

A SPIRITUALITY & HEALTH E-BOOK

# meditation *at work*

Boost your focus and decrease daily stress in your workplace with mini meditation retreats.

**One moment  
is all you need.**

Spirituality  
& Health



*how to*  
**meditate**  
*in a moment*

While a student at the Yale School of Management, I decided to invite all the students, staff, and faculty to an informal discussion that I titled “Spirituality and Management?”

This was in 1987, when the idea that spirituality and management could have something in common seemed very strange indeed. It was before yoga mats had become fashionable urban accessories, back when meditation was still seen as esoteric and foreign, back when the memory of the 1960s had been overshadowed by Reaganomics.

I decided to host this conversation because although I was enjoying my studies, there was some part of me languishing beneath the spreadsheets. I had already had some Zen-like realizations, some mystical openings, and had become an avid student of my dreams. From these experiences, I knew there was something more to life—something intangible, immaterial,

An MBA turned to meditation—  
and turned the process upside down.

*by*  
**Martin Boroson**

uncountable—that could not be included in decision analysis and strategic plans. I sensed that a fundamental part of management education was missing.

## *A Brief History of Management Education*

The practice of providing formal education to aspiring business managers—the typical MBA curriculum—began in the late nineteenth century, before the service economy and the Information Age, when the concerns of business were primarily industrial production. Although the goal was to bring a scientific approach to management, the scientific understanding of reality at that time was fundamentally different than it is now. It was before quantum physics, when matter was still solid and certainty was within our grasp. It was before theories of complexity and chaos revealed that we are embedded in systems far too complex for easy prediction. In other words, the first century of management education focused on things—things that could be counted and measured, things that behaved predictably. Good management was essentially a mechanical problem, a Newtonian endeavor (and humans were just “resources”).

This history of management influenced even the Yale School of Management, a relatively young and innovative business school, where many of the students came from backgrounds of social activism and not-for-profit management. Thus, our core curriculum in the 1980s was still heavily dominated by accounting, data analysis, economic theory, and quantitative tools for decision making. It was still based on a linear, mechanical model of reality: if you do  $x$ , then you should get  $y$ .

## *Why I Fled the Head*

To my surprise and delight, about 30 students (and one adjunct faculty member) took my bait and turned up



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to discuss the possible intersections of spirituality and management. We had an interesting conversation and even met a second time. But inevitably, we were drawn back into the practical demands of our course work, as well as that pervasive “extra” course in business school: crafting the perfect résumé, securing the perfect job, planning the perfect life. Sadly, I came to the conclusion that spirituality and management were just plain incompatible.

The way I saw it, management is primarily concerned with the material and the measurable, whereas spirituality is all about the immaterial and the immeasurable. More to the point, a “good” manager has to be in control. He does not want to be surprised, astonished, or humbled. A “good” manager is not expected to show vulnerability, make mistakes, or admit that he does not know. He wants life to go according to plan; he needs to deliver expected results. But a spiritual seeker is just the opposite: he lives to be humbled, astonished, and amazed, to discover that his view of reality is limited. He likes the fact that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in his philosophy.

And so upon graduation, the only clear path for me was the unclear one. Instead of looking for a management job, I moved to Ireland, where, at that time, there was still ample time in the day for wondering. I studied and practiced experiential psychotherapy, learning how the body contains wisdom of which the head is unaware. I also studied breath work with Dr. Stanislav Grof, the dean of non-ordinary states of consciousness, and in my breath work experiences, I had my assumptions about reality shattered repeatedly. I wrote plays, collaborated with artists from other cultures, and studied the symbolism of dreams. I began to practice Zen and, sitting for long periods of time, I learned again and again how little I knew. In this period of my life, the very idea of goal setting became almost sinful to me. I was generally not interested in results; process was everything. My time was devoted to the timeless.



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## The Basic Minute

1. Find a place of solitude.
2. Sit down.
3. Place your legs in a relaxed but fixed position.
4. Sit up.
5. Set your alarm for exactly one minute.
6. Place your hands in a relaxed but fixed position.
7. Close your eyes.
8. Focus on your breathing.
9. When the alarm sounds, stop.

