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Stress Kills Success: Mindfulness and the Small Firm Practitioner

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The Problem:

Stress not only kills success, it kills us.

Stress is the leading cause of disease. The Centers for Disease Control report that up to 90% of all diseases are stress-related.

83% of American workers report feeling stressed specifically about work. Stress costs the United States over \$300 billion annually due to increased absenteeism, employee turnover, diminished productivity, medical, legal, and insurance expenses, and workers' compensation payments.

Why Mindfulness?

Mindfulness has been shown to decrease stress. Mindfulness programs in the workplace have been heavily embraced by hundreds of Fortune 500 companies like Google, General Mills and Aetna. Due to these programs, companies like these have seen healthcare costs decrease and employee engagement increase. Research in the American Journal of Health Promotion shows that these kinds of practices in the workplace are linked with lower annual doctor visits and costs. Researchers from the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Health found that people who engage in these programs miss fewer days of work and experience a shortened duration *and* severity of common-cold symptoms.

In addition to the thousands of peer-reviewed medical journal articles, citing the many health benefits of Mindfulness, it also helps our brains. Mindfulness has been shown to improve memory, focus, productivity, decision-making and emotional regulation.

What is Mindfulness?

Jon-Kabat Zinn, a Ph.D. Biochemist, is one of the biggest thought leaders in the field of Mindfulness. He is the Founding Director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School and has authored many books on the topic. Mindfulness is a secular, non-religious practice of being aware and present. He defines Mindfulness like this:

Paying Attention in a Particular Way:

- On Purpose
- In the Present Moment
- Non-judgmentally.

Millions of people have tried this basic practice. There is both the formal practice of Mindfulness and also the Informal practice. Typically, in a formal practice, you sit in a comfortable, upright position with your spine straight. You focus your attention on some aspect of your experience—for example, your breathing. Each time your mind wanders, you focus back on the breath. The moment you realize it has wandered, THAT is the moment of Mindfulness. You may find yourself bringing your attention back to the breath many times. This does not mean you are failing at your practice—quite the contrary—you are becoming aware of the nature of your mind. As you do this regularly, you develop new cognitive skills.

The informal practice of Mindfulness is awareness in any activity—waiting in line at the grocery store, talking to a group of people, washing the dishes, and even engaging in physical activity.

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