and religions have to offer, from different languages to racial identities to religious celebrations, etc. Growing up in Singapore allowed me to experience diversity, but it was mindfulness that allowed me to accept diversity. I do not believe that one culture is "better" than another. Instead I take the position that there is only a better response in every situation. Accept the current reality and respond mindfully – that is what brings out the best in us.

Giving you this background allows me to convey one important fact about myself, which is that I am ordinary. As I practised mindfulness,

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I did not become extraordinary; in fact it became clearer to me that I am indeed ordinary. Mindfulness and Mindfulness-Based Leadership are for ordinary people who wish to be authentic and lead people in a way that brings the core of our being into our transactions with the world.

Bear in mind, finally, that while you take on all sorts of roles in life – sometimes two or more at the same time – the fact remains that you are a single person playing multiple roles. One thing connects all these roles, and that is the person that you are. That is your *being*. So be very clear of what you want first as a human being before looking at the demands of the various roles that you play.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

In this book, I would like to invite you to re-examine your assumptions about leadership through the lens of mindfulness.

In the first part of the book, we will start by going into what Mindfulness-Based Leadership is and the need for it at this point in our history. We will look at six domains that have a bearing on mindfulness – namely Awareness, Attention, Acceptance, Action, Attitude and Wisdom – and how they interact with one another. This will form the foundation of your understanding of what makes a mindful leader.

The second part of book presents 56 mindfulness reflections and eight mindfulness practices for leaders. This will take eight weeks to complete if you choose to read one reflection a day. Each reflection invites you to savour one particular facet of MBL. Like a mirror, your mind naturally reflects on the ideas in front of it with curiosity and non-judgement.

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You may find that the tone and approach of this book is quite different from other books on leadership, business or self-development. The book is structured and at the same time loose. This is deliberate. I am a man of science and a man of arts. I am a musician and I enjoy it when I write a tune and am not asked why. At the same time, I enjoy diving into the depths of logic and rationality. I have used this style to show you into the world of MBL.

At some points, you may find me a little contradictory or repetitive, but rest assured that the contradictions are necessary to counter the potential trap of polarisation. In many philosophical traditions, it is recognised that wisdom can only be discovered through paradox. The same belief underlies the appreciation and practice of mindfulness.

My purpose in this book is to present information to your awareness. And to let your mind transform on its own. This allows the *doing* to arise from your *being*, with a focus on the being of leadership. As you read this book, let go of your predictable thoughts, your ingrained behaviour, and your anxieties about *becoming* a leader. What you need to do is just read. Read with an acceptance of whatever the outcome may be. That is the best thing you can do for yourself.

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PART I

THE CASE FOR MINDFUL LEADERSHIP

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness has been defined variously since days of yore. For the purposes of this book, I am confining myself to modern definitions that have been used by secular practitioners. According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, the father of the modern secular mindfulness movement:

Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment by moment.

In a review of various definitions of mindfulness, a group of researchers defined it as:

Broadly conceptualized... a kind of nonelaborative, nonjudgmental, present-centred awareness in which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is.

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Jeffery Martin, who researches personal well-being and transformation, defines it as:

A state of psychological freedom that occurs when attention remains quiet and limber, without attachment to any particular point of view.

Based on the three definitions above, one can deduce that mindfulness is both a practice and a trait. As a practice, mindfulness is essentially mental or brain training. This refers to the various types of practices such as awareness-of-breath meditation, body scan, sitting meditation, coping breathing space, mindful eating, walking meditation, etc.

Mindfulness as a trait refers to the effortless mastery of being anchored in a state of awareness constantly. This is when mindfulness becomes a habit, pervading our thoughts, emotions and behaviour, becoming our mental disposition. Also known as dispositional mindfulness or trait mindfulness, it is the outcome of sustained mindfulness practices. One leads to the other.

Mindfulness has become very popular today due to the experiments conducted by Jon Kabat-Zinn in the late 1970s at the University of Massachusetts. His work gave birth to Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), the first evidence-based mindfulness programme. Further studies have confirmed that mindfulness can indeed bring very positive results such as reduced stress, emotional regulation, performance enhancement, increase in positive mental states, reduced depression, enhanced resilience, etc.

Since then, other variants of mindfulness interventions have emerged, such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT),

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Mindful Weight loss, Mindful Education, Mindful Leadership, and Mindfulness-Based Strengths Practice (MBSP), among many others. What was originally an intervention to reduce stress and chronic pain has now led to a second generation of mindfulness movements where the focus is on enhancing personal performance and effectiveness.

