

taking time out for a time in...

BY SARAH MCLEAN

Stressed out? Probably. It is a reality that most of us face. Stress, sometimes called the silent killer, has been blamed for all kinds of illnesses and disease: high blood pressure, depression, insomnia, anxiety. Many people find their jobs are the primary cause of stress. Deadlines that seem impossible to meet? Lunch on the run? Too many emails? Didn't get the account? Kids need you at home and you are also needed at work? Disagreement with your coworker? Phone ringing nonstop? How can you handle the effects of stress at work when you can't get out to go for a hike, or meditate, or go to a yoga class? Here are some easy ways to de-stress and become more mindful to what is important to you while you are on the job:

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**“MINDFULNESS MEANS PAYING
ATTENTION IN A PARTICULAR WAY;
ON PURPOSE,
IN THE PRESENT MOMENT,
AND NONJUDGMENTALLY.”**

JON KABAT ZINN

START YOUR DAY WITH AN INTENTION

When I arrive in my office I often set an intention for the day. Sometimes it is to be efficient, sometimes to be kind, and sometimes to be mindful of my thoughts or my body. I've heard that some people post their intention on a post-it note stuck to their computer to remind them during the day. When I bring my attention to my intention, my awareness is anchored again and again to what really matters to me.

STAY IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

Mind body expert Deepak Chopra says, “There never was a time when your life was not this moment. It is impossible to deal with that which does not exist in this moment. Therefore, live in this moment by keeping your attention in this moment.”

Our lives are made up of one moment following another. It is helpful to be prepared and to plan, but worrying about the present or agonizing over the past is not useful. Do your best now, in this moment. When you notice you are focused on or worrying about the future, bring your attention back to the present moment and go from there.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY

Once I am settled into my workday, I usually find myself in front of my computer typing away. This is when I often forget about my body. I don't think I am alone in this. I can be sitting in a very strange position for a long time, and am unaware of it as I surf the internet or type an article. I only notice when my body begins to complain. But there is another way—make body awareness an exercise. Awareness of your body is the doorway to becoming present, to being in the now, because your body is always in the present moment (unlike the mind which is usually dwelling in the past or the future). So how can you reconnect with your body? It's easy. First, bring your attention to your feet. Feel your feet on the floor. Then scan up your legs, noticing your weight on your chair, and the position of your arms and hands. Notice your back against the chair, or wherever it is. Straighten your spine. Relax your shoulders. Re-adjust your alignment. Feel which way your head rests on your neck. Feel your face, including your teeth, your eyes, your jaw, your forehead. Try to do this at least three times a day.

STOP FOR A MOMENT

Here's a helpful acronym that can remind us to become aware of ourselves: S is for Stop. Whatever you're doing, take a pause for a moment. T is Take a Breath. Take a slow, aware breath and feel the breath as it enters and leaves your body. This will help calm you down and return to center. O is for Observe. Notice what's happening in this pres-



ent moment. What are you feeling? What's happening in your body? Is there anything obvious that you can notice? And P is for Proceed. Continue with whatever you were doing. "This whole practice should take about 15 seconds," says Diana Winston, Director of Mindfulness Education at UCLA's Semel Institute. Why would you want to be more mindful at work? Being in the present moment, and being non-reactive and peaceful makes it easier to operate from that spacious place, sometimes called your soul, or your spirit, at work. Why limit this connection to yourself to the time you are at home? You can practice awareness anytime at work, at home and everywhere in between.

MINDFULNESS REMINDERS

So how are you going to remember to do this body awareness thing? Or to put your attention on your intention? Or to be in the present moment? Or to breathe? You can set up some triggers or reminders to be mindful of these things. A mindfulness trigger is a cue that will remind you to break out of "automatic pilot" so that you can be more aware of the present moment –and to anchor a sense of spontaneity, calmness and freedom. You can choose any specific activity that you do during your day and make it a mindful one. Triggers like your phone ringing, driving to work, drinking a glass of water at your desk, or even going into the restroom can be used as a mindfulness trigger. You can learn to associate those actions with becoming present, so that they act as reminders to be aware.

RING IN THE MOMENT

I have a mindfulness bell on my computer and it goes off at random intervals. I downloaded it for free. When it chimes, I stop what I am doing and turn my attention to my breath, my body or my intention. Sometimes I look away from my computer screen outside my window. Or, I close my eyes just for a moment. Sometimes I use it to remind myself to drink water. You can set up your own cues to take care of yourself. I reflect on my intention and go back to my work again. The following examples use the common occurrence of a phone ringing. You can make every phone call an adventure.

YOU HAVE A CHOICE

People often are in the habit of grabbing for the phone as soon as it rings. This reactivity can add to stress. Compulsively grabbing the phone suggests that we are not in charge of our lives. It's subtle – we can't control when the phone rings – and this feeling of being out of control, or not having a choice can be stressful. We can change that

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pattern. There is a brief instant after you hear the phone ring and before you pick it up that you can use to remind yourself that you have a choice. You can choose to pick up the phone or let it go to voice mail, or let it ring one extra time so you can take a deep breath. Taking a moment for yourself is like turning down the radio when an advertisement comes on, so you don't have to listen to it. It is a simple way to find a moment for yourself.

IT'S YOUR CALL

Also, when you hear the phone ring, you can use the ring as a reminder to bring your awareness to your body. You can scan your body for signs of comfort or discomfort, or the ring could be the trigger to remind you to bring yourself back to your intention for the day. Or try one of these: smile and take three deep breaths before reaching for the phone, or when the phone rings, send love or peace or a caring thought to the caller, especially if you don't know who it will be. It's YOUR call!

ORDINARY ACTIONS

If you are somewhat healthy, you probably drink water during your day. Mindfulness is easy to practice with drinking water. It begins when you pick up the bottle or glass. I notice the way the light reflects on the water and the container. I notice how the container feels in my hand as I hold it. I notice the temperature and feel the sensation of the water as I take a sip and swallow it. This easy practice brings me right back to this moment and I become used to taking the time out. Your day, like mine, can really be filled with enjoyable ordinary actions.

TRANSITIONS

Moments of transitions can be good triggers to integrate mindfulness. For example, no matter what kind of job you do; you will likely have to walk from the car or the bus or the train to get there and to go home. When you walk down the hall at the end of your work day to head home, rather than using this time as an opportunity to worry about all the things you didn't get done or need to do the next day; you can use the walk to practice mindfulness. Bring your attention to your feet and legs and to the act of walking. Feel each stride, feel your feet and one foot in front of another. If you walk outside, take in the sights and sounds and colors and activity. It is a great opportunity to transition from work life to home life too. Over time these practices will help you to feel calmer, and happier. They will also help you to stay in the present moment; and not get lost worrying about the past or the future. This moment now is the only one you can be sure of.



Learn more about getting less stressed and more calm on the job or at home at the Sedona Meditation Training Co. website at www.SedonaMeditation.com You'll find a schedule of meditation classes, retreats, workshops and other information on how to stay in the moment and reduce stress. Sarah McLean director of Sedona Meditation Training can be reached at 928.204.0067 or sedonameditation@gmail.com