

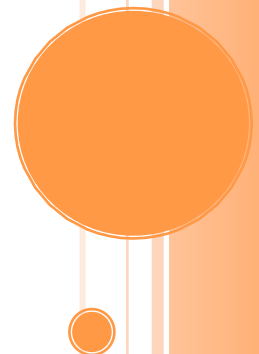
# YOGA & MINDFULNESS IN THE WORKPLACE

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# Yoga & Mindfulness in the Workplace

*'a methodological approach to the restoration  
of the full potential of the human being'  
(Stephen Cope, 1999: xii)*

There is now extensive research to support what yogis and meditators have known for centuries - that even very simple daily practices can bring about profound alterations in well-being, confidence, and the full flourishing of our personal potential. The three short courses outlined here introduce highly accessible yoga and mindfulness techniques that participants can bring into their daily work-lives. Each session focuses on a different challenge, but all arise from the same underpinning holistic technologies:

- **MINDFULNESS**
- **CONSCIOUS BREATHING**
- **EMBODIED AWARENESS**

## YOGA & MINDFULNESS IN THE WORKPLACE

### NO STRESS

This session introduces simple and subtle techniques that can be employed even in a shared office to counterbalance the physical and emotional stresses of daily work-life. Participants learn to use conscious breathing and mindful awareness, and are introduced to some easy ways to release bodily tensions, particularly those accrued in long hours of sitting at a desk.

[2-hour session, accessible to everyone, ordinary clothing is fine but flat shoes may be preferred].

### PRESENTING WITH PRESENCE

This session provides participants with tools they can use to generate authentic confidence when faced with the challenge of giving presentations. Participants learn how they can use breathing techniques to create a calm, steady foundation, and bodily positions to activate the psychophysical chemistry of confidence and presence.

[2-hour session, accessible to everyone, ordinary clothing is fine but flat shoes may be preferred].

### THE YOGA OF CREATIVITY

This session explores yoga as a way to nourish the entire bodymind of the participant and create the conditions for accessing Flow State and creative absorption. Participants are guided in a full, gentle yoga session on the yoga mats, and introduced to creative thinking techniques and creativity principles that can be applied in a wide range of activities. The session enables participants to make a deep reflection on how best they can support creativity in their own lives and work-contexts.

[3-hour session, accessible to everyone, comfortable clothing required].

## MINDFULNESS

*'paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally' (Jon Kabat-Zinn, 1994)*

In recent years, 'mindfulness' has become the object of a great deal of scientific research; 'mindfulness-based interventions' for stress reduction, cognitive therapy, and other applications have been shown to have widespread benefits (Williams and Kabat-Zinn, 2012). In 2015, an All-party Parliamentary Report on Mindfulness was prepared in the UK, which made recommendations to government for the promotion of mindfulness in a range of sectors.

Some of the known benefits of even short, simple mindfulness practice are:

- enhanced concentration
- reduced susceptibility to distraction
- improved emotion regulation

By practising mindfulness, we increase our self-awareness, and are better able to monitor and manage engagement in tasks. In the Yoga & Mindfulness in the Workplace sessions, mindfulness is cultivated through paying attention to the breath.

## CONSCIOUS BREATHING

*'We sense that the breath is intimately related to emotion, and that we breathe very differently in states of relaxation than in states of fear or anxiety... The good news is that this relationship flows both ways - conscious breathing enables you to activate the parasympathetic nervous system (relaxation response), to alter brain chemistry, to alter muscle tension and tone, to focus and calm the mind. (John Douillard, 2000)*

Yogic breathing techniques (or *pranayama*) invite us to consciously pattern the breath in particular ways. *Dirgha Pranayama* - or the Yogic Three-Part Breath - encourages full, diaphragmatic breathing which brings oxygen into the often neglected lower lobes of the lungs where there are parasympathetic nervous system receptors. This means that the breathing pattern activates the 'relaxation response'. Coupled with mindful attention to the breath, this simple breathing pattern can quickly cultivate a state of calm relaxation.

