

# HARNESSING THE POWER OF MINDSET

Exploring the Connection Between  
Mindfulness, Health and Safety,  
and Business Performance

An Executive White Paper by: CEO Health + Safety Leadership Network  
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## Introduction

There's no question that stress, pressure to perform, distraction and diminishing attention spans are all taking their toll in the workplace. According to The Quality of Life @ Work study conducted by Harvard Business Review and The Energy Project, 59% of workers are physically depleted, emotionally drained, mentally distracted and lacking in meaning and purpose.

This has massive implications for our general health and well-being, as well as our performance at work. Physical depletion, lack of attention and inability to focus not only jeopardize productivity and our capability and capacity to work, they pose a serious threat to employees' health and safety.

Recognizing that these risks will only continue to intensify, many employers are embracing mindfulness as a means to help them optimize performance, while supporting the whole health of their employees.

In his paper, *Mindfulness at Work and In Coaching*, Dr. Jonathan Passmore, psychologist and professor at the University of Evora, Portugal, notes that mindfulness can positively contribute to individuals, organizations and the economy. He also states, "The practical implications for mindfulness in the workplace are far reaching and have the potential to improve general well-being, create a healthy and safe environment and foster an organizational culture that is open to change, learning and growth."

Safe Work Australia (SWA) explored the connection between mindfulness and health and safety in their report *Mindfulness of Work Health and Safety in the Workplace*, based on their 2012 Perceptions of Health and Safety Survey.

In October 2015, members of the CEO Health + Safety Leadership Network gathered to discuss the results of the SWA report and the value of mindfulness in the workplace. Members also discussed the role they play in creating the right environment for mindfulness and a culture of health and safety to thrive.

The session was hosted by Workplace Safety & Prevention Services (WSPS), Bruce Power, The Conference Board of Canada and Thomson Reuters, and was kicked off with presentations by WSPS President and CEO, Elizabeth Mills and Duncan Hawthorne, President and CEO of Bruce Power.

Mills introduced the topic of mindfulness, along with highlights from the SWA research. She then led the group through a series of questions that were used in the Australian study, which they answered in real time, in the room. The results of the in-room poll then served as a springboard for the roundtable discussions.

In his opening remarks, Hawthorne reminded the group that excellence is achieved by striving for more, not by doing the bare minimum. "There has never been a business book written on how to regulate your way to excellence. Excellence demands active leadership and commitment to safety that places it above all other goals," he said.

Hawthorne also pointed out that leaders need to tend to organizational culture as they would a garden—by being mindful of, and pulling the weeds that are strangling, the things that they want to grow, and cultivating practices like mindfulness to enrich the environment and enhance performance.

In this white paper, you will learn about mindfulness, its connection to business performance, and how it relates to a culture of health and safety. You will also find out why Ford of Canada decided to launch a mindfulness program and how it is gaining traction in their organization. Finally, you will get a glimpse into the roundtable discussion and participants' thoughts on the role of leaders in cultivating mindfulness in the workplace.





## What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a contemporary adaptation of Buddhist practices dating back more than 2,500 years. It found its way into the mainstream decades ago, largely due to the work of Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, an MIT-educated scientist who introduced mindfulness as a means of managing chronic conditions. In 1979, he developed the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program, which is still used by organizations today.

Mindfulness practices are based on treating the brain as you would any muscle in the body, building strength and resilience by exercising it regularly. Research has proven that mindfulness can have a profound impact on well-being and general quality of life, and it is seen to be particularly helpful in reducing stress, anxiety and depression.

There are many definitions of mindfulness. Kabat-Zinn defines it as paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally.

Dr. Ellen Langer, a psychologist at Harvard University who has been studying mindfulness for more than 30 years, defines it as the process of actively noticing new things, relinquishing preconceived mindsets and acting on the new observations.

In their book *One Second Ahead*, authors Rasmus Hougaard, Jacqueline Carter and Gillian Coutts explain that mindfulness enables people to manage their attention, improve awareness and sharpen focus and clarity.

All of these skills are being threatened by our digital lifestyle and increasing addiction to distraction. Realizing this poses a significant threat to success and employee well-being, many employers are adopting mindfulness in the workplace to support their employees and enhance overall performance.

## The Business Case for Mindfulness

Rich Fernandez, co-founder and President of Wisdom Labs, says that demand and complexity continue to increase, but our capacity to manage them isn't keeping pace. Complexity is created at a "machine scale" and we can't keep up. He points out that computing power has increased two-fold every two years.

