

Andrew Safer
Safer Mindfulness

Mindfulness Instructor & Trainer – Workshop Facilitator - Writer
andrew@safermindfulness.com
www.safermindfulness.com
(709) 722-2716

WORKPLACE MINDFULNESS TRAINING WITH STUDENTS
AT MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY: EVALUATION REPORT 2017-2018

With support from Memorial University's Teaching and Learning Framework, a project led by Principal Investigator Janna Rosales, PhD (Visiting Assistant Professor, Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science) delivered three 10-week Workplace Mindfulness training programs. Undergraduate and graduate students from seven disciplines participated in the Winter and Fall of 2017 and Winter of 2018. The initiative was named "Using Workplace Mindfulness Practice to Support University Students' Well-Being and Capacities for Awareness, Attention, and Reflection." Thirty-seven students on co-op work terms, field placements, internships and practicums participated; 24 received certificates of completion, having attended a minimum of seven sessions.

The project team included Dr. Rosales; Kara Arnold, PhD (Professor, Faculty of Business); Darlene Spracklin-Reid (Lecturer, Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science); Vashti Campbell (PhD Candidate, Faculty of Medicine); Megan Walsh, PhD, (Assistant Professor, Edwards School of Business, University of Saskatchewan); and Andrew Safer, mindfulness instructor and trainer, workshop facilitator, and writer, who developed and presented the Workplace Mindfulness program sessions. Dr. Rosales and Ms. Campbell facilitated self-reflective freewriting exercises during the sessions.

Participants provided written consent, allowing their evaluation responses to be included anonymously in a report and in materials promoting the Workplace Mindfulness training program.

Safer administered the pre evaluation during the first session of each series, and a post evaluation during the last session. (For the evaluation form, see pages 7 and 8.) This report focuses on the student responses to these evaluation questions. The project's research team also developed a separate report, based on a different set of measures.

Program

The Workplace Mindfulness program consists of nine 1.5-hour weekly sessions and a 2-hour final session, which includes instruction, coaching, and practice of mindfulness, Q&A, presentation on a theme, and discussion in pairs and in the group. Weekly readings are provided online. The themes of the ten sessions included:

(Continued)

1. The Business Case for Mindfulness
2. Core Mindfulness Practices
3. Attention in the Age of Digital Distraction
4. The Power of Pausing
5. Seeing the Big Picture Beyond the Details
6. Responding Instead of Reacting
7. Building Respectful Relationships
8. Navigating Stress and Uncertainty
9. Joining Vision and Practicality
10. Tying It All Together

Quantitative Evaluation

Participants indicated the extent of their agreement / disagreement with 16 statements using a five-point Likert scale. Jeff Doucet, MSW, RSW, tabulated the quantitative evaluation data, Dr. Kara Arnold (Professor, Faculty of Business, Memorial University) provided guidance, and Dr. Megan Walsh (Assistant Professor, Edwards School of Business, University of Saskatchewan) calculated and analyzed the pre / post data. The averages (“means”) of all student responses for each statement was determined, and the percentage change pre to post was calculated. The averages for pre (3.07) and post (2.65) indicated an overall score change of 13.7%.

Fifteen participants’ responses are reflected in the statements listed below. (Unfortunately, one set of pre evaluations was lost in a house fire. Therefore, the table below represents a smaller number of participants than the tables in the qualitative portion of this report.)

Question No.	Statement	Pre-Intervention Average (Means)	Post-Intervention Average (Means)	Difference in Means	Percentage Change
11	When my thoughts overtake me and I feel worried, I don’t know how to pause or interrupt this pattern.	3.47	2.27	1.20	34.6%
2	I am keen on multitasking as it allows me to accomplish a lot of tasks.	2.67	1.87	0.80	30.0%
14	When I have difficult thoughts or feelings, I tend to avoid facing them for as long as I can.	2.87	2.13	0.74	25.8%

12	I can't imagine getting through a day without my cell phone.	3.40	2.60	0.80	23.5%
6	I have problems dealing with stressful situations	3.60	2.87	0.73	20.3%
3	I am unaware of the ways that I am impulsive.	3.33	2.73	0.60	18.0%
15	When I'm working on something, it's difficult to differentiate between priorities and tasks that could be done later.	2.967	2.53	0.37	14.7%
16	I tend to have a lot of ideas that never get implemented, and I don't know what to do about this.	3.33	2.87	0.46	13.8%
4	When I do something that doesn't meet my expectations, I give myself a hard time.	3.87	3.47	0.40	10.3%
10	I am often preoccupied and miss what is going on around me.	2.93	2.67	0.26	8.9%
5	I am easily distracted.	3.47	3.20	0.27	7.8%
9	When I'm concerned about something, it doesn't occur to me that my thoughts might not be true.	2.73	2.53	0.20	7.3%
1	Mindfulness helps get rid of disturbing thoughts and emotions	3.87	3.73	0.14	3.6%
13	After I "send" an important email or text, I often regret	2.00	1.93	0.07	3.5%

	what I wrote.				
8	When someone is talking, I have trouble putting my own thoughts aside and giving them my full attention.	2.67	2.67	0.00	0%
7	I find that I am uncomfortable being around people who need help.	1.93	2.27	0.34	-17.6%

Qualitative Evaluation

Twenty-three participants' responses are reflected in the tables below. Participants wrote their responses in their own words.

1. *What are some of the main points about mindfulness that resonate for you and your everyday life?*

The most common responses are listed below.

Categories	Number of Participants
Awareness of actions and attentiveness; listening, reasoning, and responding; not interrupting	13
Benefits of pausing, head and shoulders; waiting before reacting, respond responsibly / Learned to stop, take a moment to clear mind, get rid of frustration	10
Not getting lost in thought; thoughts are just thoughts, not reality / Being able to come back to the present moment / breath	8

2. *Which mindfulness practices are you finding helpful and in what way?*

Below are the primary practices that were listed.

