

Reflect. Recharge. Ideas big enough for

life >>>



[wellness]

Right here, right now

You've got back-to-back appointments and your tiny window for lunch slams shut when you check your email and discover that one of your pet projects is going south. You perform triage, grab a muffin on the way out the door, and check real-time quotes in the car before heading to your next appointment. Your No. 1 stock is tanking. Damn! Should have placed a stop-loss order on that sucker!

You're debating whether to sell as you make your way across town. An alert on your phone updates you: the company has halted trading. Sweat beads on your forehead. You grip the wheel tightly and holler an expletive. A stoplight followed by a police cruiser show up in your rear-view mirror. Great—now you'll be late picking up your kid for hockey practice. Your cell phone rings. Your boss needs a stat for his monthly sales meeting, so you guide him to a file folder on your desk.

The cop is asking for your registration. If everything would just go according to plan, none of this would be happening!

Enter mindfulness, a 2,600-year-old way of relating with what is actually happening right here, right now rather than staying wedded to our plans, expectations, and strategies; sticking to our Pollyanna version of how we think things should be; and feeling put upon by events as they unfold.

"Whatever gets messy with our jobs demands that we slow down and pay attention," says mindfulness medita-

tion teacher Michael Carroll in his book *Awake at Work*. This, of course, is easier said than done as the momentum of our workday barrels along, stoked further by unexpected information coming at us via text, email, and social media, combined with the natural vagaries of life.

"The difficulties go to the front of the line, so to speak, and stare us straight in the face," says Carroll. "But all too often, rather than responding with the resourceful attention that the situation requires, we dig in and resist."

When a valued employee suddenly gives his notice, do we harden our heart out of defensiveness or are we curious to find out why? "Sometimes we resist in small ways," says Carroll. "Maybe we avoid a difficult co-worker or make a harsh remark under our breath, 'Here comes that knucklehead Frank again.' Sometimes our resistance becomes all-consuming—a lawsuit turns into a lifelong battle or an offhanded remark becomes an eternal grudge."

Carroll's blunt advice? Resisting work difficulties and hoping for smooth sailing is pointless.

When the unexpected lands in our lap, we start navigating the intersection of two realities—sometimes deftly, sometimes not. The seemingly innocuous smartphone exponentially increases the chances that our current activity may be interrupted. The helter-skelter multitasking that comes with always being connected—to our boss, colleagues, and family—and the stress it generates has made the business case for mindfulness meditation.

Such big players as Google, Aetna, and General Mills are among the Fortune 500 companies that are training their staff in this ancient practice, which isn't about finding our happy place or making our minds go blank. Rather, it's showing us that we can take a break from the busyness, pause, and ground ourselves in whatever is going on at any given moment. There's an alternative to getting carried away with our problem-solving, planning, concerns, and the underlying sense of urgency. Instead of continuing to plow our way through complications we can (literally) stop and smell the roses. Then, when we're ready, we can re-engage with our circumstances with a fresh outlook. — **ANDREW SAFER**