

Workforce Mindfulness

7 Techniques for Stronger Learning Outcomes



**CoursesOnline's Workforce Training
is a new, future-forward training
solution for the UK's corporate
training space.**



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Balancing stress management and employee wellbeing has never been more important in both today's society and in the workplace. Our current climate exhibits many pressures on everyday work and finding balance at home. These include:

- Remote working and setting a routine
- Juggling homeschooling
- Concerns around possible redundancies and changes to roles
- Feelings of isolation, anger, anxiety or depression at the thought of having to endure further lockdowns through the winter and potentially onwards

A focus on mindful learning can be an excellent way for employees to relieve and temper the ill effects of stress and uncertainty.

A study by Johns Hopkins University published in the Journal of General Internal Medicine concluded that taking time out to learn new things can have a positive effect on stressful workplace situations. The study showed that team learning behaviour can create resilience and minimise the incidence of burnout where team members collect information, draw on experience, and share expertise in their team.

But how do you keep individuals motivated, calm, focused and engaged, as well as helping to develop transferable lifelong stress management skills and methods?

Here are seven ways you can begin to facilitate an optimal learning environment by instilling mindfulness and relaxation techniques into your team's daily routine.

Re-brand “Learning”

To refresh and replenish employees psychologically, you should re-brand learning itself as a break from routine tasks and BAU work. In an already stressful situation, viewing learning as “additional work” will make it less attractive, whereas approaching it as a form of respite and relief can make it more appealing and thus more likely to create a positive, enjoyable experience.



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What is my learning style?

Depending on your school of thought, there are up to 71 different learning styles or modes of learning. However, whether you subscribe to VARK or Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, spending time with each employee who is embarking on training to help identify and understand their preferred learning style can have a significant impact on how positively the training is perceived and on the end results.

For example, auditory learners who prefer to listen and tend to learn well through group discussions and repeating back information out loud can be promoted by:

- ▶ Humming and talking notes out
- ▶ The use of rhymes, mnemonics & songs
- ▶ Listening to podcasts
- ▶ Listening to binaural beats
- ▶ Offering plenty of opportunities for group discussion and presentations back to peers

Action

For each learning style, build a template of advice and guidance on how to tailor the learner engagement and revision best practice based on the specific learning mode.

Take a Break

Taking regular breaks can help reduce anxiety and build self-esteem. Just a few minutes each day can be sufficient in allowing the overworked brain time to recharge.

Taking time out for a short rest has been shown to boost new memories, and things learnt in the long term, as shown in research conducted by National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, where they discovered that “our brains may solidify the memories of new skills we just practiced a few seconds earlier by taking a short rest.”

A more recent study in 2019 “A Rapid Form of Offline Consolidation in Skill Learning” published in Current Biology suggests that “early improvements when learning a new skill are made “offline”, during breaks.”

This is particularly true for employees who spend hours huddled in front of a computer.

Encourage learners to:

- Reduce screen time
- Take breaks away from work emails or social media
- Take a short walk
- Sit in the garden or park and pause for a moment
- Get their heart rate up by doing a short workout or stretching routine
- Complete a passive task around the house

Action

Promote regular breaks! Whether in classroom or online learning, it is important to schedule planned breaks throughout the day.



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Action

Prescribe a sleeping app such as Pzizz, Headspace and AURA to help calm a busy mind

Sleep

We all know that sleep is important for our health, in addition to reducing stress and anxiety, getting enough sleep has been shown to play an essential role in memory consolidation.

Numerous tests have shown that sleep can support the ability to recall newly learnt information. Reports of enhanced memory consolidation during sleep can be found in studies dating as far back as 1924.

A study conducted by the University of California San Francisco published in Nature, Neuroscience in 2017, discovered that the brain strengthens motor skills during sleep, as key cells and neurons developed whilst learning a new skill are reinforced during deep sleep.

Think of it as sleep polishing and buffing the freshly forged neural wiring.

However, it's no surprise that COVID-19 and lockdown fears have increased the rate of insomnia within the population. Research conducted by the Economic and Social Research Council-funded Centre for Population Change at Southampton University reported that "the overall incidence of worry-related sleep loss rose from 15.7% to 24.7% during the first lockdown. And this was especially true for women, where the increase was much more pronounced – rising from 18.9% to 31.8%".

Understanding the importance of sleep quality and informing employees that this is recognised within the organisation can be hugely beneficial. Giving you the opportunity to support and consult employees about their sleep and any problems they may be facing.

