

Creating a Culture of Mindfulness at Work

Summary Report

AUGUST 17–19, 2018

This document captures key questions and insights that arose during a weekend deep dive retreat hosted by Mindful Leader and the Garrison Institute in August 2018. The participants were all internal champions of mindfulness within medium to large organizations (100+ employees). Our objective was to provide a forum where these peers could share best practices and lessons learned, bond, and find meaningful ways to support the continued growth of mindfulness in America.

Being an internal champion of mindfulness at a large organization can be a challenging (and sometimes lonely) job. It's also a position frequently held by people on a mission: passionate about the dissemination of mindfulness practices for the greater good at this moment in time. Mindful Leader and the Garrison Institute wanted to create a space dedicated to the specific concerns, needs, and inspirations of these people.

Our hope was that we could begin to form a consolidated movement and a budding community of practice across industries. As a “monastery for the 21st century,” the Garrison Institute provided the perfect setting. Over the weekend, we shared mindfulness practices, dined together, did yoga, walked in nature, and engaged in intense dialogue.

Process

The retreat was designed in an unconference format, a participant-driven modality for gathering that allows content to be determined by the interests and needs of the group. We offered a loose structure that was then shaped by input from our participants. Specifically, the questions and topics we chose to address in detail on Saturday, our full working day, were surfaced through discussion in pre-conference calls and during a series of participant-led “show and tell” presentations.

All-in-all, we were about 38 practitioners with a rich spectrum of lived experience. Participants came from industries ranging from insurance, healthcare, education, banking and finance, engineering, technology, diplomacy and social services. We also had diversity in terms of depth and length of personal mindfulness practice and experience stewarding and scaling programs at major organizations. To harness all these points of view, we created opportunities for collective wisdom to surface and resource sharing to occur.

Results

In the end, a weekend is a very brief period of time. We raised more questions, perhaps, than we answered. But, everyone agreed it was a great start. The discussions were rich and wide-ranging. And we all felt we left with a new set of friends and allies on the path. What we created was genuine community and a safe place to raise questions and share concerns. Our hope is that we can stay in touch and keep the momentum; perhaps ultimately rolling it into similar gatherings in the future.

If you'd like to stay in touch about other such future retreats co-created by Garrison Institute and Mindful Leader please contact John Sirabella at the Garrison Institute: johns@garrisoninstitute.org.

A Snapshot of Companies and Organizations Represented:

Google • BuzzFeed • Aetna • Harvard Pilgrim Health Care • Humana • Novo Nordisk
Boeing • LVMH • The United Nations • The World Bank • Goodwill • YMCA USA
Fidelity Investments • Naropa University

General Discussion and Insights

We used small working groups to dig deep into a series of seven topics selected by the group. These notes capture the nature of the discussions, but not always the answers. Some topics were covered by two rotations of group work, while some were tackled only once.

Topic 1: Starting a Mindfulness Program at Work

“Take a page from Nike’s playbook and ‘*Just Do It*.’

Overcoming fear and resistance is central to getting a program off the ground.”

Key Questions:

- What problems are we trying to solve with mindfulness and what are the consequences of not doing it?
- What is the best practice for creating a program?
- What is the science/research to demonstrate the business case? What are cultural trends and movements to support the business case?
- What are the specific, situational considerations for introducing a successful and sustainable mindfulness program in your organization?
- What is the risk? What is your tolerance for risk?
- What fears are present? For you and for the organization/leadership?

Insights and “Aha” Moments:

- **JUST DO IT.** Don’t get held up with specifics or lost in the weeds. Go for it in small ways and then adjust on the fly. Overcome fear, gain and recruit allies, adapt it.
- The “one-two punch” of creating a program:
 - How to make the business case to get buy-in
 - How to actually build it?
- Do your research. Know the specifics of your organization’s culture and openness. What does your company care about? What programs and tools are out there and available? What is your competition or similar companies doing?
- Find your internal advocates and champions. They can form the roots of your effort.
- Find the right language for your audience. Refine.
- Importance of busting misperceptions of mindfulness
- Secularizing the practices is important
- Story about using “Zen” in the name of the program - very polarizing
- Trying to take Buddhist concepts into the executives is not useful.
- Meditation can be a “bad word” in the workplace - secularize
- The science and the research are now available. Neuroscience, etc.
- Think of both formal programs and informal mindfulness moments—both