## *Getting Back to Business*

And then one day, about 15 years later, I was asked to teach meditation to a group of corporate lawyers. At first, I assumed that this would be a fairly typical meditation class; that we would have at least several hours outside the office in a lovely setting. I assumed that the lawyers would wear relaxed clothes; that for them, it would be “time out.”

But it was actually the opposite.

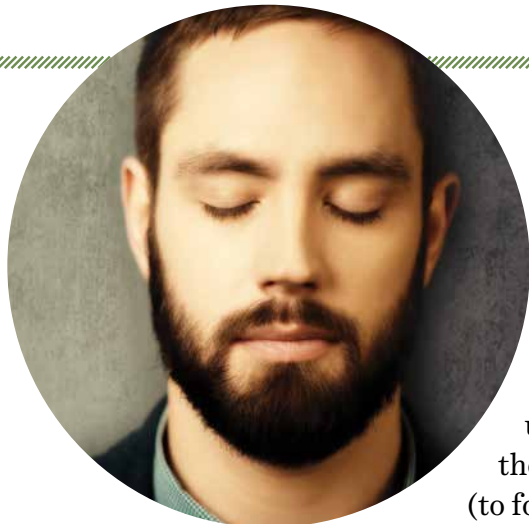
The team leader informed me that all of their training sessions were just an hour long and always held in-house. And although I was assured of having a beautiful room for this, the “beautiful room” turned out to be the boardroom. And the hour turned out to be the lunch hour. And the boardroom table was laid with trays of elegant sandwiches, potato chips, cakes, coffee, and tea.

When the lawyers entered, wearing sharp suits, sharp skirts, sharp shoes, and very sharp minds, I realized that their mood was far from what one would encounter at a typical meditation retreat. These were Type A people (as I had once been)—highly verbal, skeptical, heady, driven. And whereas I had come to teach meditation, they had come for lunch.

## *The Moment of Decision*

So I jettisoned my plans. After a brief introduction, I explained that we would jump right in with a short meditation, and I asked them not to eat beforehand. Although the concept of doing short meditation was rather unusual (in fact, I’d never tried it before), I said that it would work better if they would really “go for it.” This is not a typical meditation instruction, of course, but these lawyers appreciated the challenge.

To my great surprise, something happened. Several of the lawyers reported that they felt a small but significant shift in their state of mind. More interestingly, the whole tone in the room changed. Everything seemed



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quieter, as if there were more space in the air. The lawyers, when they spoke, spoke more quietly, as if their words were more considered and they were listening a bit more.

From this experience, I realized just how useful brief meditation could be. These lawyers could use brief meditation before arguing a case (to settle their nerves), before making a difficult phone call (to focus their minds), or at the end of the day (to leave their stress at work).

Gradually, I began to refine this idea, developing a philosophy of meditation (and an approach to meditation training) that I call “One-Moment Meditation.” One-Moment Meditation begins with an exercise that takes just one minute a day. Yes, just one minute. The point is to learn that it doesn’t take much time to make a meaningful change in your state of mind. Then, as the training progresses, you learn how to do this same exercise in less and less time, until you can do it in just a moment—in the blink of an eye.

On the surface, this practice has immense appeal for anyone who is busy, for whom even five minutes—in our crazy-busy world—seems like an eternity. But it is deeper than that. It is based on the idea that one moment of focused attention can have an enormous impact. It is based on the idea that just one moment really can change your life. It is based on the idea that this moment, right now, is really all there is, so you might as well get right to it.

### *Why Not Now?*

There is some spiritual justification for this unconventional approach. For although our greatest spiritual teachers were those who spent many years in contemplation—people who left the ordinary world for many years “in the wilderness”—their core teaching comes down to this: *Be here now*. And if the ultimate teaching is to be here now, then why not start right here and now? Why wait for the end of the journey in order to begin it?