Employees can benefit from information about the importance of a good night's rest and how it impacts their health, emotional well-being, and ultimately their ability to learn and retain information more effectively. You could also advise on making sure employees get enough natural daylight, are eating healthy snacks and avoiding caffeinated drinks past lunchtime to help aid better sleep.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness has huge potential when applied to learning new skills, from reducing stress to increasing resilience and enhancing learning retention. This can allow learners to have better focus on the content and for their brains to absorb and retain the information to a greater degree.

Mindful.org defines mindfulness as “the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we’re doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what’s going on around us” which can only be a good thing when learning new skills, training or revising.

Mindfulness, like meditation, is a skill to be learnt and honed over time. Much like any muscle in our bodies, and with some time and effort can be used as a tool to improve learning outcomes.

At CoursesOnline, we provide all of our team members the opportunity to participate in a weekly instructor-led alkaline breathing session, to encourage mindful breathing development. We regularly receive reports that this practice helps our employees have more energy, increased clarity and improves their overall mood and state of mind.

You can also encourage breathing exercises – ask learners to focus on their breath for one minute, breathing in through their nose and out through their mouth. Focus on the sensations of breathing. Where do they feel the inhale and exhale? Is it in the belly or chest? What does the air feel like coming out of their nostrils? Promote taking in positive energy through the inhale and expelling negative feelings with the exhale.

Action

Offering advice on how to access online videos, tutorials and apps can be a great first step in embedding this practice in your organisation.

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Meditation

There are over 3,000 scientific studies on the benefits of meditation linked to our health and wellbeing. Regular meditation practice can help us to feel calm, centred and focused.

In terms of learning regular meditation practice can be beneficial in:

- Increasing memory retention and recall
- Improving creative thinking and cognitive ability
- Improving information processing
- Helping to keep unwanted distractions at bay
- Reducing stress and anxiety in general

However, this can be one of the hardest techniques to get your team across. We advise starting slowly for employees new to meditation – encouraging just 1-2 minutes per day added into their daily routine. Research shows that once an individual can build up to 10 minutes per day of meditative breathing, it is the consistency which provides positive effects. Since March of this year and the first lockdown, we have been offering a weekly group meditation class as a successful stress-busting exercise.

One of our early adopters recently fed back “Mediation at night sets me up for an amazing sleep that carries through to the next day. My energy levels are so much higher post meditation. Meditation in the mornings tends to clear my head and shut down any niggling doubts I may have on any given day”

Action

Introduce a short meditation class or suggest an online guided video for your learners on a regular basis

Nature - Forest Bathing

In Japan, a well-known practice called *shinrin-yoku* has shown increasing evidence to suggest that taking time to get out into fresh air after periods of learning can improve learning transfer and memory retention.

Getting back to nature has been shown to calm an overstimulated mind – being connected with our natural surroundings can help promote a healthy headspace and allow us to escape the pressures of everyday life. It is especially important during periods of lockdown that this practice is encouraged.

In 2019, the UK's first scientific study of Japanese forest bathing science with Derby University showed that results mirrored many of the Japanese studies and participants scores improved on measures of:


- Safe and relaxed positive affect
- Compassion for others and from others
- Rumination on problems, nature connection and pro-environmental attitudes, and mood disturbance – notably depression, anger, tension, confusion and fatigue.

Action

Encourage a walk with nature
– Make sure to recommend leaving mobile phones and other devices at home!



7.



There's never been a more important time to incorporate stress management techniques into a holistic L&D strategy. Use this guide as a jumping-off point towards a more productive, mindful workplace.

A bit about us...

Learning and development are at our core – we know that skills growth is the key that moves businesses forward in a changing world. With this, we also have a keen understanding of all the challenges faced by L&D practitioners around the country, such as:

- Improving learning transfer
- Promoting and maintaining learner engagement
- Ensuring a variety of learning styles and needs are accounted for

That's why we are dedicated to maintaining a breadth of course scope when it comes to workplace learning. Workforce Training offers both online courses that include unique features such as live labs and other learning-enhancing technologies, along with more traditional components such as high-quality course materials. This ensures that we are connecting the right learning and career growth opportunities to each unique business.

Our commitment to partnering with the UK's top education providers means that we stand out from other players in the sector. By offering both premium and accredited courses, we empower organisations to streamline and diversify their learning in the simplest way.

We pride ourselves on our dedication to both our students and our partners alike. We look forward to extending this to organisations seeking to make a difference to their people and their bottom-line through training.

To find out more about how we can support your business in the future please email: sj@coursesonline.co.uk or call 07375447163 for a free consultation.