can be important in a culture just adopting these practices

- The spirit in which the program is created matters. If we push, demand, and create in a rigid and linear way, that's the kind of program we're going to get. How to involve heart, spontaneity and receptivity in the process of creation? What is the role of stillness? Patience? Slow and steady really does win the race where mindfulness is concerned.
- Many internal champions have to overcome a concern about their own personal reputation: What if it fails? Make sure you have a support system in place as you launch. It will be a lot of work and will require vulnerability. There may be mistakes. Make sure you know who to call and lean on.
- Have a sense for the metrics up front. How will we know if what we're doing is working?
- Develop a plan:
 - Business case and budget needs
 - Marketing
 - Content development
 - Evaluation system
- See: [Building the Case for Mindfulness in the Workplace](#)
- Recognizing the source of resistance: Some resistance and reactivity can come from the feeling of overwhelm many office workers are struggling with these days. It can feel like "one more thing on my plate" or "one more thing I need to look into or do." That can cause resistance. How can we respect the overwhelm and give space for it? How can we make it easier for people to engage in bite-size and manageable ways?
- Empathy can be an important tool for enlisting people into your mindfulness program. Let them know you understand their stress.
- Little programs and simple tools to start: like the #2333 phone number at the hospital that anyone can dial for a 3-min guided meditation. Used by all. Easy to distribute and tap into any time.
- Giving people non-invasive assignments to start: Just observe yourself for a week. No need to change anything; simply observe and take note of where you feel stressed or overwhelmed, how relationships effect you, where you are tired...Notice.
- Start with yourself - we are changed as much by the practice as those we bring it to. "You don't have to change the world to change the world..."
- One person at a time. We have to live and model the practices in action - that's the best "sales tool."

Topic 2: Scaling a Mindfulness Program

“Become a curator for the curious. Nurture their interest and provide support to your internal champions.”

Key Questions:

- What are we scaling and how will we do it?
- What does the program look like beyond the launch phase. Beyond early adopters?
- Money/resources are necessary for scaling. How can we prove the business case for what we’re doing to get the funds to do more of it?
- Beyond Mindfulness: What additional mindfulness-based tools and practices can enhance a program as it scales? Non-Violent Communication...Emotional Intelligence...Empathy...Team dynamics... Psychological safety...

Insights and “Aha” Moments:

- The process of scaling is organic and depends on the culture of the organization: no one-size-fits-all approach.
- Connection between data/metrics and scaling your program: Proof of impact, results lead to greater investment
- The metaphor of a tree for building and scaling a program:
 - Roots: Find champions, they will form your strong roots and foundational allies
 - Trunk: Begin to build a program with the help of your champions: identify the content and refine it for your organization, a community of support (it takes time!)
 - Limbs: moving beyond the choir, programs, outreach
 - Leaves: the seasons, things change, you adjust, there will be highs and lows
- The employees themselves are your greatest asset; look for allies on the intranet, create affinity groups around mindfulness
- [Re:Work with Google](#) — Open source info on how to run employee-to-employee trainings
- Marketing tactics such as contests, games, challenges can be marketed to

build awareness for your program and can normalize engagement—on trend right now: wellness challenges, fitness challenges, etc. Can foster team feeling and encourage people who would normally be reluctant to try mindfulness

- Normalizing and Socializing: Marketing programs internally can be a great step towards normalizing and socializing mindfulness in the culture (“Oh, leadership must be supportive of this if they’re promoting it.”)
- Communicate to people in their language (i.e., if you’re talking to engineers, use their terms and reference points...tailor the language)
- Internal Resources and Champions: Your internal champions can be great support and advocates for what you’re doing. Identify and tap into the internal resources you already have. “Closet meditators” come out of the woodwork.
- Be a part of conversations that are already happening. Ride the wave. Leverage existing momentum within the company:
- Tie mindfulness into the broader language of Self-Care. How it can help with stress reduction, diet, sleep?
- Tie mindfulness into the conversation about innovation, decision-making and creativity that’s happening at many companies.
- Communities of practice can hold each other accountable and provide support/structure to the expansion of a program
- Virtual and digital tools can help: [Headspace](#), [Calm](#)...Help people know which options are good. Become a curator for the curious. Nurture their interest.
- Mindful meetings, mindful listening, mindful driving and flying (Boeing): incorporate mindfulness and integrate it into activities the company already engages in. Integrated practices work really well for those who don’t like a sitting practice.
- Go slow. Pilot first and collect metrics and then refine over and over.
- Branded merchandise is helpful.
- Word of mouth is critical.
- An internal product can ultimately become an external offering

