Mindfulness Increases Happiness

What is mindfulness? It is basically being fully present in daily life. It is awareness of both where we are and what we are doing. Being mindful is an asset to keeping us grounded, less anxious, and happier. We gain more awareness of being mindful when we practice daily. How do we practice being mindful?

- Set aside time and a specific place on a regular basis. This space can be a quiet corner in a room, a park among the trees, or another place of solitude chosen by you.
- Recognize the present. Don’t jump ahead in your thoughts nor lag behind. This takes practice, but it is attainable. Stay calm. Breathe in and out slowly. You are quieting your mind with an emphasis on staying in the present.
- If your mind wanders, don’t become upset. Just take a few more deep breaths. Practice this for minutes at a time. As it becomes easier for you, you can increase the time.

Mindfulness opens the door to focused and relaxing meditation. To meditate, you should consider the following (or another exercise that has worked for you in the past):

1. Choose a space that allows for a stable and comfortable position. This can be a chair, a cushion, or even the floor.

2. Pay attention to your body position—cross your legs if you are on the floor or cushion, or plant them solidly in front of you if you are on a chair. Your arms should be parallel to your body. Allow your back to relax in its natural position.

3. Allow your gaze to relax, and pay attention to your breathing. Your mind may wander; however, that is ok. Concentrate on your breathing. Take deep breaths in through your mouth and out through your nose.

4. After you become comfortable with your breathing, allow your head to raise. If you happen to have your eyes closed, open them. Recognize the sights and sounds around you. How does your body feel right now? What are you thinking about? What is your level of confidence or anxiety?

5. A few cleansing breaths and a sigh of accomplishment can complete the exercise.

Remember, this is a practiced routine. Like any practice, sometimes the results are very positive, and sometimes they need some further thought. Such exercises can aid in putting you in a state of being in the present. A really big bonus comes in the form of happiness. When you are able to be mindful of being present in your daily life, you will find yourself happier. When you are happy, tension and stress decrease, and not only will you feel the positive effects, but so will those who are around you.

“The best way to capture moments is to pay attention. This is how we cultivate mindfulness. Mindfulness means being awake. It means knowing what you are doing.” ~Jon Kabat-Zinn
Vacation Time Benefits Both Employer and Employee

Thousands upon thousands of vacation hours were lost last year. Many companies have established rules that if vacation is not used by a certain date, the hours are lost and cannot carry over to the following year. Some companies may allow a certain number of days or hours to be carried forward; however, unless you are planning an extensive world tour, you will likely continue to be faced with “use or lose” hours or days on an annual basis unless you start using these precious days. Since it is early in the year, it might be a good time to look at your potential vacation hours, and make some long-range plans. Remember, it is good for both the business and the employee to have vacation time.

**Employer benefits**—First of all, vacation banks cause a liability to companies. They are often faced with huge payouts when an individual leaves a company and has accumulated a large number of vacation days. Secondly, research shows that when personnel take their vacations, productivity increases because after a period of R&R, employees are more likely to be able to focus on the work at hand. While such things are a benefit to the employer, it is also important for the company to create an atmosphere that encourages time off. This may start with examples set by those in “command” of the departments. If employees recognize that their superiors are taking some time to get that much-needed rest and/or recreation, they are more likely to follow suit. Planning ahead for time off can increase productivity prior to going on a vacation, and the time off can be the catalyst for improved work upon return. Both of these possibilities are a benefit to the “bottom line” for the company.

**Employee benefits**—Employers incorporate paid time off into their budgets. Employees are not taking advantage of a company when they utilize the time they have earned. Sometimes, it is difficult for an employee to plan for a long vacation. However, many companies allow for taking a few days at a time. This plan can be used to extend a holiday—taking a few days off prior to the holiday, or at the end of it, can allow the employee to have a “mini” vacation. Three or four of these extended periods throughout the year can give employees the rest they need. Consequently, they are likely to find the work load more tolerable, and are better able to complete tasks after these few extra days. In addition, their families and friends will appreciate their having more time to enjoy doing things together. It is certainly worth working toward better utilization of time off.

Whether you have a lot or a little of vacation time earned, remember it is earned. Just as you earned the paycheck you receive each pay period, and you use it, do the same with your time off. It is a health benefit. Anything that can reduce stress will also improve your overall well-being.