



Can Mindfulness Make You a Better Salesperson?"

Linda Richardson interviews the world's leading expert, Andrew Scheffer.

In 2000, Andrew Scheffer was my student in a graduate program at The Wharton School, at The University of Pennsylvania. Since that time, after spending 15 years in private wealth management on Wall St. in New York and in Singapore, he has turned mindfulness, his 25-year passion, into his thriving full time occupation. Andrew's experience in this area is extensive and includes eight years of full time study with some the world's greatest teachers, prior to Wharton,

and periods of intensive practice after Wharton. He has dedicated more than 10,000 hours to intensive training in this field. Andrew now works with large and small companies globally. He is unique in his field in combining a strong business and sales background with a deep understanding of mindfulness.

In preparation for my interview, and because of my personal interest in mindfulness, I thought about the definitions I had learned

such as, "being engaged and observing the present moment non-judgmentally," "being mindful of what is going on," "being in the flow". But I particularly like Andrew's definition of mindfulness as a *quality of mind, a faculty of mind that each of us already has*. Andrew likens mindfulness to the *Wizard of Oz* in which the lion, the scarecrow and the tin man came to realize that they already possess the qualities they thought they were lacking; they needed only to

recognize, identify and nurture those qualities within themselves.

Mindfulness training offers practical techniques to use to recognize and enhance the mental quality of mindfulness, which we already possess. Andrew sees the “definition”, “observing non-judgmentally in the present moment” as the result of cultivating mindfulness, rather than a definition of mindfulness itself.

Recently, mindfulness has gotten a great deal of media attention in corporate America with companies such as Aetna, Google, Target, SAP, Glh and numerous others making mindfulness development a part of their strategies. Also, media megastars Oprah (Soulful Sunday) and Anderson Cooper (60 Minutes) have highlighted mindfulness’ effectiveness. Top sports franchises, including the Seattle Seahawks, Chicago Bulls and L.A. Lakers, are also training their talent in mindfulness and achieving outstanding results.

Andrew saw the interest in mindfulness, and the extensive research reinforcing the benefits of mindfulness, as an opportunity to make his life’s passion his life’s work by bringing mindfulness to the business world. The data points to the many benefits of mindfulness, including: better decision making, increased productivity, deeper awareness, improved ethics, greater resiliency, and greater energy and mental and physical health, resulted in things like increased engagement and reduced absenteeism. He has found receptiveness among companies

that are looking to mindfulness as a way to gain a performance edge and engage their team members to set them apart.

Many of the top companies (as ranked by Forbes or other employee choice awards) are among the first and early corporate adopters, and their commitment to corporate mindfulness programs has made mindfulness more acceptable in modern business culture. Andrew does caution that, as mindfulness has become more popular, many people are adding it to the names of courses and presenting themselves as qualified teachers - even when they lack a deep experience of it. At this point, differentiation is a challenge and there isn’t even a standard definition of mindfulness.

Recent advancements in neuroscience, enabled by FMRI (Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging of the brain), have led to new discoveries that the brain can be developed and transformed. In studying people who meditate, scientists found that meditation actually changes the structure of the brain and develops new neural pathways, as well as thicker connections within different areas of the brain.

Meditation not only enables the brain to develop in areas associated with happiness, compassion and well being, but it also deactivates areas of the brain associated with fear and other negativity. Most people don’t focus on what qualities they are developing with their thinking such as worry or stress. As they worry or are stressed, they are actually

strengthening the habit and the physical parts of the brain associated with these negative emotions. However, with mindfulness, people can shift the mind from negative to neutral or even to positive.

If mindfulness can be cultivated and developed and improve things such as decision-making and productivity, how can you, in your role in sales and life, go about becoming more mindful? Andrew discussed how much of a salesperson’s time is consumed by thinking about the past or worrying about the future. Being lost in those mind states, he says, is the opposite of mindfulness. But by meditating, by focusing on the breath, the mind can quickly be shifted out of negative tendencies. Focusing on breathing seems very simple but is amazingly difficult, i.e. after a quarter of a second the mind frequently wanders to thoughts, which often are negative. The ability to see positive potential in what previously had seemed hopeless is quite essential in sales and all aspects of life. It allows for a better future by taking advantage of opportunities in the here and now and not wasting time speculating about an uncertain future.