I call this Mindfulness 2.0, a new version of mindfulness that leverages the strengths we already possess – rather than merely treating our problems – to enter into the world of mindfulness.

SECULAR VS RELIGIOUS MINDFULNESS

As you may know, mindfulness does have religious roots. It was born as a soteriological practice (i.e., concerned with salvation) in ancient South Asia, and was primarily practised by people of three religions, namely Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. It eventually spread across Asia, evolving along the way.

Contemplative practices are not unique to these three religions. Indeed they are found in all major religions of the world, in various forms. These can collectively be referred to as religious mindfulness. One distinguishing feature of religious mindfulness practices is that they are aimed at a religious goal built around religious beliefs.

The second school of mindfulness is called secular mindfulness, which is the focus of this book. In contrast to the religious school, secular mindfulness focuses on mental and physical health, and more importantly, well-being. This is the key differentiator.

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A third school of mindfulness is "McMindfulness" – a much-commoditised version of mindfulness that has become popular by riding on the bandwagon of the secular mindfulness movement. I define McMindfulness as a phenomenon where teaching mindfulness is more important than practising it. The need to propagate mindfulness by teachers who themselves are yet to embody it gives birth to McMindfulness.

MINDFULNESS - BASED LEADERSHIP (M B L)

Mindfulness-Based Leadership (MBL) leverages the practices and insights gained from the secular mindfulness movement to use it as an effective tool in leadership. Importantly, MBL allows you to develop yourself as a leader *and* as a human being.

Today, in a rapidly changing world, we need a new type of leader. Especially now that we are entering the fourth industrial revolution, we need a different type of leadership wisdom to address unique needs. I view MBL as one of the effective ways to develop our competencies in this new and ever-changing world. In this book I will use the term "mindful leader" to refer to a practitioner of MBL.

One of the key premises on which MBL is built is that leadership is a *role*, not you. You have taken up the role of the leader voluntarily or involuntarily. Therefore, your identification with the role of the leader is artificial to your being and purely for the sake of meeting a functional need. I will expand on this as we go along.

Leadership, being a role, sometimes does come to an end. Sometimes it transforms into another role. I have worked with retired diplomats and academic professors who were unable to let go of

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their roles although their roles had officially ended. Like a marriage that ends by choice or naturally through the demise of a partner, leadership too has an expiry date. Recognising this fact is itself a great hallmark of wisdom.

I see leaders as a microcosm of a larger culture or sub-culture. People tend to follow and emulate the way their leaders think, speak and act. Hence, leadership has a significant impact on organisational culture. Mindfulness helps leaders to constantly be aware of the culture they envision and to align their thoughts, words and actions with that desired culture.

LEADERSHIP BELIEFS, IDEAS AND TRENDS

Leadership is not something new to humanity. Our earliest ideas about leadership go as far back as when we lived in tribes. There would usually be a tribal leader or village leader, who would usually be an elder or the most powerful member in the community. Over time, this structure slowly grew into a monarchy, where a king or queen had all powers. Their power was absolute. Control of the military and defences came under their command too.

As society evolved, another type of leader started to hold power in a state or country. These were the merchants, who paid taxes and ensured that society thrived. These were the business leaders.

As political systems changed around the world, politicians who were voted into office took over the role of the monarch. They either replaced the monarchical system or operated alongside it. This introduced yet another type of leadership.

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All this while, there would also be religious founders, whose followers span political borders, and whose leadership is followed till today.

While leadership is nothing new, it is a subject that is increasingly being studied. There have been researchers attempting to correlate leadership with religion, politics, gender, race, political systems, height, weight, colour, age, etc. Everybody seems to be trying to answer the question: are leaders made or born?

The last two decades, in particular, have given birth to many new theories and models of leadership.

One result is that we are in the business of making leadership another business. And all of them tend to present a model of leadership that is defined by very senior leaders or sometimes charismatic ones. But leadership does not belong to the sphere of senior and middle management. It belongs to anyone who has a person following her or him.

When I worked with supervisors in an engineering environment, I found that modern ideas of leadership frequently failed. Most models assume a high degree of individual autonomy, but this may not be present in some cultures or settings. The Western world is known to be more individualist, while Eastern cultures tend to be more collectivist. Broad leadership prescriptions that neglect these variables simply do not work.

