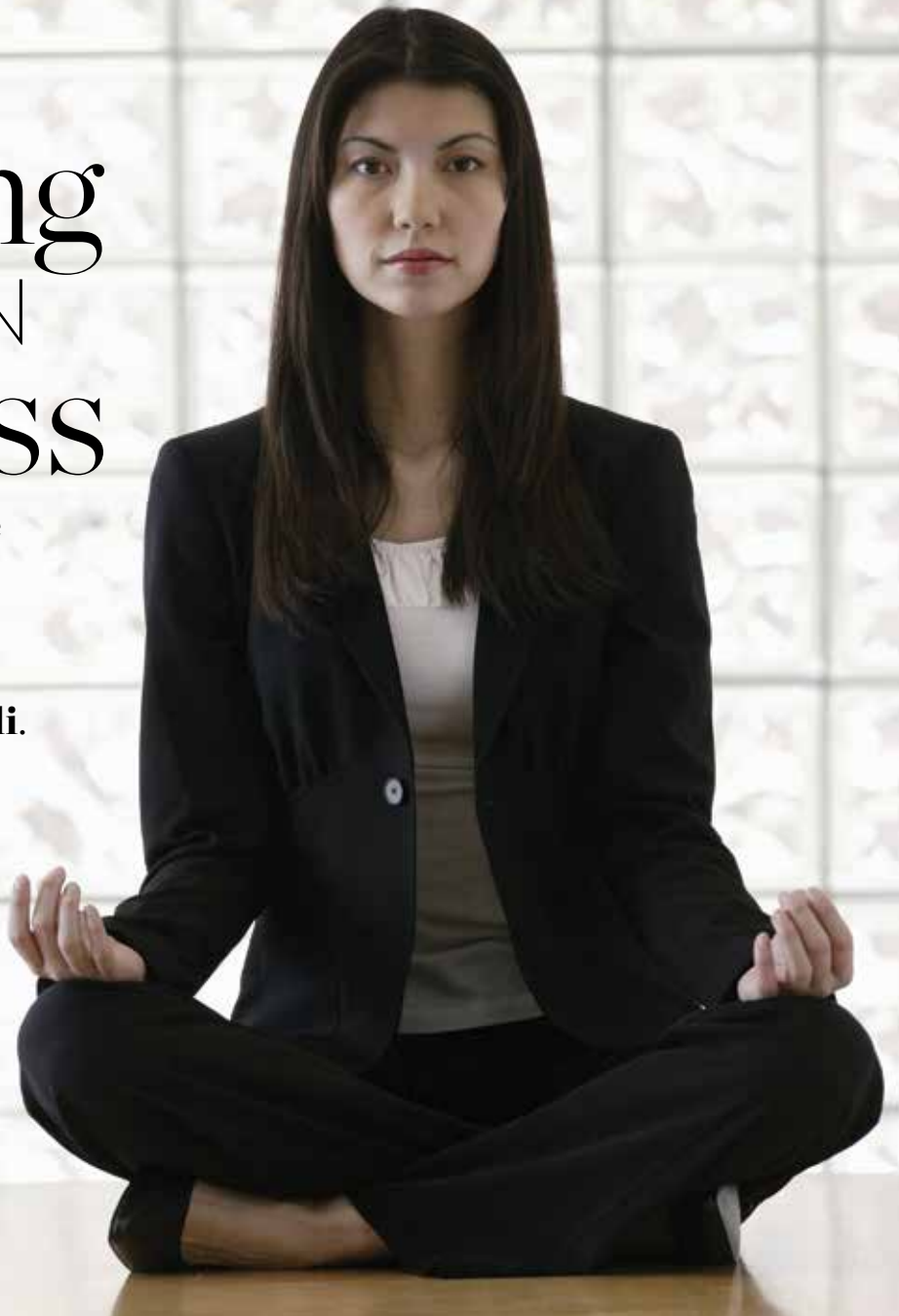


Minding YOUR OWN business

Taking time out to practice 'mindfulness' in your salon will benefit you, your staff, your clients and your bottomline, according to **Deborah Mangum Copelli.**



