

Mindful feelings at work

Individuals continually attempt to remain well in a culture in which people are working longer hours and dealing with the struggles of commuting and environmental hazards. Everyone seeks to live longer, be in the best of health and have a sense of meaning and purpose.

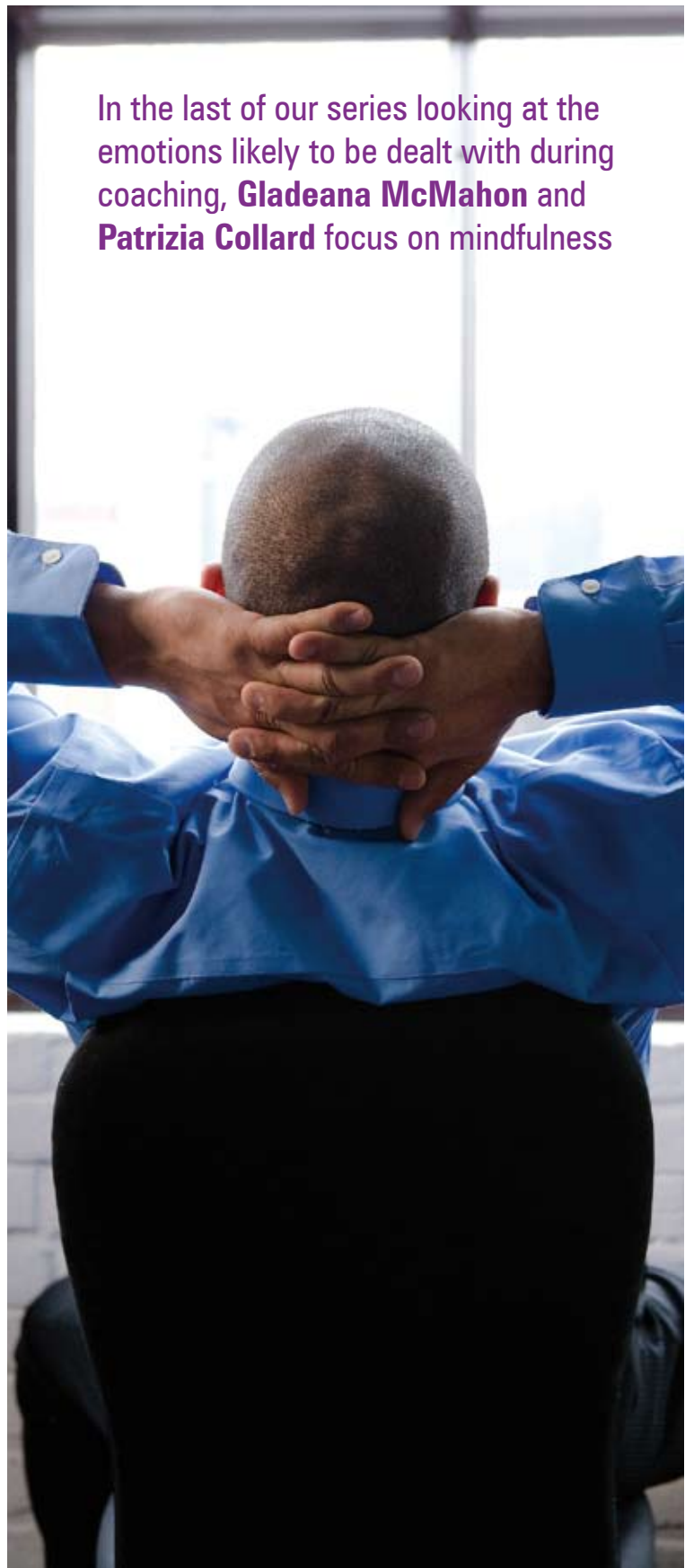
Meaning and purpose have been identified as key factors for increasing psychological and physical resilience and these qualities are equally important whether related to work or to life in general¹.

Historical perspective

Therapeutic interventions such as mindfulness-based stress reduction and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy² are used to treat a variety of physical and psychological difficulties. There is growing research to show how such approaches can be used with pain management³, alleviating physical symptoms associated with stress⁴ as well as with recurrent conditions such as depression⁵ and anxiety⁶.

Mindfulness-based cognitive coaching is the newest development drawing upon

In the last of our series looking at the emotions likely to be dealt with during coaching, **Gladeana McMahon** and **Patrizia Collard** focus on mindfulness



the strategies of mindfulness-based therapies and the skills and methodology of cognitive behavioural coaching. MBCC is applied to individuals who do not fall within the medical or therapeutic areas and is now finding its way into the corporate coaching arena.

It is rare for people to be emotionally or psychologically present, as they tend to engage with thoughts and feelings associated with the past or hopes, anxieties and desires associated with the future. For example, they may be worrying about a past event or preoccupied with some future challenge, rather than focusing on what is happening today.

