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**Can Mindfulness
Make You a Better
Business Travel
Manager?**

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Can mindfulness make you a better business travel manager?

An international mobility manager's work day is pretty hectic. Whether you're spending hours consolidating data, trying to track down rogue travel, or haggling over better rates for hotels, the stress of a hard day's work takes a toll on your mental and physical health.

International organisations from [Google](#) to the [US Army](#) are now turning to a proven method for keeping their employees happy, healthy and more effective on the job. For them, the answer is 'mindfulness'.

You've probably heard about it. Maybe you've even been curious to learn more about it. For instance, did you know that mindfulness can really boost your effectiveness at work? In fact, recent scientific research links mindfulness with a long list of work-related benefits.

This eBook explains what mindfulness is, how it works, and how it can benefit you in your work as a business travel manager and in your everyday life in general. It also gives you some easy introductory exercises and tips, so you can explore the benefits of mindfulness for yourself.

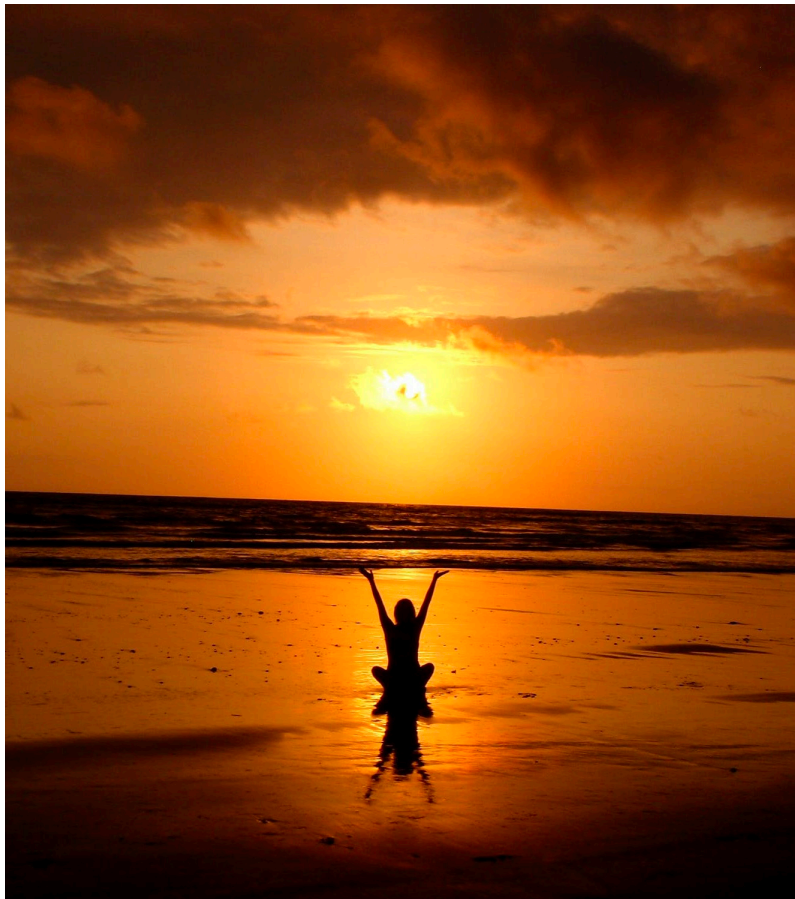
So, start by taking a deep breath. Find a comfortable spot where you can sit and read, and then enjoy finding out all about this fascinating topic!



What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is actually very simple. All it means is focussing your thoughts on the present and simply observing what is going on. You pay close attention to whatever occurs in the here and now, without passing judgment. You just carefully observe and accept things for what they really are.

People who practice mindfulness use meditation and other mental exercises to achieve a mindful state. These meditations are designed to focus your attention on your thoughts, emotions and physical sensations. You can practice mindfulness while sitting, lying down, standing, walking, eating or even working (Sources: [Mindful.org](https://www.mindful.org) and [University of Exeter](https://www.exeter.ac.uk)). Training your brain over time with mindfulness exercises has been found to cause many benefits, as you will see.



What are the benefits of mindfulness?

In recent years, a growing body of scientific research has linked mindfulness with a long list of mental and physical health benefits.

