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# Why I Brought Meditation into the Classroom



By [Randel Carlock](#), the Berghmans Lhoist Chaired Professor in Entrepreneurial Leadership at INSEAD

## **Business schools have a role to play in creating self-aware leaders, not just technically competent managers.**

When I was a CEO, I learned what it was to be a decision-maker, never able to switch off, always on the move and always on the phone. I've founded and run four companies during my career, one of which ended up being listed on the NASDAQ. That event changed my life. Going from an entrepreneurial leader to a leader of a listed company threw me into a swirl of stakeholders, shareholders and federal regulators. The stress in my life increased exponentially.

That's when I first turned to meditation. After attending a three-day executive workshop where meditation and mindfulness were on the curriculum, I saw first-hand how powerful this tool was.

At first, I was looking for ways to better manage my business. What meditation taught me was ways to better manage myself. Meditation creates space — space in one's mind to think. A few minutes in the morning and

again in the evening is all that is necessary to help centre yourself and to help you focus. It helped me to put stress and demands in a container, dealing with them slowly and focusing on the important decisions, both at work and at home.

## **Meditating EMBA's**

When I became a professor, I saw my younger self in many of my participants. The demands of fast-paced careers, families and study radiated from MBA and EMBA students in my classroom. Gruelling schedules mixed with intense study and obligations makes for lots of stress.

I decided we all needed to take the time to unplug and refocus. Investing just a short amount of time at the beginning of class has been invaluable to my students. The participants feel centred, focused and more open minded. At first, many are sceptical. I hear “teach me about management” an awful lot, especially among the younger students, but afterwards, they tout the benefits.

## **The mindfulness phenomenon**

I've also used meditation because of the pace of traction this phenomenon is making in business.

General Mills, the U.S. cereal company finds that it improves creativity, because people are thinking more about their work and not about other things in their life. It improves team work because people are more sensitive to each other. Google has an internal course called “Search Inside Yourself” to teach employees to breathe mindfully, listen more to their co-workers and enhance their emotional intelligence. Even McKinsey is embracing meditation to keep employees healthy and happy.

Closer to home, Muhammad Awan, one of my GEMBA '13D participants, said he's already been using meditation within his team at work. “When there is a particularly stressful meeting we're about to go into, we gather for a couple of minutes and everybody takes a minute to think, reflect, step away from the pressures of the situation which is not like the environment of going in there to attack the task. It differentiates the process of the meeting. I've really found it to be useful,” he says.

At business schools, we're also researching the importance of making mindfulness part of the leadership curve. My colleague [Zoe Kinias](#), Assistant

Professor of Organisational Behaviour, Sigal Barsade, the Frank Bernstein Professor of Management at The Wharton School and INSEAD PhD student **Andrew Hafenbrack** have **demonstrated** how mindfulness meditation can improve resistance to the “sunk cost” fallacy in business decision-making.

## **Self-management**

**[video:<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8oDzUqVgJI> width:300 height:169 align:left]**Most importantly of all, I have brought meditation to my students to help them better manage themselves, not just to improve their performance but to lead them to healthier lives. Dauren Yerdebay, another of my GEMBA '13D participants told me that he found meditation after his doctor was concerned about how stress was impacting his health. “The only way you can control the stress you have is through meditation, because if you combine it with some minor exercise, you don’t have to worry about keeping control over your health because controlling your mind is much more important and now I realise that it was a crucial step in changing my behaviour. Through meditation, I managed to make more significant decisions in my life that helped me,” he said.

To borrow a phrase from Peter Drucker, the leadership author, consultant and educator, the 21st century is shaping up to be the era of “Self-Management”. It is part of the evolution of management thinking now that we’ve moved from the 20th century’s focus on efficiencies in business and how humans interact.

To me, there are two main outcomes of meditation. One is that it improves self-awareness, understanding of who you are, and the other is social awareness and how you relate to other people. Both of these are powerful tools for building teams, being creative and making clearer decisions.



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