



Embrace Mindfulness as a Leadership Practice

Mindful leadership will keep you advancing, innovating, and building for the future.

By Jon Mertz

In a world of ever-faster change, successful leaders are turning to mindfulness as an essential leadership practice. Mindfulness creates stability and keeps you purpose-centered as you navigate change.

Mindful leaders embrace several key factors that together represent a whole new leadership paradigm. These mindful keys include:

1. Work hard to build, create, and excel in purpose.

Personal Action Each morning, contemplate the day ahead. Fast forward to the end of the day and identify what completed actions will make your soul smile. Write down those completed items, identify the activities to do, and schedule them into your calendar.

Leadership Practice: Create space for team members to do their work, including think space, heart space, and technology space. Each space empowers team members to solve problems, align on organization purpose, and collaborate effectively.

“Mindful leaders respond with thoughtful questions.”

2. Engage in tough conversations.

Personal Action: Don't put off difficult conversations. Approach them with empathy, and focus on your breathing so that you can interact with calm attention. Rather than reacting, mindful leaders listen carefully and respond with thoughtful questions.

Leadership Practice: Encourage team members to discuss mistakes made. Listening to what didn't work helps team members be more empathetic.

3. Nurture relationships that matter.

Personal Action: Carve out time each month to contribute to a community organization. Through such work, you'll develop relationships to keep you centered in your local community. This isn't about networking; it's about practicing your relationship skill set in extraordinary ways.

Leadership Practice: Encourage team members to spend time each month doing work in the community. They'll enhance their relationship building skills while keeping focused on what matters most.

4. Be nice when everything tempts you not to be nice.

Personal Action: Take time to contemplate. Some may meditate. Some may pray. Some may get lost in thoughts while running. Whatever works, take the time to re-center, and use these practices at least five times per week. Self-

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compassion springs from within. From self-compassion, compassion for others rises.

Leadership Practice: A quiet strength of character exists in being humble and kind. Encourage these behaviors. Highlight them. Being nice doesn't mean low expectations. To the contrary, by gently bringing out people's talents, you inspire their best efforts. Too often, we may be tempted to play to the crowd and say whatever we think will gain people's attention. Instead, we need to stand out by saying and doing things that are helpful. Our hands are meant to be extended in a helpful way; it's why we have arms and elbows.

5. Always get up, no matter what, to create something better than the day before.

Personal Action: To build resiliency, go to nature. Take a hike. Go river rafting. Ski. Snowshoe. Bike through the mountains. Nature is resilient. From your interaction with nature, you will refresh and strengthen.

Leadership Practice: Communicate with clarity and transparency. Being open about the challenges, dips, and misses is difficult but necessary. To build a resilient culture, be transparent in what is good and what isn't. Be clear in what problems need to be solved and how each person's talents are needed to advance the organization.

6. Strive less, enable more.

Personal Action: Be actively present for others. Practice being in the moment by listening closely to your spouse, partner, kids, and friends. Turn off all devices and have a conversation. Take the same practice into your workplace by not being distracted during one-to-one conversations.

Leadership Practice: Set the tone for the culture by communicating why the organization needs to move from Point A to Point B. Hire great people, and let them use their talents to enable the strategic direction. Support your teams with encouragement, tools, plans, measurements, and celebrations. Work to ensure that others know you trust them through the successes and lessons learned.

7. Align your wisdom through trust.

Personal Action: When your soul, heart, and mind all align, trust and confidence develop. No matter in work or outside of work, identify what things make your

soul, heart, and mind be at home. Then do those things. Self-trust blooms here.

Leadership Practice: Motivating an organization around a strategic choice requires appealing to heart, mind, and soul. When it comes to leading strategy, discern these connection points. Then use these suggestions to close any strategic gaps:

Heart: Sometimes your heart is into the change, yet many questions remain unanswered. In such cases, you need to tap into the minds of different team members, ask for their input, and think through the scenarios more deeply.

Mind: Perhaps your mind has come to a logical conclusion but your heart isn't in it. You need to explore what's missing to tap into the passion of your organizational culture. If passion about a direction is missing, you need to identify the motivating forces.

Soul: There will be times when you know in your soul what the right move is, but the change is so big that you hesitate. A certain nervousness is normal when you embark on something new. Be present in the moment, using your heart and mind to re-center. Then move forward fully with what you know is right. 

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Leadership Essentials

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The Best Leaders Are Change Agents (Vol. 34, No. 1)

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Nested at the Heart: A New Approach to Nonprofit Leadership (Vol. 29, No. 6)

Smart and Fast Are Not Enough: The Need for Better EQ (Vol. 29, No 1)

Is It Time for a Time-Out? Take Stock of Your Life (Vol. 31, No. 4)