

LEARNING MADE EASY



Career Development

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Career Development

ALL-IN-ONE

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Career Development All-in-One For Dummies®

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Introduction

When was the last time you received an email and cringed at the muddled organization and horrible grammar? Or you felt so overwhelmed that your productivity plummeted? Or how about the last time you or a colleague were so nervous during a presentation that you came across as unprepared or worse — unprofessional?

Unfortunately, business professionals in all stages of their careers encounter these situations at one point or another. Although these instances may seem benign on the surface, they harm your professional reputation, which is hard to reverse. Would you want to do business with someone who is so unorganized that he constantly misses deadlines or turns in shoddy work because he's rushed? Of course not! Time management and having a solid organizational system are just a couple of the secrets to success that we discuss in this book.

About This Book

This book provides you with detailed information on topics that will help you gain the confidence needed to grow and advance in your professional life. You'll read about how practicing mindfulness can make you a more effective manager, how to craft the perfect written document that gets results, how to present like a pro, and more.

Foolish Assumptions

There's a time and a place for just about everything and assumptions are no different. First, we assume that you are a business professional and you're ready, willing, and able to devote some time and energy into your professional development.

We also assume that you have at least a general knowledge of the major software packages that businesses use and are interested in utilizing them to advance in your professional activities. If that's the case, this is the book for you!

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, you'll find special icons to call attention to important information. Here's what to expect.



TIP

"If you see people falling asleep during your presentations, bang a book against the table to wake them up." Kidding!

This icon is used for helpful suggestions and things you may find useful at some point. No worries, though: No one will be falling asleep during your presentations if you take to heart the tip written here!



REMEMBER

This icon is used when something is essential and bears repeating. Again, this icon is used when something is essential and bears repeating. (See what we did there?)



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The little Dummies Man is information to share with the people who handle the technical aspect of things. You can skip technical-oriented information without derailing any of the hard work you're putting toward achieving your best professional self.



WARNING

Pay attention to these warnings to avoid potential pitfalls. Nothing suggested will get you fired or arrested (unless you do something like practice mindfulness *so well* that you start to nod off while driving or during meetings with the CEO — we can't help you there). If you see this icon, slow down and proceed with caution.

Beyond the Book

Although this book is a one-stop shop for your professional development, we can cover only so much in a set number of pages! If you find yourself at the end of this book thinking, "This was an amazing book! Where can I learn more about how to advance my career by working on my professional development?" head over to www.dummies.com for more resources.

For details about significant updates or changes that occur between editions of this book, go to www.dummies.com, search for *Career Development All-in-One For Dummies*, and open the Downloads tab on this book's dedicated page.

In addition, check out the cheat sheet for this book for tips on making presentations, making the most of your time, and more. To get to the cheat sheet, go to www.dummies.com, and then type *Career Development All-in-One For Dummies* in the Search box.

1

Mindfulness

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Chapter **1**

Exploring Mindfulness in the Workplace

In tough economic times, many organizations look for new ways to deliver better products and services to customers while reducing costs. Carrying on as normal isn't an option. Leaders must engage staff, and everyone needs to become more resilient in the face of ongoing change. For these reasons, more and more organizations offer staff training in mindfulness.

Major corporations, such as General Mills, have offered staff mindfulness training in recent years. Google and eBay are among the many companies that now provide rooms for staff to practice mindfulness during work time. Business schools such as Harvard Business School now include mindfulness principles in their leadership programs.

So what is mindfulness, and why are so many leading organizations investing in it?

Becoming More Mindful at Work

In this section, you discover what mindfulness is. More importantly, you also discover what mindfulness is not! You find out how mindfulness evolved and why it's become so important in the modern-day workplace.

Clarifying what mindfulness is

Have you ever driven somewhere and arrived at your destination remembering nothing about your journey? Or grabbed a snack and noticed a few moments later that all you have left is an empty wrapper? Most people have! These examples are common ones of *mindlessness*, or going on autopilot.