Topic 3: The Relationship Between Mindfulness and Compassion

“Mindfulness is not necessarily compassion, but it can lead to it.”

Key Questions:

- What is the best language to use when talking about compassion?
- What is the relationship between mindfulness and compassion?
- How do you teach compassion?
- What is the *real* level of interest in compassion in the corporate world?
- Where and how does self-care fit in?
- What is the difference between compassion and empathy?

Insights and “Aha” Moments:

- Mindfulness is not necessarily compassion, but it can lead to this.
- Mindfulness allows greater capacity for empathy. Empathy plus mindfulness leads to compassion.
- Compassion training is a different thing than mindfulness.
- Embodiment and empathy are important foundational skills for bringing compassionate action into the culture.
- “You can’t give what you don’t have.” Especially in environments like healthcare providers and hospitals...customer service frontline, teachers in the classroom, etc. People need the tools to find compassion and relate with empathy. Mindfulness is the building block here.
- Mindfulness: a skill providing a physiological calm—which leads to ability to focus attention, deepen awareness, and recognize emotion
- Empathy: an emotional response to an awareness of suffering (or another state); feeling the feelings of another as one’s own: “I feel your pain.”
- Compassion: A deliberate response to alleviate the suffering of another or others with personal balance. Allows a healer to heal in a healthy manner.
- Bring compassion and empathy into existing leadership curriculum; lay the foundation with mindfulness
- This feels like the next frontier of mindfulness in the workplace because we’re needing to have more compassionate conversations about difficult topics at work. It can also help with the stress and difficulties of change management.
- Recognizing studies and teachers on the frontline of this topic: [Fierce Compassion](#), [Kristin Neff](#), etc.

Topic 4: Change Management and Mindfulness

“We have to be aware of the ethics here:
Mindfulness is for liberation, not coercion.”

Key Questions:

- Living in this time of radical transition and chaos: How explicitly do you make mindfulness a part of change management at work?
- What role could mindfulness play in the change/transformation process?
- Can a focus on team dynamics be the next frontier of mindfulness training in the workplace?

Insights and “Aha” Moments

- Often change happens at the organizational level with little attention to the needs and experience of the individuals or even teams.
- Mindfulness can help ease transition and change at all levels (three concentric circles—from inner to outer):
 - Individual level
 - Team level
 - Organizational level
- Mindfulness and the mechanics of change management:
 - Desire to change
 - Mechanisms to change
 - Actual behavior change
- Mindfulness has focused on the individual within a company, while change management has focused on the organization. Can we meet in the middle?
- Helping individuals to build interpersonal skills and relationships within small teams can help create safe spaces to “metabolize” change and reduce the perceived threat level.
- We have more work to do to show management the practical relevance and impact of the work we do as mindfulness educators and program directors.
- We must be aware of the ethical issues here — we can use mindfulness to inspire a new relationship to change, but not to coerce. Mindfulness is for liberation, not coercion.
- Change is often perceived as a negative, so the role of mindfulness in change management must be protected with integrity.
- Essential to sustainable and successful transition: integrate, empower, embody, ground in the body.

- Time to shift from bringing impact to individuals to bringing impact to teams: communities can work to make change happen more smoothly and with less disruption: Western mindfulness, the way we teach it, is frequently focused on the individual and must now include more of a group experience.

Topic 5: Metrics and Buy In

“Think early and often about ways to capture data...
Start small and measure it all... Measure what matters.”

Key Questions:

- How and where can we learn more about how others are measuring the success of their programs? How can we share tools?
- How in depth or “academic” do the measurements need to be? How validated do the tools for measuring programs need to be?
- What are the ways we can get a “quick read” on programs?

