

01. Mindfulness Practices

The Five-Step Mindful Creative Problem Solving Practice

Whether you are looking for innovation, a new creative concept, or a solution to a management problem, this mindfulness practice brings surprising insights and innovative solutions.

When you've done your best to solve a problem and come up with nothing a sense of inertia can set in. It's that feeling of stuck-ness that says there is no solution. Excessive chatter, whether it be in the meeting room or inside your own mind, makes things worse.

The purpose of this practice is to quiet that noise and allow you to discover new possibilities.

Do It in Five Steps

Step 1: Discuss

Either alone or with your team, think about and discuss the specific problem that you face. Don't hold back, seek to uncover every aspect of the problem and try to think outside the box.

Step 2: Reflect

In a group setting, enter a short period of silence where everyone writes down their own definition of the problem and at least three potential solutions to it. The only rule here is to avoid writing down anything emotional or feelings-based. You must be very specific here.

Example:

"My co-worker does not acknowledge all the hard work I put into things, and I feel unappreciated."

This feedback is unlikely to encourage a solution. Instead, consider this approach:

"When I try to explain the problem I am having working on a specific task, my co-worker does not respond and does not offer any advice."

This way of framing the problem is more focused on concrete facts or observations making it easier to find solutions.

Step 3: Describe

Next, read aloud all the definitions of the problem and the potential solutions to it. If the group is too large to read everyone's contributions, have the group break up into teams to distill down to a manageable number of responses. Get them up on a whiteboard and merge the similar responses. Distill it all down to a set of problems and solutions that everyone feels good about.

Step 4: Sit On It

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- Next, enter a final period of sitting – silent reflection. Keep a pen and pad at your side, sitting still, keeping your back straight.
- Fix your eyes, keeping them partially open, looking at a single area on the floor approximately three feet in front of you.
- Then simply observe your breathing, concentrating on the sensation of it going in and out of your nose. As your mind begins to wander, refocus on the feeling of your breath.

Don't get involved in a chain of thoughts – one thought leading to another – but instead allow each thought to dissipate without focussing on it by coming back to your breath.

If a truly unique or valuable insight arises in your mind, take your pen and paper and write it down, and then return to the observation of your breath.

Continue this meditation for ten-minutes.

Step 5: Brainstorm

Once the ten-minute meditation is complete, begin to brainstorm the solutions that the group responded with earlier in the process. Allow everyone to contribute to the brainstorm, sharing any insights that arose during their silent meditation no matter how outlandish they might be.

Identify three optional solutions to the problem, and rate them from least likely to succeed to most likely to succeed. Then list the pros and cons for

each of the three potential solutions, including a simple cost-benefit analysis.

Discuss these in detail and make your final choice.

A Word of Caution

The solution most likely to succeed is not always the best option. If you are seeking innovation or genuinely unique solutions, you might choose a different option on the list.

There is often greater reward for a higher risk.

Workshops and Coaching

If you are interested in getting your organization started on the exciting and rewarding path to more creative problem solving through mindfulness, I am available for coaching and workshops.

Email: tyrone@parduemindfulness.com