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part

Mindful growth

10

Inspiration and growth

The opening questions

- What part of your role do you value most as a leader?
- How many times have you encouraged, supported or helped others grow – this week?
- Which leaders inspire you and why?

Inspiring growth through the workplace

Life is like a classroom. Only those who are willing to be lifelong learners will move to the head of the class.

Zig Ziglar, American author, 2013

Jane Hart (2018) opened her learning and development keynote speech ‘The Learning Ecosystem’ with three warnings:

1. There is no longer a ‘job for life’.
2. Artificial intelligence and robotics is changing the nature of many jobs.
3. Knowledge and skills may be going out of date as fast as they can be learned.

How much has changed since you have been reading this book – or even doing your six-minute meditations?

Realistically, while you may not need to worry about your knowledge being surpassed that quickly – at least not yet – the mindful leader is certainly aware that learning habits have changed. Because a person's career (perhaps even your own) may take them through a number of transitions, learners have to be flexible, skills have to be transferrable and learning is now more independent than it has ever been before.

Simply put – you are reading this book and working through the exercises yourself, whereas, say years ago, to introduce 'mindful practice' you might have had a taster workshop and then training on how to apply the concepts. Learning and development is no longer dependent on the old-fashioned classroom.

Furthermore, if you are learning independently, so too can your team, and the options are plentiful and can be encouraged, for example social media, conferences, TED talks, online forums, all alongside the training, which can be arranged by the organisation itself. Your team are also constantly learning from you – whether you or they realise it consciously or not.

There is always a role for helping others learn within leadership. This is derived from the 'Servant Leadership' approach (Greenleaf, 1991). While earlier models of leadership focused on the leader as at the 'top of the hierarchy', the 'servant-leader' helps others develop – and in doing so generates higher performance and fulfilled employees. Maslow (1971) described this as achieving self-transcendence '... the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature and to the cosmos'. This was the ability to move beyond development for individuals but progress the development of

others for the good of society. On a smaller scale, this is the ability to help others grow.

Many leaders see the benefits in nurturing their teams – not least because a team of highly skilled people is better than the leader alone. However, it is not just hard skills being referred to. Even Maslow mentions the ‘holistic’ nature of self-transcendence and this emphasises, once again, the important role that mindfulness has to play in leadership. Wijebandara (2016) summarised John Quincy Adams (sixth president of the USA): ‘. . . a leader is one whose actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more.’ He goes on to state the qualities expected of a leader as identified by his college students: ‘Integrity, vision, persuasion, adaptability, generosity’ being some of the most important. More importantly, Wijebandara (2016) argues, leadership is long lasting when it is not imposed, but rather, when followers are encouraged to learn and grow to become equals. This is also the essence of Buddhism, the foundation of mindfulness.

Therefore, building on and bringing together the personal and professional work covered in the earlier chapters, this chapter looks at how applied mindful practice with a focus on creating a positive contemporary learning environment can help you develop and grow your team, as well as help you become the best inspirational figure you can be.

How can my self-development inspire my team?

In her book *Mindful Leadership* (2012), Maria Gonzales emphasises the importance of compassion within leadership. The act of helping others is not only of benefit to those being helped, but to those who witness it. She tackles the ‘self-care’ proviso (one must be emotionally, mentally and physically

healthy before helping others) by reminding the reader that compassion is ‘. . . deep caring without attachment . . .’ and that it is possible to show support without being drawn into the situation yourself.

Furthermore, while your own self-development means you are better able to adapt to a changing world (Reichard and Johnson, 2011), it is also very possible to influence the personal growth of your team through their acknowledgment of what you are doing.

In an even more direct way, in becoming more open and self-reflective, you will have other opportunities to influence others, which previously you might have hidden.

EXERCISE 10.1

Thought experiment

Have you hidden a failure? What was it? What have you learned from it? Maybe there are some exam grades you never talk about. Maybe you're hiding a relationship that didn't work out. However, if you just repress it somewhere, you will never learn the lessons the failure is trying to teach you. Just because you have left an experience on the cutting room floor, learn and inspire others through what you learned from the deleted scene.

Experience of your own ability to come through failure can empower and inspire others as much as success. Hanley (2017) suggests that mindfulness can also help enhance the belief that we have the capacity to meet challenges (even when we have experienced failure in the past). He studied the effect of mindful practice on student beliefs about failure,

finding that the higher the self-report on mindful behaviours (such as awareness, openness, managing impulses), the more likely they were to maintain belief in their academic behaviours after failure.

Don't throw the game

How can you let mediocrity win?