Insights and “Aha” Moments:

- Know what the organization cares most about and how mindfulness can contribute to that bottom line. Measure what matters:
 - Engineers care about Safety, Engagement, and Collaboration
 - In Health Care: the conversation was about morale and engagement
- Metrics drive the business case: Correlation between metrics and proving the business case and getting the money needed to build, support, and scale programs.
- Value of longitudinal tracking - watching individuals and groups over time; year-over-year metrics. Is attendance in programs up or down?
- Quick reads:
 - Surveys with just 2-3 open-ended questions
 - Use of Slack
 - Polling, pulse surveys after every program—“Our employees love to give feedback.”
- Good quick read questions:
 - Was this a good use of your time?
 - Would you recommend this to someone else?
 - Did you gain skills that will help you do your job better?
- Tough to attach an ROI to wellness programs - avoid if possible. Evaluations versus benchmarks, peer review.
- Some sample metrics:
 - Absences
 - Productivity
 - Turnover

- Healthcare spend
- Employee engagement
- Fewer errors or injuries
- Customer satisfaction
- Types of questions/measurement:
- Pre/post program
- Scales
- Self reporting (i.e., How often did you practice this week?)
- Open-ended questions

Topic 6: Qualification and Credentials Conversation

“Understand what your company considers a quality offering.
It will be different for everyone.”

Key Questions:

- What are important qualifications for mindfulness teachers and how do they differ by setting?
- Is it better to do something (if you are resource constrained) than nothing? What are some solutions that can be a bridge to a better-funded program? Open source? Digital resources?
- Where does this conversation intersect with the diversity and inclusion conversation? If we only recognize limited and expensive Western-oriented credentials, we lose.

Insights and “Aha” Moments:

- Qualifications will differ depending on where you are and what the tolerance for experimentation is. Schools and healthcare companies have a lower tolerance for un-credentialed teachers and programs.
- Make sure you’re measuring feedback on teachers through surveys. Know how your teachers are doing at all times. Supervision is critical.
- Beyond credentials there are the important intangibles: does this person fit our company culture?
- Learning to teach mindfulness does not necessarily make you an expert.
- Number of hours of practice. What is their personal practice? (i.e. At least 10 years of personal practice and at least 3 silent retreats...)
- [IMTA: International Mindfulness Teachers Association](#)
- Could include:
 - Humility, beginner’s mind
 - Demonstrations of their skills
 - Participation in silent retreats
 - Depth of personal practice
 - Facilitation/teaching/public speaking experience
 - Perhaps, relevant industry experience
 - Formal training in a respected program
 - Ethical and moral alignment/integrity
- Depends on culture and budget for your program

- Mentoring your teachers is important — help them grow and develop
- Assess their credentials and levels of accreditation
- Understanding what your company considers a quality offering.
- We need to respect the delicacy of this work for many people. We were reminded by the UN delegate that many people in her programs have experienced a great deal of trauma. We need to know if the teacher is capable of working with trauma.
- Diversity of opinions present as to how credentialed a teacher needs to be. Consensus agreement that we need to be clear what we are and are NOT teaching in our respective programs.
- Acknowledgment by the group of the tensions in this question. We can't also just look through a Western-scientific lens and only recognize the validity of credentials from expensive training programs. Becoming a mindfulness teacher requires a lot of money and time that many don't have. Where does this question intersect with the diversity and inclusion conversation? This is an important point.

Topic 7: Diversity and Unconscious Bias

“Diversity is the answer, not the question.”

Key Questions:

- How do we honor diversity without making anyone feel “less than” or unwanted/threatened?
- How do we awaken interest in those who are currently unaware of our systems of oppression?
- How do we incorporate justice training into our mindfulness programs? Is this the place for it?
- How can mindfulness uncover bias? How do we make the invisible visible?
- Can we see our internal thoughts around this without shame and with compassion?
- What role could mindfulness have in supporting cultural fluency?
- How do you bring students from diverse backgrounds into an environment where exposure to contemplative practices isn’t a privilege, but a birthright?
- What is the role of mindfulness in breaking through hate and enabling civil conversations?
- How do we use our mindfulness program/practices to raise awareness and wise action for unconscious bias and social justice?
- How do we invite more diverse-identified persons into the work?
- How do we undertake the task of decolonizing mindfulness?

