


LEARNING MADE EASY



# Mindful Leadership

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand



Incorporate mindfulness  
into your approach

—  
Improve your  
leadership style

—  
Reap the benefits of being  
attentive to colleagues

**Juliet Adams, FCIPD**

*Director, A Head for Work Ltd*

**Technical Editor:**

**Marina Grazier, MBPsS**

*Owner Director, The Mindfulness  
Exchange Ltd*





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# Contents at a Glance

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Part 1: Breaking the Mould</b> .....	5
CHAPTER 1: Exploring Mindful Leadership.....	7
CHAPTER 2: Discovering Why Mindfulness Matters to Leaders.....	17
CHAPTER 3: Harnessing the Neuroscience of Mindful Leadership .....	31
<b>Part 2: Learning from Mindful Leaders</b> .....	45
CHAPTER 4: Case Study 1: Andrew Stone, Baron Stone of Blackheath.....	47
CHAPTER 5: Case Study 2: Tim Neild, Royal Navy Commander.....	57
CHAPTER 6: Case Study 3: Marion Furr, Director of MBPA.....	65
<b>Part 3: Developing Mindfulness</b> .....	73
CHAPTER 7: Setting the Stage for Transformation.....	75
CHAPTER 8: Week 1: Focusing Your Attention .....	83
CHAPTER 9: Week 2: Observing the Mind-Body Connection.....	101
CHAPTER 10: Week 3: Minding the Gap.....	121
CHAPTER 11: Week 4: Recognising That Thoughts Are Not Facts.....	143
CHAPTER 12: Week 5: Turning Towards Difficulties.....	163
CHAPTER 13: Week 6: Developing Intention .....	177
<b>Part 4: Applying Mindful Leadership</b> .....	195
CHAPTER 14: Enhancing Your Personal Presence and Influence.....	197
CHAPTER 15: Leading in a Digital Age .....	209
CHAPTER 16: Leading in Times of Change.....	221
<b>Part 5: Becoming a Mindful Organisation</b> .....	235
CHAPTER 17: Introducing Mindfulness to Your Organisation .....	237
CHAPTER 18: Integrating Mindfulness into Everyday Work Practices .....	251
<b>Part 6: The Part of Tens</b> .....	267
CHAPTER 19: Ten Mindful Ways to Make Better Decisions.....	269
CHAPTER 20: Ten Mindful Ways to Reduce the Risk of Burnout.....	279
CHAPTER 21: Ten Ways to Improve Your Attention with Mindfulness.....	289
CHAPTER 22: (More Than) Ten Sources of Info on Mindful Leadership.....	301
<b>Index</b> .....	311



# Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
About This Book .....	2
Foolish Assumptions.....	2
Icons Used in This Book.....	3
Beyond the Book.....	3
Where to Go from Here.....	4
PART 1: BREAKING THE MOULD.....	5
CHAPTER 1: <b>Exploring Mindful Leadership</b> .....	7
Establishing the Facts about Mindfulness and Leadership.....	7
Understanding mindfulness.....	8
Redefining leadership .....	8
Exploring the Benefits of Mindful Leadership .....	9
Refreshing your knowledge of leadership.....	9
Investigating human nature .....	10
Deconstructing Mindfulness.....	11
Defining mindfulness .....	11
Maintaining metacognition and an optimum mind state.....	12
Exploring the Evolution of Mindfulness.....	13
Identifying the foundations of mindfulness in the workplace.....	14
Starting your own mindful leadership journey.....	15
CHAPTER 2: <b>Discovering Why Mindfulness Matters to Leaders</b> .....	17
Leadership Challenges of the Modern Workplace.....	18
Leading in a VUCA world.....	18
Leading when change is the norm.....	19
Identifying Sources of Pressure.....	20
Defining pressure .....	20
Defining stress.....	21
Identifying sources of pressure that can lead to stress.....	21
Recognising power stress .....	22
Mindful Ways to Improve Your Leadership .....	23
Letting go of the stereotype .....	23
Recognising your stress levels.....	24
Mindful strategies for leading in a VUCA world .....	24

