



Photo:
Thich Nhat Hanh
From Plum Village website

15 Practical Ways to Find Your Zen At Work

Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh on the power of mindfulness

by Jo Confino

The Huffington Post's "[Work Well](#)" series is also part of our "[What's Working](#)" solutions-oriented journalism initiative.

This story is part of our monthlong "[Work Well](#)" initiative, which focuses on thriving in the workplace. You can find more stories from this project [here](#). Given how much time we spend at work, it is a crying shame if we don't get the most out of it.

But how can we feel joyful and generous if we feel stressed out by the constant nagging sense that we have too little time and too much to do?

The practice of mindfulness offers one answer.

The Zen Buddhist master [Thich Nhat Hanh](#), who is credited with being the father of [mindfulness](#) in the West, has developed a checklist of actions we can take to ensure not only that we stay in balance but also are able to see our work in the context of creating a better world.

Thay, as he is known to his hundreds of thousands of followers around the world, believes the practice of mindfulness is relevant to everyone, regardless of what job they do. He writes in his book [Work](#) that "[l]earning the art of stopping, of releasing tension, of using loving speech and deep listening, and sharing this practice with others can have a huge impact on our own enjoyment at work and on our company's culture."

"When we know how to take care of our strong emotions and to establish good relationships at work, communication improves, stress is reduced, and our work becomes much more pleasant," he continues. "This is a huge benefit not only to ourselves, but also to those we work with, to our loved ones, our families, and the whole of society."

Mindfulness is the art of bringing our full attention to the present moment starting with awareness of our breath. This allows us to experience life without being caught up in the past or worrying about what might happen in the future.

“The future is made up of only one substance and that is the present moment” Thay writes, “By taking care of the present, you are doing everything you can to assure a good future.”

The 89-year-old Vietnamese monk, who was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Martin Luther King for his work in seeking an end to the Vietnam war, is critical of Western society’s obsession with competition at work, which serves only to strengthen our sense of self at the expense of other people and the environment.

In fact, he believes the desperation to succeed at all costs helps fuel our voracious economic system, which in turn is leading to climate change and the destruction of ecosystems and biodiversity.

Photo:
Nelson Luiz Wendel
via Getty Images



“Those striving to be the best, to be at the top, have to work very hard to get there, and doing this, they suffer a lot,” he writes. “Once they reach the top, they have to keep on striving in order to stay there, and often they suffer from tremendous stress and become burnt out. If we continue living like this we’re heading not only towards self-destruction but also toward the destruction of our planet.”

Thay says we should replace our fixation with fame, wealth and competition with the three Buddhist powers: understanding, love and letting go.

“Only when we can establish harmony, love and happiness within ourselves are we in a position to really help our business,” he writes.

So here are 15 practical steps They says we can take to bring mindfulness to our work:

1. Start your day with 10 minutes of sitting in meditation.
2. Take the time to sit down and enjoy eating breakfast at home.
3. Remind yourself every day of your gratitude for being alive and having 24 brand-new hours to live.
4. Try not to divide your time into “my time” and “work .” All time can be your own time if you stay in the present moment ad keep in touch with what’s happening in your body and mind. There’s no reason why your time at work should be any less pleasant than your time anywhere else.
5. Resist the urge to make calls on your cell phone while on your way to and from work, or on your way to appointments. Allow yourself this time to just be with yourself with nature and with the world around you.
6. Arrange a breathing area at work where you can go to calm down, stop and have a rest. Take regular breathing breaks to come back to your body and to bring your thoughts back to the present.
7. At lunchtime eat only your food and no your fears or worries. Don’t eat lunch at your desk. Change environments. Go for a walk.
8. Make a ritual out of drinking your tea. Stop work and look deeply into your tea to see everything that went into making it: the clouds and the rain, the the plantations and the workers harvesting the tea.
9. Before going to a meeting, visualize someone very peaceful, mindful and skillful being with you. Take refuge in this person to help stay calm and peaceful.
10. If you feel anger or irritation, refrain from saying or doing anything straight away. Come back to your breathing and follow your in- and out-breath until you’ve calmed down.
11. Practice looking at your boss, your superiors, your colleagues or your subordinates as your allies and not as your enemies. Recognize that working collaboratively brings more satisfaction and joy than working alone. Know that the success and happiness of everyone is your own success.
12. Express your gratitude and appreciation to your colleagues regularly for their positive qualities. This will transform the whole work environment, making it much more harmonious and pleasant for everyone.
13. Try to relax and restore yourself before going home so you don’t bring accumulated negative energy or frustration home with you.
14. Take some time to relax and come back to yourself when you get home before starting on household chores. Recognize that multitasking means you’re never fully present for any one thing. Do one thing at a time and give it your full attention.
15. At the end of the day, keep a journal of all the good things that happened in your day. Water your seeds of joy and gratitude regularly so they can grow.

