

# aetna® CASE STUDY

## The Proven Benefits of Workplace Mindfulness Training

### HOW MINDFULNESS CAN HELP YOUR EMPLOYEES AND YOUR BOTTOM LINE

#### Background

Aetna started its **Mindfulness & Yoga program in 2007** after their CEO Mark Bertolini had a serious ski accident and upon return to work found it very difficult to focus due to the pain and medication he was on. He instead turned to other forms of therapy including yoga and meditation to help him get back on track. The positive and rapid results that he personally experienced led him to launch a pilot project with his employees which has now touched and helped over 15,000 employees.

#### Overall Results

Internal mindfulness training research done at Aetna showed:

- 28% reduction in stress
- 20% improvement in sleep quality
- 19% reduction in pain
- reduced healthcare costs of app. \$3,000/person/yr
- 69-minute gain/wk in productivity
- **11-to-1 program ROI**

#### *Problem analysis:*

Many companies these days are experiencing the effects of **high levels of stress** within their organizations, which can cost them millions of dollars in terms of increased healthcare costs, higher rates of absenteeism and greatly reduced employee engagement and productivity.

It was in this situation that Aetna found itself in the mid 2000s. As part of an in-house mindfulness pilot project, employees had been asked to maintain an anonymous daily journal of their work activities and state of mind. In reviewing these journals periodically, Bertolini came to the realization that Aetna's employees were experiencing levels of stress far beyond what he could have imagined. This stress arose from both their work work and personal lives.

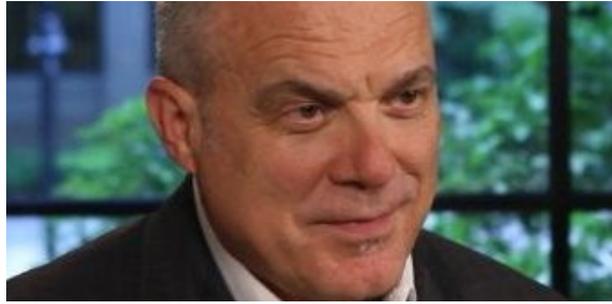
Drawing on his own experience in dealing with the stress of personal crises, he felt a deep a responsibility to help his employees by sharing the tools and strategies that he had used to face his challenges and emerge healthy, strong and resilient.

#### *Alternative solutions:*

The old way of dealing with stress: **stress management** - trying to help people cope and reduce the amount of stress they are exposed to. The new way: **mind management** - recognizing that stress, change and challenges are part of life and helping empower individuals and developing their level of resiliency. They are able to change their perspective, their level of presence and their overall beliefs and attitudes so they deal the stress differently.



**The Aetna stock price has multiplied more than 6x since Bertolini has been at the helm, using a conscious approach to run the business**



Mark Bertolini - Aetna CEO

Mindfulness training is not just about being a good employer or corporate citizen. As we all now know, stress impacts people's ability to fight and defend against illness. Companies therefore have a vested interest in lowering employees' stress.

*"When employees are in the highest quintile of stress, their health care costs are \$2,000 a year on average higher than the average employee,"* says Bertolini.

For more information about **Mindfulness, Meditation & Resiliency Lunch & Learn training** in the workplace please contact **Jackie Roberge** or visit the **Business & Beyond** website.



***The Aetna Mindfulness Program:***

In the initial phases of the mindfulness program Mark explains that there was a lot of internal resistance. People would say that the company exists to make profits and not foster collaboration and compassion! But being an insurance company, they did their research and the data combined with their financial results speak for themselves.

In their initial pilot program, Aetna offered employees a choice of free yoga or mindfulness meditation training. They did a double blind study to test the effectiveness of the offers. The results were so positive that the program spread like wildfire.

*"We saw dramatic **drops in stress (-28%)** after the program was over, and we saw a **69-minute gain per week** in productivity of our employees. We had this groundswell inside the company of people wanting to take the classes,"* Bertolini said. *"It's been pretty magical."*

**The benefits went beyond just stress reduction and productivity gains.**

*"The other part that we couldn't measure that I think is far more important is **being present in the work environment, and by being present making better decisions** for the organization and those decisions depending on where you are in the company take a longer time to have an impact, and we'll see that over time"* he added.

The success of and belief in the program has generated much interest and Aetna has opened up its mindfulness programs to their insurance customers and their employees. **The program has also transformed their image from stodgy to one of the most progressive companies in North America!**