Like many humans, you're probably not present for much of your own life. You may fail to notice the good things in your life or hear what your body is telling you. You probably also make your life harder than it needs to be by poisoning yourself with toxic self-criticism.

Mindfulness can help you to become more aware of your thoughts, feelings, and sensations in a way that suspends judgment and self-criticism. Developing the ability to pay attention to and see clearly whatever is happening moment by moment doesn't eliminate life's pressures, but it can help you respond to them in a more productive, calmer manner.

Learning and practicing mindfulness can help you to recognize and step away from habitual, often unconscious emotional and physiological reactions to everyday events. Practicing mindfulness allows you to be fully present in your life and work and improves your quality of life.

Mindfulness can help you to

- » Recognize, slow down, or stop automatic and habitual reactions
- » Respond more effectively to complex or difficult situations
- » See situations with greater focus and clarity
- » Become more creative
- » Achieve balance and resilience at both work and home



REMEMBER

Mindfulness at work is all about developing awareness of thoughts, emotions, and physiology and how they interact with one another. Mindfulness is also about being aware of your surroundings, helping you better understand the needs of those around you.

Mindfulness training is like going to the gym. In the same way as training a muscle, you can train your brain to direct your attention to where you want it to be. In simple terms, mindfulness is all about managing your mind.

Taking a look at the background

Mindfulness has its origins in ancient Eastern meditation practices. In the late 1970s, Jon Kabat-Zinn developed Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which became the foundation for modern-day mindfulness. Figure 1-1 shows how it developed.

FIGURE 1-1:
Mindfulness
timeline.



In the 1990s Mark Williams, John Teasdale, and Zindel Segal further developed MBSR to help people suffering from depression. Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) combined cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) with mindfulness.

Since the late 1970s, research into the benefits of mindfulness has steadily increased. Recent studies have examined, for example, the effect of practicing mindfulness on the immune system and on those working in high-pressure environments.

Advances in brain-scanning technology have demonstrated that as little as eight weeks of mindfulness training can positively alter brain structures, including the amygdala (the fear center) and the left prefrontal cortex (an area associated with happiness and well-being). Other studies show benefits in even shorter periods of time.

Busy leaders who practice mindfulness have long extolled its virtues, but little research has existed to back up their claims. Fortunately, researchers are now increasingly focusing their attention on the benefits of mindfulness from a workplace perspective.

MBSR and MBCT are taught using a standard eight-week curriculum, and all teachers follow a formalized development route. The core techniques are the same for both courses. Most workplace mindfulness courses are based around MBCT or MBSR but tailored to meet the needs of the workplace.

Although MBSR and MBCT were first developed to help treat a range of physical and mental health conditions, new applications for the techniques have been established. Mindfulness is now being taught in schools and universities, and has even been introduced to prisoners. Many professional education programs, such as MBAs, now include mindfulness training.

Researchers have linked the practice of mindfulness to skills that are highly valuable in the workplace. Research suggests that practicing mindfulness can enhance

- » Emotional intelligence
- » Creativity and innovation
- » Employee engagement
- » Interpersonal relationships
- » Ability to see the bigger picture
- » Resilience
- » Self-management
- » Problem solving
- » Decision making
- » Focus and concentration

In addition, mindfulness is valuable in the workplace because it has a positive effect on immunity and general well-being. It has been demonstrated to relieve the symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress.

ACT

In the late 1980s, research began by Steven Hayes and colleagues for another form of training called Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). ACT combines mindfulness and acceptance with action-based strategies. In the last few years, ACT has begun to be adapted to meet the modern workplace, sometimes called Acceptance and Commitment Training.

Recognizing what mindfulness isn't

Misleading myths about mindfulness abound. Here are a few:

Myth 1: I will need to visit a Buddhist center, go on a retreat, or travel to the Far East to learn mindfulness.

Experienced mindfulness instructors are operating all over the world. Many teachers now teach mindfulness to groups of staff in the workplace. One-to-one mindfulness teaching can be delivered in the office, in hotel meeting rooms, or even on the web. Some people do attend retreats after learning mindfulness if they want to deepen their knowledge, experience peace and quiet, or gain further tuition, but doing so isn't essential.

