

Mindful Moments — or: why you should shower more to boost innovation

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08/11/2019 About the pitfalls of a busy working life and how you stay focused.

When I was still developing my own company, my stress level often went through the roof. I wouldn't say that I necessarily worked more hours than during my consulting years or my MBA but obviously, there were simply more topics on the table and on top of that there was something like anxiety in the room that stressed me out. The reason may have been that we bootstrapped the company and sales were everything else but constant. If we were short on cash, the first thing we did was cut our own salaries in order to decrease our burn rate.

About the pitfalls of a busy working life

Now, things are different. This doesn't mean that my job at Porsche is all stress-free, there are other reasons for busy days and inner stress now: Working in a bigger team and a large company with many departments comes along with the fact that I often do not control my own schedule. A meeting here, a call there, after that a workshop and in the meantime, I try to think about our product portfolio, which team to support how, where to invest more, which hypothesis to test in the next design sprint and so on.

However, no matter if I develop my own products or I just support other team developing products, the everyday challenge is the same: to maintain a creative and proactive mindset needed to be sharp and add true value to yourself, your team and product or to the people you are supporting.

Stay focused!

As I pointed out in my previous article, developing products — as well as businesses — is very much about understanding people, their needs and how to best support them. However, to understand others, you first need to understand yourself and in particular the influence of your mind on your view of others and their behavior. Self-awareness, as Daniel Golemann already pointed out, thus is the basis for emotional intelligence.

But who is actually able to understand oneself, to be aware of oneself? Especially in a connected work-environment where we are all overdosed with distractions from various sources — led by the one we're always carrying in our pocket. Are you actually able to really focus on and learn about yourself and do you even recognize when you want to focus but your mind wanders away?

If you now ask yourself what I'm talking about — I want to talk about mindfulness. This means the ability to focus your awareness on the present moment. It's about paying attention but even more about acknowledging the moment when you are losing your attention and need to re-focus.

Mindfulness, meditation and esoteric nonsense?

When I started to get into mindfulness some years back (my own company's main brand is in fact called "mindfuel" and focuses on health & wellbeing) meditation still seemed like esoteric nonsense to me. That was before I got in touch with what Google teaches employees in its "Search Inside Yourself" course.

Chade-Meng Tan, the author of the bestseller "Search Inside Yourself" uses his own definition of mindfulness that I find quite intriguing: "Mindfulness is a quality of mind that we all experience and enjoy from time to time, but is something that can be greatly strengthened with practice, and once it becomes sufficiently strong, it leads directly to the attentional calmness and clarity that forms the basis of emotional intelligence."

The power of a shower

To me, this quality of mind happens when I am taking a shower. This may sound cliché, but it's true — I often find solutions to difficult challenges while taking a shower even though I don't think about a

special topic at hand. Even more important to me: Mindfulness is the key to emotional intelligence and it can be trained through meditation practices! That was a missing link for me. All my life, I was dedicated to sports. I played football, tennis, volleyball, did martial arts, I went running and to the gym. Basically, I trained all the muscles in my body, constantly. But as much as I trained my body, I neglected to practice my mind (formal education aside). And it was about time to change that.

An easy, but long way: Practicing mindfulness

I quickly discovered that practicing mindfulness (or mindfulness meditation) is super easy and straight forward. The challenge, however, is that it is an ongoing journey that never ends. There's no quick goal to achieve. Coming back to the analogy above, the mind is like any other muscle of your body and needs constant training in order to achieve sustainable results.

To me personally, this ongoing journey is a great experience in itself because I enjoy enhancing myself (or at least trying). I obviously always find situations in which I can act better in retrospective but I see remarkable learnings:

- I gradually become a better listener — you can ask my wife. I used to be the kind of person that gets carried away during conversations because of my own personal chatter. It still happens to me but I recognize it and focus my attention again.
- I pause more. That means I stop when I consider it to be necessary even though a deadline might be tight and everybody expects me to be busy. But you have to come to the point where you realize that being busy is not the same as being productive.
- I talk less. This means that I withdraw myself and my own opinion more in order to let others take precedence. Let me tell you: Ego can be a terrible thing when trying to learn from situations, conversations or feedback.

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I would like to encourage you to join me on our common journey on being better selves. As a start, you can do the following:

1. Be positive about the topic. It might help you to read “Search Inside Yourself” or “Your Brain at Work”

by David Rock. Both give great insights into the “Why?” but are also packed with useful tips for anyone who wants to jump into the topic.

2. Create a routine. One of the first steps towards more mindfulness is taking a small but fix bite of time for yourself — to focus, re-structure or simply think straight. You can use apps such as 7mind or headspace that help you get started and establish a routine.

3. Find someone to do it with. If you are working at Porsche and you don't have a mindfulness buddy you can, of course, reach out to me and we might do a morning routine together.

Get started today and let's share experiences, let me know about your routines and let's encourage each other!

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