Freddie Trumper, *Chess* by Tim Rice,
Benny Andersson, Björn Ulvaeus

Towards the end of the musical *Chess*, the character Freddie Trumper tells his one-time rival Anatoly Sergievsky to play for the win rather than throw the game. The reason was not any hidden political or romantic agenda, but because he loved and valued the game too much to see its play compromised.

Sometimes, for the sake of a hidden agenda, popularity or, even, compassion, you may feel the need to 'throw the game' or deliberately perform badly. In some premeditated occasions, this may be an example of 'Skilled incompetence' (Argryis, 1986) where a leader gifted with emotional intelligence may sabotage their performance to prevent a lack of ability being discovered. For example, if that leader does not know how to address points raised in a memo, they may 'bury it in a drawer' until such time it has been forgotten and, when found out, merely admit to 'forgetting about it' – 'forgetting' (incompetence) being easier to forgive than the lack of ability to deal with the issues.

The act of avoiding an issue to prevent someone else from difficulty is just as disempowering. You are not helping anyone through protecting them, nor yourself. Better to face the areas which need development and take steps to nurture your talents in there.

How can my practice grow and develop my team?

Once you are confident in being a role model for continued personal development, you can structure your organisation to value continuous learning as well. According to Yeganeh and Kolb (2009), mindfulness is one of the best ways to cultivate intentional and thoughtful action within an organisation. With much current organisational development using the Kolb Learning Cycle – capacity to experience, reflect, think and act, Yeganeh and Kolb propose that mindful practices, such as deep breathing or programming your computer to ask you periodically ‘Am I being intentional?’ (or a similar reflective question) can help prepare the mind to learn as well as encourage more active engagement with the material being pondered. This can help teams get more out of their training. Beyond that, you can cultivate an organisation of independent learners.

EXERCISE 10.2

Mini ‘modern learning’ audit

- What is currently available for my team to learn and develop?
- How much of this is available ‘on demand’?
- How do I encourage my team to pursue independent learning?
- How much do I engage in independent learning?*

*This last question is a little like telling a child that reading is good for them and not being able to tell them what *you* are currently reading. Independent learning is as much the practice of ‘do as I do’ as well as making the options for it available.

Hart (2018) also said that, with an emphasis on independent learning and growth, there is a need to recruit for ‘learnability’ rather than the soft skills alone. Sullivan (2015) suggests a

number of methods that can be used to assess the ability to learn of interview candidates. These include:

- Use a technical question to assess the level of learning and ask for an explanation on the process used to solve the question.
- Ask candidates to identify their learning goals and the resources they currently use.
- Ask candidates about what they have chosen to study independently.

Once you have included learning ability as part of your selection criteria, make sure you have the resources in place to nurture that skill. This might include:

- providing the time to learn
- encouraging staff to ask for ‘stretch assignments’
- requesting feedback yourself
- making a point of learning, and perhaps sharing that learning, every week
- keeping up to date with developments in your field and making your team do the same – perhaps through asking different people to lead an ‘updates’ or ‘learning and development’ section on a weekly briefing.

Promote growth through acknowledging the ‘dark side’ of highly skilled team members

In the previous chapter, derailment factors were discussed, so this will not be covered at length here. However, it is important to be mindful of your high-fliers – especially those recruited for ability to learn. Those who seem to make multi-tasking look easy, who are always first off the mark in responding to anything required or who are quick to jump at opportunities to learn more, may also be over-thinkers. In

itself, wide and critical thinking and broad analysis is a very helpful trait when it comes to self-development, decision making or dealing with arising issues, but it can also have a very negative side. The high-flier can become very consumed with matters beyond their concern and influence if they have little clarity on how to channel their energy efficiently.

If you or members of your team:

- dread one-word replies
- are always seeking more information
- want to get everything right
- always need to know 'why'
- find it difficult to let things go

(adapted from McKibben, 2018)

. . . then chances are you (or they) are over-thinkers.

The over-thinker is excellent at critical analysis and information gathering – which makes them good at their jobs. Plus, the ability to (over) think is most likely to be praised with comments such as, 'I don't know how you fit it all in' and 'You know so much about everything' because the benefit of over-thinking is knowing quite a lot about a number of things . . . many of which will not be relevant to the problem at hand. What exacerbates this is the very ease at which it is possible to access information and this means that an over-thinker can work themselves into a state of anxiety while gathering more and more information . . . which may or may not be of use. It's a bit like the proverbial hamster on the wheel.