	Mindfully Reducing Leadership Stress.....	25
	Minding the gap .....	25
	Gaining a sense of completion.....	27
	Engaging your recovery and renewal circuitry.....	27
	Understanding that Mindfulness Is Not a Panacea for All Ills .....	28
	Don't shoot the messenger .....	29
	Be mindful of your breath .....	29
	When to seek professional help.....	30
<b>CHAPTER 3:</b>	<b>Harnessing the Neuroscience of Mindful Leadership.....</b>	<b>31</b>
	Grasping the Potential and Limitations of the Executive Brain .....	32
	The human brain 101 .....	33
	Boosting your neuroplasticity .....	34
	Becoming conscious of your unconscious.....	36
	Recognising Your Hidden Drivers.....	37
	Maximising reward, minimising threat .....	37
	Exploring fight, flight or freeze.....	38
	Recognising the human negativity bias .....	39
	Recognising the wandering mind .....	40
	Establishing How Mindfulness Works.....	40
	Stage 1: Setting intent .....	41
	Stage 2: Focused concentration .....	42
	Stage 3: Open monitoring.....	43
	Recognising the importance of kindness and acceptance .....	43
	<b>PART 2: LEARNING FROM MINDFUL LEADERS.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4:</b>	<b>Case Study 1: Andrew Stone, Baron Stone of Blackheath.....</b>	<b>47</b>
	The Impact of Mindfulness on Andrew's Work.....	48
	Mindful negotiations in the Middle East .....	49
	Mindful leadership at M&S.....	50
	Mindful work in parliament .....	51
	Mindful self-management .....	52
	Cultivating happiness .....	52
	Andrew's Mindfulness Experience and Practice.....	53
	Finding the motivation .....	53
	Developing mindfulness .....	53
	Incorporating mindfulness every day .....	54



	Andrew's Hints and Tips .....	54
	Leadership Insights .....	55
<b>CHAPTER 5:</b>	<b>Case Study 2: Tim Neild, Royal Navy Commander</b> .....	<b>57</b>
	The Impact of Mindfulness on Tim's Work .....	58
	Working under pressure .....	58
	Maintaining balance and perspective .....	59
	Remaining focused in meetings.....	59
	Improving personal effectiveness and productivity .....	59
	Improving sleep quality.....	60
	Becoming more self-aware.....	60
	Mindfulness Experience and Practice.....	60
	What was Tim's motivation to learn about mindfulness? .....	61
	How Tim started to develop his mindfulness.....	61
	How Tim incorporates mindfulness into his day .....	62
	Tim's Hints and Tips for Leaders .....	63
	Leadership Insights .....	64
<b>CHAPTER 6:</b>	<b>Case Study 3: Marion Furr, Director of MBPA</b> .....	<b>65</b>
	The Impact of Mindfulness on Marion's Work.....	66
	Leading a major restructuring programme.....	66
	Being a less frantic, more authentic leader .....	67
	Introducing mindfulness to the Department of Health .....	68
	Marion's Mindfulness Experience and Practice.....	68
	Finding the motivation .....	68
	Developing mindfulness .....	70
	Incorporating mindfulness every day .....	70
	Marion's Top Tips for Leaders .....	71
	Leadership Insights .....	72
	<b>PART 3: DEVELOPING MINDFULNESS</b> .....	<b>73</b>
<b>CHAPTER 7:</b>	<b>Setting the Stage for Transformation</b> .....	<b>75</b>
	Understanding Self-Authoring.....	76
	Developing the Tools for Self-Authoring .....	77
	Understanding your leadership style and preferences .....	77
	Deciding what's working and what's not.....	78
	Setting your intention.....	78
	Harnessing the power of neuroplasticity.....	79

	Taking Your First Step Towards Mindful Leadership .....	80
	WorkplaceMT training structure and rationale.....	80
	WorkplaceMT training requirements and expectations .....	81
<b>CHAPTER 8:</b>	<b>Week 1: Focusing Your Attention .....</b>	<b>83</b>
	Mindfulness or Mindlessness: Discovering the Difference .....	83
	Observing autopilot in action .....	85
	Recognising habitual responses .....	86
	Noticing the mind's tendency to wander .....	87
	Tuning in to the Present Moment .....	89
	Focusing Your Attention .....	91
	Practicing mindfulness of breath.....	92
	Mindfulness of breath – the science.....	94
	Week 1 WorkplaceMT Practice Exercises .....	98
	Week 1 formal mindfulness exercises.....	99
	Week 1 informal everyday mindfulness exercises .....	99
<b>CHAPTER 9:</b>	<b>Week 2: Observing the Mind-Body Connection.....</b>	<b>101</b>
	Exploring the Impact of Work on Your Body .....	102
	Working as a board member.....	102
	Working in IT.....	103
	Exploring Mind-Body Science .....	105
	Influencing your decisions and judgment .....	106
	Discovering the link between your tissue and your brain .....	107
	Assessing the impact of posture on performance .....	108
	Tuning in to Your Body .....	109
	Tuning in to your early warning system.....	110
	Pausing to appreciate the moment .....	110
	Observing your reactivity cycles.....	110
	Scanning Your Body .....	111
	Body scan exercise .....	112
	Body scan – the science .....	114
	Reflecting on the body scan .....	115
	Managing Expectations .....	115
	Week 2 WorkplaceMT Practice Exercises .....	118
	Week 2 formal mindfulness exercise: Body scan .....	118
	Week 2 informal everyday mindfulness.....	118
<b>CHAPTER 10:</b>	<b>Week 3: Minding the Gap .....</b>	<b>121</b>
	Working Smarter, Not Harder.....	122
	Minding the Gap.....	123

