

Mindfulness: A Simple Way to Lead Better

An interview with Janice Marturano, author of Finding the Space to Lead

Janice Marturano lived a high-energy, high-pressure life as a vice president and deputy general counsel at General Mills. Looking to restore her personal equilibrium during a rocky time, she discovered mindfulness meditation. To her surprise, mindfulness and leadership quickly became intertwined.

Within weeks of beginning a morning meditation practice, she became more aware of how she acted and reacted at work. She used mindfulness practices to become more focused in her conversations and decisions. Her days became more productive and priorities were met. Mindfulness was making a positive difference in the quality of her leadership.

She shared her experience with colleagues at General Mills and eventually helped create the company's Mindful Leadership training. Today, mindfulness is a way of life at the company.

Marturano has created a second career as founder of the [Institute for Mindful Leadership](#) and is author of the new book [Finding the Space to Lead: A Practical Guide to Mindful Leadership](#). She spoke with CCL about her journey and why mindfulness is a simple thing to learn — and a powerful way for leaders to make a difference in their organizations and communities.

CCL: How did you realize that mindfulness could make a significant difference at work?

Marturano: When I first started, it was separate — I meditated and I worked.

But I was fascinated by how much I was learning about myself, the workings of my mind, my emotions and how I was meeting my life. Within just a few weeks, I realized if I put purposeful pauses into my day, it would affect the way I was doing my job and leading my team. I looked more clearly at how I was spending my day — much of it was spent on the loudest voice, not on what was most important. I was able to let go of things, which allowed my team to have greater responsibility. I had a new ability to hold ambiguity.

Before this, I would have many days when I looked at my watch at 6:30 and thought, "I don't know where the day went. I've been busy all day, but I'm not sure I could tell you what I got done today." One day, I looked at my watch and I realized I hadn't had one of those days in a very long time. I became even more curious about this connection between training the mind and cultivating leadership excellence and thought, if more people

Each month the Premium subscribers of *Leading Effectively* have access to an



interview with a thought leader, author or expert. Through these interviews, we offer different perspectives on topics related to leadership. Featured in the April 2014 issue was author Janice Marturano.

knew about this it would help them, the business and maybe the community.

CCL: How do you define a 'mindful leader' and why does it matter?

Marturano: A mindful leader embodies leadership presence by cultivating focus, clarity, creativity and compassion in the service of others.

If we're going to have breakthrough leadership and breakthrough organizational changes we need people to do two things: strengthen their ability to connect to themselves, each other and the community and strengthen their ability to skillfully initiate change. Those are things that can happen when we pause and ask, *what's called for now?*

CCL: What has driven the interest in mindfulness at work?

Marturano: It's not about mindfulness. It's about the incredible challenge and complexity of being a leader today. People are sensing that we need more capabilities than we have right now.

The challenge comes from familiar factors — shrinking global world, speed of change, scarcity of resources — and very real, difficult global problems. People in leadership roles have the best chance of making a difference if we can bring our whole selves to the moment, to the challenges.

But we are pulled away from our whole selves. We're distracted. We're constantly connected. We're on autopilot. In this state, we are less able to lead with excellence. We've trained our brains (this is where neuroscience comes in) to flit from one thing to another. But when we need to sustain attention because we need to have a difficult conversation or we need a strategy that goes beyond what we've done before, we must bring more to the table than a mind that flits away every few moments.

CCL: You say mindful leadership requires four fundamental skills: focus, clarity, creativity and compassion. Why these four and how does mindfulness cultivate them?

Marturano: *Focus* is needed because our ability to aim and sustain attention is absolutely critical for difficult problem solving. Yet, because our minds are continually distracted and pulled away we find it very, very difficult. In mindfulness training, we bring attention to a very narrow focus, say the sensation of our feet on the floor or our breath — then we notice when our attention has wandered and we redirect it. The practice is actually the redirection. Every time we do that, we are strengthening our ability to sustain attention.

Clarity is needed to see what is — not what we expect to see or what we hope will be. As we practice mindfulness, we see our own conditioning, biases and filters. When we jump to an assumption, we can pause and ask: can I stand in this space, see what is actually here and proceed with greater clarity?

When we are on autopilot there is no hope of creativity. *Creativity* requires spaciousness. When we are in the midst of all the thinking and busy-ness and the to-do lists, our ability to have that space is limited. So in our practice, we begin to notice our capacity to be in what's called *open presence* — to be with what's here without getting caught up in it all.

Compassion is about cultivating deep, true understanding of what is here, including things that are complex and difficult and cause suffering, in our lives, others' lives, in our community. When we understand, we can make choices that are reflective of our best selves, and with a realization that we are all in this together. We

can be focused. We can see what is actually here. We can be creative about how we meet this moment.

CCL: Your book is intended to be practical, so people can take a look, start today. How do we begin?

Marturano: In our work at the Institute for Mindful Leadership, we use three elements or practices to support the development of leadership excellence: meditation, leadership reflection and purposeful pauses.

This is practical and simple. Just begin with 10 minutes of meditation, and you will notice changes very quickly. On the book website is a [basic meditation](#) — hit play or put the app on your phone and you have the audio to take you through it. Purposeful Pauses are mini-trainings in meditation and take just a minute or two during the day and allow you to step off the auto-pilot mode. Leadership reflections teach us to use our intuition, emotional intelligence and wisdom to look more deeply at the components that allow us to lead and live with excellence.

CCL: If you're just one person, how can mindfulness make a difference in an organization?

Marturano: There are very practical things you can do as an individual. You can have a more mindful meeting, even if no one else knows how to practice mindfulness meditation or do leadership reflection. There are things you can do to have better communication and make that meeting more productive. You can start to manage your calendar differently at work. As you start to make changes, people begin to see there is something different about your reactivity, your ability to let go, your courage to say what is important to say. When you are more present to be the best you can be, to be strong and courageous, to listen to what's called for now, the ripple effect is much, much stronger and more powerful than you might imagine. People will notice.

Got 20 Minutes to be a Better Leader?

Ten minutes, twice a day opens up much-needed mental space – the space today's leaders say they desperately need, says Janice Marturano.

Marturano, author of *Finding the Space to Lead*, says Mindful Leadership helps us face the incredible challenges of being a leader. A simple ten-minute sitting meditation – chair or floor, home or office – is the way to start. Here's how it works:

1. Sit comfortably in a way your body can be still and supported. A straight-backed chair is fine. "A meditation cushion does not make you a better meditator," Marturano insists.
2. Bring your attention to your breath.
3. Be open and curious about whatever you notice. Thoughts, sensations, sounds ... don't try to change or control or judge what you notice.
4. When your attention pulls or drifts away, redirect your attention back to your breath. "This is not about clearing your mind or finding your bliss," says Marturano. "The process of redirecting is the practice. You are building your ability to pull yourself back to focus in the midst of countless distraction.

Do this twice a day. Details and audio downloads for this basic mindfulness meditation and other leadership practices are free on her website, FindingTheSpaceToLead.com.