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MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

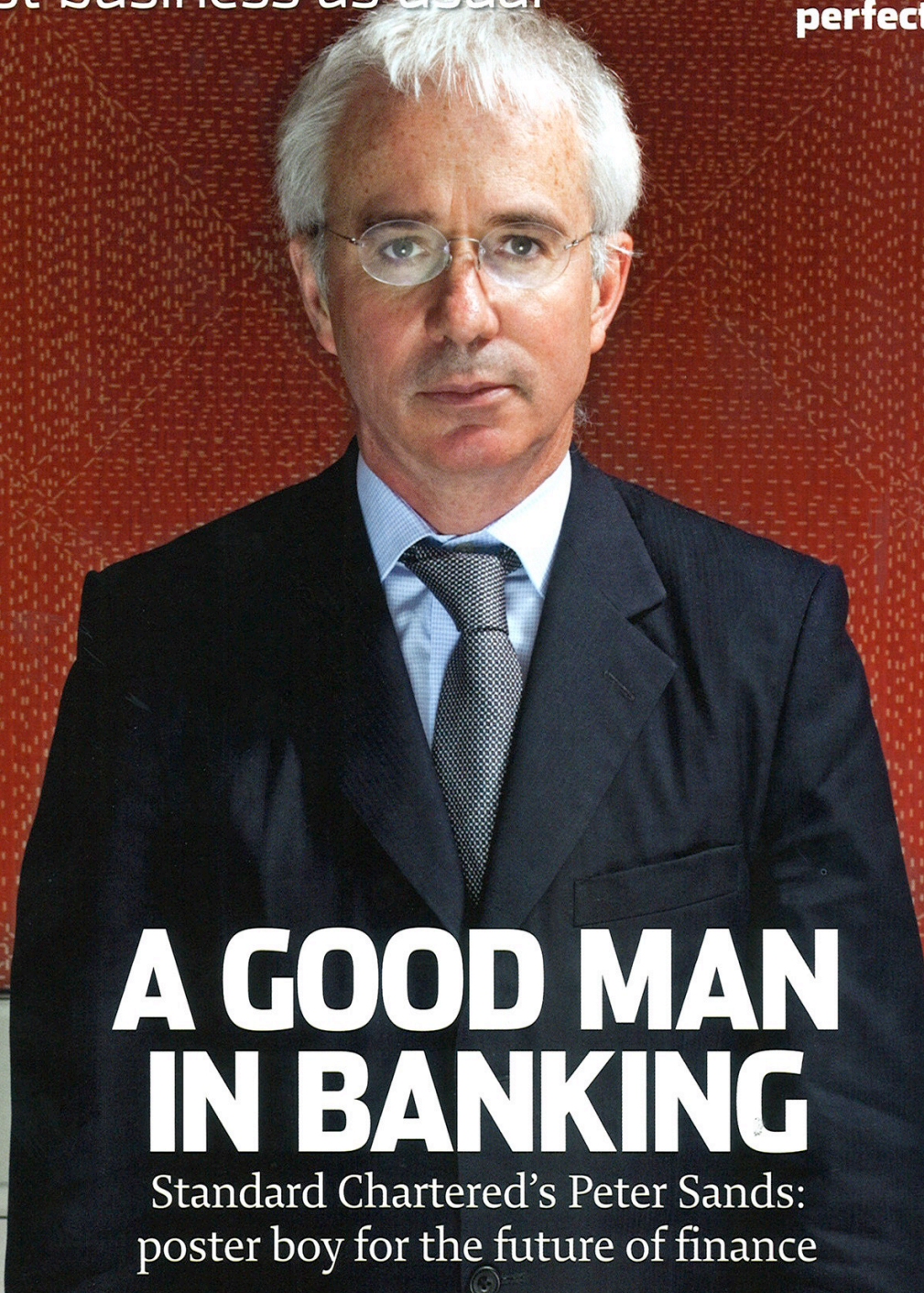
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Expand your mindfulness

Facing a tough economy and heavy workloads, strung-out managers are turning to a range of meditation techniques to help them keep their cool and become better bosses. JOHN MORRISH seeks out some headspace.

Times are fraught, and overstretched executives are constantly on the lookout for a way to clear their minds so they can work in a calmer, more effective, and more responsive way. Cultivating a special state of consciousness called 'mindfulness' – an intense awareness of the here and now – is proving attractive to a growing number of senior managers, both in the US and here.