Noticing Patterns of Thought.....	125
Applying Kindness to Your Work.....	126
Adopting an Approach Mode of Mind .....	127
Adopting an approach mode of mind at work.....	128
Understanding the science of approach and avoidance .....	129
Taking Stock of Your Progress .....	129
Stretching without Striving.....	130
Stretching without striving exercise .....	131
The science behind stretching without striving .....	136
Mindfulness of Breath and Body.....	136
The Three-Step Breathing Space .....	138
Week 3 WorkplaceMT Practice Exercises .....	140
Week 3 formal mindfulness exercise .....	141
Week 3 informal everyday mindfulness.....	141
<b>CHAPTER 11: Week 4: Recognising That Thoughts</b>	
<b>Are Not Facts.....</b>	<b>143</b>
Observing the Guessing Game .....	144
Separating the facts from your interpretation.....	145
Surviving adversity.....	147
Acting on assumptions.....	148
Reducing Mental Pain .....	149
Recognising your inner bully .....	151
Observing your inner bully at play.....	152
Identifying Sounds and Thoughts .....	153
Observing the impact of sounds.....	154
Mindfulness of sounds and thoughts exercise .....	154
Living with Frustration .....	158
Mastering the Three-Step Breathing Space .....	159
Week 4 WorkplaceMT Practice Exercises .....	160
Week 4 formal mindfulness exercise .....	160
Week 4 informal everyday mindfulness.....	161
<b>CHAPTER 12: Week 5: Turning Towards Difficulties.....</b>	<b>163</b>
Facing Up to Difficulties .....	164
Accepting difficulty.....	165
Approaching difficulty .....	166
Approaching difficulty exercise .....	167
Reflecting on your experiences.....	169
Picking Your Battles Wisely .....	172
Don't sweat the small stuff .....	173
Practice mindful acceptance .....	173

Using the Breathing Space to Deal with Daily Challenges .....	175
Week 5 WorkplaceMT Practice Exercises .....	176
Week 5 formal mindfulness exercise .....	176
Week 5 informal everyday mindfulness.....	176
<b>CHAPTER 13: Week 6: Developing Intention.....</b>	<b>177</b>
Accepting Your True Self .....	179
Knowing When It's Time to Do Things Differently.....	180
Balancing Your Life and Work.....	181
Striking a balance that's right for you.....	182
Filling your energy tanks .....	183
Managing Yourself for Resilience .....	184
Getting the most out of meetings.....	185
Dealing with pressure .....	185
Cultivating Kindness.....	186
Cultivating kindness exercise .....	187
Cultivating kindness short exercises .....	190
Setting an Intent to Make Mindfulness Part of Each Day .....	191
Week 6 WorkplaceMT Practice Exercises .....	193
Week 6 formal mindfulness exercise .....	193
Week 6 informal everyday mindfulness.....	193
<b>PART 4: APPLYING MINDFUL LEADERSHIP .....</b>	<b>195</b>
<b>CHAPTER 14: Enhancing Your Personal Presence and Influence.....</b>	<b>197</b>
Establishing Your Personal Brand.....	198
Discovering your values and personal drivers .....	198
Identifying your personal values.....	199
Seeing yourself through the eyes of others .....	200
Harnessing the Power of Influence.....	201
Promoting trust.....	202
Being consistent.....	202
Showing assertiveness without aggression.....	202
Being flexible, not rigid.....	203
Being personable .....	203
Walking the talk.....	203
Listening.....	204
Becoming a 3-D Negotiator.....	204
Practicing mindful negotiation .....	205
Becoming a better negotiator .....	206

**CHAPTER 15: Leading in a Digital Age** ..... 209

- Defining Digital Leadership ..... 210
  - Identifying the role of social media ..... 211
  - Identifying the digital implications for leaders..... 213
- Exploring the Impact of Leading in a Digital Age..... 213
  - Recognising signs of information overload ..... 214
  - Recognising executive attention deficit disorder..... 214
  - Managing your attention ..... 215
- Coping with the Demands of Digital Leadership..... 217
- Working More Effectively in a Digital Age..... 218

