



Mindful Minutes to De-stress

Learning objective: This team building activity helps team members develop skills for calming the mind, to improve focus and reduce stress.

Time required: Approximately 10 - 15 minutes per session.

Instructions:

Ideally, the leader would try this activity a few times him- or herself, before rolling it out to a team.

Suggested wording:

Most work situations require focus and energy. Slowing down may feel counterproductive to some employees. In fact, research shows that taking time to slow down, even for just a few minutes, can improve productivity and focus.

As challenging or ridiculous as it may feel for some of you, please give this a try. Notice the stress that is in your body right now. Is it in your neck, around your eyes, in your shoulders? Pay attention and notice the changes after we complete this exercise. I'll be talking in my best calm, slow voice and you just need to close your eyes and follow my instructions, which are conveniently labelled A, B, C, and D. Try to keep your body and mind still throughout this exercise.

- 1) A is for "Anatomy". We don't want the physical body getting in the way of the mind. Sit comfortably in your chair, feet on the ground, hands placed on your legs or in your lap. Don't lean too far back – you may get sleepy, and this is about calming an alert mind.
- 2) B is for "Breathing". No incense or herbs required! We just need to breathe in... (*demonstrate breathing in slowly*) and out... (*demonstrate breathing out slowly*). The skill here is to train your mental focus on your breath rather than on your thoughts. Breathe in and out normally; don't hold your breath. Just pay attention to it.
- 3) C is for "Counting". Breathe gently while you silently count in and out. "1" breathe in..., "2" breathe out..., "3" breathe in..., and "4" breathe out...

Lead the group slowly and in a whisper through a count of 10, then and ask them to continue for another minute or so on their own. Give the following instruction in a soft voice after 20 seconds or so.

- 4) D is for "Distraction". You *will* get distracted by sounds, smells... and thoughts. Each time you notice you're being distracted, gently bring your attention back to your breathing and start again at "one".

Allow the group to continue in silence for a short period of time.

- 5) *Wrap up in a soft voice with:* OK. Now when you are ready, open your eyes, look around, and maybe take a stretch. Pay attention to the places where you had stress when we started. Is it the same or better? Do you feel more or less focused? We did this for less than five minutes and yet most of us will have gained a sense of calmer focus. As you go about your day, see if you maintain a calmer, more productive focus.