Mindfulness is achieved by meditation techniques, often involving sitting on a cushion, eyes closed, concentrating on the inflow and outflow of your breath. Or you might spend 10 minutes studying, sniffing, tasting and finally eating a piece of fruit. That might make it sound like a remnant of the hippy-dippy, navel-gazing 1960s and 1970s, but the evidence for mindfulness' effectiveness is good enough to have impressed hard-nosed companies such as Google (which has invited mindfulness gurus to speak at the Googleplex), General Mills, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deutsche Bank, Procter & Gamble, AstraZeneca, Apple, Credit Suisse, KPMG, Innocent, Reuters and many more.

According to Don McCormick, assistant professor of management at California State University and a dedicated meditator, it 'can help individuals to manage workplace stress, perform tasks more effectively, enhance self-awareness and self-regulation, experience work as more meaningful, improve workplace relationships, increase ethical behaviour, and make perception more accurate'. It is said to pay dividends for

leaders and managers, by improving the quality of their listening and communicating.

Impressive claims, then. But what exactly is mindfulness? Michael Chaskalson, an experienced British mindfulness teacher and the author of a powerful little book called *The Mindful Workplace* (Wiley-Blackwell), says it is 'a way of paying attention to yourself, to others and to the world around you. And it's a quality of attention which is open, kindly and non-judgemental.' McCormick uses a mnemonic, Canape, when explaining it to his students: 'Concentrated Awareness of experience, Non-judgemental and Accepting in the Present moment, and characterised by Equanimity.' Hardly snappy, but it seems to work.

Business people who have taken up mindfulness meditation find it has helped them in different ways. David Huntley is one enthusiast. An actuary by profession, he has had a 25-year career in financial services, running the Australian and New Zealand businesses of Swiss Re and becoming head of Pearl Life after Pearl took over Resolution in 2008. Now he has a portfolio career, including coaching, working with a start-up business and taking on his first non-executive role. In 2006, newly back in Britain from Australia, he was introduced by his own business coach to Chaskalson. 'Within a week or so, I was sitting in a hotel room studying a raisin for 10 minutes, thinking, crikey, how much are we paying the guy?'

But he persisted with a range of meditation practices, including 'body-scanning', in which you focus on the sensations in various parts of your body, and 'sitting meditation', in which, initially, you focus all your attention on your breath. Something called the 'three-minute meditation' proved especially helpful. 'If I had a big meeting coming up, I'd nip into the gents and sit there and do it. I definitely felt calmer, more present and more centred.' He liked it so much that earlier this year he

went back for an eight-week course intended for business coaches. It has given him more focus, he says. 'I feel that I'm using a number of senses to be with clients, rather than just listening to what they say.'

Business, Huntley says, works at two levels: propositional and implicational. The propositional level is about setting out plans and projects; the implicational level is about what people think of each other, what people say about each other, how messages are received. 'So you've got this noise going on at this implicational level,' he says. 'Mindfulness has the capacity to calm that noise down and enable you to work more in the moment without that noise going on.'

While it may be a hot business trend, the roots of mindfulness go deep. It originated in the teachings of the Buddha 2,500 years ago, and similar ideas and practices are found in many religions. But the mindfulness being offered to business people is a secularised version, shorn of religious language, though many of its teachers it have Buddhist backgrounds.

Chaskalson has been a Buddhist since 1975. He created and ran an ethical import business before becoming a full-time mindfulness teacher. He teaches a course at Bangor University and runs a company offering business coaching.

He says: 'When you are better at working with your mind and mental states, things go better for you. If what you are after is greater emotional intelligence in your people, a greater capacity to empathise and connect with others and for them to regulate their own emotions, we know that mindfulness training will help.'

In the US, Michael Carroll, author of *The Mindful Leader* (Shambhala Publications), is a former Wall Street and Disney executive. Another Buddhist, he is a believer in a serious regime of practice 'on the cushion'. He emphasises that mindfulness is about being rather than doing.

'Business people are good at getting stuff done, meeting objectives, hitting the numbers, closing the deal. This is a different type of effort. It's not the effort of how to get somewhere, it's the effort of how to be somewhere. 'Out of that sense of presence and seeing clearly, we begin to notice that the social intelligence skills that we require begin to naturally manifest [themselves], because we are paying attention. We're listening to someone and we're resonating with their unspoken message, because we're not rushing past that to our goal.'

Reaching that state of calm is not always easy. Formal meditation can be boring and frustrating. You will probably fall asleep when you start. But all you have to do is keep doing it, it is said, to see its benefits permeating your daily life. In an analogy originated by Jon Kabat-Zinn, effectively the inventor of modern, secular mindfulness, it is better to weave your parachute before you jump out of the plane.