**CHAPTER 16: Leading in Times of Change** ..... 221

- Understanding Change from Your Brain’s Perspective ..... 222
- Leading When Change Is the Norm ..... 224
  - Managing change or leading change?..... 225
  - Observing the change continuum ..... 225
- Exploring Models of Change Leadership..... 227
  - Kotter’s model of change leadership..... 227
  - Prochaska and DiClemente’s stages of change model..... 228
  - Prosci’s ADKAR Model ..... 229
- Practicing Mindful Strategies for Leading Change ..... 230
  - Letting go of the illusion of control..... 231
  - Becoming more emotionally intelligent..... 232
  - Remaining rooted in the present moment..... 233

**PART 5: BECOMING A MINDFUL ORGANISATION** ..... 235

**CHAPTER 17: Introducing Mindfulness to Your Organisation**..... 237

- Starting with the Outcome in Mind..... 238
  - Defining desirable organisational outcomes ..... 238
  - Assessing the risk of possible negative impacts ..... 240
- Developing Mindful Individuals in Your Organisation ..... 241
  - Cultivating mindful individuals..... 242
  - Making mindfulness more accessible to staff..... 243
- Making Your Organisation More Mindful..... 245
  - Designing a mindful workplace..... 245
  - Deciding on your approach ..... 246
- Getting Down to Practicalities..... 247
  - Gaining support and buy-in..... 247
  - Piloting mindfulness..... 248

Practical Considerations.....	249
Developing internal capacity.....	249
Providing mindful practice space.....	250
<b>CHAPTER 18: Integrating Mindfulness into Everyday Work Practices.....</b>	<b>251</b>
Managing Yourself Better.....	252
Mindful Meetings.....	252
Understanding why you should have meetings.....	253
Discovering when meetings are most effective.....	254
Improving meeting efficiency by creating the space to think.....	256
Mindful Decision-Making.....	258
Exploring decision-making in the brain.....	258
Improving your decision-making.....	260
Making decisions mindfully.....	262
Mindful Project Management.....	263
Becoming a single tasker.....	264
Mindfully leading projects.....	265
<b>PART 6: THE PART OF TENS.....</b>	<b>267</b>
<b>CHAPTER 19: Ten Mindful Ways to Make Better Decisions....</b>	<b>269</b>
Becoming Aware of Heuristics.....	269
Avoiding Overconfidence.....	270
Remembering That You Are a Social Animal.....	271
Avoiding Linking Things That Aren't Connected.....	272
Becoming Conscious of Your Unconscious.....	272
Making Fearless Decisions.....	273
Improving Your Working Memory Capacity.....	274
Avoiding Sunk Cost Bias.....	274
Approaching Decisions with an Open Mind.....	275
Managing Your Emotions by Tuning in to Your Body.....	276
<b>CHAPTER 20: Ten Mindful Ways to Reduce the Risk of Burnout.....</b>	<b>279</b>
Identifying the Symptoms of Burnout.....	280
Recognising the Causes of Burnout.....	281
Avoiding Work Mismatching.....	283
Making Work More Rewarding.....	284
Increasing Your Self-Efficacy.....	284

Identifying the Essentials You Need from Your Work.....	285
Encouraging Creativity.....	286
Taking Good Care of Yourself.....	286
Getting Support.....	287
Taking Time Out to Appreciate the Good.....	288
<b>CHAPTER 21: Ten Ways to Improve Your Attention with Mindfulness.....</b>	<b>289</b>
Noticing When Your Mind Wanders.....	290
Focusing on Breath.....	291
Focusing on Your Body.....	292
Focusing on Sounds.....	294
Using Your Body as an Early Warning System.....	296
Avoiding Falling into the Zone of Delusion.....	296
Minding the Gap.....	297
Enjoying Mindful Coffee and Chocolate.....	297
Engaging in Mindful Walking.....	298
Doing the Three-Step Body Check.....	298
<b>CHAPTER 22: (More Than) Ten Sources of Info on Mindful Leadership.....</b>	<b>301</b>
The Academy of Brain-Based Leadership.....	302
Institute for Mindful Leadership.....	303
Time to Think.....	303
The Mindful Globe.....	304
Mindfulnet.org.....	304
A Head for Work.....	304
Dr Rick Hanson.....	305
Daniel Goleman.....	306
Mindful Work.....	306
Mindfulness in Organizations.....	307
Resonant Leadership.....	307
Neuroscience for Leadership.....	308
The Mindful Brain.....	308
Mindfulness: Finding Peace in a Frantic World.....	309
<b>INDEX.....</b>	<b>311</b>





# Introduction

**M**indfulness is a mental discipline that has been practiced for thousands of years. Modern science has researched the impacts of mindfulness on health and well-being over the last 40 years. In recent years, researchers have turned their attention to exploring the benefits of applying mindfulness to the way people work.