Categories	Number of Participants
Walking meditation	11
Head and shoulders / pausing	10
Sitting meditation	9
Loving-kindness / compassion virtue is very helpful	4

3. How helpful has this workshop series been for you? (0 = not helpful; 10 = extremely helpful)

Ranges / categories	Number of Participants
0-4 (not helpful) =	1
5-7 (somewhat helpful) =	3
8-9 (very helpful) =	13
10 (extremely helpful) =	6

4. Specifically, how does your study and practice of mindfulness help during the workday?

The most common responses are listed below.

Categories	Number of Participants
Helps stay on task, not get distracted / more focused / more efficient / pace myself	4
More attentive in meetings / concentration / listening	4
Learn how to deal with stress / less stress, worry, and anger	4
Active listener / able to listen better, communication skills / develop stronger relationships	4
Responding instead of reacting, and non-reactive / Learn to step back from situations to succeed, and process what's going on	3
Less anxious / helps me not get flustered. When I do, practicing mindfulness helps me deal constructively / See how I get triggered, have options to come back and move in good direction	3

5. Have you been able to do some mindfulness practice at home? If yes, how many times a week? Usually for how long?

Frequency of meditation practice at home

Length of time per practice session

Times / Week	Number of Participants		Length of session	Number of Participants
1-2	2		1-5 min.	1
3-4	9		5-15 min.	12
5 or >	11		> 15 min.	9
No practice	1			

6. Do you think your colleagues could benefit from learning about workplace mindfulness?

Categories	Number of Participants
Yes	23
No	0

Summary

by Jeff Doucet, MSW, RSW

Pressure to perform at school or in the workplace can lead to numerous complications, which impede one’s ability to perform at one’s best. Enhancing one’s ability for increased concentration, better focus, less distractibility, and increased communication and relationship skills bolsters both workplace performance and personal well-being. Whether in the professional realm, or the more personal aspects of one’s life, stress can impact in many ways including one’s performance, relationships, and self-esteem. Most people perform better when they feel less stressed. Managing our stress in the workplace is vital to helping us perform at our best and avoid potential hazards such as burnout. Some of the benefits of the Workplace Mindfulness Training, as indicated by participant comments, include decreased stress, improved concentration, better interpersonal relations, and less worry and anger. Most people wish to maximize these attributes both in the workplace and in all other aspects of their lives as well.

Results from the evaluation of Workplace Mindfulness Training with Memorial University students show very positive outcomes for the majority of participants. Of the 23 participants who completed the evaluation, 19 claimed that they found the program very or extremely helpful, 3 found it somewhat helpful, while only 1 participant felt that the workshop was not helpful at all. Interest on the part of the participants is also evident as 22 of 23 who completed the evaluation continued the learned meditation practices at home with the vast majority practicing at least 3 times a week between sessions. Additional feedback included all 23 participants believing that their colleagues would benefit from learning about Workplace Mindfulness for themselves.

Themes that were identified regarding mindfulness practice and the workplace included increased focus, less distractibility, better listening, and increased concentration and communication skills. Participants also noted a greater ability to deal with stress, worry less, and improve relations with others and an overall ability to be more efficient on the job. By increasing awareness and attentiveness, responding rather than reacting, learning to pause, and realizing that thoughts are just thoughts, participants identified an increased ability to manage many of the stressors they face in the workplace. Participants also acknowledged an increased ability to manage intrusive thoughts, avoid distractions (e.g., cell phone), and navigate stressful situations better. They also noted increased awareness, the benefits of focusing on one thing at a time, and the impact of managing difficult thoughts and feelings.

Personal code: _____

Workplace Mindfulness Evaluation Form

(pre-post intervention)

Please write down in the box on the left the number that best fits how you feel with regard to the statement:

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neither Disagree, nor Agree 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree 0=Don't Know

- Mindfulness helps get rid of disturbing thoughts and emotions.
- I am keen on multitasking as it allows me to accomplish a lot of tasks.
- I am unaware of the ways that I am impulsive.
- When I do something that doesn't meet my expectations, I give myself a hard time.
- I am easily distracted.
- I have problems dealing with stressful situations.
- I find that I am uncomfortable being around people who need help.
- When someone is talking, I have trouble putting my own thoughts aside and paying attention fully.
- When I'm concerned about something, it doesn't occur to me that my thoughts might not be true.
- I am often preoccupied, and miss what is going on around me.
- When my thoughts overtake me and I feel worried, I don't know how to pause or interrupt this pattern.
- I can't imagine getting through a day without my cell phone.
- After I "send" an important e-mail or text, I often regret what I wrote.
- When I have difficult thoughts or feelings, I tend to avoid facing them for as long as I can.
- When I'm working on something, it's difficult to differentiate between priorities and tasks that could be done later...
- I tend to have a lot of ideas that never get implemented, and I don't know what to do about this.

(Continued)

(Post-intervention only):

1. What are some of the main points about “mindfulness” that resonate for you and your everyday life? _____

2. Which mindfulness practices are you finding helpful, and in what way?

3. _How helpful has this workshop series been for you? (0 = not helpful; 10 = extremely helpful)_____
Specifically, how does your study and practice of mindfulness help during the workday?

4. Have you been able to do some meditation practice at home? _____
If yes, about how many times a week? _____ Usually for how long? _____
5. Do you think your colleagues could benefit from learning about Workplace Mindfulness? _____
6. Do you have any suggestions on how this workshop series can be improved? _____

Thank you!

© Dr. Martha Traverso-Yeppez and Andrew Safer 2016