

Time for mindful self-management in legal professions

By Reinhard Gaertner, Attorney and Specialist for Mindful Leadership and Acquisition at CLP-Consulting for Legal Professionals

Mindfulness-based training and mindful leadership seminars have become widely accepted in business and industry. The following article deals with the question which advantages these offers can also bring in the legal field.

You may have heard about Mindfulness in conversation with friends or family. The term "mindfulness" has now become a buzz word. Amazon currently produces more than 20,000 results in the "book" category alone.

But mindfulness in connection with your work as a lawyer? You might ask yourself: How does the fact-oriented



and efficient work in the law firm with meditation and the preoccupation with the "here and now" fit together?

A mindful attitude is a good basis for taking the hectic pace out of your own professional life. It is worth getting to know possibilities, pressing the "reset button" and strengthening composure and presence for

the challenge that is currently at hand.

In my long years as a partner in a large law firm, I have not always succeeded in doing so.

The tight schedule and many urgent meetings often left me driven and stressed for many

days. I took many topics and thoughts about clients and lawsuits home with me instead of having a clear head. Also for my private life.

It is now generally accepted that mindful behavior promotes well-being from within and prevents stress-related illnesses. This is why, for example, various health insurance companies offer their policyholders free courses on this topic. This purely health-related perspective for better coping with stress-related situations is certainly very important and essential, especially for lawyers in their daily work.

However, mindfulness is about more than that: it is about improved self-management by focusing on the current situation. It is about a more conscious way of dealing with stressful situations and the daily challenges of legal work. For the everyday life of managers, the mantra of the Mindful Leadership further education offers, which are currently widely used in business and industry, is: "Only those who can consciously lead themselves are able to lead".

How is this to be understood?

Meeting daily stress with self-regulation

Studies show that working life has accelerated dramatically, mainly due to digitalization.

About 10 minutes should be the time window in working life before the next task is due or the next disturbance, be it a phone call, an e-mail or the friendly colleague with a question. I do not doubt these studies, in my experience as a lawyer even without digitalization.

More interesting, however, are the opinions about our behavior in these stressful situations. Jon Kabat-Zinn, who developed the

Mindful Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) method, speaks of the "autopilot". This means that in such situations we tend not to sit in the driver's seat of our own and conscious decisions, but to act or react in a lightning-fast automated manner with the same patterns. Like a programmed autopilot of an airplane that intervenes in certain situations. Who does not know such situations, in which you ask yourself afterwards why you for example "went up" immediately and did not react more prudently?

Scharmer, professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), speaks of "downloading" in this context. This is meant in the sense that when faced with challenges, people tend to "download" patterns of action they have learned in the past and apply them. What is more, every human being views his environment through the eyes of his habitual thinking, or better: through the glasses of his experiences. A view that draws a different picture for everyone. Which is perhaps why you are looking for the best sleeping position in a cinema chair while your partner is talking about the best film of the year.

This application of experience is a great help in daily life and therefore highly valuable. However, our horizon of experience is naturally limited and, especially in challenging situations, leads to the fact that these situations are not seen as they are, but through the filter of our experiences. With the consequence described above, behavior patterns are automatically applied.

Taking the lead

The goal is now set. It is about improved self-

regulation, about avoiding one's own automatisms. To let go of the judgments you have brought with you and to focus your attention on what - not only in stressful situations - actually IS. Strengthening the ability to look first, without evaluation and without identification with emerging feelings. But more with curiosity about what is happening. It is often said to open a window of time for oneself in the sense of "hold and look". A window that makes it possible to recognize emerging reaction patterns from the perspective of one's own observer. Um - Wait a minute! - choose a conscious reaction in a second step. To sit in the drivers seat, to take over self-management. To act confidently and creatively. Not to be automated and to put off the limiting glasses of one's own experiences.

Let me quote Viktor Frankl: "There is a space between stimulus and reaction. In this space lies our power to choose our reaction. In our reaction lies our development and our freedom". Opening this time window or space is the goal of mindfulness-based approaches. Because the means of choice, in challenging situations, is to open our eyes to what is, what is going on - and not to react automatically - that is the strengthening of mindfulness. One can experience this in order to make a conscious choice for oneself as to what the right reaction is.

Chances of mindfulness in a world out of joint due to corona

We are currently experiencing a crisis situation that nobody expected and that affects each of us with different intensity. There is helplessness, worries and fears, the future is uncertain. All too humanly, we tend to identify

with these intense, negative emotions, to live them out and perhaps even to intensify them. Or, conversely, to fight them by attempting to suppress incriminating feelings. To practice mindfulness in this situation means to disidentify from negative emotions. To try to adopt an observant attitude by questioning emerging reaction patterns. Thus to recognize that we are not helplessly at the mercy of stressful feelings, but that it is up to us to choose a conscious reaction.

I wish you inner calmness, peace and distance.

About the Author

Dr. Reinhard Gaertner has over 30 years of experience as a partner in law firms such as Beiten Burkhardt and Taylor Wessing. He has various additional qualifications as a coach and trainer and supports lawyers in particular with the topics mindfulness, acquisition, conflict management and communication. As a CLP instructor, he can combine his many years of professional experience with his heart's desire and make a valuable contribution to the post-graduate training of soft skills with lawyers.