Another trend in leadership theories today is the attempt to paint a picture of leadership through the eyes of the followers. This approach often makes the leader play the role of support-giver, nurturer, or family member who cares for and loves his employees.

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The followers, on their part, tend to seek a leader based on what they like and dislike.

These ideas unfortunately mix up identities and blur the lines that we have drawn for the sake of social conventions. A good example would be the role of the secretary. Here is an apt quote from the TV series *Mad Men*: "He may act like he wants a secretary, but most of the time they're looking for something between a mother and a waitress." The things we do may overlap with other roles but that does not mean that the role gets transformed. We cannot be treating the secretary as our mother because she makes coffee in the morning every day.

Conventional leadership theories also make it seem as if leadership is only meant for the rare few who are charismatic and self-actualised. Some even allude to leaders or heroes like Achilles, Siegfried and Roland – all of them mythical! We perpetuate this fantasy by expecting leaders to become these heroes. This is a completely unrealistic expectation. You are bound to be disappointed and frustrated if you compare yourself against "superheroes". Such ideas about leadership lead to self-judgment when you fail and to a certain form of narcissism.

Leadership is not something fantastic. Rather it is about being effective in delivering what needs to be delivered and perhaps exceeding it. To accomplish this, you do not have to be self-actualised or charismatic or superhuman. You just have to be yourself, an ordinary human being paying attention to the essentials.

The other tendency in "great stories" about leadership and successes is that they are written in reverse. We love to create solutions and systems out of our life experiences by looking at them

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backwards, in retrospect. And then we prescribe the solutions forwards to the world.

This approach leads to the assumption that we can control results with certainty. It also assumes that the environment we operate in does not change over time. It is quite a feat to predict success with a formula. It is easier to come up with the "whys" and the "hows" *after* securing victory. Because you can then retrace the steps you took and write a wonderful account of it. As with so many things, this tendency is simply human – a point that has been echoed by Daniel Kahneman, the Nobel-winning psychologist, in his book *Thinking Fast and Slow*.

I wish we studied the predictability of success more than trying to reverse-engineer it. I have yet to meet a successful businessman who learnt it all from books. In fact, wisdom informs us that by the time you read a book about how to be successful and try to replicate every step of the author's prescription, the time and environment would have changed. This is the pitfall of trying to be a successful leader by reverse-engineering.

With technology changing at an ever-faster rate and the advent of so many "disruptive" innovations, this point has never been more relevant.

One aspect of life that has seen enormous changes is the blurring of the line between business and personal life. Through social media and pervasive high-speed internet, businesses have entered into the most private spaces of our life. They are redefining how we consume information, how we see ourselves, how we relate to the people around us. I do not view this as something unfortunate, but it is definitely changing the way we live.

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MINDFULNESS AND BUSINESS

There has always been a perceived tension between mindfulness and business drive. Focusing on the present moment and reducing one's reactivity could be viewed as counterproductive to ambition.

Indeed, I know some mindfulness practitioners who have developed a distaste for profit and for being driven. There is a tendency for such people to focus on promoting the virtues of positivity, happiness and well-being while shying away from addressing questions of "success" and business drive. This perception creates an opposition between the two worlds.

This is not something new. The ancient practitioners of mindfulness were monks, renunciates, anchorites and itinerant ascetics. I call people with such tendencies "contemplatives". Edwin Bryant, a professor of Indology, has found that contemplative practitioners since 3000 years ago have always been challenging new technologies of exploitation, and shunning the life of securing and preserving wealth.

Mindfulness reconciles this apparent incompatibility by balancing one's drive with wholesome action. We often tend to view results in an "ends justify the means" fashion. Mindfulness regulates this view by allowing one to focus on well-being and the ethics behind the means. As a result, decision-making becomes clearer, more ethically informed, less reactive or impulsive, and hence more sound for business.

So what we need is not to convert people who focus on business growth and profitability into permanent navel-gazers. Rather, we need to meet them in their own space to inspire a certain wholesomeness in the way they view the world.

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One of the strengths of MBL is its ability to bring self and organisational goals into balance. There should therefore be no fear that MBL will displace the profitability of a business, as a mindful leader's intention is very clear: to create sustainable results. This balance can be likened to the balance between the rational and emotional sides of the brain.

For this to happen, we need to recognise ourselves for what we are. That's what is going to help us be an effective, mindful leader. Each one of us is unique and we should never strive to be the same. We may seek the same things – happiness, enjoyment, autonomy, security – but we seek them differently. And that is what makes the world beautiful. Mindfulness makes this vision of seeing unity in diversity possible. MBL paves way to such a realisation.

