

Mindfulness Matters

It is an important technology leadership skill

by: Don Crawley, Compassionate Geek

Editor's Note: Don Crawley, author of "The Compassionate Geek," will present the keynote address, "How Leadership Affects Customer Service & How Customer Service Affects Your Bottom Line," as well as a breakout session, "How to Be a Better Listener," at BTA IGNITE Orlando, March 20-21 at Disney's Yacht Club Resort in Orlando, Florida. Learn more at www.bta.org/IGNITEOrlando.

At the risk of overstating the obvious, working in office technology can test your patience like few other professions. One minute you are troubleshooting a complex networking issue and the next minute someone is asking you why their copier/MFP is not working. Then there is the constant ping of messages, alerts and tickets competing for your attention. Add a customer who wants everything done yesterday and it is no surprise that office technology work can feel stressful and chaotic.

That is where mindfulness comes in. Mindfulness is not mystical or complicated. It is simply the practice of being aware of what is happening right now: your thoughts, your emotions, your surroundings and being intentional about how you respond.

When you are mindful, you do not just react to stress — you respond to it. You are less controlled by your frustration and more in control of yourself. That awareness makes you more effective and easier to work with.

Why Mindfulness Matters in Technology

In "The Compassionate Geek" (and in my article in the January issue of Office Technology, "Building the Right Culture"), I wrote about the "Five Principles of IT Customer Service:" technical competence, compassion, empathy, good listening skills, and treating others with dignity and respect.

All five are rooted in mindfulness and apply to all forms of customer service, not just IT. You cannot truly show empathy if you are not paying attention to someone's emotions. You cannot listen well if your mind is jumping ahead to your next task. You cannot treat someone with dignity and respect if irritation blinds you to their humanity.

Mindfulness brings these principles to life in your daily



work. Technical competence requires focus. Empathy and compassion require emotional awareness. Listening and respect require intentionality — the deliberate choice to give someone your full attention and respond thoughtfully.

Awareness: The First Step Toward Mindfulness

Awareness means noticing what is happening inside and around you. That includes your thoughts, emotions, body language and tone of voice, as well as how others respond to you.

Imagine you are helping a customer who is upset because their project files disappeared after a system crash. You can feel your frustration rising as they interrupt you. Awareness means catching that moment. You might silently acknowledge, "I'm getting irritated," and then take a slow breath before responding.

That pause gives you a chance to choose your next move. Instead of saying, "You should have backed up your files," you might say, "I understand this is stressful. Let's see what we can recover." That is mindfulness in action — noticing what is going on and choosing your response instead of reacting automatically.

Awareness is especially powerful when you are dealing with someone who is angry or frustrated. In those moments, it is easy to take their emotion personally or react defensively. When you stay aware, you can see their frustration for what it is — an expression of fear, stress or confusion — and respond calmly and compassionately instead of escalating the situation.

Intentionality: Choosing Your Impact

Intentionality is the next step after awareness. It is not enough to notice what is happening; you also have to decide what to do with that awareness.

Every word you say and every action you take has an impact. Whether you are answering a service ticket, working with a teammate or talking with a customer, your choices shape how the other person feels about you and your company.

Intentionality means asking yourself, "What do I want this person to feel when our interaction is over?" and "What outcome am I hoping to achieve, and what tone or words will help me get there?"

Being intentional does not mean being fake. It means taking ownership of your impact. You might feel irritated, but you choose calm professionalism. You might feel rushed, but you choose to slow down and listen.

Intentionality is a life skill for everyone. It helps you navigate conversations with family, friends and neighbors. It helps you avoid unnecessary arguments and, instead, find solutions that work for everyone involved. It is how you build stronger relationships in every part of your life.

Mindfulness as a Leadership Skill

If you are a manager or supervisor, mindfulness is the difference between just managing and being a true leader. A mindful leader not only focuses on tasks and output, but also pays attention to their team members' moods, motivation and stress levels. They notice when someone on their team is overloaded or when a conflict is beginning to simmer. Mindful leaders model calm under pressure. When you stay composed during an outage or crisis, your team members see that it is possible to be decisive and empathetic at the same time.

I have dealt with many managers who thought leadership meant always having the answers. In reality, great leadership often means asking good questions, listening deeply and being fully present in conversations. That is mindfulness in practice.

Everyday Mindfulness in Your Work

You do not need to sit in meditation for an hour a day to practice mindfulness. You can bring it into your workday in simple ways.

(1) Pause before responding. When you get an irritating email or ticket, take a few seconds before replying. That short pause can mean the difference between escalating a conflict and resolving it gracefully.

(2) Take mindful microbreaks. Between tasks, step away

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from your screen for a minute. Roll your shoulders, roll your head slowly in a circle and roll your ankles to release tension. Take a slow breath and notice your surroundings. These small resets help your mind and body stay relaxed and focused.

(3) Listen with your full attention. When someone talks to you, close your laptop. Give them your full focus. Listening deeply is one of the simplest ways to show respect.

(4) Check your tone. Before you send an email or chat message, read it once more. Ask yourself, "Would I say this the same way face-to-face?" If not, adjust the tone to be more human and understanding.

(5) Reflect daily. At the end of the day, think about your interactions. What went well? What could you have handled better? Reflection builds self-awareness and emotional intelligence over time.

How Mindfulness Improves Your Work & Life

Mindfulness helps you create better experiences for your customers, coworkers and everyone you interact with. When you are present, aware and intentional, people feel heard and respected. They trust you more, even when problems take time to solve.

Picture two technicians handling the same issue. One is distracted and short-tempered. The other listens carefully, explains clearly and stays calm. Which one earns the user's trust and appreciation? That is not just technical skill. It is mindfulness.

When you combine mindfulness with the "Five Principles of IT Customer Service," you get a powerful approach to life and work:

- Technical competence ensures your solutions work.
- Compassion and empathy make people feel understood.
- Good listening skills help you uncover the real problem.
- Dignity and respect build trust that lasts.

Those qualities help you succeed not just as an IT professional, but as a thoughtful, grounded human being. ■

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