What is important for over-thinkers to do is:

- break the cycle of over thinking, when you recognise you are caught in one
- learn to focus on what is within your direct influence

- appreciate that ‘rainy days’ will come, sometimes they will pour and you cannot always control that . . . but you can prepare for it.

Mindful practice helps with all of this – and not just through meditations (although any of the meditations accompanying this book may be used at any time).

Try this exercise.

EXERCISE 10.3

1. Use thought stopping to break the cycle of over-thinking when you recognise it

Thought stopping is a cognitive behavioural therapy technique of saying ‘Stop’ or ‘no’ out loud (or making another sharp noise) when you recognise that you are getting into a cycle of negative thinking. A word of warning – it may be better to do this in private.

2. Accept that rainy days come – and sometimes they will pour

Try channelling your energy into your physical and mental well-being so that you are fit to face them when they do. Eat well, exercise, see friends, hug a pet – do the things that make you feel good long term.

The inspiring – and tangible – benefits of the ‘here and now’

Once your mind stops rushing, it is possible to enjoy the present. Sprinting from one goal to the next without learning from – and taking a moment to enjoy – success is as unhealthy and ineffective for the leader as wallowing in the past, reviewing mistakes and reliving bad experiences without taking action to overcome them. When you focus on the here and now you are ‘. . . less reactive . . . able to

regulate [your] emotions . . . [and can] shift it into how . . . [you] understand and create change.' (Steidle, 2017).

Not only that, but you maximise your engagement with the tasks at hand.

Try this exercise

EXERCISE 10.4

- Switch off your phone/leave it in a desk or bag during meetings (so you are not even distracted by a vibration).
- Conduct meetings away from your workstation so you are not distracted by your computer.
- Negotiate time to speak with your team rather than stopping what you are doing, even for a 'quick question'.

You might even find that your team also do the same.

Such behaviour also has the benefit of signalling to your team, 'I'm here, I care about you. I'm listening and what I am telling you to do is not just based on my own personal opinion but what I'm observing and hearing from you' (Cuddy, 2015). It builds trust, which in turn retains your following.

As a leader, you will always be a role model for someone – and it is better that you are a positive one in deed and in position. Applying mindful practice to your daily life will bring benefits both personally and professionally. Keep going.

IN SUMMARY

1. Leaders retain followers through inspiring and empowering them rather than imposing power over them.
2. Helping your team to grow is part of self-transcendence where you give back to others and in doing so improve your segment of the world.
3. Being able to see a leader's own commitment to self-development sets a positive example to the team.
4. Another means to inspire growth is to create an organisational learning ecosystem which offers multiple opportunities for independent learning.
5. Recruit for learning ability, but also be mindful that positive skills have a potential 'dark side'.
6. Be present in the 'here and now' within your leadership role. It benefits your performance and your relationship with your team.

CHAPTER 10 TOOLKIT



- The most effective and inspiring leaders motivate others to ‘. . . do more and become more!’ (John Quincy Adams).
- The traits most valued in leaders are the interpersonal ones which encourage teams that they can become equals.
- Longevity in leadership is through inspired followers rather than imposition of power.

Key points to remember

1. *Always* remember that in your leadership position you are a role model.
2. *Sometimes* try modelling the self-development behaviour you want, sometimes try teaching it.
3. *Try to* cultivate a reflective, adaptable and empowered learning organisation through recruitment and procedural and training practice.

Take action

1. **Remind yourself to continue to inspire and grow through practising this daily affirmation**

‘I’m going to become a better version of myself

‘I’m going to start living up to my potential

‘I’m going to become the person I was meant to be.’

Try this to remind yourself that as a leader you are always inspiring others – sometimes unconsciously

- Look at yourself in the mirror.
- List three ways in which you might inspire others (these can be practical, physical, intellectual or in any area).

2. **Then try that exercise with your team**

Tell them that, when they are comfortable in themselves, they will often inspire without realising.

Secret inspirational Santa:

- Write all the names of your team and put them in a hat.
- Take a name from the hat.
- Write/state how that person inspires you.

Things might be revealed that each person did not realise.

3. **Challenge yourself – try to do one of these every day**

- Complete one random act of kindness.
- Offer at least one genuine and justified expression of congratulations at someone else’s success (in your personal or professional life).
- Express love or attention in the way that someone you care for likes it – not the way *you* like it (five languages: gifts, quality time, compliments, intimacy, acts of service).

What I tried

| Date | Action |
|------|--------|
| | |

What worked for me

| Date | Action |
|------|--------|
| | |

Please use a separate piece of paper if necessary.