



Leaders who use mindfulness at work: Case study 4

Michael Forlenza, PhD, MPH

School of Leadership and Professional Advancement

Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

Job role and business background

Michael is Assistant Dean in the School of Leadership. His role is both strategic and operational; “I serve on the schools’ senior management team and have responsibility and oversight for 30 staff members, approximately 200 adjunct faculty, and 800 adult undergraduate and graduate students. Academically, I provide both direct and indirect support to undergraduate and graduate degree programs as well as non-credit professional development programs”.

The School has an annual budget of approximately \$4 million. Michael’s primary focus is on the development, reorganization, and implementation of school-wide operations and academic programs, policies, procedures, and processes. His role is highly analytic as well as strongly integrative and collaborative; working across groups within SLPA and the University.

How did you become interested in mindfulness?

Michael first encountered mindfulness in the late ‘80’s. His current practice is based on the MBSR. “Being a psychologist, I also look to the neuroscience and contemplative science literature”.

How does mindfulness help you in a work context?

“Mindfulness supports my leadership practice at several different levels simultaneously. First, on a personal level, I find the practice helps me deal with the stress of constant information overload and shifting demands and priorities. It also helps as I manage my staff; I am more present, more thoughtful and deliberative in decision-making. I believe that as I practice mindfulness, I am also a better mentor and coach. It is not that I don’t get frustrated or irritated at times; it’s just that I am more aware of it and I can more quickly recover balance and not blow things out of proportion.”

How does mindfulness help your organisation?

“I think my team runs smoother and more cooperatively. Several of the team members have asked for more detailed instruction in practice. Externally, I have developed a series of well-attended networking events for professionals looking at leadership from a mindful perspective, and I have also developed a graduate course in our leadership program on leading mindfully. This course integrates the practice of mindfulness and the practice of leadership in a very practical way. I am hoping to create a version of the course for corporate trainings.”

If a colleague asked you if it was worth finding out more about mindfulness, what would you tell them?

“Yes. Mindfulness is a set of practical techniques for systematically training your attention. Improved attention will result in better listening, better emotional balance and less stress. For anyone in a leadership position these are keys to success. Additionally, being mindful will enable you to create stronger teams and a more supportive and positive work environment. This in turn will lead to greater productivity and less workplace stress and conflict.”

Further Information

- Duquesne University’s School of Leadership: <http://www.duq.edu/leadership>
- Mindfulnet: Mindfulness in the workplace: <http://www.mindfulnet.org/page9.htm>