In 2014, Microsoft surveyed 2,000 Canadians to find out how technology and our increasingly digital lifestyle habits are affecting attention spans. The study found that 44% of respondents have to concentrate really hard to stay focused on tasks, and 37% say that they are unable to make the best use of their time, causing them to work nights and/or weekends. And since 2000, we've whittled four seconds off our attention span, dropping from 12 to a mere eight seconds.

In his article in the *New York Times*, *Addicted to Distraction*, Tony Schwartz states, “The brain’s craving for novelty, constant stimulation and immediate gratification creates something called a ‘compulsion loop.’ Like lab rats and drug addicts, we need more and more to get the same effect.”

He also states that, “Endless access to new information also easily overloads our working memory. When we reach cognitive overload, our ability to transfer learning to long-term memory significantly deteriorates. It’s as if our brain has become a full cup of water and anything more poured into it starts to spill out.”

In the article *Recovering from Information Overload*, in the *McKinsey Quarterly*, authors Derek Dean and Caroline Webb call on leaders to take responsibility for resetting these norms. “Multitasking is not heroic; it’s counterproductive. As the technological capacity for the transmission and storage of information continues to expand and quicken, the cognitive pressures on us will only increase. We are at risk of moving toward an ever less thoughtful and creative professional reality unless we stop now to redesign our working norms.”





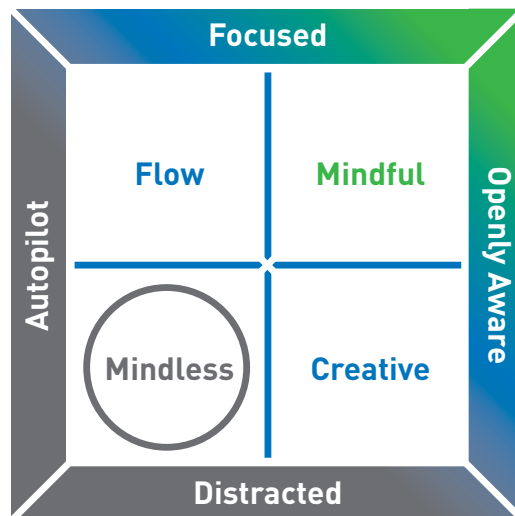


In a recent presentation at the Rotman School of Management at University of Toronto, *One Second Ahead* authors Rasmus Hougaard and Jacqueline Carter explained today’s employees work under a PAID reality: Pressure, Always on, Information overload, and Distracted. As a result, they have watched the number of participants in their training programs grow steadily year over year. “Companies see mindfulness as fundamental to achieving business results,” says Hougaard.

## Mindfulness and a Culture of Health and Safety

“If you had a told me 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago that CEOs would come to an event where the topic is mindfulness—unbelievable! And there is such true openness to the value of that and the state of mind of the worker.”

— Barbara Tait  
General Manager, SafeStart  
a Division of Electrolab Ltd.



In *One Second Ahead*, Hougaard, Carter and Coutts use the matrix of mental effectiveness to illustrate our various states of mind. When we are most effective, we find ourselves in quadrant 2. We are mindful, openly aware and focused. Directly opposite on the matrix is the mindless quadrant, number 3. When we are operating in this quadrant we are distracted and functioning on autopilot. Not surprisingly, many accidents occur when we are working in mindless mode. Carter notes, “Many organizations we work with see the benefit of mindfulness as a

foundational tool to enhance safety. All the policies and procedures in the world aren’t of much use when people aren’t paying attention.”

Strengthening our ability to focus and being more aware must first occur on an individual level. However, to enhance business performance, and health and safety, it must also occur on an organizational level. In order for this to happen, leaders must create the right environment and employ processes and practices that foster and reinforce collective mindfulness.

In *A Call for Mindful Leadership*, Dr. Ellen Langer explains that when we are mindful we can take advantage of opportunities, avert dangers that don’t yet exist and increase creativity and productivity. She cautions that without proper leadership, organizations cannot achieve a culture of mindfulness. “It’s nice to imagine a company where everyone is mindful. But it will take some time to achieve the ideal even if possible. Meanwhile, we need leaders whose major, perhaps only task is to promote mindfulness in those around them.”

In *Managing the Unexpected: Assuring High Performance in an Age of Complexity*, Karl Weick and Kathleen Sutcliffe examine high reliability organizations (HROs)

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and their ability to manage unexpected events through mindfulness. Firefighting, military operations, hospitals and nuclear organizations are all examples of HROs. These types of organizations are distinguished by the fact that they are able to perform high risk work but without rare, catastrophic events. Their success depends on the ability of individuals, and the organization as a whole, to interact in real time with uncertainty or threat from the external environment, and to perform reliably on a consistent basis.