Where is your mind right now? You're probably reading the title and first sentence of this story on the benefits of 'mindfulness' in your business. Ok, that's a good thing. What else are you doing while you're reading this. If you're at reception, you might be looking at your bookings for today. And you're likely checking the roster to see who's on, and in which room. You could also be thinking about the water level in the hot stone cooker, or whether you've filled up the spa bath yet. Or you might be ruminating about Mrs. VIP walking in the door soon; what will you say to her? Her requested therapist is

running late and you know she has to get straight back to work after her treatment. Will you offer her a complimentary hand massage in hopes of occupying her time usefully, or will you just let her rest and wait? You might question yourself more, and wonder if you should have sent her a quick text to let her know that her treatment would start a few minutes late today. But then she'd already be on her way. Or she might text back that she'll re-book, and you don't want her to do that. Are you starting to get a bit anxious, stressed and lacking confidence about the hundreds of mental decisions that you make on a minute-by-minute basis? Take a breath; you are not alone!

In the span of seconds these thoughts and more might go through your mind as an owner or manager of a busy salon or day spa, and that would be quite normal.

So, ask yourself the question: how often do you set aside time to just focus and notice what is going on with your breath, heartbeat, the temperature around you, sensations on your skin, what you are hearing, smelling, feeling in your muscles, seeing before your eyes?

If you answered that you purposefully do this exercise at least once per day for a minimum of five minutes, then you are practicing mindfulness.

And you would know that the residual effects of this practice are phenomenal. Even though it's trendy at the moment, this concept is still somewhat foreign to our Western culture. The closest most of us get to it would be in our yoga class, which is great, provided the yoga instructor is also switched onto the total mind wellness benefits.

You might wonder how you can operate a proactive business and be 'mindful' at the same time. This... is paradox. You can still be working on several things at once, as would be required in your business, but with each you will be able to transition from one to another like a seamless dance of segues devoid of the extraneous head chatter or self-questioning. Multi-focused is what you are when you check your Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube repeatedly while on the phone booking in your client and asking them twice what time they wanted. You aren't being mindful of the task at hand, which is booking in your client. The opposite of mindfulness also includes multi-thinking, negative self-talk and doubt. It might seem a bit contradictory, the concept of mindfulness and running a successful business, but it doesn't all have to happen simultaneously – it's an integrative process.

However the more you purposefully practice mindfulness, even if just for five minutes several times a day, you will begin to notice subtle changes occurring over time. What's most profound is that you will soon become aware of what's working for you and what's not; clearly being able to move forward on decisions you'd previously found overwhelming. By removing the mental clutter and the busyness in your head, you give space to what is right in front of you, armed with new tools to effectively conquer any challenges that might come your way.

It is now scientifically proven that mindfulness and any form of meditation and hypnotic states of awareness provide new neural pathways in the brain, allowing for more openness and creativity. Flexibility and the opportunity to see another perspective are sometimes crucial when it comes to surviving in this unpredictable economy. The most influential and successful business people all have some type of inner mechanism and routine that includes a practice of

being present in the here and now or focused on one thing for a sustained amount of time, on a regular basis, aka mindfulness. Staying productive and engaged can be challenging at the best of times but in uncertain circumstances it is even more important.

I recently read a very compelling article in the *Harvard Business Review* about how to empower yourself and your staff with resilience and effectiveness. It listed some fairly basic steps that you can put into place in your business, and in this case, your salon or spa. It doesn't require much time, budget or intense resources. You can help yourself and your therapists handle their feelings of stress, burnout or disengagement just by encouraging an overall atmosphere of mindful-wellness. Where stress can be contagious, so too can being well, with contentment being more powerful than chaos.