Nowadays, hundreds of corporate organisations, from Google to General Mills, from Dow Chemicals to the UK Parliament, use mindfulness to help their employees boost their resilience, productivity, emotional intelligence, focus and well-being. Leading business schools now recognise that mindfulness provides the foundation for effective leadership and routinely offer mindfulness training to MBA students and those in search of new approaches to the challenges of the modern-day workplace.

A lot of hype and myth surrounds mindful leadership. Simply put, mindful leadership = mindfulness + leadership.

A mindful leader is simply a leader who uses mindfulness to gain deeper knowledge of himself and makes a conscious effort to use this knowledge to manage himself better, taking personal responsibility for his actions and striving to be the best leader he can be.

Mindful leaders provide calm, clarity and a clear sense of direction, carefully balancing the needs of the organisation with the needs and aspirations of the workforce. Mindful leaders monitor themselves to maintain a focus on present-moment reality, their impact on other people, and their reactions to stressful situations.

Mindful leaders experience the reality and vividness of what's going on in any given moment, without knee-jerk reactions based on negative mind states (such as anxiety, fear or anger) responding with a calm awareness and care for themselves and others.

*Mindful Leadership For Dummies* offers a highly accessible and practical guide for busy professionals. It includes all the basics you need to know, such as what mindfulness is and how it works (Chapter 1) and the underpinning neuroscience (see Chapter 3). It includes a full six-week WorkplaceMT course (Chapters 8 through 13), which you can use to teach yourself mindfulness

or as a course workbook if you decide to attend a WorkplaceMT course. It includes practical guidance on improving your presence and influence (Chapter 14), leading in a digital age (Chapter 15) and mindfully leading change (Chapter 16). For those looking for ways to introduce mindfulness to their organisation, you can find pragmatic advice and guidance in Chapter 17.

We hope you enjoy reading *Mindful Leadership For Dummies* and that it leads to improvements in the way you work, your happiness and well-being.

## About This Book

Whatever your reason or level of engagement, you'll find something in this book for you. It's designed to be practical and accessible, full of real-life examples that you can start applying straightaway. For some, this book will prove the catalyst for major change; for others, the messages in this book may be less resonant.

This book provides you with the information and guidance you need to make up your own mind and decide how mindfulness can help you become a better leader. We encourage you to read with an open mind and a sense of exploration. In the spirit of mindfulness, suspend judgment as you read and experiment with some of the concepts and techniques described in these pages, and then take from it what works best for you.

## Foolish Assumptions

When writing this book, we have made a number of assumptions about you, the reader:

- » You've picked up this book because you're committed to becoming a more mindful leader.
- » You have experience working in a professional role.
- » You're ready to change the way you work for the better.
- » You're just curious, or even sceptical, about mindfulness.

» You've read about mindfulness in the business pages of your newspaper or an article in your trade journal and you want to know whether the hype is justified.

## Icons Used in This Book

Like other *For Dummies* books, this one has icons in the margins to guide you through the information and help you zero in on what you want to know. The following paragraphs describe the icons and what they mean.



REMEMBER

Information flagged with this icon is useful and worth keeping in mind when working with your experience of low mood and depression.



TIP

The text next to this icon offers quick and effective ideas to support your leaning about mindfulness.



WARNING

This icon flags text that you need to take heed of.



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

This icon points out interesting bits of information that goes beyond need-to-know. You can skip paragraphs marked with this icon if you're pressed for time, but reading them will further enhance your understanding.



PLAY THIS

When you see this icon, you can download an MP3 to guide you as you practice a formal mindfulness exercise.

## Beyond the Book

In addition to the material in the print or e-book you're reading right now, this book also comes with a free access-anywhere Cheat Sheet that provides top tips on becoming a mindful leader, the most recent research into mindful leadership and developing a leadership approach that works best for you. To get this Cheat

Sheet, simply go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and search for “Mindful Leadership For Dummies Cheat Sheet” in the Search box.

We also offer further resources that go with this book.

- » Visit the Resources page of [www.aheadforwork.com](http://www.aheadforwork.com) for leadership, productivity and mindfulness resources. You can also use this website to get in touch with Juliet about the programmes offered.
- » Go to [www.workplacemt.com](http://www.workplacemt.com) to find out more about WorkplaceMT mindfulness training, its research base, teachers and teacher training.
- » Check out The Mindfulness Exchange Ltd. (TME; [www.mindfulness-exchange.com](http://www.mindfulness-exchange.com)). Marina is the owner of TME, which is a spin-off from Oxford University's Oxford Mindfulness Centre (OMC) that provides mindfulness training for the workplace. You can use this website to contact Marina.
- » To find out more about mindfulness and its research basis and to browse books and resources, check out [www.mindfulnet.org](http://www.mindfulnet.org), the mindfulness information website.