Here is a list of the top 10 benefits linked with mindfulness*:



Improving your relationship with yourself

Mindfulness allows you to observe your thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations in an accepting, non-judgmental way. In the process, you notice things about yourself that you may not have known before. Often, we are overly critical of ourselves and the way others might perceive us. Mindfulness can help us overcome those anxieties.



Improving your relationships with others

Becoming more mindful gives you insight into the dynamics within relationships. You learn to appreciate others more, and to manage your own expectations more effectively. Mindfulness improves your powers of empathy, the ability to put yourself in someone else's position and understand what he or she is going through. This brings greater satisfaction and better communication to your relationships.



Coping with stress

By shifting your focus to the present, mindfulness allows you to stop stressing about the future or regretting past mistakes. It helps you to slow down and brings you a sense of calm and tranquillity. It can also improve your sleeping, which in turn helps you be more resistant to stress.



Improving your focus

Many mindfulness exercises encourage you to focus very carefully on small details for a relatively long period of time (usually a few minutes, at least). By learning to concentrate on details, you start to see things more clearly.



Boosting creativity

Coming up with creative solutions often involves approaching the situation with an open, objective attitude. Mindfulness allows you to become more observant and less judgmental, so you start to consider more possibilities than you may have seen in the past.



Strengthening neural connections

Neuroscientists have discovered that long-term, regular mindfulness meditation actually rewires your brain, allowing you to become naturally more focussed and resistant to stress.



Improving your 'working memory'

We've all had moments where we've gone 'blank' and forgotten something that was just on the tip of our tongues. This occurs whenever your brain's working memory (its very short-term memory) malfunctions. Mindfulness training can strengthen the brain functions responsible for your short-term memory, allowing you to keep more pieces of information in your head at once.



Stabilising your mood

A mindful person is less easily rattled or irritated by their surroundings, including other people. A [recent study](#) even found that mindfulness training is as effective as antidepressant drugs in some people who suffer from clinical depression.



More confident decision-making

Because mindfulness reduces our anxieties about the uncertainties of the future, it allows us to be more confident in our decision-making. If you've ever lost sleep over a pressing decision, or ruminated over how to reply to an important e-mail from a colleague, mindfulness might just help you roll with the punches more effectively.



Longer life

Ok, you may be thinking this is too good to be true. However, **researchers** have found that mindfulness reduces your body's inflammatory response, making you less susceptible to certain kinds of illness. It was also proven to extend the lives of patients diagnosed with certain chronic diseases, and hypothesised to have similar life-giving benefits for all people who practice it.

* Sources: [Mindful.org](https://www.mindful.org), [University of Exeter](https://www.universityofexeter.ac.uk), [American Psychological Association](https://www.americanpsychological.org), [Psychology Today](https://www.psychologytoday.com), and [The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com)

It's not easy being a business travel manager. You deal every day with complex, difficult issues, from duty of care, to cost control, to simply keeping your company's travellers satisfied. Imagine how the benefits listed above could make your work day a lot easier!

Next time you're feeling worn out after a stressful negotiation or your shoulders are aching from hours behind an Excel spreadsheet, why not give mindfulness a try?



Mindfulness and meditation: The basics

Anyone can learn to live more mindfully, but it takes some practice. Meditation is a great way to start achieving the amazing benefits listed above.

A basic meditation takes just five to 20 minutes. It's best to start with short meditations and gradually increase the length of your sessions.

Here's a great basic meditation* to get you started:



Make time

Plan a specific time to meditate. Pick a moment when you will not be interrupted by your colleagues. Turn off the sound on your phone and go to a quiet spot. At first, you may want to practice at home where you can be sure to find a peaceful location.



Sit in a comfortable position

You may wish to take off your shoes. If you're more comfortable, sit in a chair. Otherwise, sit on the floor. Allow your body to relax. Be sure you choose a position that you can hold comfortably for a few minutes. Try sitting in a chair with both feet resting on the floor and your arms relaxed at your sides.



Close your eyes, but open your mouth (a little)

It may look funny, but relaxing your jawbone and opening your mouth slightly has a naturally calming effect on your brain. Closing your eyes makes it easier to focus.



Breathe

Breathe normally. There's no need to force yourself to take deeper or slower breaths. Simply focus on each breath. As you breathe, focus your full attention on your body's movements: your chest rises and falls with each breath. Perhaps you feel movement in your shoulders, throat or other parts of your body. Focus carefully on these sensations as your breath passes through you.



