Toxic emotions disrupt the workplace, and mindfulness increases your awareness of these destructive patterns, helping you recognize them before they run rampant. It’s a way of reprogramming your mind to think in healthier, less stressful, ways. The following information is an introduction to the ancient practice of mindfulness, focusing on its application at work.

**Mindfulness Definition**

Mindfulness essentially means moment-to-moment awareness. Although it originated in the Buddhist tradition, you don’t have to be Buddhist to reap its benefits. This description explains the basic philosophy:

> When you are mindful...You become keenly aware of yourself and your surroundings, but you simply observe these things as they are. You are aware of your own thoughts and feelings, but you do not react to them in the way that you would if you were on “autopilot”...By not labeling or judging the events and circumstances taking place around you, you are freed from your normal tendency to react to them.

**A Guide to Understanding & Practicing Mindfulness**

**Mindfulness Meditation**

Many people immediately associate mindfulness with insight meditation, which starts by focusing on the breath. In, out. In, out. When your mind wanders, notice where it goes (e.g., errands, a distressing conversation, etc.) and then bring your attention back to your breath. Don’t resist your mind’s natural urge to wander, but train it to return to the present. By settling into your body and noticing how it feels, you center yourself in the moment you’re living, too.

You’ll find the following resources useful when you’re prepared to learn more about mindfulness meditation.

**Mindfulness In Plain English**

**A Practical Guide to Mindfulness of Breathing and Tranquil Wisdom Meditation**

**Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR)**

Jon Kabat-Zinn established mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) in the 1970s to help patients suffering from chronic pain. It differs from basic mindfulness meditation in the following ways:
Performed in a group program with 10-40 participants
• Structured to progress for 8-10 weeks
• Weekly sessions last 2.5 hours (plus one all-day session)
• Includes meditation practice, yoga postures, and mindfulness during stressful situations and social interactions
• Requires commitment to complete daily 45-minute homework assignments

Five years ago, Google invited Jon Kabat-Zinn to speak to its employees about mindfulness. Watch the video when you have a free hour.

Other Mindfulness Exercises
Mindfulness includes a broad spectrum of informal activities in addition to meditation and MBSR. Here are a few simple techniques that you can incorporate every day, even at work:

• Spend at least 5 minutes each day doing nothing
• Get in touch with your senses by noticing the temperature of your skin and background sounds around you
• Pay attention to your walking by slowing your pace and feeling the ground against your feet
You can find examples of more exercises at these pages.

The Mindfulness Guide for the Super Busy: How to Live Life to the Fullest
The Quite Short Guide to Mindfulness

Mindfulness Benefits
Mindfulness enhances emotional intelligence, notably self-awareness and the capacity to manage distressing emotions. It also delivers these measurable benefits:

• Reduced stress
• Lower blood pressure
• Improved memory
• Less depression and anxiety

Lifehack Presents: The Mindfulness Meditation Mini Guide
Research empirically demonstrates its efficacy. I’ve summarized some of the most important findings below.

This study of mindfulness studies concludes that “mindfulness training might enhance general features of coping with distress and disability in everyday life, as well as under more extraordinary conditions of serious disorder or stress.”

Mindfulness-based stress reduction and health benefits – a meta analysis
A study with cancer patients demonstrates that “increases in mindfulness over time relate to declines in mood disturbance and stress.”
The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being
Meditation “can produce increases in relative left-sided anterior activation that are associated with reductions in anxiety...” and those with this brain activity recover relatively quickly after an emotional hijack. It also strengthens the immune system.

Alterations in Brain and Immune Function Produced by Mindfulness Meditation

Matthieu Ricard, a French Buddhist monk who resides in Nepal, significantly outperformed hundreds of volunteers on a happiness scale tested by the University of Wisconsin, earning him the title “happiest man in the world.”

Matthieu Ricard: Meet Mr. Happy

Stanford University’s Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education developed a Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT) protocol and subsequently tested it. A centerpiece in the protocol is meditation, and the study found that “the amount of formal meditation practiced during CCT was associated with increased compassion for others.”

Enhancing Compassion: A Randomized Controlled Trial of a Compassion Cultivation Training Program

Mindfulness at Work

A number of well-known companies have implemented mindfulness programs for its employees. For example:

- Apple
- Google
- McKinsey & Company
- Deutsche Bank
- Procter & Gamble
- Astra Zeneca
- General Mills
- Aetna

An August Financial Times article describes the growth in mindfulness in the West and cites General Mills as one company that is making it an integral part of its company culture.

[General Mills] has even begun research into its efficacy, and the early results are striking. After one of Marturano’s seven-week courses, 83 per cent of participants said they were “taking time each day to optimize my personal productivity” – up from 23 per cent before the course. Eighty-two per cent said they now make time to eliminate tasks with limited productivity value – up from 32 per cent before the course. And among senior executives who took the course, 80 per cent reported a positive change in their ability to make better decisions, while 89 per cent said they became better listeners.
The Mind Business

Mindfulness In Silicon Valley

One chapter in *Contemplative Practices in Action* is devoted to the impact of meditation in the lives of Silicon Valley leaders. In a seminar called Spirituality for Organizational Leadership at Santa Clara University, participants discuss how meditation practices can assist them in leading their organization. Those who complete the seminar tend to integrate what they learned into their busy lives in the following way:

1. Anchor your day with a contemplative morning practice (e.g., Breath, Zen, Kabbala, etc.)
2. Before entering the workplace, remind yourself of your organization’s purpose and recommit to your vocation as a leader
3. Throughout the day, pause to be fully present in the moment before undertaking the next critical task
4. Review the day’s events at the close of the day to prevent work stresses from spilling into your home life
5. Before going to bed, engage in some spiritual reading

Mindfulness at Google

Google deserves special mention. Led by Chade-Meng Tan, its Jolly Good Fellow, Google introduced a program to increase emotional intelligence using mindfulness — and backed by scientific research. It’s called Search Inside Yourself and is now offered to organizations outside the Googleplex.

Google Asks Employees To Take A Deep Breath
Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute

Mindfulness Quotes

“What you resist, persists.” – Carl Gustav Jung

“By letting it go it all gets done. The world is won by those who let it go. But when you try and try, the world is beyond winning.” – Lao Tzu