

Lesson 4

Cultivating optimistic thinking outside of work

Introduction

Separating work and home life can be tricky, however there are simple ways to regain control over your feelings and thoughts about work, such as mindfulness.

If you want to know what a good work-life balance feels like, it's useful to know how to prioritise, set firm boundaries, and find time every day to reset, relax and recharge.

If you're preoccupied with work-based issues during non-work times and would rather not be, then using the mindful breathing exercise described in this lesson each day will help develop more positivity in both your home and work life and improve your concentration.

Science

Detach or integrate?

Whether you'd like to completely segment yourself from thoughts about work during your personal time, or integrate them across your whole waking hours, each approach has its pros and cons.

Integrators are people who like to blend work and life, whereas 'segmentors' prefer very clear boundaries between work and life.

Detaching from work when you're not there gives your mind a well-deserved rest from task-oriented and results-driven periods that can be fast-paced and stressful.

Cognitive Emotional Segmentation Strategy:

Studies on mindfulness have demonstrated that following this intervention, employees experience less emotional exhaustion, negative mood and strain-based work-family conflict. They also benefit from increased psychological detachment during non-work times and higher satisfaction with their work-life balance.

If you're struggling with work-related thoughts or emotions during non-work time, this can affect your personal life and impair your work-life balance, but there are ways you can reach the best-case scenario for you.

Value

In return for investing just a few minutes each day into your mindfulness practice, you will become more productive and successful in life.

Naturally, our lives are complex with many demands. By learning these techniques, you will feel more in control, less distracted and able to deal with what life throws your way.

Completing this lesson will teach you how to be completely present, anchoring you to the moment and separating your personal time from work time.

You will feel less emotionally exhausted and more comfortable in your own skin.

Exercise

Noticing your breathing and its qualities: is it shallow, deep, quiet or noisy, warm or cool? This might be a novel exercise for you, but take it from the experts, it's worth it!

Some mistakenly believe that mindfulness is the same as relaxation; however, mindfulness is about bringing your awareness to and accepting the present moment and internal events, such as your feelings and thoughts.

The emphasis of relaxation on the other hand, is to change the current state.

Both are complementary approaches that support the relaxation response.

Try this short mindful breathing exercise to help you develop positivity in your life, either in your work break, or at home.

Mindful breathing

Slowing down and taking a breath is one of the basic principles of mindfulness. It enables you to think before you act or react, which you can sometimes do quickly, especially when you're emotionally charged.

As breathing is something you've done since you were born, you tend to take it for granted and underestimate its power. It can change the way you behave and has the ability to give you those valuable moments of reflection before you act.

- Find a place where you won't be disturbed, and you can be still and quiet for a few minutes.
- Sit back in your chair or lie down.
- Loosen any tight clothing and rest your hands on your lap.
- Pay attention to your feet. Wiggle your toes and notice how your legs, arms, head and neck feel against wherever they're resting.
- Breathe:
- Start with two deep, cleansing breaths and on the breath out, feel your body sinking into the chair or bed...
- Allow your natural breathing pattern to resume.

- Notice the quality of your breaths: are they shallow, deep, slow or rapid? Are you breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth? Or are you using solely your nose or mouth for both in and out breaths? Notice any difference in temperature on the breath in as opposed to the breath out...
- Focus on your body:
- Make a mental note of whether you feel your body's getting heavier or lighter. Which parts of your body are moving whilst doing this mindfulness exercise?
- Now, be aware of all the contact points of your body on the surface you're resting.
- Accept your thoughts:
- Notice if any thoughts pop into your mind. If they do, that's okay - acknowledge them before allowing them to drift away naturally. For some, it helps to return your attention to the rise and fall of your abdomen as you inhale and exhale.
- It doesn't matter how many thoughts you have. Each time, notice where your mind has travelled to and gently redirect your attention to your breath.
- Awaken:
- Have a gentle stretch and open your eyes before moving.

Wrap

Learn to simply be.

Whether you're concentrating, breathing, or bringing your attention to the here and now and letting go of other concerns, you're going to have to get comfortable being alone with your own thoughts... with your own self.

Alone time is the key to finding balance in our lives.

Mindfulness is learning to simply be with yourself.

It takes practice to pay attention to yourself, and it's an ongoing journey.

Next steps

Use the mindful breathing exercise as described in this lesson each day. Absorb yourself in the moment, focusing on your breathing and then your body.

In the next lesson, we will help you transition towards being a more optimistic thinker using the ABC technique.