They explain that these organizations possess a collective “mental orientation that continually evaluates the environment as opposed to mindlessness where a simple assessment leads to choosing a plan that is continued until the plan runs its course. Mindfulness tracks small failures, resists oversimplification, remains sensitive to the operations in practice, maintains the capability for resilience, and takes advantage of changes in who has expertise.”

Weick and Sutcliffe also outline four coexisting subcultures that must exist to support mindfulness and a culture of safety:

<b>Reporting culture</b>	People are prepared to report errors and near misses
<b>Just culture</b>	Blame and punishment are not the default responses to errors
<b>Flexible culture</b>	People adapt readily to sudden and radical increments in pressure, pacing and intensity
<b>Learning culture</b>	People can convert lessons learned into reconfigurations of assumptions, frameworks and action

The SWA report *Mindfulness of Work Health and Safety in the Workplace* aligns with the concepts presented by Weick and Sutcliffe. Based on the Perceptions of Work Health and Safety Survey conducted in 2012, SWA examines the connection between mindfulness and a culture of health and safety using three measures: what businesses count on, preoccupation with failure and sensitivity to operations.

Participants at the CEO Health + Safety Leadership Network roundtable discussed the report and responded to some of the survey questions. They discussed the results of the poll and explored perceptions and practices in their workplaces.

**“Mindfulness tracks small failures, resists oversimplification, remains sensitive to the operations in practice, maintains the capability for resilience, and takes advantage of changes in who has expertise.”**

— Managing the Unexpected: Assuring High Performance in an Age of Complexity, Karl Weick and Kathleen Sutcliffe



## Overview of Roundtable Discussion

The SWA report was based on responses from 520 sole traders (proprietors), 1,052 employers and 1,311 workers, representing seven industries: agriculture, road transport, manufacturing, construction, accommodation and food services, public administration and safety, and health care and social assistance. While it is based on a small sample size, the report provides an important baseline for future research, and a helpful comparison for Canadian businesses.

Elizabeth Mills led the group through some of the questions used in the SWA survey, which they answered in real-time, in the room. The questions fell under the three focus areas of the Australian research: what businesses count on, sensitivity to operations and preoccupation with failure.

### What Businesses Count on

1. Everyone feels accountable for safety
2. This business spends time identifying how our activities could potentially harm our workers

### Sensitivity to Operations

1. People look for feedback about things that aren't going right
2. Workers have the discretion to resolve unexpected problems as they arise

### Preoccupation with Failure

1. Workers are rewarded if they spot potential trouble spots
2. Managers actively seek out bad news
3. The business often updates our procedures after experiencing a near miss

The exercise was aimed at gathering off-the-cuff perceptions of participants. Afterward, the group broke into individual table discussions to explore the perceptions and practices that may or may not contribute to mindfulness and create a culture of health and safety in their workplaces.

### They Worked Through the Following Questions:

- What immediately do you think of when thinking about these questions in your workplace?
- Have you asked similar questions in the past?
- What actions would you take if the results were shown to your company's executive group/board of directors today?
- How interested would you be in benchmarking your mindful health and safety culture with this tool?



## Summary of Conversations

On mindfulness in general, one participant asked how it really differs from a safety culture when both require being in tune with your surroundings and risk factors. Some felt mindfulness might be a higher priority in larger, high-risk organizations. Several people raised the point that union environments likely differ from non-union because unions typically help to promote health and safety and keep it top of mind. It was noted that repetition and routine become the enemy in any environment—high-risk, lower-risk, small and large. When repeating tasks, people tend to assume that nothing changes and they stop thinking about potential risks.

A fair number of participants noted that in their organizations there is a heavy focus on collecting data, and less emphasis on examining root causes. There was general agreement that more could be done to consider what might go wrong and to actively look for issues and problems.

Many agreed that a gap exists between the perceptions of senior leaders, managers and workers. The leaders at the event are highly committed to health and safety, but mid-managers and employees may not be at the same level. Employees may not be aware of issues, the reporting processes in place or leadership’s commitment to keeping them safe. Further, they might be reluctant to report for fear of reprisal or because they don’t believe issues will be resolved. Some acknowledged that their organizations have, in the past, taken a more punitive or blaming approach to errors, which would stifle reporting.