When individuals are distracted by the past or the future, they are not at their best in the present. It's one thing to reflect on the past, learn from a previous experience or think constructively about how to handle a future situation but it's another to ruminate about these in a way that increases anxiety.

Different parts of the nervous system are activated when we are consciously focused on the present⁷. This enables people to create a greater sense of calm and control, which in turn minimises the risk of unwanted stress while aiding clearer thinking. This leads to improved decision-making and an increased satisfaction with life.

Rumination triggers the so-called 'stress response', which has a number of debilitating physical, emotional, psychological and behavioural aspects⁸.

The evidence base

There is increasing evidence of the effectiveness of mindfulness-based approaches, including a 2003 study⁹ that demonstrated a lowering of psychological distress amongst medical students. Also in 2003, another study¹⁰ demonstrated reduced blood pressure and improved emotional

health, including higher job satisfaction, in hypertensive employees. A 2004 study¹¹ highlighted improved brain and immune function brought about through mindfulness meditation and Collard and Walsh's study in 2008 recorded an improvement in the well-being of participants in all areas of their life.

Mindfulness-based interventions can significantly improve the quality of well-being at all levels and individuals can improve their sense of satisfaction by including mindful awareness training into their daily life. From a corporate perspective, this leads to more effective and productive behaviours at work.

Mindfulness-based cognitive coaching

Becoming more **mindful** means connecting with the experience of 'being' rather than of 'doing', increasing effectiveness and personal productivity¹². This may be seen in areas such as dealing with appraisals, where being more present during the process enables the manager to focus on more details during the process. He is then able to provide better feedback and create a more fruitful discussion with the employee.

The skills associated with CBC are interwoven with those of mindfulness-based awareness training. For example, helping individuals identify self-defeating beliefs together with their underlying assumptions and the thoughts they engage in, based on these strategies and beliefs, that lead to unhelpful emotional and

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behavioural consequences¹³. CBC lays emphasis on the thoughts, feelings and behaviours that a client engages in and the effect these have on his physiology¹⁴.

Bringing together MBAT and CBC led to the birth of MBCC, which provides the individual with the skills and strategies needed to gain new and healthier beliefs about himself, others and the world in general while encouraging him to connect to the present.

This links with the realm of positive psychology, as this 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 future¹⁵.

MBCC can be used with individuals as well as groups. The coaching programme involves introducing clients to the background, associated research and skills associated with mindfulness. The coach engages in the same psycho-educative approach that is used in traditional CBC. The client needs to be an active participant in his own coaching programme. The relevance and benefits of using a mindful approach to work are explored in relation to his presenting issue(s).

The coach and client decide on the best way of engaging in the MBCC process and, as with all coaching approaches, commitment is an essential requirement to ensure the best possible outcome.

The client may opt for a whole MBCC programme or to have some concepts of MBCC introduced into an existing coaching programme. For example, if a CBC programme is underway, the mindfulness component can be positioned at the point where the coach believes this will be of greatest benefit. Alternatively, if an MBCC group is being set up, a client may become part of this.

During the coaching programme, clients are asked to engage in mindfulness-based meditative exercises. People often believe that the meditative part of the process requires engagement in traditional meditative sittings on a daily basis. These are encouraged as they teach clients how to locate sensations, emotions and thoughts but are not essential. Some clients may wish to undertake them; others may be uncomfortable with the idea.

Many clients are surprised to discover that mindfulness can be applied to daily tasks (see figure 1 below).