Myth 2: Practicing mindfulness will conflict with my religious beliefs.

Mindfulness isn't a religion. For example, MBSR and MBCT are entirely secular — as are most workplace programs. No religious belief of any kind is necessary. Mindfulness can help you step back from your mental noise and tune into your own innate wisdom. Mindfulness is practiced by people of all faiths and by those with no spiritual beliefs. Practicing mindfulness won't turn you into a hemp-clad tofu eater, a tree-hugging hippie, or a monk sitting on top of a mountain — unless you want to be one of these people, of course!

Myth 3: I'm too busy to sit and be quiet for any length of time.

When you're busy, the thought of sitting and doing nothing may seem like the last thing you want to do. In 2010, researchers at Harvard University gathered evidence from a quarter of a million people suggesting that, on average, the mind wanders for 47 percent of the working day. Just 15 minutes a day spent practicing mindfulness can help you to become more productive and less distracted. Then you'll be able to make the most of your busy day and get more done in less time. When you first start practicing mindfulness, you'll almost certainly experience mental distractions, but if you persevere you'll find it easier to tune out distractions and to manage your mind. As time goes on, your ability to concentrate increases as does your sense of well-being and a feeling of control over your life.

Myth 4: Practicing mindfulness will reduce my ambition and drive.

Practicing mindfulness can help you become more focused on your goals and better able to achieve them. It can help you become more creative and gain new perspectives on life. If your approach to work is chaotic, mindfulness can make you more focused and centered, which in turn enables you to channel your energy more productively. Coupled with an improved sense of well-being, this ability to focus helps you achieve your career ambitions and goals.

Myth 5: If I practice mindfulness, people will take me less seriously and my career prospects will be damaged.

Some of the most successful and influential people in the world practice mindfulness. Senator Tim Ryan and Goldie Hawn, for example, are keen advocates of mindfulness. Practicing mindfulness doesn't involve sitting cross-legged on the floor — an office chair is fine. If you find it impossible to sit quietly and focus because you work in an open-plan office, or you're concerned about what others think, plenty of other everyday activities can become opportunities to practice mindfulness that nobody will notice. Walking, eating, waiting for your computer to boot up, or even exercising at the gym are all good opportunities to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness can be practicing with your eyes open, while you're moving around during the day.

Myth 6: Mindfulness and meditation are one and the same. Mindfulness is just a trendy new name.

Fact: Mindfulness often involves specific meditation practices. **Fiction:** All meditation is the same. Many popular forms of meditation are all about relaxation — leaving your troubles behind and imagining yourself in a calm and tranquil special place. Mindfulness helps you to find out how to live with your life in the present moment — warts and all — rather than run away from it. Mindfulness is about approaching life and things that you find difficult and exploring them with openness, rather than avoiding them. Most people find that practicing mindfulness does help them to relax, but that this relaxation is a welcome by-product, not the objective!

Training your attention: The power of focus

Are you one of the millions of workers who routinely put in long hours, often for little or no extra pay? In the current climate of cutbacks, job losses, and business efficiencies, many people feel the need to work longer hours just to keep on top of their workload. However, research shows that working longer hours does not mean that you get more done. Actually, if you continue to work when past your peak, your performance slackens and continues to do so as time goes on.

Imagine your job is to chop logs. After a while, your axe needs sharpening and your muscles need resting. If you keep going, you'll become inefficient and are more likely to have an accident. By taking a break and sharpening your axe, you can return to the job and get more done in less time. You'll probably enjoy the job more too. Mindfulness practice is like taking that break — you reenergize and sharpen your mind, ready for your next activity.



REMEMBER

Discovering how to focus and concentrate better is the key to maintaining peak performance. Recognizing when you've slipped past peak performance and then taking steps to bring yourself back to peak are also vital. Mindfulness comes in at this point. Over time, it helps you focus your attention to where you want it to be.