I began to see that our belief that meditation requires a long time or a special place actually can be a form of procrastination. I am not against longer periods of meditation, and I continue to practice in that way. But I believe that instead of thinking about how long it takes to meditate or how long we can sustain meditative awareness, we really should just get right to it. We should do a moment of meditation right now. And right now. And right now.

### *Meeting the Mind of a Manager*

As I began to teach One-Moment Meditation in workplaces—to corporate executives, to doctors, to nurses, and to many stressed-out office workers—I began to see how useful the meditative mind could be in the world of work. By stripping meditation of many of its cultural associations, right down to its core idea, and making it very portable, I had discovered a point of contact with the managerial mind. Indeed, in the book *The Drucker Difference*, Jeremy P. Hunter, of the Peter F. Drucker and Masatoshi Ito Graduate School of Management, writes that meditation can help managers with what he calls “self-management.” Mindfulness meditation, he believes, can help managers to focus better, direct their attention better, and become more sensitized to their reactive (i.e., unconsidered) emotions. In other words, managers can use meditation to get a grip on themselves and therefore manage better.

For me, however, this doesn’t go far enough. Meditation can also help managers learn that it’s OK, from time to time, to stop managing. For it is in the unmanaged moments—those moments when we are not in control, when we are not sure of the answer, when we are curious, humble, and quiet—that inspiration is most likely to strike. Meditation training can also help managers to listen better, relate better, and, by developing a calmer personal presence, promote calmness in times of anxiety. Meditation training can help managers to become more aware of their values, make more enlightened decisions,



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and bring more compassion into their actions.

Through coaching and workplace training, I am now helping leaders and teams to get in the habit of pausing periodically to clear their minds, to “refresh their browsers” and tap into a deeper stillness within them. But stillness is not the be-all and end-all; the meditative mind is actually quite dynamic. Meditation also helps you to cope with change, respond to external situations more appropriately, and take effective action.

### *A Way Forward*

In the thirty years since my graduation, the nature of management education has changed considerably. The Yale School of Management has a new curriculum, more rooted in the real complexity of the world and with a strong emphasis not just on management but on leadership. Leadership training recognizes that people, in all of our unpredictability, are part of the picture, and the study of leadership puts the mystery of human psychology firmly at the center of the conversation.

As contemplative practices continue to become more mainstream, I imagine a future in which more managers will be leaders in the best sense of the word—helping people not just to achieve goals but also to become wiser and more realized. I imagine a day when meditation, already a proven tool for growing consciousness, will become a standard practice in the education of leaders. I imagine a day when leaders are skilled at taking time out for reflection and insight, and teams pause regularly to center themselves. And I also imagine a time when the meditative mind will be considered a vital tool in the development of organizations, helping whole systems to be more awake, flexible, responsive, vibrant, and “in the moment.”

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**Martin Boroson** is the author of *One-Moment Meditation: Stillness for People on the Go*. For training, consulting, or more information, visit [onemomentmeditation.com](http://onemomentmeditation.com).



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# HOW TO MEDITATE IN A MOMENT

*by* **Martin Boroson**

Although the purpose of One-Moment Meditation is to help you to tap an experience of deep peace in just a moment, we start with a minute. This is because a moment goes by so quickly, you'd have to be a master to notice one. A minute, however, is like a moment with handles on it. You know where it begins and ends, so it's easier to grasp. So we begin with an exercise that I call the "Basic Minute" (see page 5).

Try to do the Basic Minute in a quiet place, once a day. The only equipment you will need is a timer. The timer is essential because for this exercise it is important for you to let go of your own anxiety about time, to stop "holding" time for yourself, and to prove to yourself that this exercise really takes only a minute.

You can do the Basic Minute several times a day, but please don't do it for longer than a minute at a time. If you want to do longer meditation, that is great; just do it some other time. The whole point of the Basic Minute is for you to learn that you can tap a deep experience of peacefulness quickly. If you do it for longer, you're cheating.



