



# solutions

# IN THE ZONE

## Three easy steps to experiencing mindfulness

Often, we find ourselves quickly losing our attention in day-to-day interactions — even in a one-to-one conversation, you may find yourself being distracted by thoughts of the future — like thinking about what is next on your to-do list. Mindfulness is about being as fully aware and focused in the current moment as possible.

There is a conscious effort to be “in the zone” — fully absorbed in the task or experience at hand. In the workplace, mindfulness training has been shown to increase job satisfaction and reduce emotional exhaustion (i.e., burnout). Here are three basic actions or steps you can take to help maintain your awareness of the present moment — and, eventually get into the zone.

Mindfulness has been shown to have many benefits. For instance, more and more research supports the link between mindfulness training and overall improvements in physical health and improvements in symptoms for those experiencing some mental issues, like depression.

Beyond these benefits, being mindful can help you be a more effective leader in your department or division. Being aware and present can also help improve and deepen your worksite relationships. Mindfulness practice is another strategic tool that you can add to your toolbox as a leader.



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## Step One: Breathe

Breathing deeply, completely, and slowly is one of the most effective ways to bring you into the moment. Slow and complete breaths help your body to quickly relax.

Most of the time, we are swimming in stress — inadvertently triggering the “flight or fight” response of the nervous system. Remembering to slow your breathing brings you to a “rest and digest” nervous system response, which allows you to approach your workday more calmly — and ultimately, more effectively.

Begin with a complete exhale. Then allow the inhale to come in naturally. Next, see if you can make your exhales last a little longer, still letting the inhales happen effortlessly.

## Step Two: Slow down

Too often, we feel like we need to be doing all of our tasks as quickly as possible. This feels both efficient and effective. Yet, there can sometimes be a lot of truth to proverb that “haste makes waste.” You can often produce a much better outcome by allowing a little time and breathing space. This can be especially true for creative projects or interpersonal relationships within your team.

An ideal for every leader is to act rather than react. Slowing down can give you the space to make this a reality.

## Step Three: Meditate

Meditation is a way to relax and renew the mind, body, and spirit. Meditation is not necessarily about having no thoughts; it is about having no reactions to your thoughts, so allow the thoughts to come and go. Be gentle and patient with yourself and the process.

There is a simple meditation that incorporates the other two steps — breathing deeply and slowing down.

- Set a timer for five to 10 minutes.
- Sit or lie down with your spine comfortably straight.
- Start to feel your breath — being aware of when you inhale and feeling when you exhale.
- Become more sensitive to being in the moment — aware of your body sitting in the chair, the sounds you hear, etc.
- Now, begin to count your breaths. Count up to 10 and then begin counting again, starting at one. (Each inhale and exhale counts as one repetition.)

- If you lose your count, always start at “one” again.
- To end, take a big inhale and retain the breath in the body for a few seconds. This signals to your body and your mind that the meditation has ended.
- Do a gentle stretch.
- Slowly bring yourself back to your regular activities.

## A Mindful Day

Some quick tips for a more mindful day:

- Give yourself time — three to five minutes — to decompress upon arriving to and leaving from work.
- Resolve to take a few deep breaths before starting your meeting.
- When the meeting ends, give yourself a few moments of integration before you rush to the next activity.
- Answer your phone after three rings, not one.
- Pause before sending your next email.
- Give yourself some time each day to meditate.

Mindfulness is not only for the individual; it can also be the start of a more mindful culture for your whole department or organization — lifting spirits and performance.

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