INTRODUCTION

To lead from their greatest potential, leaders need a process that supports them to become consistently self-aware, self-regulating, values-based, innovative, open-hearted and balanced within.

Mindfulness, an ancient practice that is now being proven by science, provides this process. In its simplest form, mindfulness means to maintain a non-judgemental awareness of our attitudes, thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and environment in the present moment.

Mindfulness in the corporate world is often reduced to little more than a skill for stress reduction, increased focus, and greater productivity. While this has value, it misses the full impact that mindfulness can have on leaders, society and whole systems.

Drawing from over two decades of disciplined mindfulness training, Michael Bunting shows how leaders can leverage the power of mindfulness to lead from their greatest potential. He integrates proven mindfulness practices with well-researched leadership disciplines to create a refreshing model of conscious, authentic and compassionate leadership.

The ultimate purpose of mindful leadership is not just to increase productivity and profits, but rather to create great workplaces with more meaning, integrity, compassion and joy. Mindful leaders can do far more than boost the bottom line—they can make the world a much better place.

MINDFULNESS, LEADERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

Leadership is one of the most challenging endeavours we can undertake. While it can often elicit the best in us, it can also expose our avoidances, reactivity, insecurities and values indiscretions.

There is a path that allows us to access our whole, authentic selves to lead with awareness, courage, compassion and integrity. That path is mindfulness, which is the practical application of self-awareness. It is the “how” of self-awareness.

Developing as a leader is about cultivating our inner strength to stay aware and balanced under fire, to inspire others with an inspirational purpose, to appreciate others’ gifts, and to courageously hold ourselves and others accountable when we want to slip into avoidance and justification. Perhaps above all, it is to stay aware and authentic.

Without mindfulness, we cannot cultivate these qualities to their fullest extent. Mindfulness provides the base of self-awareness and self-regulation that is essential to consistently accessing our prefrontal cortex and our best selves in the cauldron of leadership.

WHY MINDFULNESS MATTERS FOR LEADERSHIP AND THE BOTTOM LINE

A critical factor in creating and sustaining job satisfaction, productivity and a healthy bottom line is workplace engagement.

Leadership behaviour has a substantially bigger impact on engagement than any other factor. In fact as much as 37 per cent of employee engagement can be attributed to leadership behaviour.

The key to transforming leadership behaviour is the cultivation of mindfulness integrated with evidence-based leadership practices. This creates a truly self-aware and self-managing leadership style.

The formula is simple: Highly engaged organisations are more profitable and effective. The key to improving your organisation’s engagement is your leadership behaviour. And mindfulness—the practical application of self-awareness—is the most effective method to ensure your leadership behaviour is exemplary.
THE RESEARCH ON MINDFULNESS
Mindfulness has been shown to literally change the structure and function of the brain and provide the following benefits:

- Improved cognitive skills, including improved executive functioning, sustained attention, visuospatial processing, working memory and increasing our information processing speed.
- Enhanced creativity. Mindfulness practice can reduce “cognitive rigidity,” thus enabling us to respond with greater flexibility.
- Stronger relationships, including reducing social anxiety, improving our ability to empathise, and decreasing emotional reactivity.
- Health benefits, including depression prevention, increased immune functioning, pain control, improved sleep patterns, greater ability to curb and overcome addictions and binge eating, and improved heart health.
- Improved genetic health and longevity. This is based on Nobel prize-winning research.

All of these benefits clearly have a profound impact on leadership. When leaders are focused in the present they are calm, clear, open, relaxed, engaged, productive and “in flow”—precisely how they need to be to function at their best.

THE SEVEN DISCIPLINES OF MINDFUL LEADERS
Just being mindful is not enough. Even with serious mindfulness training we can still be poor leaders. When mindfulness is fully integrated into leadership, exponential progress can be made.

This book marries research-based mindfulness and leadership practices to provide a clear pathway for improving your leadership and your life. The pathway includes the following:

1. Be Here Now
Through mindfulness we develop, both internally and externally, a clear-eyed view of the world. We see reality as it is, not as we want or don’t want it to be. We are present to what is happening in front of us, right now, this very moment. Right now is real. Everything else is memory of the past or imagination in the future. Reality is always now. And mindfulness is living in and being fully present to the now.

Mindful leaders learn to train their minds to stay in the present moment, thus increasing their inner peace and equanimity and enabling them to make wiser decisions, treat people better, and proactively manage their behaviour.

2. Take 200 Per Cent Accountability
The worst thing leaders can do is blame other people and/or circumstances when things go wrong. Mindfulness practice brings us in touch with the truth of things and provides us with a level of profound honesty. In doing so, we cannot continue with our blaming and denying. We realise we are often the authors of our difficulties and so we look to change our own behaviour first, and in doing so inspire others to do the same.

Mindful leaders take accountability, but without taking on the burdens of others. They hold themselves 100 per cent accountable for their actions and responses, while holding their team members 100 per cent accountable for theirs. This equation, 200 per cent accountability, is how leaders create great teams.

3. Lead From Mindful Values
To believe in leaders, people have to know who they are and what they stand for, and whether or not they can trust them. Leaders must know their core values, and then live in accordance with them. Mindful values create trust, collaboration, connection and engagement.

Mindfulness gives us the ability to “make the unconscious conscious” so we can see where we are out of alignment with our values and course correct. We learn to become honest with ourselves and others, which in turn creates credibility and trust.

4. Inspire a Mindful Vision
The “why” of mindfulness is the reduction of suffering and the increasing of connection, wellbeing, joy and love for ourselves and those whose lives we touch. Mindful leaders leverage this “why” by tapping into and awakening our innermost yearnings for meaning and purpose. They create a mindful vision for their teams and organisations, which is a vision focused on making a positive difference and alleviating suffering in the world—doing something that is good for everyone, not just something that makes shareholders wealthy at the expense of other people or the planet. A mindful vision makes people whole again and awakens the best in them.

5. Cultivate Beginner’s Mind
The best leaders are those who constantly push us to find new and better ways to do things, to explore and discover, to conquer limitations. To accomplish this, mindful leaders cultivate “beginner’s mind,” which allows them to explore and observe things with a deep sense of openness, much like a child explores the world with curiosity and wonder, with no fixed point of view. This is the heart of an innovation mindset.

6. Empower Others to Shine
The point of leadership isn’t to get glory for ourselves, but rather to enable and inspire teams to accomplish what we could never accomplish alone. Mindful leaders compassionately and generously empower those around them, helping them realise their potential in the pursuit of meaningful goals.

7. Nourish Others With Love
People need encouragement, appreciation, and recognition to perform at their best. The best leaders are always looking for ways to recognise and praise their people. They truly see their people and take notice of their contributions.

Mindful leaders cultivate the mindsets of loving-kindness, empathetic joy and gratitude which enables them to authentically nourish their people with care and natural appreciation.
ABOUT MICHAEL BUNTING

Michael Bunting is the founder of the leadership consultancy WorkSmart Australia, a Certified B Corp. He has trained and coached thousands of leaders, from CEOs to front-line leaders. He is the co-author of A Practical Guide to Mindful Meditation with Patrick Kearney and Extraordinary Leadership in Australia & New Zealand with Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, the world’s premier researchers and authors in the field of leadership. He also teaches Mindful Leadership for Sydney University’s award-winning Global Executive MBA.

Michael has kept a disciplined personal mindfulness practice for over 23 years and has taught mindful leadership to businesses and government for more than 16 years. Michael holds two business degrees and a postgraduate diploma in mindfulness-based psychotherapy.

He lives with his family in Sydney, Australia.