

# BEING **HERE**

Our special report continues with mindfulness-based cognitive coaching. It's a new intervention, but one that is delivering increased control and happiness in clients' lives, say **Patrizia Collard** and **Gladeana McMahon**

**M**indfulness-based cognitive coaching (MBCC) is a newly developed intervention that draws on the strategies of mindfulness-based therapies and the skills and methodology of cognitive behavioural coaching (CBC). Its aim is to help clients appreciate, enjoy and have more control over, their daily lives.

Approaches such as mindfulness-based stress reduction and

mindfulness-based cognitive therapy have been used for some time in medical and mental health settings. They are used to treat clients with a variety of physical and psychological difficulties, including pain management, physical symptoms associated with stress and recurrent conditions such as depression and anxiety. MBCC, however, has been designed for use with coaching clients in non-medical or therapeutic settings.

Jon Kabat-Zinn introduced mindfulness interventions into

medical and psychological settings. He defined mindfulness as the ability to be present in each and every moment of life with deliberate and alert intention and awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 1996).

Being mindful differs significantly from the 24/7 lifestyle of the 21st century, in which individuals are rarely emotionally or psychologically present. Mostly they engage with thoughts and feelings of the past or hopes, fears and desires to do with the future.

There is significant evidence that learning to experience life from moment to moment can create

calm and well-being, whereas over-planning, ruminating and fretting triggers the so-called “stress response”. This response brings with it a host of self-defeating physical, emotional, psychological and behavioural aspects that can lead to physical and mental illness (Palmer and Cooper, 2007).

On the other hand, connecting with what has been termed “the here and now” stimulates a completely different physiological response. Other parts of the nervous system become activated, allowing the experience to take on new meaning (Collard and Walsh, 2008), providing the individual with the ability to create a greater sense of calm and control. Individuals – and their bosses – benefit from clearer thinking and improved decision-making and judgement. They enjoy a greater sense of satisfaction with life.

### What is MBCC?

Teaching clients to become more mindful helps them reconnect to the experience of “being” rather than “doing”. In turn, this increases

individual effectiveness and, as a by-product, personal productivity (Linley and Joseph, 2004).

In the current climate, for example, exercising mindfulness during downsizing means the process is conducted with more compassion and less stress for all, potentially turning the situation into an opportunity for growth.

In MBCC, the skills associated with CBC are interwoven with mindfulness-based awareness training (*see exercises below*). The CBC element is about helping clients identify self-defeating core beliefs, associated assumptions or strategies and the thoughts they engage in based on these, that lead to unhelpful emotional and behavioural consequences (McMahon and Leimon, 2008) and a negative impact on their physiology. Clients are encouraged to gain more self-enhancing ways of thinking, feeling and behaving (McMahon, 2007).

MBCC provides skills and strategies to devise new and healthier beliefs about self, others and the world, with the ability to

connect to the present. This has links with positive psychology, which also places emphasis on the need to learn to live effectively in the present by minimising the negative impact of placing too great an emphasis on the past – and future (Bonniwell, 2008).

### How does it work?

MBCC can be used with individuals and groups. The coach needs to engage in the same psycho-educative approach used in traditional CBC, making sure the client understands and knows they need to be active and committed to the coaching. The client must understand the background, benefits, research and skills associated with mindfulness at the start. The coach and client then decide how best to proceed.

MBCC can be rolled out as a coaching programme or introduced into existing coaching. Clients are asked to engage in mindfulness-based meditative exercises. These can be complex so that clients learn how to locate sensations, emotions and thoughts. ►

## Daily mindfulness-based exercises

### Exercise 1

- Choose a time and a place where you will not be disturbed.
- Sit upright in a chair, with feet flat on the floor, your palms in your lap.
- Bring your attention to the sensations of your body. Note any tension. Relax.
- Next, bring your attention to your breathing. Without controlling it, notice the flow of the in-breath, the pause, and the flow of the out-breath.
- When you notice your mind has wandered, bring it back to your breath.

*Continue for 10 minutes. Practice daily, increasing to 30 minutes twice a day.*

**Graham Lee**

### Exercise 2

- Take five minutes in the morning to be quiet and meditate. Listen to the sounds of nature, gaze out of the window, take a quiet walk, drink a cup of tea – and really taste it.

### Exercise 3

- When you sit in your car, become aware of the quality of your breathing and how your body feels.
- As you drive, notice any tension in your body. Are your hands gripping the wheel? Is your stomach tight? Do you feel you have to be tense to drive effectively?

### Exercise 4

- When you stop at a red light, or are stuck in traffic, bring awareness to your breathing or the sky, or the sights around you.

### Exercise 5

- While sitting at your desk, bring attention on a regular basis to your bodily sensations and your breathing. Some people use a full hour as a time to check on their breathing and to make sure that it is slow and comfortable.

*“Just be” for a few minutes every hour.*

**Patrizia Collard**

Some clients may be uncomfortable at such a prospect. Others are surprised to discover that mindfulness can be applied to daily, rather mundane, tasks.

There are many longer meditative exercises, such as the Body Scan (where an individual focuses slowly on each part of his or her body for 45 minutes), although benefits can still accrue from much shorter exercises (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Daily mindfulness-based exercises (see box, previous page, for examples) take a few minutes but, as Collard and Walsh (2008) found, clients can still reap the benefits quickly, even from such short periods of practice. “Mindful awareness” increases with every application.

