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MEDITATE YOUR WAY TO ACCIDENT PREVENTION

We know that practicing mindfulness improves both mental and physical health because it strengthens the part of the brain that helps you cope with anxiety, improves your eating habits and prepares you to face the unexpected without fear. It is not surprising, then, that there is a correlation between mindfulness and safety prevention. Researchers studying the effects of mindfulness have noted response mechanisms to various stimuli, that imply it can help prevent accidents.

PRACTICING MEDITATION

- Pay attention to details
- Stay in the moment
- Stay alert to stimuli without reacting emotionally
- Be receptive to new information and ways of interpreting that information
- Try not to over-plan everything. Most plans are too specific and prevent you from acting in the moment in response to new information.
- Pay particular attention to the body and your experience of it
- Face your thoughts, sensations and external stimuli objectively and non-judgmentally
- Be aware of unexpected or negative stimuli without practicing avoidance

Studies have shown that mindfulness training enhances specific areas of the brain, including those governing attention-related behavioral responses. In mindfulness, there are two forms of attention: concentrative and receptive. Concentrative is about maintaining a focus on something specific, such as the breath. In Receptive attention (best practiced after mastering concentrative attention), the goal is to keep attention readied in the present moment, receptive to the whole field of awareness. This makes it possible to focus the attention specifically on unexpected stimuli and to react calmly, without panic.

Receptive mindfulness is just the kind of thought and response control you want, for example, in an air traffic controller or a nuclear operator. These are people who need to know when danger is approaching, and how to react quickly and calmly. Their job is to keep things unexciting. They watch dials, read printouts, manipulate graphic displays, all with a special kind of alertness to the unpredictable, to even the faintest signals of approaching danger. You might say they have a preoccupation with failure, always on the alert for what could go wrong. They do not avoid warning signals, no matter how minor, nor do they simplify them. They are alert to them in an objective way. This is called conflict monitoring. In a way, it coincides with the goal of mindfulness, which is the process of bringing one's complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis and paying attention in a particular way, nonjudgmentally, resulting in voluntary, rather than instinctive or habitual responses.

Diane L. Coutu, the author of "Sense and Reliability," an article in the *Harvard Business Review* relates the following example the consequences of not practicing conflict monitoring, as told by her interview subject, psychologist Karl E. Weick:

"For a classic example of a company misreading or ignoring a weak signal, you might consider the staffers at Ford's recall office during the Pinto crisis in the 1970s. They were aware that the Pinto could sometimes catch fire in low-speed, rear-end collisions. But they saw no need to recall the car, because they couldn't find a "traceable cause" for the incidents. They missed the fact that bolts on the cars' rear axles had punctured the gas tanks of the Pintos involved in those crashes. Their inability to pick up on weak signals spelled disaster."

Sometimes, says Dr. Weick, we can only see what we are prepared to see. He concludes that organizations, like people, can benefit and stay safer by learning to be more mindful. Failures are easier to recover from if they are spotted early on, when they are small. That requires attention to detail, and being responsive to new information as it arises: it is important to stay in the moment.

Practicing this kind of mindfulness can keep you safe in your personal life as well as your professional life, not just in terms of keeping yourself and your family safe, but in terms of staying healthy by practicing mindful eating habits and maintaining an awareness of your physical state. This in turn can raise self-esteem and nurture the ability to cope with anxiety and the unexpected. It can also train you to allow yourself to see things differently and entertain different solutions. Some people never let their guard down because they think they've seen everything. That can result in disaster. Practicing mindfulness can help prevent everything from household accidents, occupational mishaps and car accidents to wide scale disasters.

REFERENCES

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