We've recorded MP3s to guide you when you practice the formal mindfulness exercises as detailed in Chapters 8 through 13. Download them from [www.dummies.com/go/mindfullleadershipfd](http://www.dummies.com/go/mindfullleadershipfd).

## Where to Go from Here

This book is designed so that you can dip in and out as you please. You're invited to make good use of the table of contents (or the index) and jump straight into the part or chapter that grabs your attention. You're in charge, and it's up to you.

If you're new to mindful leadership, or not sure where to start, begin with Part 1, and you'll have a better idea of how to proceed. If you're ready to start your mindfulness development, start at Chapter 7, and then work through Chapters 8 to 13 in order.

We wish you all the best in your quest to be a more mindful leader and hope you find lots of valuable ideas and information within these pages. Above all, see this book as an exploration with nothing to lose but everything to gain.



# **Breaking the Mould**

## **IN THIS PART . . .**

Explore what mindful leadership is and how it can work for you.

---

Examine the leadership challenges of the modern workplace.

---

Discover the potential and limitations of your brain and become aware of your unconscious drivers.

**Understanding mindfulness and leadership****Exploring the evolution of mindfulness****Discovering the benefits of mindful leadership**

## Chapter 1

# Exploring Mindful Leadership

**M**indful leadership is about flexibility of thought and actions, breaking out of autopilot and habitual behaviours and being the best you can be in any given moment. Mindfulness certainly isn't a silver bullet or a quick fix; it takes time and practice. But every great journey starts with one step, and this book will be your companion and guide every step of the way.

## Establishing the Facts about Mindfulness and Leadership

In this section, we start with the basics and establish a shared understanding of what mindfulness is and how it can enhance your leadership capability.

## Understanding mindfulness

Mindfulness is all about your ability to focus attention on the situation at hand with the intention to observe the judgments you make and choose how to respond appropriately. Developing this ability helps you to step away from automatic habitual responses to observe present-moment reality with an open mind and to make smarter decisions.

Everyone has the capacity to be mindful, but like anything worthwhile, it takes time, effort and practice. In the section 'Deconstructing Mindfulness' you'll find a more succinct definition of mindfulness and how to develop it for yourself.

## Redefining leadership

The definition of *leadership* varies subtly from theory to theory. At its most basic, leadership is a process of social influence where a person (the leader) secures the help and support of others to accomplish a shared task.

In recent years, leadership theory has started to focus on the leader as one human being, leading other human beings. Recent discoveries in neuroscience and psychology have transformed our knowledge of how the human brain learns, reacts to different stimulus, and interprets what's happening.

On a daily basis, as a leader, you're involved in changing people's brains – literally! Everyday ordinary and extraordinary life events are the catalysts for thoughts, decisions and learning, which in turn change the structure of the brain physically. Understanding your brain, and how and why others do what they do, helps you use your brain more effectively. Applying neuroscience to your actions and behaviours as a leader helps make you a more effective, adaptive and resilient leader. You can find out more about this in Chapter 3.

Mindfulness is now recognised as a foundational skill for effective leadership. Peter Drucker once said that we can't manage others unless we learn to manage ourselves first. Mindfulness increases self-awareness, which enables you to manage yourself better. *Mindful leadership* combines the practice of mindfulness with



practical management and leadership techniques, enabling leaders to engage a wider range of their capacities to the challenges at hand. Check out Chapters 15, 16 and 17 for the practical application of mindfulness to everyday work challenges.

## Exploring the Benefits of Mindful Leadership

Having considered the meaning of both mindfulness and leadership (see previous section), you may be asking yourself, ‘What’s in it for me?’ The following sections drill deeper into the role of leadership today, the evolution and modern-day uses of mindfulness, and practical ways to apply mindfulness to your work as a leader.

### Refreshing your knowledge of leadership

Ideas about what makes a good leader have changed and evolved dramatically over the years. In the 1920s and 1930s, trait theories argued that leaders were born. From the 1940s to the 1960s, behavioural theories argued that you can be taught leadership – it’s just a matter of adopting the right behaviours when attempting to lead.