Meditation

Andrew teaches two modes of meditation: *Mindfulness and Heartfelt Loving-Kindness*. If at this point this seems touchy feely, please give it a chance. Many global leaders are banking on it as an essential part of their business strategies. The research and, most importantly, feedback from

participants across industries, support it. For example, Andrew works with clients such as the GLH Group, the largest owner and operator of hotel rooms in the UK. He developed a mindfulness based training program to empower employees and foster the company's proactive and supportive "Radical Hosting" and "Never Worry Alone" culture. The program will now be rolled out to 2500 employees company wide. In addition to introductory mindfulness programs and custom training, Andrew provides modules that can be integrated within a client's current training and development initiatives to make it a part of the culture's fabric. Mindfulness also has been proven to enhance learning outcomes - it helps get participants in the right mindset and frees their mind of some of the stress or distractions.

Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness Meditation starts with the present moment. To be mindful, Andrew suggests starting with the very basic steps of Mindful Meditation (Breath Meditation) in which you concentrate on your *breathing because breath is neutral (no feelings or emotions are attached to it) and therefore it serves as a wonderful object of attention*. In mindfulness, the concept of neutral is important. At first, trying to pay attention to ones breath is incredibly difficult. But meditation can retrain the mind to be more skilled in concentration and seeing what is going on more clearly. It can help you observe opportunities more accurately and

perceive things more rapidly, which is a strong advantage in sales.

Andrew recognized how difficult the level of focus was decades ago in his early days of learning meditation. His object was to slow his walking down by paying attention to three elements: lifting of the foot off the ground, moving of the foot forward, and the placing of the foot on the ground. In those short moments as he tried to pay careful attention, he found his mind wander almost instantly. If seemingly easy tasks like focusing on one's breath and paying attention to the sensations of walking are difficult, imagine what happens to salespeople whose days are hectic and pressured when they are not even intently trying to focus... Imagine how easily their minds drift, they get distracted or react (unskillfully) without thinking. In a sales call, however, if you can note when you stop listening to your customer and when you begin to formulate your answer (most people stop listening to an answer fully between 47 and 52 seconds, but most customers' answers are longer than that), you can stop missing the enormous amount of useful information the client is sharing with you, and additional sales opportunities. With mindfulness, the quality of your solutions can be better than your competitors' who are distracted and lost in their own thinking. Your ability to listen fully informs your ability to offer effective solutions. And very few training programs teach the skill of focusing and being present.

To start training, Andrew

suggests the noting or labeling technique in which you note or label what you are experiencing (example breathing as the abdomen rises and making a soft mental label or note, 'rising/rising', "falling/falling" or noting emotions such as worry or frustration and labeling them as "worry/worry", "frustrated/ frustrated", "thinking/ thinking", or whatever is most appropriate). When you label your experience, it helps you detach from the content and be more aware of the actual mental or physical process taking place. Then you are in a better position to assess if how you are spending your time is how you actually want to be spending your time, and if the habits you are developing will lead to the results that you want. Seeing clearly, allows for conscious choices.

Andrew uses mindfulness not only for himself, but with teams he has managed. He finds that most salespeople get caught up in their own thinking when they meet with their customers or prospects. When salespeople are caught up in the content of their own heads, their capacity to respond to the client is very limited and therefore they don't connect and cannot address the issues important to the customer. Unless salespeople are present, they won't know where their customers are in their thinking or what the real concerns are, and therefore they will not be able to address their clients' doubts or concerns effectively.

Mindfulness allows salespeople to first practice and enhance their ability to listen by focusing on

themselves and quietly following their breath. This discipline is then transferred to listening to customers and colleagues. Andrew sees mindfulness as the most effective tool to connect with oneself and with others - two essential qualities of Emotional Intelligence. It has been Andrew's experience that when a salesperson can be present and listen to what a customer is actually saying, they will have a remarkable capacity to respond skillfully. Mindful Meditation gives a moment of clarity by breaking habitual reactions and provides the mental space needed for a moment of conscious decision-making, which enables a salesperson to interact far more effectively with customers.

