

# MINDFULNESS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY LEADER – A HUMAN ENERGY CONSERVATION TECHNOLOGY

According to the Oxford English dictionary, energy is defined as the strength and vitality required for sustained physical or mental activity. In the 21st century world of today, leaders and decision-makers responding to multiple demands on their leading, managing and executing abilities need a high level of energy in order to cope and maintain success and balance in their lives. Sustaining optimum and ever-ready energy on a daily basis stresses the human body and can be health damaging.

Mindfulness as a practice, can be the answer to conserving human energy so that this vital resource can be carefully managed and sustained.

This practice mirrors the natural behaviour of animals existing in climes with harsh, freezing winters. The animals hibernate through the winters when food is scarce and any physical activity in the cold external environment saps their energy reserve. Hibernation helps the animals sustain their lives by winding down their metabolic rate and thereby, greatly reducing their energy needs. When spring comes around, these animals' metabolic rate winds up again and they waken to resume normal activities.

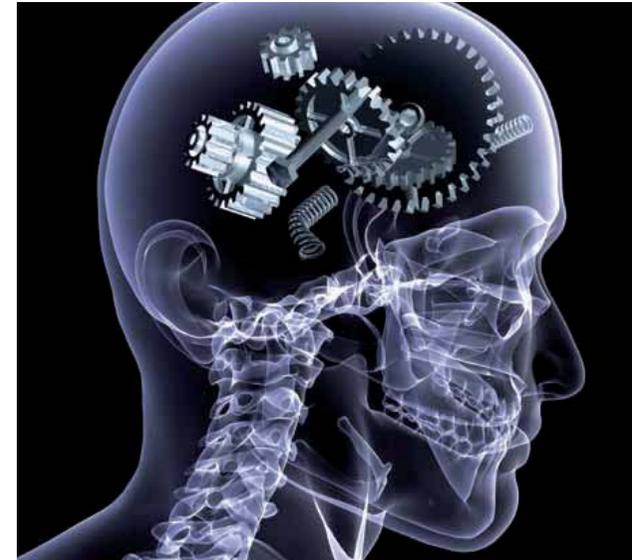
If human beings can find a way to 'hibernate' like the animals do, sustaining and restoring vital energy to meet the demands of living in the modern world would be that much easier.

Dr. John Ding-E Young and Dr. Eugene Taylor in their paper on 'Mindfulness as a Practice of Voluntary Hypometabolic State of Biological Estivation' reveals that subjects who are asked to sit quietly in an environment of reduced illumination while attending exclusively to their breathing cycles begin to show immediate changes in their physiology similar to other hypometabolic conditions. The most characteristic elements include decreased oxygen consumption and carbon dioxide elimination and decreased respiratory rate and minute ventilation with no change in respiratory quotient. But the most significant difference is that the body appears to move into a state analogous to many, but not all, aspects of deep sleep, while consciousness remains responsive and alert. In essence, be in a state of efficient energy utilization and conservation.

## Mindful Leadership is Powerful Leadership

According to Ben Bryant, IMD Professor for Leadership and Organisation, "At the centre of the hurricane of economic globalization is the quiet space of mindfulness – a philosophy and practice which helps those exercising leadership to situate themselves calmly in the eye of the hurricane, where they are able to tap into the clarity and creativity necessary to ensure wisdom in decision-making and focused, authentic leadership".

On a typical workday, someone in a managerial or leadership position is often required to hop from one meeting to another. Switching off from one meeting and then switching on to another can be quite challenging especially if you have already been into two or three meetings and it is only just the beginning of the day. Mindfulness allows one to be fully present at whatever task or meeting one is attending and not be thinking about the list of a hundred things to do or the next meeting to go to. Because one is focus and present from moment to moment, one can be very efficient and productive. Due to the sense of completion and achievement after each meeting or task at hand, one is able to "depart" completely from it and move on to the next. And the same attitude is being applied to the next task in hand. By practicing mindfulness at work, one not only gets things done efficiently, one even feels fresh at the end of the day even though one has attended to a million things on that day.



Many scientific studies have shown how mindfulness leads to significant changes in brain activity. It is found that, a subject practicing mindfulness demonstrates more cognitive flexibility, creativity and innovativeness, higher levels of well-being, emotional regulation, and more empathy due to increased levels of alpha and theta brainwave activity.

There are many examples of how mindfulness has been adopted as a culture for multinational corporations. Global trend-setting technology giants like Google and Facebook instituted in-house mindfulness training programme for their employees as they kept up with the latest innovation in the effective up-keeping of their companies' human resource. Apple, Unilever, Sony, GE are also among the pioneer adopters of this practice.

In his book 'Driven to Lead' Harvard Professor-Emeritus Paul

Lawrence discusses how the mind can be remodeled for leadership. Developing clarity through mindfulness enables leaders to integrate their four drives – security, materials acquisition, bonding with others and the search for meaning – into an integrated decision-making process.

## What is Mindfulness Training?

Mindfulness Training is an active observation and training of the neural networks of our brain. Specific methodology is used to increase one's ability to focus and manage one's attention. Prolonged period of practice results in a simple way of becoming present in every moment to face circumstances openly and directly. Mindfulness Training (predisposes us to be initiative) makes us proactive and better at responding rather than reacting to our experiences in everyday life.

## A Mindfulness tip for energy conservation at work

If in the course of a day, you find

your energy level depleting e.g. in a long drawn out meeting, here is a mindfulness technique to help revitalize your energy.

- Bring your awareness to your breathing.
- Count each breath as you inhale and exhale.
- Do this for 20 counts each.

## Conclusion

While efforts are focused in promoting and inventing new ways to help conserve the energies of our planet, it must not be ignored that leaders themselves need to conserve their own biological energy to perform well at what they are required to do.

Unlike the animals hibernating to weather the harshness of winter, leaders of today can be trained to voluntarily enter into a state of mindfulness as a strategy to conserve and sustain vital energy to weather the demanding and often unpredictable stresses of the world environment.



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