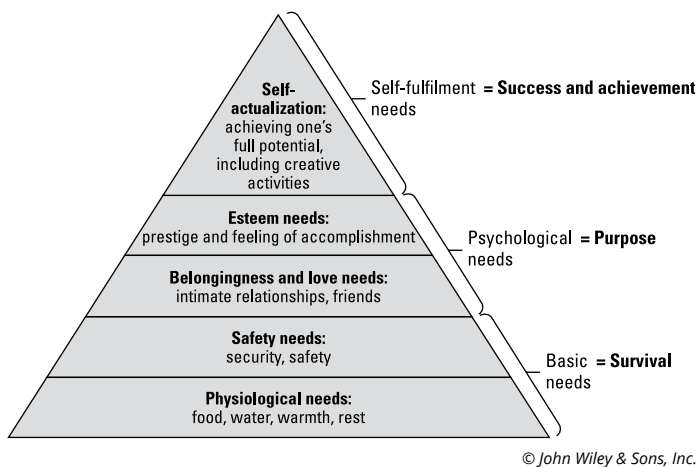
In more recent times, contingency theories (such as situational leadership) argue that no one leadership style is correct and that as a leader you need to adopt the correct leadership style for the situation. Transformational theories view leaders as agents of change. As a transformational leader, you can *transform* the workplace via teamwork or team development, or by acting as an agent of change or a strategic visionary.

One of the most recent approaches to leadership is *authentic leadership*. It’s an approach that encourages honest relationships with followers, whose input is valued. Authentic leaders tend to be positive people with truthful self-concepts who seek clarity and promote openness. By building trust and generating

enthusiastic support from their followers, authentic leaders are able to improve both individual and team performance. Authentic leadership is a growing area of study in academic research on leadership, and mindfulness is a core element. Read more about authentic leadership in Chapter 14.

## Investigating human nature

If you want to be a good leader, you need to have some understanding of what makes people tick. At a deep level, most humans have a natural desire to be led, fuelled by a primeval desire to survive, have a purpose in life, and achieve. Abraham Maslow described this in his hierarchy of needs (see Figure 1-1).



**FIGURE 1-1:** Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Located at the foundation of Maslow's triangle are basic needs – needs for survival. Like most animals, humans will do anything and everything to survive and sustain life. Challenging situations may result in a feeling of threat. Threats to pride, integrity and future success may lead to seeking guidance, support and leadership from others to minimise threats. In a work context, if your ability to complete a task is threatened, it can have a negative impact on your future success and progress, which is why people are naturally predisposed to need leaders.



REMEMBER

Good leaders help individuals to gain a meaningful sense of purpose by helping them align their thoughts and clarify the reasons behind their work. Humans need understanding to fully engage, and good leadership meets this need.

According to Maslow, after basic needs (survival) and psychological needs (purpose) are met, humans strive for self-fulfilment. In a work context, leaders can greatly enhance individuals' potential for success and achievement. Good leaders help individuals work towards their full potential and maximise their performance.

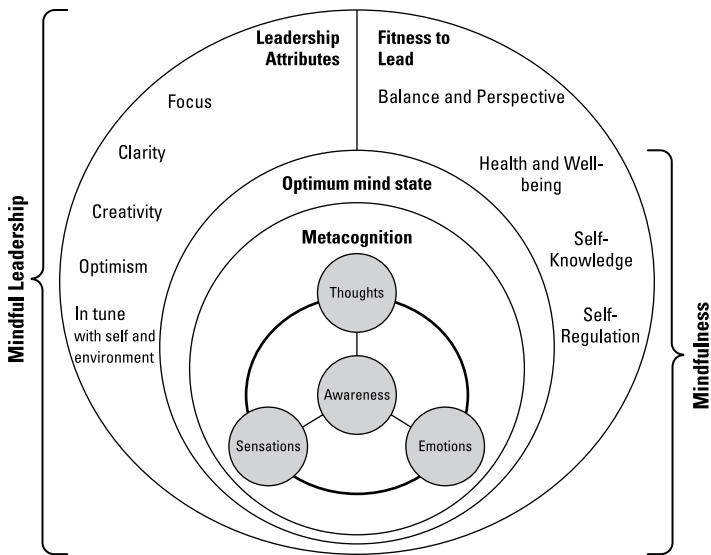
## Deconstructing Mindfulness

As a human being, you perform at your best when you're authentic to yourself and lead in a way that resonates with your values. Of course, doing so is often easier said than done. It takes time and effort and an acceptance of personal responsibility for your actions. Unravelling and revealing your true self involves self-awareness and reflection, which is where mindfulness comes in.

### Defining mindfulness

When you strip away the hype and well-worn catchphrases, mindfulness is simply the cultivation of metacognition and maintenance of an optimum mind state (see Figure 1-2).

