

How Mindful Leaders Get Results

by Scott Eblin

One of the things I know for sure about leadership is that leaders control the weather. If you've ever worked in a setting where the first question everyone asks each other in the morning is "What kind of mood is he (or she) in today?" then you know the truth of that statement. The answer to that first thing in the morning question determines the kind of day everyone has ahead of them and, consequently, the quality of the work that gets done. If the leader is sunny and bright, then it's going to be a good day; if the leader is stormy and cloudy then everyone better buckle up and prepare for a bumpy ride.

I thought a lot about leaders and the weather as I was writing my new book, *Overworked and Overwhelmed: The Mindfulness Alternative*. Because of the ever increasing expectations of the do more with less, 24/7 connectivity environment they're operating in, more and more leaders feel overworked and overwhelmed. That feeling leads to bumpy weather and, according to my company's research, comes through in low performance on key leadership behaviors such as:

- ◆ pacing themselves,
- ◆ taking time to define or redefine what needs to be done,
- ◆ giving others their full presence and attention and
- ◆ understanding the impact of their comments and actions on their team's morale and productivity.

With all of the demands on their time and attention, what should leaders do differently? I'm confident that working harder isn't the answer. In a 2013 study, the Center for Creative Leadership found that the average smart phone enabled executive, manager or professional is connected to their work 72 hours a week. There are only 168 hours in a week, so if the leader is spending 72 of them on work and let's say eight hours a day (56 hours a week) on sleeping, eating and bathing, that only leaves 40 hours a week to do everything else they need or want to do. Working harder is only going to exacerbate the chronic state of fight or flight that many leaders find themselves in these days.

The alternative for the overworked and overwhelmed leader is to take a more mindful approach to work and life.

We hear and read a lot about mindfulness these days, so let me spend a minute talking about what it is and isn't for the average person. It isn't spending hours a day meditating like a Buddhist monk. That's great, of course, but most of us don't have the time or patience for that.

My working definition of mindfulness is that it's doing simple things that make us more aware of what's going on around us and inside us and then being intentional about what we're going to do – or not do – next.

The good news is that there are some easy to do mindful routines that leaders can follow that will definitely make a difference for them, their teams and in the results they achieve. Those routines and a plan for following through on them is what I share in *Overworked and Overwhelmed*.

We've all heard of the fight or flight response, but few of us have heard of the rest and digest response. Think of fight or flight, which is controlled by your body's sympathetic nervous system, as the gas pedal that helps you get things done – especially in crisis situations. Think of rest and digest, which is controlled by your body's parasympathetic nervous system, as the brakes which keep you from spinning out of control and ending up in a big, hairy crash. Just like you'd never drive a car and only use the gas pedal, you shouldn't live your life without using the brakes.

The good news is that even a few moments of routines like breathing deeply from your belly, getting up from your desk to stretch for a few minutes or taking ten minutes to go for a walk can activate your rest and digest response and get you out of the chronic state of fight or flight that creates stormy weather for you and your team. Being mindful – aware and intentional – about when you're overusing the gas pedal and when you need to apply the brakes can create a leadership climate that enables you and your team

to get great results.

There is a mindfulness alternative to feeling overworked and overwhelmed. It starts with learning simple ways to get off the gas pedal and use the brakes. That's how mindful leaders get results and that's what I teach them how to do in *Overworked and Overwhelmed: The Mindfulness Alternative*.