## EMBODIED AWARENESS

*“...teaching clients to pay attention to embodied self-awareness can assist them in changing their thought patterns to more positive and self-consistent ones, to elevating their moods, and enhancing the ability of their pre-frontal cortex to link thought and feeling based in homeostatic self-regulation.” (Lischertzke & Eid in Alan Fogel, 2009)*

Mindfulness of the breath cultivates embodied self-awareness. In yoga, movements to awaken and stretch the body are always synchronised with conscious breathing. In this way, the Yoga & Mindfulness at Work sessions give participants access to tools with which they can monitor and manage their physical, emotional and energetic comfort and ease. They can learn to create the internal conditions that allow them to perform at their best - with ease, confidence, and creativity.

Pause... notice... breathe... move...

## **SOME BASIC PRACTICES FROM 'NO STRESS'**

### **PAUSE, BREATHE...**

#### **AWARENESS**

Close your eyes, take a deep breath, exhale with a sigh; feel your sitting bones drop into the support of the chair. Inhale, allowing your spine to find an easeful upright position. Exhale, shoulders melt, hands relax, face relaxes... NOTICE... What sensations arise on the physical plane? What stretches or movements is your body asking for?

**Set an alarm to remind you to take a small break every 25 minutes, then do one or more of the following...**

#### **DIRGHA – three-part or diaphragmatic - BREATH**

Sit comfortably in an upright position. Inhale and exhale through the nostrils, taking increasingly deep, slow, full breaths. On the inhalation, belly expands, ribcage expands, at the top of the breath, collarbones lift slightly. On the exhale, release chest, then ribs, then belly.

#### **UJJAYI BREATH**

Find a gentle sounding at the back of the throat by 'fogging' your breath on an imaginary mirror. Try this with an open-mouth exhalation first, then try closing your mouth and completing the exhalation through the nostrils whilst continuing the 'ocean sound'. When you are comfortable making the gentle sounding, with no strain, on the exhalation, find the same sound on the inhalation. Layer the ocean-sound onto your Dirgha Breath, inhaling and exhaling through the nostrils.

### **MOVE....**

**Co-ordinate gentle movement with the breath, timing each movement to coincide with an in-breath or an out-breath. Inhale on movements that open the body, exhale on movements that release. Use your Dirgha/Ujjayi breath throughout.**

## **NECK AND SHOULDERS**

Sitting in an easeful upright position, inhale. On the exhalation, drop the chin gently to the chest, release the jaw, release the muscles at the top of the neck that attach to the skull. On an inhalation, slowly lift the chin from the chest and raise it towards the ceiling, letting the weight of the head drop back without constricting the back of the neck. Repeat for 3 – 5 breaths.

Exhale, dropping the chin to the chest. On an inhalation, roll the left ear towards the left shoulder, the chin glides along the line of the collarbone. Exhale to centre, inhale to the other side. Move slowly and mindfully, giving the sensitive neck muscles time to release.

## **SUN BREATH**

Bring your arms to your sides. On an inhalation, arms reach out to the sides, palms facing up and glide up overhead. Shoulders remain relaxed. Exhale, and float the arms back down by your sides. Coordinate the movement to the breath. Breath initiates. Arms move lightly, as if floating on the breath.

## **LATERAL STRETCH**

Inhale the right arm overhead, finding lots of length from sitting bones to finger tips. Both sitting bones remain equally committed to the chair. Exhale, reaching the raised arm overhead and arching to the left. Inhale back to centre, exhale repeat. After 3 – 5 repetitions, float the arm back down. Notice any difference side to side. Repeat with the left arm raised.

## **HAND CLASP SEATED CAT/DOG.**

Sit towards the front of the chair, hands on knees. On an inhalation, elongate the front body, belly soft, chest broadens. Clasp the hands; on an exhalation turn the palms to face front and push the hands away, dropping chin to chest and rounding the spine. Inhale, drawing the clasped hands gently to your belly as you roll spine and head back to upright.

## **SPINAL ROTATION**

Sit towards the front of the chair. Inhale, lengthening from sitting bones to the crown of the head, hands float up overhead. Exhale, turning the torso to the right, right hand comes to the

back of the chair, left hand comes to the right knee. Inhale, lengthening the spine as you return to centre; exhale to the other side. Notice whether on each exhalation, without forcing, you can move a little more deeply into the rotation.