Insights and “Aha” Moments:

- Diversity is the answer, not the question. Diversity can be seen as a monoculture problem. Example of the monoculture of corn versus the indigenous wisdom of planting “the three sisters” together to diversify and call on the strengths of each plant to create an eco-system. Better together. Stronger and more resilient when we can incorporate and leverage our differences.
- Key leaders in the mindfulness movement originally were white, American males. We’re now seeing the results of this: blind spots are coming into focus.
- Intersection of political literacy and emotional intelligence
- Biases (known and unknown) are foundational and need to be well-understood.

- Cultural appropriation and the secularization of mindful practices.
- What are community practices that are truly inclusive?
- In some corporate cultures there is a low readiness for conversations regarding racial diversity. How to bring them along?
- There are thousands of teachers who don't fit the usual profile...we have a lot of discovery to do
- Spiritual bypassing—using one's personal journey to disconnect and avoid tough issues
- Awareness that people of color can experience resistance when in a teaching situation with a white teacher
- We have to/get to hire more people of color, women, and indigenous people as teachers. We need to make this a priority.
- Develop specific communications for minority audiences: understand their specific needs and barriers.
- Seek to understand what other cultures bring to this work: be open, vulnerable. Be the student.

Shared Resources and Tools

- [How to Read Nature, book by Tristan Gooley](#)
- [Mindful Magazine](#)
- [Center for Mindfulness, UMass](#)
- Hotline to Peace: 360-385-2200 x2238
- [eNaropa: Mindful at Work, 8-week online course \(also free 7-day course\)](#)
- Mindfulness-Based Emotional Intelligence Facilitator's Guide
- [Becoming a Resonant Leader, book by McKee, Boyatzis, Johnston](#)
- [The Mind of the Leader, book by Hougaard and Carter](#)
- [Awakening Compassion at Work, book by Worline and Dutton](#)
- [Center for Healthy Minds](#)
- [Shakti Leadership, book by Raj Sisodia and Nilima Bhat](#)
- [Greater Good Science Center:](#)
- [Palouse Mindfulness Online Free MBSR Materials](#)
- [TED: "Color Blind or Color Brave", Melody Dobson](#)
- [TED: "The Danger of a Single Story", Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](#)
- [TEDx: "Sit Up and Pay Attention", Deborah Hendricks](#)
- [TheCalmMonkey.com: Change management and meditation \(Wendy Quan\)](#)
- [Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, UMass](#)
- [Healthcare and Society MBSR Curriculum](#)
- [Re:Work with Google \(open source employee training\)](#)
- [Mindful of Race, Ruth King \(also an interview on Goodlife Project Podcast\)](#)
- [Radical Dharma, book by Angel Kyodo Williams](#)
- [CTZNWELL podcast \(see Angel Kyodo Williams' interview to begin\)](#)
- [Mindful Education Online Training - Daniel Rechtshaffen](#)
- [Harvard "Project Implicit" IAT : Implicit Association Test](#)
- [BlindSpot, book by Banaji, Greenwald, Martin](#)
- [Rhonda Magee - How Mindfulness Can Defeat Racial Bias](#)
- [Lueke & Gibson, "Mindfulness Meditation Reduces Implicit Age and Race Bias"](#)
- [Black Lives Matter - Healing Justice Toolkit](#)
- [IMTA - International Mindfulness Teacher's Association](#)
- [UCLA, MARC - the Mindful Facilitator Teacher Training Program](#)
- Public health dissemination and implementation science tools/frameworks
- [Cohen's Perceived Stress Survey \(PSS\)](#)
- [Work Limitations Questionnaire \(WLQ\)](#)
- [Mindful Education Resources](#)
- [American Mindfulness Research Association](#)
- [Trauma Sensitive Mindfulness, book by David Treleaven](#)
- [Work on Unconscious Bias via Be More America](#)

For More Information Contact:

John Sirabella
The Garrison Institute
johns@garrisoninstitute.org

Mo Edjlali
Mindful Leader
info@mindfulleader.org

