

You're at work, but are you awake?

Advances in technology have made it possible for us to work 24/7, causing the boundary between life and work to disappear. With the Internet, e-mail, fax machines and cell phones, we can be continually connected. But the goal should be to disconnect in order to be aware of the present. Instead of focusing on achieving, perhaps we should be still and achieve nothing but peace of mind.

Being awake at work is the antithesis of multitasking. When we are awake at work, we are living in the moment and fully present for what we are doing. In today's chaotic and fast-moving world, it is easy to not be *here*. In other words, the mind is wandering in numerous directions, and it is hard to focus and concentrate on what is important. Think of a snow globe as a metaphor. After shaking it up, it is only after the "snow" settles that you can see what is inside clearly. We must quiet the mind in order to think clearly and to let the vision emerge out of the chaos.

One trend in the development of leaders is the practice of finding ways to slow down, stop doing and be in the

moment. Michael Carroll, author of "Awake at Work," a newsletter with the same title (www.awakeatwork.net), and the forthcoming book "The Mindful Leader," describes mindfulness meditation as a practice in which we take time to simply be. The purpose is to stop being busy so that we can be fully present. This concept was made popular by Eckhart Tolle in his book "The Power of Now." If we can learn to be present, then we are not wasting time worrying about the future or regretting the past. We can be open to the possibilities presented to us both personally and professionally if we are in the "now."



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This practice is critical for leaders, because we are living and working in uncertain times.

Everything is fluid and changing. We must wake up and be alert in order to make the best decisions. As the old expression says, when opportunity knocks, be ready. But first, one must be awake.

The opposite of not being awake at work are people who run around doing things, but without being sure why. They are busy, but they do not feel fulfilled. They may be achieving

and "moving up," but they don't feel as if what they are doing is important or meaningful. They often speak and act in inauthentic ways, not caring about what they do, how they do it or to whom, with little consideration for the consequences of their actions.

According to Marsha Sinetar, author of "To Build the Life You Want, Create the Work You Love," "mindfulness puts us in a constant present releasing us from the clutter of distracting thoughts so that our energy, creativity and productivity are undiluted.

Attention is power and those who work in the state of mindful awareness bring an almost supernatural power to what they do."

It is important to remember that no one arrives as the perfect leader, but rather we are all becoming more effective through continual learning, internal and external feedback, and contentment with whom we are as people. We can learn from Caribou Coffee Co., an organization that has already figured this out. Its motto: Life is short. Stay awake for it. □

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