Author Viktor E. Frankl said it best, *"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."*

Mindfulness, according to Andrew, is the practical tool and technique that gives us that space and freedom.

While companies invest heavily in sales training, Andrew finds that salespeople need the ability to "clear their minds" and break undermining habits, and mindfulness gives that ability. When top tennis players were analyzed for what differentiated the very top players from the group below them, recovery rituals were the common denominator. If at every point a top player uses the few seconds in between points to refocus his or her mind and recover, over the course of a 3 hour match that can add up to

15-20 minutes of less exertion, in addition to some recovery time. Now, considering that fatigue contributes to poor decision-making, it becomes clear how a simple practice, even for a few seconds, repeated regularly can accumulate to have a significant impact.

If throughout the day, and right before a sales call, you can take a moment to "clear your mind" of the negative and recover a more positive outlook by following your breath for 5 seconds or a minute, and during a sales call control your emotions, you will become more aware of what you are feeling (using the noting technique), and you are more likely to remain at your "peak" to respond more skillfully and get to the heart of an objection or understand the real goal of a client.

By noting your own emotions (what is going on in your experience), you can cut off the negative disruption and distraction in its track. Unnoted is unacknowledged, but noting releases the store of emotions. The key is not to be carried away by the past or by what is happening now that you are not conscious of, but to stay in the present and clear your mind, so you have the capacity to respond wholeheartedly and skillfully.

Mindfulness can be difficult, because the mind is easily off on some tangent and it is necessary to pick up and start over again. Initially people berate themselves with critical self talk (that follows many people throughout their daily lives) with thoughts such as "I should be

able to do this" or "What is wrong with me; I can't do this." But by observing that negative self-talk, you take the first step to transforming or eliminating the negative thoughts. In any case, Andrew assures it won't have the power over you that it previously did. He sees for himself that through meditation, over time, he has become less critical of himself, less angry or frustrated and that he learns more quickly from his mistakes.

Loving Kindness Meditation

Whereas mindfulness is focused on the present moment reality, Loving Kindness Meditation is more conceptual in nature. It starts with you focusing on yourself. It involves repeating four phrases that move from an initial focus on yourself, to later focusing on a person who has been positive or a benefactor in your life, and ultimately, to all beings. The phrases are simple and are intended to arouse the associated feelings...

- May I be safe (This phrase is protective - think of a time of pure happiness and freedom from external and internal enemies)
- May I be happy (This phrase is meant to help you associate with a feeling of pure happiness)
- May I be healthy (This phrase is meant to help you associate with a feeling of physical well being)
- May I look after myself with ease (This phrase is meant to create the quality of equanimity and things flowing easily.)

The phrases are repeated three or

more times to help you see the positive qualities in yourself and your customers and colleagues. In turn, customers and colleagues sense the positive feeling coming toward them and respond to that much more favorably. Andrew has found that meditation takes away negative blaming, fault finding, and the dynamic of us vs. them. It is training for the brain like weight training is for the body.

Loving Kindness Meditation starts the shift to wanting what is best for customers, even when your and their ideas are different, and helps correct the discord. It can help reduce the baggage, slow down negative responses and, ultimately, transform emotions like frustration and agitation. That shift of mindset is powerful in sales interactions in creating many new

sales and collaboration opportunities.

Advice from Andrew

You live in a world where managers and senior executives put enormous demands and amounts of pressures and expectations on you. It is important to step back from that and figure out what is best in the context of your being a successful salesperson, so that you know what you need to do to be successful. Most managers know the results they want, but often they don't know how to produce those results in you.

You must be responsible for

yourself and your best performance by figuring out what will work and what is optimal for you. Mindfulness, because it will help you see more clearly, will help you make better decisions and see the opportunities in the present that will help you meet your goals. You can't live in the past. The future is uncertain. All you have is the present moment. To maximize it, be present in the moment and you will figure out the next step to take and the one after that—but not two beyond that. ■



To learn more about how Mindfulness can benefit you or your organization, contact Andrew Scheffer at Andrew@andrewscheffer.com or www.andrewscheffer.com

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