### **SEATED FORWARD FOLD (*UTTANASANA* VARIATION)**

Feet firmly planted, hip-distance apart. Inhale, lengthening the spine and letting the arms float up overhead. Exhale, folding from the hip crease, bring the chest to the thighs. Head releases forward, arms drape towards the ground. To release, press into the feet, draw the navel slightly towards the spine to engage the core, and roll back to sitting upright. For a deeper forward fold, open the knees wide and release the torso forward between the knees.

### **EVEN STANDING (*TADASANA*)**

Stand with your feet tracking forwards, hip-distance apart. On an inhalation, lift the shoulders up to the ears; exhaling, drop them back and down. Shoulder blades draw towards each other and glide down the spine. Repeat 2 – 3 times to release tension in the shoulders.

Check that the knees are not pressed back. Let the tailbone draw down towards the floor. Navel draws slightly towards the spine to engage the core. Press down evenly through all four points of the feet – ball of the big toe, little toe, inner and outer heel. On an inhalation, arms reach out to the sides, palms up, and float up overhead. On the exhalation, they float back down. Keep activating the legs by pressing down through the feet; keep engaging the core by drawing the tailbone down and the navel towards the spine; keep elongating through the spine by imagining the crown of the head floating towards the ceiling on each inhalation. Co-ordinate the speed of the movement to the length of your breath.

### **STANDING BALANCE (*BALAKIKASANA*)**

Begin in the *Tadasana* stance described above, arms by your sides. Bring your weight over the right foot. On an inhalation, lift the left foot off the floor, and let the arms float out to the sides, with relaxed shoulders and soft elbows. See how softly you can sustain the balance. After a few moments, exhale the arms back down as the foot comes to the floor. Take a moment to notice what it feels like to come back to standing on two feet. Repeat on the other side.

### **DESK DOG (*ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA* VARIATION)**

Stand facing a desk or chair, with your hands shoulder width apart, resting on top. On an exhalation, walk backwards, folding at the hip crease, until your legs and torso are at (or moving towards) a 90 degree angle. Make sure the knees are soft, or bend them to allow greater flexibility through the spine. Bring your ears in line with your upper arms. Send your



hands and sitting bones away from each other. Breathe into the gentle stretch. To release, slowly walk back in.

### **CHAIR WARRIOR (*VIRABHADRASANA* VARIATION)**

Sit towards the front of your chair, then turn both knees to the right, so that your right buttock and thigh are on the chair, left buttock and thigh are off the front edge of the chair. Use your left foot for support. Slide your left foot back behind you, with the left foot pointing in the same direction as your right foot (ie. to the right). Right ankle is directly under the right knee. Come onto the toes of the back foot. Square both hips directly to the right. Bring your torso to an easy upright position, tailbone dropping down towards the floor. For a deeper stretch, press into both feet to bring your weight off the chair. If you feel stable in this stretch, you can inhale your arms overhead. To release, drop your weight into the support of the chair, draw in the back foot, and swivel back to sitting in the chair facing forward. Repeat to the other side.

### **SEATED YOGA MUDRA**

Sit towards the front of your chair, with your feet wide apart. Clasp your hands behind your back, drawing the shoulder blades towards each other and down. Hinge at the hip crease, bringing the torso forward between the knees, as the arms reach back and up behind you. Keep the neck long, chin slightly tucked, as you angle forward. As your torso comes between your knees, relax the spine, letting the head and neck release, continuing to reach the arms up overhead, drawing the shoulders away from the ears. To release, inhale, drawing the arms back down towards the chair and allowing the movement to draw you gently back upright. Release the hands, letting them float back to the knees. Pause with eyes closed to 'listen' to the energetic effects of this inversion.

Pause... notice... breathe... move...

## INDICATIVE SOURCES:

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## ABOUT THE PRESENTER

**Deborah Templeton** is the pen-name of Dr. Deborah Middleton, an academic researcher, writer, and Kripalu Yoga instructor. She directs the Mindfulness and Performance Project at the University of Huddersfield, and has published in a number of academic journals. She also writes contemplative performance texts, and her work has been performed internationally. In addition to the Kripalu Yoga Teacher training (2012), Deborah has also formally studied Tibetan Buddhist Meditation (Naropa University 2010), is a Level One teacher of the ITM Alexander Technique (Bristol, 2016) and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.