

Mind Yourself

To be consciously present
in your life and work

Recently, work life has changed dramatically: the workloads have increased; tasks and work time are becoming more hectic and fragmented. There is less time to recover and almost none to reflect after a busy day, and the pace of change has increased, as well. All this leads to solid stress situations, a lowered ability to cope with challenges and eventually even to a burnout.

by István Kosztolányi

A typical knowledge worker is distracted 50 to 100 times per day by incoming e-mails. Some people even beat this number by regularly checking their mobile phone. The average attention span in most managerial positions is reduced to three minutes. All these distractions decrease our concentration and awareness dramatically: we feel hyperactive and struggle to solve everything by trying to do more. The result is, however, an ineffective and unproductive use of both, our individual energy and organizational resources.

Balanced principles

Working with many leaders, who had to learn some new behaviors and unlearn some of their existing patterns in order to balance their work and life, we came to some principles related to conscious personal change:

- The more clearly we comprehend what we want to learn and achieve, the less time and energy it requires.
- Learning is a process, not an outcome – we can get the most out of it if we become »ourselves«.
- Although development (training, coaching etc.) is done in an organizational context, the development affects the person as a whole.
- In order to achieve organizational goals, a leader influences the behavior of peers and employees. The most important tool for this is his own behavior, energy level and congruency. ►



- The variety of personal leadership tools and the number of choices among them will outline the flexibility – the »freedom« – of the leaders.

Since adults spend most of their waking hours at their workplace (instead of being with their spouse, family, friends etc.), it really matters what kind of workplace it is and how they live the time during working hours, too.

To foster leaders' consciousness, we have chosen mindfulness as a conceptual and attitude base for our development work, including various tools and elements of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). In our practice, mindfulness means to pay attention; to be in the present consciously, without judgement. Mindfulness is not an answer for our problems in life. It rather means that we can sense our topics more clearly with a free mind. In most cases, our conscious mind alone is helpless if permanently required to change behaviors, feelings and responses that are automatic and unconscious. The goal is not to understand or classify all the details of our problems, but to find the place or driver within ourselves that triggers the transformation of our problems. The more we sense from internal and external environment, the more thorough decisions we can make. If we decrease our sensitivity, for example by using only our cognitive processes, we reduce our chance to make a sound decision, to think, feel and act differently. Instead of thinking about »What problem am I not having?«, we shall seek to get hold of the necessary resources for change.

Now or never

When we start a mindfulness process, we interpret together with the client what »being here«, »being one« and »THIS being life« actually mean. The last definition is extremely important from a systemic point of view as well, since we often encounter leaders trying to solve their problems in another dimension – disregarding that their life is just here and happening just now. This process sometimes needs lots of personal energy and real time learning in the full context of the person by recognizing his patterns. We also believe that learning shall be reflected in the actions and behaviors of the leader who is working on his own mindfulness and developing a recognizable competence: new behaviors with a deeper understanding of one's self and measurable (organizational) impacts. A leader is efficient and

effective if he is mentally stable, has a connection to the core of his personality, and if the mind can be released from the everyday operative spin, thus creating a spiritual and physical balance.

Mindful coaching

In our coaching practice, we use tools which help the coachees to improve their personal states of awareness. We run simple exercises to increase perception in various situations and to balance energy both, in life and work. Along the coaching process, we persistently bring the coachee's attention to how he can translate these exercises into business results. By using these exercises, leaders will be able to pay closer attention to their physical, emotional and cognitive states, thus becoming more competent in choosing the »best« action and behavior in the given situation. Also, by sensing and recognising resourceless, inefficient or counterproductive states, the leader can do self-interventions to retrieve his balance, thus having a greater chance of a better performance. The personal well-being of managers is a pre-condition for the long-term efficiency and effectiveness of organizations. Coaching and mindfulness go together well since both of them are about – among other things – responsibility. This happens when the leader is confronted with his freedom of choice and realizes that he is in charge for his own personal and professional life. The way this can be beneficial for the individual, as well as for the organization is shown by the following two examples from practice.

»Often leaders try to solve their problems disregarding that their life is just here and happening just now.«

Cases from the life of leaders

The young leader



A young talented lady with good career prospects led a 15-member key team in a fast growing local subsidiary of a spinning multinational corporation. Everyone spoke about her as a top management potential but she was dreaming to be a specialist in a professional field growing more and more important for the company.

The coaching started with the aim to clarify her role and future in the organization, i. e. she had to make up her mind and choose between being a leader or a specialist. Her dilemma was even reinforced by her concept that she could not have a full »freedom of choice« which rooted partially in her loyalty to the company and to her manager who mentored her a couple of years ago.

During the third coaching session when we had already listed all the »logical« pros and cons, we used some mindfulness exercises on physical states and sensations, and she came to a crucial conclusion. She could not pick her professional role because the energy needed for this decision was drawn by an inner dialog she was having with herself. This dialog was about her marriage and her plan to have a baby. Her very personal dilemma triggered also physiological changes resulting in her resourceless psychosomatic states.

By increasing her state of mindfulness she could »clear her mind« from the inner dialog and she could make her decisions. Now the company expects her back as a talented specialist when her maternity leave ends.

The successful strategist



A newly appointed Managing Director proved to be a successful leader with the potential for an international career. He was close to 40 when he took a leadership position in a traditional global company's local subsidiary with high CEE importance. He had brave and innovative thoughts and intentions on how to reposition the local company to gain share on those markets which conventionally were not home turf for them.

To support this personal vision (which he skilfully made an organizational vision as well), a personal process started with the goal to work on his extremely direct, sometimes arrogant and strong communication style. He occasionally happened to fiercely oppose anyone, even fighting the regional director or the CEO, which did not facilitate the realization of his plans.

While working on his communication skills and attitude, we used some »slowing down« exercises which drove him to fully unknown fields of his thinking and emotional states. As an outcome, he pinpointed two areas which he found were fuelling his arrogance and harsh style. We equipped him with several communication tools and techniques, and through a sensitizing process, he became aware of his mental and physical states and thus, capable of purposefully managing them.

Obviously, this was not the only resource he had. However, according to his own judgement it contributed a lot to his promotion into a regional position recently. ●