THE DARK SIDE

More than ever, now is the time for a leadership based on mindfulness. It is not that the world was perfect in the past, but the problems that humanity suffers from today stand to be ameliorated as never before through the application of mindfulness. In particular, we are experiencing unprecedented disruption and fragmentation in our lives, our societies and the environment.

In the following pages, I want to look at some of these problems we are facing, and explore how a mindful leader can respond to them in a manner that leads us towards what I call wholesomeness.

Stress

Technological progress, instead of reducing stress by making life easier, has increased stress by making us dependent on technology.

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With constant internet connectivity and social media access, we have become addicted to our digital devices.

This "digital stress" affects people of all ages, but the younger generation appears to suffer the worst. In research done by the American Psychological Association in 2015, it was found that Millennials and Generation X in the US were the most stressed demographic group.

In the workplace, both leaders and followers experience high stress. Leaders or managers with limited control, especially, have been found to be under more stress. A leader's behaviour also significantly influences the level of stress experienced by his subordinates.

Stress affects different personality types in different ways. Type A leaders – driven, competitive and time-sensitive – appear to experience more stress than Type B leaders, who are typically calm, stable and reflective. This does not mean, though, that a Type A leader should try and become a Type B, or that Type B leaders are never stressed.

Stress has always been something that mindfulness addresses. The first wave of secular mindfulness teachings was explicitly directed at reducing stress – the MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) programme developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn was instrumental in popularising mindfulness.

My interest, however, is in helping you *prevent* stress instead of mitigating it. There is an additional value in stepping into the world of mindfulness not from a debilitated state but from a state of positive health and performance. It is from this state that we can take the next step in creating positive change within and without.

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VALUES

There are a few fundamental values that I consider very important for a leader. The first of these is truth. Truth is always a statement of fact. And facts create knowledge in the minds of listeners. Unless we see the connection between truth and knowledge, we may not see the value of truth and of expressing truth.

Sometimes the truth we need to communicate to our team members can be a hard one to take. In such situations, discretion is required. For example, organisations that are planning to downsize usually have to retrench some of their staff. Unfortunately, they tend to keep the news under wraps until the axe falls, leaving employees mired in anxiety, doubt and confusion.

Imagine if instead of this practice, organisations acted with truthfulness and transparency. There is a good chance that by engaging the whole organisation in sharing responsibility, we might inspire collective innovation and voluntary efforts to save the company. One of the best practices in downsizing, according to Kim Cameron of the Ross School of Business (University of Michigan), is to look at staff as assets and not to treat downsizing as a threat. This is consistent with the spirit of MBL – approaches such as this come from a place of truth-sharing and values.

Next comes a value that makes truth possible, and that is communication. A leader's ability to keep his team members informed is very important. The busyness of our work can sometimes make this a low priority, but just as the best marriages are built on non-judgment and respectful communication, likewise the integrity of a leader-member relationship depends very much on the same

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conditions. The effect of this, over the long-term, is a deep level of trust between leaders and their team.

What if a leader's values are not aligned with those of his team members? This can create challenges. Most often, what happens is that the leader's values take precedence. Because of this, some members gradually lose their sense of belonging and ownership, because they feel their values are not considered important. Other team members may adopt the leader's values unthinkingly, eventually morphing into clones of the leader. In such situations, it is important to go back to the fundamental values of truth and transparency. Use these fundamentals as your basis for establishing the team's collective values.

Inquiry

1. What are the values of my team members? Have I asked this question to my team?
2. How open can I become with my team members? Can I communicate in a timely and truthful manner?

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INADEQUACY

In mindfulness, the opposite of wholeness is the feeling of inadequacy. We are naturally disposed to feeling inadequate because we are always in a state of "need" with regard to health, wealth and knowledge. That is the nature of our body-sense-mind complex.

As children, we first experienced our inadequacy when our parents sent us to school because we needed knowledge. We went there to acquire knowledge. As we grew up, we felt inadequate socially

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because we did not have friends and thus went about forming a network of friends to give us support. In the workplace, we feel inadequate when we are unable to meet targets, which seem to get more unattainable each year.

In leadership, feelings of inadequacy can limit our effectiveness. We go through an inner battle with self-judgment, feeling ourselves incompetent or not good enough for our role. These thoughts lead to stress, anxiety and unhappiness. As a result, our performance is adversely affected.