Open your mind

As you begin to relax, you will feel more open toward your surroundings. Accept your surroundings and do not dwell on negative thoughts. If you catch yourself thinking a negative thought, or becoming distracted by thoughts about work, for example, return your focus to your breathing and continue. Take note of any sensations, feelings or emotions you experience, but avoid thinking about them in terms of 'good' or 'bad'. Simply acknowledge that they exist and allow them to pass through your mind.



Slowly return

Keep focussing on your breathing. With a little practice, you will soon enter deeper and deeper states of calm and relaxation. Stay alert and do not fall asleep (some meditation is designed to help you all sleep, but this meditation is designed to help you focus on the present, one breath at a time). Gradually allow yourself to return to a 'normal' state, and end the meditation by opening your eyes and taking a deep breath in and out.



Be kind to yourself

If you struggle to relax or find it too difficult to avoid negative thoughts, take a break for now. Do not feel upset or force yourself to continue. Meditation is a skill that requires practice. The harder it is for you to meditate in the beginning, the greater the benefit will eventually be for you. The next time you practice meditating, see if you can continue for a little longer.

* Sources: [Mindful.org](https://www.mindful.org) and [Meditation for Dummies](#)

Guided meditations

Once you've mastered the basics of meditation, you can learn to become increasingly mindful. There are countless books, online articles, videos and websites devoted to mindfulness and meditation. Mindful.org is an excellent non-profit resource that offers many free videos and 'guided' meditations.

During a guided meditation, a meditation instructor helps you remain focussed by telling you what to think about. This can be very useful if you are new to meditation, or if you just want to relax quickly without having to plan things for yourself.

Another excellent online resource is the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center, which provides [free audio streams of guided meditations here.](#)



Body scan

One of the most famous forms of mindfulness meditation is the 'body scan'. This is a guided meditation that draws your focus to each part of your body, one by one. The body scan draws your focus to the here and now. It also raises your awareness of how your body feels.

Here, you will find a [three-minute guided body scan meditation](#) to try.

You can also perform a body scan meditation by yourself. However, it's best to start with a guided meditation and then practice until you are familiar enough with the technique to try it on your own.

You can either sit or lie down when you perform the body scan. Start with by focussing on the tips of your toes. Think of how they feel. How does the floor feel underneath them? How do your socks feel against your skin? Are your toes warm or cold?

Then, slowly shift your attention to your feet and then gradually move upward through your calves, knees, thighs, hips, waist, abdomen, etc. until you have focussed on every part of your body and how it feels.



More mindfulness exercises

There are many other meditations and exercises that will train your brain to operate more mindfully. Here are a few that you can try right away:

The Raisin: Take a raisin in your hand and focus all your attention on it for at least five full minutes. Observe its shape, the texture of its surface, its weight, the way it smells, etc. Take note of the things you observe, but avoid judgment. Remain open, accepting and objective. There are many variations of this exercise. For example, you can use a leaf, a flower, a spoon, or any other object small enough to hold in your hand. The point of this exercise is to learn to patiently, slowly observe things as they really are without allowing your judgments to interfere.

The 'I' Exercise: Have you ever noticed how often you use the words 'I' or 'me' each day? Even if you don't consider yourself overly egotistical, you'll probably be surprised at just how often you talk about yourself. In this exercise, you simply pay attention to how often you use the word 'I' throughout a full day. Again, avoid passing judgment. The exercise is not about making you feel guilty or ashamed. It is to draw your focus towards your communication with others. You can also do the same exercise with 'you'. Or, try being mindful of how many questions you ask others.

The Mindful Meal: This is another classic mindfulness training. Next time you sit down to a meal, try eating mindfully. Focus on every aspect of the food, the table setting, the silverware, etc. Chew your food and swallow it as you normally would, but focus carefully on your movements and every sensation. This will train your brain to focus on the present. You can perform the same kind of exercise with any routine daily activity: like ironing a shirt, brushing your teeth, or washing dishes.

As with any form of 'training', the key is to practice regularly. If possible, try spending at least a few minutes each day performing an activity mindfully.

Mindfulness hacks

Training your brain to be more mindful will automatically improve your work performance thanks to the amazing benefits listed above. But did you know there are also mindfulness ‘hacks’ that can help keep you focussed and reduce your on-the-job stress? Try these, for example:

Clear your desk.