Some participants are diligent about rewarding employees for spotting issues; one regularly sends thank you notes to employees who step up in this way. It was agreed that acknowledging the efforts of employees who raise concerns or bring safety issues to the fore would go a long way toward building a reporting culture. It is equally important to communicate regularly to make employees aware of new programs designed to enhance health and safety performance, and the organization’s efforts to close gaps.

When asked what actions they would take if the in-room poll results were shared with their board of directors, many participants responded saying that they would need to dive deeper into the results. However, there was significant agreement that the numbers would open the door to healthy and necessary conversation, that senior management should own the numbers, be ready with an action plan and present the case for continuous improvement. A few said they would raise the need to improve reporting, and would talk about the need for mindfulness training. Others said they would use it as an opportunity to start closing gaps between senior leadership, management and employees.

Several participants indicated they asked similar questions in the past using different survey tools. Some even noted that they have done quite comprehensive research similar to this, but the results were overwhelming and transferring the insights into action was difficult. Many indicated they would be interested in participating in a Canadian version of the SWA survey.

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**“This starts the internal conversation in the company about where we are, why we are there, and where we want to be. And then the next step is: what are we going to do about it?”**

— Roger Blake,  
Americas EHS Coordinator/  
Director EHS Canada,  
Siemens Canada Limited

## Conclusion

There is significant evidence to show that mindfulness is not a peripheral practice being used only by “enlightened” organizations. It has taken hold in the business world and has become a vital tool for organizations wanting to counter the effects of growing pressure, technological demands and our constant craving for distraction. As one participant noted, even the number of leaders who invested their time in this event about mindfulness is telling.

Kate Pickert, author of the *TIME* article, *The Mindful Revolution*, summed it up this way: “If distraction is the pre-eminent condition of our age, then mindfulness, in the eyes of its enthusiasts, is the most logical response.... There are no signs that the forces splitting our attention into ever smaller slices will abate. To the contrary, they’re getting stronger. Already, many devotees see mindfulness as an indispensable tool for coping—both emotionally and practically—with the daily onslaught.”

Most of the roundtable participants were open to the concept and seemed to see a logical connection between mindfulness, health and safety and enhanced business performance. They are all at different stages of readiness, but there was a strong interest in exploring this topic further, and benchmarking mindfulness practices as they relate to health and safety in their workplaces.



## Introducing Mindfulness at Ford of Canada

In the summer of 2015, Ford of Canada piloted the concept of Mindfulness with 100 employees representing the organization's various skill teams and organizational levels. The decision to explore Mindfulness came as a result of a benchmarking trip to Google headquarters by President and CEO Dianne Craig, along with a group of Ford representatives. They were so impressed that they quickly set the wheels in motion when they returned.

"Employee engagement is extremely important to Ford of Canada. In fact, it is one of our big six business priorities," says Steven Majer, Vice President of Human Resources. "While we've had great success with engagement, our employees continue to identify stress as an opportunity. It's a competitive market and with pressure from new entrants and emerging markets, we knew we needed to look at the way we work."

The employees started their journey with two, eight-hour mindfulness training sessions delivered by an external vendor. The vendor also provided a sustainment program, which includes resources and online learning labs. "Stress never goes away," says Majer. "It can be a positive thing, but it can also be harmful. That's why sustainment of mindfulness and how we handle stress is so important."

Overall, employees have responded positively to the program. In a survey conducted after the two training sessions, 91% of participants indicated that they thought the training was a good use of time, 98% said the content would be useful in managing stress, and 94% said the content will help them manage their well-being.

At this point, the program has focused primarily on health and well-being, but Majer says mindfulness is about being aware and in the moment, and he sees a natural link to health and safety. "It's estimated that we have about 60,000 thoughts each day. If we're not fully leveraging the prefrontal cortex of the brain, we're not as aware of hazards, and we're more prone to accidents."

It's too soon to talk about observable organizational changes, but Ford plans to conduct an initial assessment of the program in September 2016. Anecdotally, Majer feels it has been a success. "A lot of people have thanked me, and there is a definite pull from others in the organization who want to get involved." Now, he says, their focus is on working with the participants who fall in the middle of the bell curve, as well as growing the program organically.

In addition to a mindfulness day, which took place after the training, Ford offers weekly guided mindfulness programs and town hall events to engage more employees and managers in the program. Majer feels leadership involvement has been critical to the success of the program. "Dianne is very involved; she's a champion of mindfulness, and she's made it okay for people to practise at work."