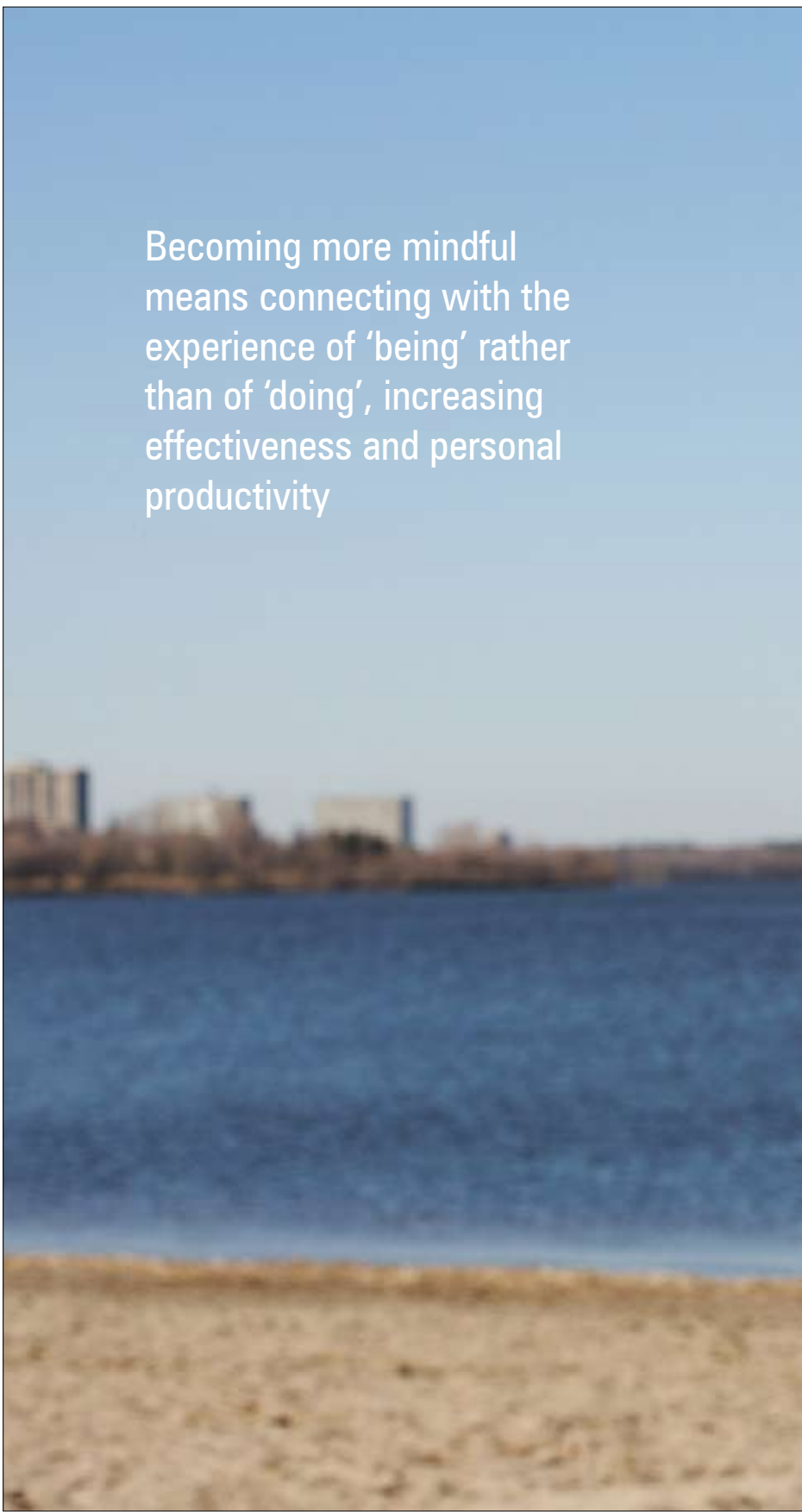
1. Take five minutes in the morning to be quiet and meditate, listen to the sounds of nature, gaze out of the window, take a quiet walk, drink a cup of tea and really taste it.
2. When you sit down in your car, become aware of the quality of your breathing and how your body feels. While you are driving, 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?
3. 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.
4. While sitting at your desk, bring regular attention to your bodily sensations and breathing. Some people use the full hour as a time to check on their breathing and make sure it is slow and comfortable. 'Just be' for a few minutes every hour.

Collard and Walsh found that there were tangible benefits from even short periods of practice.

While there are a number of longer meditative exercises such as the body scan (a 45-minute exercise in which a person focuses on each part of his body), benefits can be gained from much shorter exercises¹⁶.

When participating in the mindfulness part of the programme, the insights gained by the client become the focus for discussion. The more traditional elements of CBC come into play at this point. For →

Figure 1
– Simple
mind-
fulness-
based
exercises



Becoming more mindful means connecting with the experience of 'being' rather than of 'doing', increasing effectiveness and personal productivity



example, if a client finds it hard to concentrate due to constant worries about getting things right, the coach focuses on the unhelpful thoughts that lay behind the worries.

Figure 2 right demonstrates the types of changes that the CB part of the MBCC programme would be seeking to achieve in helping a client develop a healthier thinking style.

The client is encouraged to consider the way that a more realistic and compassionate way of perceiving the world increases personal effectiveness and decreases negative emotional outcomes. This process is used to help create the behavioural changes required¹⁷.

MBCC brings together two approaches into a model that provides the client with more control over, and enjoyment of, his daily life.

Perhaps the last word should be given to a client who, at the end of an MBCC programme, stated: "I feel as if I am now able to stand back from situations rather than just react to them. I get more done and feel far less stressed." ■

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Client's thoughts associated with self-defeating perfectionist thinking	Healthy achiever thinking based on cognitive behavioural coaching methodology
"If I make a mistake, 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, 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."	"I did well and can always try again."

Figure 2
Perfectionist thinking versus healthy achiever thinking

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