Offices are notoriously cluttered, and when you’ve got thousands of data points to enter into an Excel sheet, the last thing you have time for is to straighten up. However, creating a clear work space allows you to focus on your present task. It also prevents you from being distracted by unrelated or less important information that may steal your attention.

Bundle your tasks.

Experts advise that organising small, similar tasks into larger blocks allows you to achieve greater efficiency. That’s because doing related tasks all in a row enables to reach a ‘flow state’, which is where you’re at your most efficient. For example, if you have a lot of e-mails to write, try blocking off a specific time during the day to work through your inbox rather than answering each e-mail on the fly.

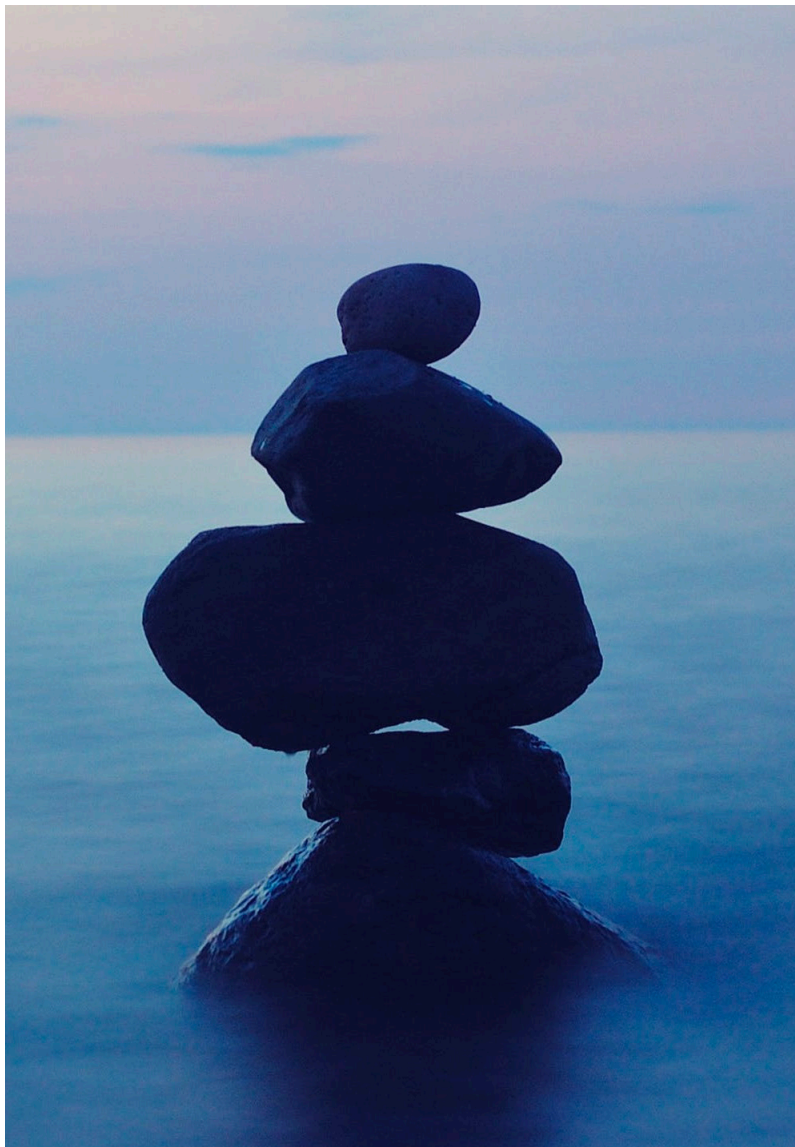
Turn off e-mail alerts.

Are you addicted to your e-mail? Do you feel a little rush whenever an e-mail alert pings on your laptop? Since many of us will drop anything we’re doing to open a new e-mail, those little pings can be a big distraction. To avoid being pulled out of the present, turn off the alerts. Set aside appropriate times throughout your workday to deal with e-mail, so you can focus fully on other tasks without getting distracted by the ping.

Be kind to your mind

Now that you're familiar with the basics of mindfulness, try following guided meditations online or practising mindfulness on your own. Even if an exercise seems silly (like staring at a raisin), just remember you are actually training your brain to achieve greater effectiveness.

Be sure to share this eBook with your business travellers and colleagues. Together, you can create a more mindful work environment. Everyone can benefit from that!



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