The insights and challenges the client experiences when participating in the mindfulness part of the programme become the focus for discussion between coach and client. It is here that the more traditional elements of CBC come into play. For example, if a client finds it hard to concentrate on being focused in the present, because of constant thoughts about what others might think or work needing to be done, the coach encourages the client to explore the meaning of these thinking intrusions. Examples of perfectionist vs healthy achiever thinking (see panel below) demonstrate the types of changes needed to help a client develop a more self-enhancing thinking style.

The client is encouraged to consider how a more realistic and compassionate way of perceiving the world increases personal effectiveness and decreases negative emotional outcomes for

## Mindfulness: the proof

### 2003

- Rosenzweig et al demonstrated the lowering of psychological distress among medical students.
- McCraty showed a reduction in blood pressure and emotional health in hypertensive employees.

### 2004

- Davidson et al highlighted improvements in brain and immune function by meditation.

### 2007

- YY Tang et al found that five days of meditation/mindfulness produced lower anxiety, depression, anger and fatigue.

### 2008

- Collard and Walsh demonstrated an improvement in the well-being of participants in all areas of life.
- Spence, Cavanagh and Grant showed that mindfulness training with cognitive behavioural and solution-focused coaching is better at helping clients reach health goals than health education seminars.

## The perfectionist vs the healthy achiever

Client's thoughts associated with self-defeating perfectionist thinking	Healthy achiever thinking based on CBC methodology
● If I make a mistake then it is awful and I have done a bad job.	● If I make a mistake it is not the end of the world. I can always learn from it and do better next time.
● If I make an error then people will think badly of me and I will seem incompetent.	● Everyone makes mistakes and there is nothing to be ashamed of. I did my best.
● No one wins any prizes for coming second.	● How many people can say they came second? I can always try again.

everyone concerned. Thus, the behavioural changes required to produce a more effective way of being (McMahon and Rosen, 2008) are created.

### A closer look

As a relatively new approach still in development, MBCC needs fuller evaluation. However, anecdotal comments and the positive outcome of client applications together with the findings from an increasing research base suggest that it holds much promise.

Perhaps the last word should go to a client who took part in a CBC

coaching programme into which MBCC was introduced halfway through: “I practised mindfulness for a few weeks. There seemed a shift in attitude, and all I needed to do was ‘nothing deliberately’. My application was not consistent but its effects were significant. I have had a sense of being less at war with myself. What’s more, I have just achieved a significant promotion and am about to head up a much larger organisation. The changes in personal behaviour have translated into business success. There is not one area of my life that has not been positively affected.”

This client is now a CEO in the financial services sector. ■

● **Gladeana McMahon** is director, professional coaching standards, at Cedar TM, vice president of the Association for Coaching and one of the UK founders of cognitive behavioural coaching.

[www.gladeanamcmahon.com](http://www.gladeanamcmahon.com)  
[gladeana@dircon.co.uk](mailto:gladeana@dircon.co.uk)

● **Patrizia Collard** is a senior lecturer at the University of East London (UEL). She is currently undertaking a range of mindfulness research projects at UEL.

[www.stressminus.co.uk](http://www.stressminus.co.uk)  
[contact@stressminus.co.uk](mailto:contact@stressminus.co.uk)

## Further information

- J A Astin, “Stress reduction through mindfulness meditation. Effects on psychological symptomatology, sense of control, and spiritual experiences”, in *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 66, 2, pp97-106, 1997.
- R E Baer (ed), *Mindfulness-Based Treatment Approaches: Clinician’s Guide to Evidence Base and Applications*, Academic Press, Elsevier, USA, 2005.
- P Collard and J Walsh, “Sensory awareness mindfulness training in coaching: accepting life’s challenges”, in *Journal of Rational-Emotive and Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, 26, 1, 2008.
- R J Davidson et al, “Alterations in brain and immune function produced by mindfulness meditation”, in *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 65, pp564-570, 2003.
- J Kabat-Zinn, A Massion, J Kristeller and L Peterson, “Effectiveness of a meditation based stress reduction program in the treatment of anxiety disorders”, in *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 149, pp936-943, 1992.
- J Kabat-Zinn, L Lipworth, R Burney and W Sellers, “Four-year follow-up of a meditation-based program for the self-regulation of chronic pain: Treatment outcomes and compliance”, in *Clinical Journal of Pain*, 2, pp159-173, 1987.
- J Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: How to Cope with Stress, Pain and Illness Using Mindfulness Meditation*, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, UK, 1996.
- J Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*, Hyperion, USA, 1994.
- R M McCraty, “Impact of a workplace stress reduction programme on blood pressure and emotional health in hypertensive employees”, in *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 9, 3, pp355-369, 1 June, 2003.
- G McMahon and A Rosen, “Why perfectionism at work does not pay”, in *Training Journal*, pp60-63, May 2008.
- G McMahon, “Understanding cognitive behavioural coaching”, in *Training Journal*, pp53-57, 2007.
- T Morris, *What Do Buddhists Believe: Meaning and Mindfulness in Buddhist Philosophy*, Walker & Company, UK, 2008.
- S Palmer and C Cooper, *How to Deal with Stress*, Kogan Page, UK, 2007.
- S Rosenzweig, D K Reibel, J M Greeson and G C Brainard, “Mindfulness-based stress reduction lowers psychological distress in medical students”, in *Teaching and Learning in Medicine*, 15, 2, pp88-92, 2003.
- V Z Segal, M G Williams, J D Teasdale, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression*, Guilford Press, UK, 2001.
- Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, Rider & Co, 2008. (ISBN: 978 184 6 041068)
- Y Y Tang, Y Ma, J Wang, Y Fan, S Feng, Q Yu, Q Yu, D Sui, MK Rothbart, M Fan and M I Posner, “Short term meditation training improves attention and self regulation”, in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, US, 104, 43, pp17152-17156, 2007.