It is very likely that while you are doing this exercise, you will get distracted. That is perfectly normal. If it happens, just say something nice and nonjudgmental to yourself, like “hmm,” and bring your mind back to your breathing.

You may not experience perfect peace or complete enlightenment during this exercise (though it is possible). But even if you manage just to turn down the volume of your thinking or reduce your stress level a bit, isn't that valuable? You will then approach the next minute in a much better frame of mind.

When most people first do the Basic Minute, they think that it goes by very quickly. But with practice, you will drop into a state of peacefulness more quickly and more deeply, and in doing that you will discover that there is actually a lot of time in a minute. In other words, the more you settle into the minute, the more space you will find there.

Once you've practiced the Basic Minute, you might like to try more advanced training in One-Moment Meditation, which shows you how to make a Basic Minute much more useful and flexible, with exercises such as the Portable Minute, the Emergency Minute, the Bonus Minute, and the Surprise Minute. You then will learn how to reduce the length of the minute gradually, until you can get the same sense of equanimity in just a moment. Then you can experience peacefulness wherever you are and stillness even when you're on the go.

You will also learn the enormous power of just a moment. For although we think of a moment as fleeting and insignificant, the word “moment” actually comes from a Latin word meaning “a particle sufficient to turn the scales.” In other words, one moment is revolutionary. A moment can change everything. ◀





# DIY Quiet: 6 tips to find your stillness

The neighbor's smoke alarm is beeping, demanding a new battery. A kid is bouncing on a pogo stick out in the yard—squeak, squeak, squeak. Trying to focus on a task can be challenging with all the sounds interrupting us . . . excuse me, a helicopter is hovering overhead. OK, I'm back. What was I saying? It's true: the world is a noisy place. Yet there are ways to create an inner sanctuary, even as distractions pop up around us.

## *Think big*

It sounds counterintuitive, but try becoming exquisitely aware of all the sounds around you. "Focus on your heartbeat and breath, and then the sounds inside the room, and the sounds in the building, the sounds outside the building," says Misa Hopkins, the author of *The Root of All Healing* and a sound healer. Gradually bring your awareness back in. "Focus on the sounds you want to hear rather than the sounds that are there."

*by*

**Kathryn Drury Wagner**



## *Become vulnerable*

“Often, distraction is caused by fear,” says Seth Godin, the founder and CEO of Squidoo and the author of 14 books on leadership and business. Fear of? “The quiet, the truth, fear of putting something into the world and saying, ‘Here, I made this.’ If you can befriend the fear and embrace the vulnerability that this brings, it becomes significantly easier to be mindful.”

## *Don't be so hard on yourself*

“How we respond to sound is very personal,” says Alex Doman. “It’s an emotional response rather than a neurological response.” Doman is the founder and CEO of Advanced Brain Technologies and coauthor of *Healing at the Speed of Sound*. When we’re tired or stressed, he notes, “our resilience to sound is lower and our reaction to it is higher.”

## *Take a sound bath*

“Immerse yourself in sound and then turn it off,” says Hopkins. “Twenty minutes of sound, and then 20 minutes of stillness. Things become very calm and very clear.”

## *Refocus*

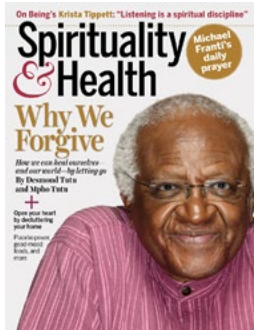
Do “deep breathing,” suggests Doman. “Or go to a quiet place for five or 10 minutes and refocus and come back. It takes time to reset; when your attention is called away, it’s not going to be right where you left off. You have to get back into your flow. Some of this is about creating new work habits.”

## *Meditate*

Developing the ability to selectively listen is something that you have to learn. During meditation, Hopkins says, “you are attentive to the silence. That’s where the peace is: in the space between the sounds.” ◀

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**Kathryn Drury Wagner** is a freelance editor and writer based in Los Angeles. She blogs about women in the workplace at [CareerContessa.com](http://CareerContessa.com).



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