The thing to remember about inadequacy, however, is that it only pertains to a specific domain. For example, I may be in need of negotiation skills – this makes me inadequate in that area, but in that area only. You cannot be inadequate *as a person*. So don't let any sense of inadequacy in a specific area become pervasive to the point where you feel small as a person.

The pervasiveness of our sense of inadequacy largely depends on how much value we have given to judgments about us by the external world as well as our self-judgment. When someone tells me that I am an irresponsible leader, it is actually a piece of information. But my inner sense of pervasive inadequacy quickly turns it into self-judgment, which creates self-talk statements such as "I am a useless manager" or "Nobody likes me in my team".

Leaders with a pervasive sense of inadequacy sometimes use their power to compensate for it. This makes their team members compliant, which gives the leaders a sense of adequacy in having control over others, which they equate with leadership.

For us to move away from such behaviour, self-awareness is required. This is where mindfulness comes in. It helps us to pierce

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through the smoke to see reality as it is, and to disassociate identities associated with self-judgments.

Inquiry

1. What are the areas of my leadership where I have noticed my limitations? Am I able to accept them?
2. What are the situations in which I have used my power and control to get things done?

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HABITS AND ADDICTIONS

We are creatures of habit. Psychologists tell us that most of our habits form during childhood and continue to rule a big part of our behaviour, including our leadership behaviour. Say I was an unhappy child who threw a tantrum whenever faced with a problem, then as a leader I might demonstrate this same behaviour in work situations. I might get angry and lash out at others when things don't go my way. In short, we bring our childhood habits to work!

One specific habit that we can get locked into is addiction to success. This happens when we get so used to success and perfection that we cannot accept "falling short" or having to let go of a job title which once gave us power and status. This addiction to success can become pathological if not noticed and managed.

Early in my career, I knew a senior finance professional who committed suicide because he was laid off. It appeared that his suicide was not due to his loss of job, as might be expected, but the loss of identity. He had come to have an unhealthy reliance on his job to give him a sense of identity and achievement.

WEEK 6 MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

THREE-MINUTE COPING BREATHING SPACE

Purpose

This exercise helps you step out of "autopilot" mode and bring yourself into the awareness of the present moment. It is especially valuable when your thoughts are moving in a negative direction.

Method

1. AWARENESS

- Adopt a comfortable standing posture, keeping your body relaxed.
- Become aware of your body and the surface on which you are standing.
- Then ask yourself:
- What is my experience right now in my thoughts?
- Acknowledge thoughts as mental events.
- What am I feeling?
- What are some bodily sensations?
- Acknowledge and accept your experience.

2. BREATHING

- Gently redirect your full attention to breathing.
- Notice the belly rising and falling with every breath.

3. CONSCIOUS EXPANSION

- Expand the field of your awareness around your breathing.
- Include the sense of the body as a whole, your posture, and facial expression.

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COMFORT

As leaders, we have to get used to being comfortable doing the uncomfortable. Comfort is linked to what we like, familiarity and our habits – therefore, being comfortable is not necessarily a good thing for leaders of teams and organisations.

The pitfall of comfort is that it assumes that things will always remain the same. But it is in the nature of things to change. Hence, it behoves us to be always receptive to doing the uncomfortable.

We are usually at our best when things go as we expected. But when things go south, we get unsettled. The test of leadership is not when times are great but when the going gets tough. That is when we recognise the nature of our mind, values and wisdom. Comfort and discomfort can be great teachers.

When we are comfortable for too long, it could be a sign that the environment is stagnating – or we are stagnating – and radical change will soon take place. Leaders of companies that have been successful over a length of time tend to review their strategy periodically. We should similarly take stock of our comforts and discomforts regularly, and adjust ourselves accordingly.

Inquiry

1. How do I behave in uncomfortable situations?
2. What are the things that make me uncomfortable?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kathirasan K is an established mindfulness teacher and practitioner, with a background in contemplative practices, philosophy, organisational development, leadership and education. He holds an MBA from the University of Wolverhampton and is Director of the Centre for Mindfulness, which organises courses, talks and workshops on mindfulness; delivers tailored training programmes to MNCs, government agencies and educational institutions; and conducts mindfulness teacher training. His first book, *Mindfulness in 8 Days: How to Find Inner Peace in a World of Stress and Anxiety*, was published by Marshall Cavendish Editions in 2017.