Steps you can take:

- 1. Encourage wellbeing practices** like mindfulness, meditation and yoga. Post on the employee noticeboard a list of local classes that your staff can attend before or after their shifts. Or, better yet, devote an hour or two per week to wellness workshops with a specialist practitioner that you, your clients and staff can attend at different times depending on your schedules. You could make it complimentary to your staff or reward them with a class for work-related accomplishments.
- 2. Brain training conflict resolution** through the practice of mindfulness can train the brain and create useful mental habits that develop resilience and productivity at work and in life. Owners and staff who practice mindfulness collaborate better, navigate stress more effectively and sustain higher levels of performance. You don't have to be a guru at it, but by practicing for as little as five minutes several times a day, you can start to reap the benefits. And the neuroscience is in and has been for some time now – research has proven that mindfulness, meditation and any heightened states of alpha and theta brain wave activity is literally growing our grey matter. Businesses worldwide are on board too, hence the concept of 'workplace wellness'.



to think of your staff's work as a series of sprints rather than a marathon, where their performance is rewarded over the duration.

5. Show empathy and compassion. As an owner or manager, kindness costs you nothing and rewards you generously both from your own happiness and fulfilment equation and that of your staff – it is truly a win-win. It also impacts your employee's performance in a positive way while engaging them more in their daily tasks thus increasing your profitability. A research project at the University of NSW found that the single greatest influence on productivity and profitability within an organisation is the ability of leaders to spend more time developing and recognising their people. This included welcoming feedback, constructive criticism and fostering cooperation amongst the team. The research also found that understanding staff's motivations, hopes and difficulties and creating appropriate support allowed employees to perform at their best. This alone showed the greatest impact on profitability and productivity.

Putting this all together, the *Harvard Business Review* article states that the advantage of implementing mindfulness and wellness in the workplace pays off in dollars saved from employee attrition and gives owners and managers the satisfaction of knowing that their staff are well looked after and given every opportunity to grow and expand their own creativity and brain power.

3. 'Mono-tasking' for optimum focus. Author and researcher, Dr. JoAnn Deak, says that multitasking typically doubles the time it takes to do a task and doubles the number of mistakes. Leave the multiple activities to your computer and focus on the job at hand, get it done, edit it and move on to your next task. Prioritisation is the key here and managers can assist staff by giving clear, one at a time instructions emphasising what is most urgent for a timely delivery. For example, you might notice that your appointments are relatively quiet in the school holidays, making this a good time to offer some value added incentives to your database and/or to engage your staff in extra training on new products and treatments.

4. Utilise gap times or slow periods purposefully. The 'always on' anytime, anyplace, anywhere behaviour results in suboptimal, dissatisfying and continuous partial attention of your staff. Instead, be deliberate about assisting your staff to pause and recharge during slow periods. For example, you might want to offer staff a mindfulness meditation workshop during a lull. It's better

If you want to look at the stats, one that stands out amongst the crowd shows that an average of 62 minutes per week of enhanced productivity saved a company \$3000 per employee annually just by having staff participate in mindfulness programs offered by the company. Happy workplaces had a 46 per cent reduction in staff turnover, 19 per cent reduction in the costs of sick leave and 12 per cent increase in performance and productivity. The happiest employees spent 46 per cent more of their time focused on work tasks and felt 65 per cent more energised than their colleagues. In addition, the businesses implementing wellness practices reported twice the earnings and nearly three times the gross profit of other businesses where average to low levels of employee engagement existed.

So, focusing on your staff's resilience actually pays you in good karma as well as your bottom line. And even though most of us have learned to leave our personal lives at home as soon as we reach the workplace door, a recent Gallup Poll in the USA suggests it is no longer realistic to expect this from your employees. So, actually introducing staff to strategies that empower them both at home, personally and at work will make for a better all-round person. Monika Broecker, founder of the Centre for Personal Growth in the USA says this is, "upgrading [the] mental and emotional capabilities" of your team.

Engage yourself and your staff in the practice of mindfulness, meditation and wellness and they will grow their brains not only for your business but also for themselves and for the betterment of all. It promotes the foundation of a high-performance team and individual. And isn't it time we all take responsibility, mindfully, going forward to help heal ourselves, our fellow humankind and the world overall? ■