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LEADERSHIP

Why Leaders Need Meditation Now More Than Ever

by [Matthias Birk](#)

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A global pandemic is in full effect. Risks of infection are on the rise, stock markets are tumbling, the economy is on the verge of a global recession, and every business is facing uncertainty. Chances are high that you're feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and afraid.

That's normal. The survival part of our brain (mainly the amygdala) kicks in when we perceive a threat and causes our focus to narrow. This is helpful when we face an immediate threat, but it also means our thinking can follow unproductive patterns: We are more likely to engage in [worst-case scenario thinking or, alternatively, deny the threat](#); we have [less access to the creative and analytical parts of our brain](#); and we are impaired in our [ability to empathize, listen, and relate to others](#).

Unfortunately, those are the exact skills we need as leaders in times of crisis. We need the full capacity of our brain to weigh best possible options, question our assumptions, come up with new and creative ways of doing things, and remain calm in order to reassure employees, customers, and business partners while listening and taking their concerns seriously.

Meditation can be of tremendous help during times like this. Practicing meditation has been shown to [reduce anxiety](#), [calm the amygdala](#), [increase our ability to think creatively](#) and [empathetically take other people's perspective](#). Steve Jobs, an early adaptor of meditation [described his experience](#) like this: “You start to see things more clearly and be in the present more. Your mind just slows down, and you see a tremendous expanse in the moment. You see so much more than you could see before.”

In my work with executives I've observed three practices that help in times of crisis.

Meditate first thing in the morning

In times of uncertainty, there is a strong temptation to start the day by checking your email and news. But when we do that, we are [drawn into reactive mode](#), often fighting one fire after another. On the contrary, starting the day with a few minutes of meditation can help you center and calm fear-based thoughts. There are many different ways to do this: You can use an app such as Insight Timer and sit in bed while listening to a [guided meditation](#). I have found it most useful to get up and, after a cup of coffee, sit down on a cushion or in a chair and [practice a simple mindfulness meditation](#).

Over time you will notice that you start the day with an openness and awareness for possibilities that you would otherwise not have seen. Zen Master Shunryu Suzuki, one of the pioneers of meditation in the U.S., has called this “beginner's mind.” It's when our thoughts quiet down, our minds open up to see the present reality with less judgement and preconceived notions. Salesforce CEO, Marc Benioff, an avid meditator, [describes this effect like this](#): “Beginner's mind is informing me to step back, so that I can create what wants to be, not what was. I know that the future does not equal the past. I know that I have to be here in the moment.”

Start each meeting with a few minutes of meditation

We are biased toward action in times like these and sometimes that can be a good instinct. But taking a moment at the beginning of a meeting (virtual or in person) to get present, notice your own emotions, and start the meeting with an increased ability to listen and be open to ideas can [can help teams](#) to be more thoughtful about problem solving.

For some teams, this may be a new experience, and some people might find this too “touchy-feely.” So to start, tell your team that you need them fully present and focused in the meeting. Then suggest an experiment: Ask them to simply focus on their breath for one minute. When they get distracted, suggest they simply return their attention to the breath. Most first-timers are surprised at just how distracted they are and how hard it was to stay present for one minute. Most of them will also feel that they are more calm and present after doing this. And that one minute can change the nature of a meeting. As one executive described the effect this way, “Whereas often times we just talk at each other in these meetings, team members seemed to be more present, they listened, heard each other out, and showed a willingness to learn.”

Step back when you get caught in unproductive thought patterns

When you feel anxious throughout the day, take a moment to breathe and observe your thoughts. Chances are you have left the present moment and gone down a rabbit hole of thinking through future scenarios. While scenario planning is critical, it's important to do it with presence and a calm state of mind, examining actual facts and not getting carried away by the fiction of your mind. Practically, this is what this looks like: Sit in your chair, close your eyes and focus your attention on the movement of your belly, breathing in and out. After a while you will notice your thoughts calm down, you'll feel more present and alive. And you'll start to notice an opening of possibilities and opportunities.

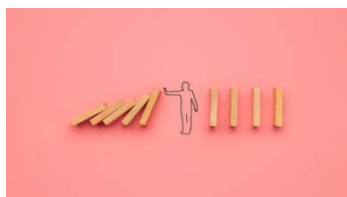
One of the most important advantages of meditation is that it allows us to step out of our own survival centric thinking and [connect with others empathetically](#). This is important, because research shows that when we get scared, [we display greater egocentrism](#) and it is harder for us to take other peoples' perspective. But people inside and outside your organization are in distress right now. This is an opportunity to show compassion and care in difficult times, an opportunity to show your team and organization who you are as a leader.

[Matthias Birk](#), PhD has been practicing meditation for over two decades, and has taught meditation and leadership to hundreds of executives at Columbia Business School, NYU, and companies, such as Goldman Sachs and McKinsey & Company.

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Meditation has tremendous impact on individuals attitude and behavior. It is good to every one to practice and be clam. It aids to understand individual themselves and widen the spectrum of consciousness. Further helps to draw the intuition of subconscious and inspiration from superconscious mind. The merits of meditation are unlimited hence good to practice by everyone

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