- » *Metacognition* can be described as the ability to observe what's going on in your mind. When developing mindfulness, you cultivate an open monitoring state where you're aware of your thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations in any given moment of time.
- » An *optimum mind state* can be described as a feeling of ease, when you feel safe and secure, and your body and mind is functioning in its optimum state. In other words, an optimum mind state occurs when you're free from anxiety, anger and fear and are feeling secure, happy and comfortable with your surroundings. This state allows you to be the best you can and reach your full potential.



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**FIGURE 1-2:** Mindfulness and mindful leadership.

The following sections explore these terms and what they mean in more detail.

## Maintaining metacognition and an optimum mind state

Cultivating metacognition enables you to become more aware of your automatic tendencies and responses. This awareness allows you to make decisions and act appropriately based on present-moment reality instead of being hijacked by strong emotions and impulses triggered by past experiences and predictions of the future, which often lead to inappropriate actions and reactions.

Maintaining an optimum mind state is important. When you experience a negative emotional mind state, such as anger and fear, even to a small degree, your brain responds automatically. Your brain senses something is wrong and responds quickly to safeguard you.

For example, if you were standing in the middle of a road with a lorry hurtling towards you, you wouldn't want to have to take a

moment to decide what to do, would you? In this situation, it's wholly appropriate that your brain should take control, quickly and efficiently evaluating the threat and the options and deciding on the right course of action. If this happened to you for real, you would almost certainly automatically jump out of the way without any conscious thought to avoid death or injury. In this instance, engaging in conscious thought would slow you down, but engaging autopilot allows you to live to tell the tale.

This lightning-fast, efficient, unconscious response has helped humans to survive and evolve into arguably the most successful species on the planet. But it does have its downfalls.

## Exploring the Evolution of Mindfulness

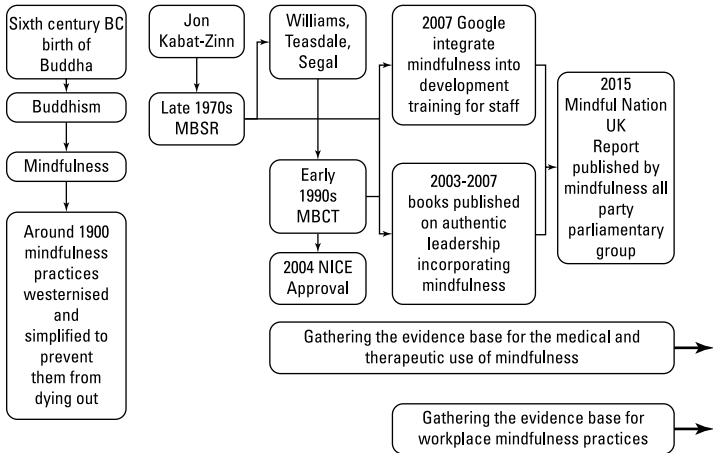
Figure 1-3 shows a timeline of the evolution of mindfulness.

Mindfulness, as cultivated in the WorkplaceMT exercises you find in Chapters 8 through 13, originated from ancient practices, which were a component of Buddhism. In the late 1890s to early 1900s, mindfulness practices were simplified and westernised in an attempt to safeguard their future survival in a time of colonialism.

This more secular version of mindfulness was popularised by the pioneering work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, who developed Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in 1979. MBSR blended Jon's scientific training with his Buddhist and yoga training. His work sparked the interest of the scientific community who started researching the impact of mindfulness. In the 1980s, about one scientific research paper on mindfulness was published each year.

In the 1990s, John Teasdale Zindel Segal and Mark Williams blended MBSR with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to form Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) as a treatment for recurrent depression. In the 1990s, about ten research papers on mindfulness were published each year.

### Mindfulness at work timeline



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**FIGURE 1-3:** Mindfulness evolution timeline.

In 2004, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommended MBCT as a treatment of choice for recurrent depression. This accelerated scientific interest in mindfulness further, and by 2013 about 500 papers on mindfulness were published each year.

## Identifying the foundations of mindfulness in the workplace

Exactly who first applied mindfulness to the challenge of the modern-day workplace is unclear. In recent years, a number of prominent leaders have come forward and admitted that they've been practicing mindfulness for a number of years, and they've claimed that it's been invaluable in their work as a leader.

In 2007, Google started to integrate mindfulness into its development programmes for staff. The success of Google's Search Inside Yourself programme may have been one of the catalysts for mindfulness gaining increasing traction in the workplace.

In 2011, Professor Mark Williams (co-creator of MBCT) and Dr Danny Penman published *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World* (Piatkus) as a self-help guide.