Kabat-Zinn is a medical scientist and a Buddhist. Creating a clinic at his Massachusetts hospital in 1979, he adapted the practice of mindfulness meditation from Buddhism, removed its religious trappings, and began using it in the treatment of chronic pain, then stress. Since then, mindfulness has been used for anxiety, depression – where it is recommended by Britain's NICE – sleeplessness, relationship problems, eating disorders and many more.

More recently, it has appeared in other areas. In the US, it has been used in education, in the prison and police services, by trial lawyers and even by marines heading for Iraq: the idea was to make them more resilient and able to cope with the extreme stress of battle.

Kabat-Zinn's background led him to insist that the benefits of mindfulness meditation should be measured scientifically: there are now hundreds of academic papers attesting to its worth. It is even claimed that after a standard Kabat-Zinn programme of eight two-hour sessions, held once a week and supported by daily homework, the brain itself expands in the areas associated with learning, memory, self-awareness, compassion and introspection.

Andy Parsons is a pharmacologist and neuroscientist and a vice-president at GlaxoSmithKline. An internal coach at GSK, he says that for him mindfulness is about 'being completely present and listening to what's going on around you. Being truly present and mindful allows you to really focus without running scripts from past experiences.'

He took part in a Chaskalson-run course at GSK for internal coaches. Having taken the eight weeks of weekly formal practice, plus homework, he says he does his best to keep it up, without spending 40 minutes a day on the mat. 'I try and involve it in whatever I'm doing on a day-to-day basis; while the computer's booting up, I try to take a moment to focus on my breathing and put myself where I need to be for the day.'

Those who took the course with him have also taken from it what they need. 'People tend to find their own way,' Parsons

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explains. 'It's something people bring into their being.'

At Transport for London, some 600 employees have received a mindfulness-based programme since 1979, aimed at reducing stress and improving wellbeing. Working on the Underground or the buses can be extremely stressful: the course is intended to improve staff's resilience. Psychotherapist and occupational therapist Emerald-Jane Turner devised the course, which includes some traditional Buddhist meditations rebranded as relaxation exercises.

TfL is proud of the results: among those who did the two-hours-a-week, six-week package, days off for stress, anxiety and depression dropped by 71% over the next three years. Attendees reported remarkable improvements in their relationships, sleep, and ability to relax. 'We do a measurement,' says Turner, 'and it increases people's happiness.'

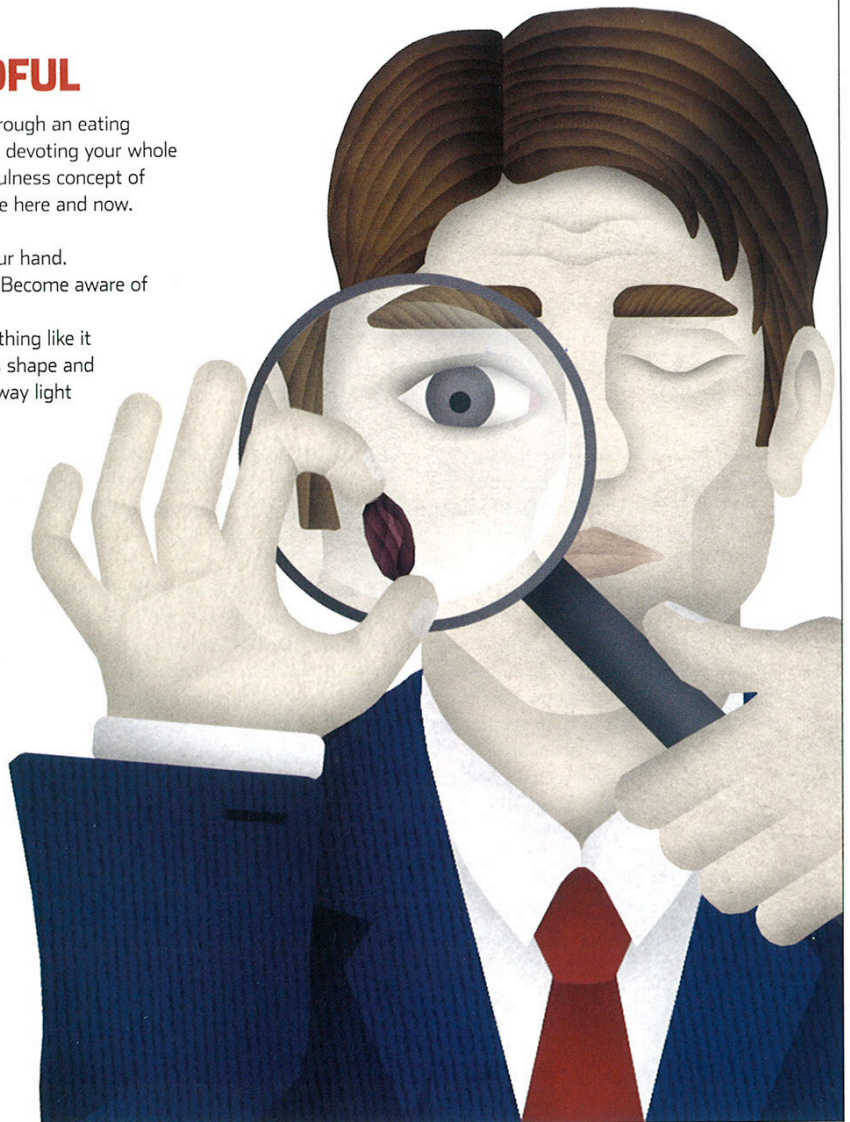
Turner has gone on to offer similar material, sometimes delivered by telephone counsellors and downloaded guided audio meditations, to the London Fire Brigade and DuPont in Switzerland, among others. Who would want to be rescued by a burned-out fireman, after all?