**"I would encourage leaders to build mindfulness into their workplaces. As leaders, our task is not just to make people more productive and better soldiers; our practices should make them better people—better fathers, mothers, friends, brothers and sisters."**

— Steven Majer  
Vice President  
Human Resources,  
Ford of Canada



## About the CEO Health + Safety Leadership Network

The CEO Health + Safety Leadership Network is a distinguished group of leaders who share a commitment to building sustainable businesses and communities.

This dynamic collaboration offers fertile ground for exchanging knowledge and ideas in the pursuit of performance excellence. In addition to optimizing their own organizational health and safety performance and return-on-investment, members:

- Demonstrate health and safety through their leadership,
- Build brand value and enhance corporate reputation,
- Influence provincial and national health and safety policy and ensure your business requirements are represented in critical conversations,
- Contribute to the transformation of health and safety culture in Ontario and, in collaboration with other Charters, across Canada,
- Access exclusive research and information,
- Contribute to provincial sustainability and growth, and
- Celebrate health and safety leadership and encourage others to contribute to a culture of health and safety.



## Join Us for the Next Roundtable Event

The next CEO Health + Safety Leadership Network Roundtable will take place on October 24, 2016, in conjunction with the Canada's Safest Employers Awards Gala in Toronto. Roundtable participants will receive preferred pricing on Gala tickets. Over 70 leaders joined us for the event last October. Space is limited. Reserve your spot today by contacting Simona Mazat, Lead, CEO Programs, Events and Promotions, [simona.mazat@wsps.ca](mailto:simona.mazat@wsps.ca).

## Interested in Participating in Canadian Research on Mindfulness?

If you are interested in participating in research to benchmark mindfulness as it relates to health and safety in your workplace, please contact Simona Mazat, Lead, CEO Programs, Events and Promotions, [simona.mazat@wsps.ca](mailto:simona.mazat@wsps.ca). If you have any questions about this report, please contact us at:

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## APPENDIX A: Roundtable Participants

The following organizations participated in the October 2015 CEO Health + Safety Leadership Network Roundtable:

Airtron Canada	National Safety Council
Bee Clean Building Maintenance	Nations Fresh Foods
Bell Canada	Ontario Ministry of Labour, Prevention Office
Bruce Power	Optimum Talent
Canadian Occupational Safety Magazine	Ports Toronto
Carillion Canada	Public Services Health & Safety Association
Compass Group Canada	Radiation Safety Institute of Canada
CSA Group	Retail Council of Canada
Distinct Infrastructure Group Inc.	SafeStart, a Division of Electrolab Ltd.
DISTINCTTech	Sault Area Hospital
Festivals and Events Ontario	Securitas Canada Limited
Ford of Canada	Siemens Canada Limited
GDI Integrated Facility Services	SNC Lavalin O&M
General Motors of Canada Limited	SNC-Lavalin
Habitat for Humanity Canada	Standard Mechanical Systems Ltd
Harding Fire Protection Systems	The Beer Store
Infrastructure Health & Safety Association	The Conference Board of Canada
IS2 Workforce Solutions Inc.	The DATA Group Ltd
Kitchener-Wilmot Hydro	THINK'n Corp.
LCBO	Threads of Life
Levitt-Safety	Tyco Integrated Fire & Security Solutions (Simplex Grinnell)
Lincoln Electric Company of Canada	Workplace Safety North
Longo's	
Minerva Canada Safety Management Education Inc.	

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Workplace Safety & Prevention Services (WSPS) is a leader in providing impactful risk management solutions that drive lasting business success for our customers. WSPS offers unparalleled health & safety expertise, insight and solutions for creating healthy work environments where employees thrive and businesses prosper.

A dynamic \$43-million organization servicing 162,000 member firms, WSPS is primarily focused on the agricultural, industrial/manufacturing and service sectors. A key player in the Ontario occupational health & safety system, WSPS brings together community and business leaders to influence positive change to create a safer and more profitable Ontario.

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#### CEO HEALTH + SAFETY LEADERSHIP NETWORK

The CEO Health + Safety Leadership Network is a distinguished group of leaders who share a commitment to building sustainable businesses and communities. We are leaders—CEOs, Directors, operational and informal—who are stepping beyond the bounds of our own organizations to spur transformation on a much larger scale. We understand we are in a position to positively influence health and safety in Ontario and, in concert with other regional leadership charters, across Canada.

#### Let's Shape the Future of Health and Safety Together

[CEOHSNetwork.ca](http://CEOHSNetwork.ca)

**Committed to building a  
culture of health and safety.**

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