Nothing is without its downside, however. Erik Dane, assistant professor of management at Rice University in Houston, Texas, is not a meditator or a Buddhist, and he has written a rigorous and fascinating paper for the *US Journal of Management*, in which he posits some possible drawbacks to mindfulness. 'From a workplace standpoint,' he says, 'we're very much in the infancy of understanding whether

MAKE YOURSELF MINDFUL

One common way of introducing mindfulness is through an eating meditation. Take several minutes over this exercise, devoting your whole attention to it. It demonstrates the essential mindfulness concept of concentrating on the evidence of your senses, in the here and now.

- 1 Take a single raisin and place it on the palm of your hand.
- 2 Feel the weight and structure of it on your hand. Become aware of its temperature.
- 3 Look carefully at it as if you have never seen anything like it before. Use your eyes to explore every part of it, its shape and texture, its hollows and ridges, its colours and the way light falls upon it.
- 4 Touch it, exploring its texture with your finger, perhaps with your eyes closed. Pick it up gently with your other hand, and feel the way it is made.
- 5 Place it under your nose, exploring its aroma and being aware of any sensations this produces in your mouth or stomach.
- 6 Bring the raisin to your mouth, noticing the precise movements of your hand and arm. Place it in your mouth and, without chewing, explore the sensation of it in your mouth and on your tongue.
- 7 Gently move it to your teeth and begin to chew slowly. Observe the texture of the raisin and the way its flavour is released. Note how the tastes change with each gentle bite, and the way your saliva flows. Keep chewing, slowly, until there is no longer anything to chew.
- 8 Be aware of the sensation of wanting to swallow, then swallow.
- 9 Feel the sensation as the raisin slips down your throat and into your stomach.
- 10 Ask yourself how your body feels now you have completed the exercise. What have you become aware of that you might not have noticed before?



mindfulness overall is useful, or more specifically the conditions under which it's useful versus potentially harmful.'

He finds mindfulness helpful for experienced employees dealing with dynamic tasks; less good for inexperienced employees dealing with static tasks. He gives an example from his own experience. If you're leading a class, heightened external awareness makes you a more responsive teacher. If you're sitting and writing, you're better off with other 'attentional states', such as 'absorption' and 'flow'. Even McCormick, who tries to bring mindfulness to all his daily activities, admits that he can't write while mindful.

Unlike, say transcendental meditation, with its secret Sanskrit mantras, mindfulness is effectively in the public domain and you can learn simple sitting meditation by watching Kabat-Zinn or Carroll speaking at the Googleplex on YouTube. But it is best to be led by a teacher, and here your options, and costs, vary widely.

To devise and run a course for your workforce, Turner's EJT Associates charges around £100 to £120 a person for six

sessions for a group of 12. If you want to make a real splash, former Buddhist monk Andy Puddicombe of Headspace will charge you £4,000 for a single session with 200 to 700 employees. A half-day with Chaskalson through his company, Mindfulness Works, will cost around £1,000 per trainer.

In the US, Carroll, with his company Awake At Work, favours longer-term involvement and tailors his prices according to his clients' circumstances. To coach the CEO of a Fortune 1000 company, he'd be looking at \$3,500 a month; for a physician running a five-person private practice team, footing the bill herself, he'd go as low as \$1,000 a month.

Those who just want to dip their toes in, however, might want to go to Puddicombe's website, getsomeheadspace.com, where daily guided meditations cost from as little as £3.75 a month. Puddicombe is a gifted teacher: intelligent, helpful and reassuring. The fact that each day's meditation is different removes some of the boredom. And the first 10 days are free. Why not give it a try? It could change your life – for the better. **mt**