

Simply Being Present[®]

FAQ (frequently asked questions, answered by Simon Michaels)



What's the purpose of Simply Being Present?

To help busy people to cope with workplace stress, and to create a happier, more productive working environment.

What impact can we expect?

Outcomes are that trainees become:

- Calm and clear-headed
- More focused
- And more emotionally intelligent

At work, this means they can:

- Get more done, without getting stressed
- Be more creative and innovative
- And get on better with colleagues, clients and service users

What's different about Simply Being Present ?

Mindfulness is the core skillset. But I've adapted the standard training in four main ways:

1. It helps people deal with the main stress factors **at work**, such as workload pressure and difficulties with other people.
2. It's designed for **busy people**, and is based on doing quick exercises, often, which can be integrated in the middle of a busy day.
3. It's **bespoke**. We create a programmes that address your workplace's unique issues.
4. It **combines face-to-face with e-learning**. That makes it flexible and accessible.

Does it work – and how quickly will I get results?

It starts working on day 1, but it's not a quick fix. To get long-lasting effects one should do the exercises every day for 2 months.

In a survey of 60 clients in 2016 on a five-point scale of self-assessed impact, over 90% reported 'significant' or 'amazing' impacts on stress and happiness.

What's the challenge with standard mindfulness training?

Lots of people can't commit to the 45 minutes a day, or to being at every class, and there's quite a drop out rate - especially for busy people who are already overburdened; hence our 'short and often' approach to practice.

It can seem a bit 'new-age'; we make it simple and based on solid neuroscience.

Most courses are generic; we gear our training to workplace issues.

The standard course model was created in the 1970s for hospital outpatients, and it's hardly changed. So it's time to adapt it.

What makes Simon particularly qualified to do this?

It's my combination of business experience and real-world mindfulness practice.

For 25 years I've advised businesses, government and enterprise agencies, and I sit on the Board of 6 ethical companies.

I've also been a very committed meditator for 20 years, I've done mindfulness teacher training, and worked with over 60 clients.

For me, mindfulness has made a huge difference. I used to be a very stressed individual when I was a consultant, then I got made redundant and I really had to start making some changes, or I was going to get ill. It's not a quick fix, but it's totally changed my life, and my work improved, so I'm on a mission to help others get the benefit too.

What's the structure of the training?

We scope out your workplace's unique stress points. We take a holistic look at workplace culture, to identify where action is needed.

We agree how you or your staff can best access the course (getting the right mix of face-to-face and e-learning, at times that suit), we then:

- Show trainees how to do the exercises, and how to fit them into a busy day
- Communicate in ways that suit individual learning styles
- Keep everyone on track, every day, with texts or emails
- Enable interaction within the training cohort via webinars and a forum

All the trainees do is:

- To try to practice for 10 minutes every day, plus many moments, for one month, then we guide people in keeping it going for a further month
- Commit to make a change, for themselves and for the organisation as a whole.

Can you do it when you feel like it or have the time?

Yes. But the important thing with this is repeated practice, every day, whenever you get a moment. That's how you change your brain, creating new neural pathways that correspond to your habits of reaction, and that takes about 60 days.

Is this designed for anyone, or is it more geared to professionals?

Yes, it's more geared to professionals. Also, it's adapted it for the specific stress factors in different professions, and is bespoke for every organisation.

How does it actually work?

With even 8 weeks of mindfulness practice, brain scans show an increase in the grey matter of the insula, which controls the integration of thoughts and senses, and in the frontal cortex which controls working memory, selective attention and executive functioning (*Lazar 2017*).

People learn to be fully aware, present-focused, and more open-minded. They also learn to recognise old habit patterns of stress reaction, and start to change them. The brain actually develops new neural pathways and has been shown to physically change.

The brain changes, that sounds a bit scary?

We've all been changing our brain since we were born. We develop automatic reactions to all kinds of stress triggers, and that gets hard-wired in the neural pathways and memories in our brain.

The trouble is that we may have learned some reactions long ago that are no longer useful. Or we may carry around with us baggage from our parents, authority figures or heroes.

We all build up our behavioural patterns – so some of us automatically get angry or intolerant, whereas others will retreat and hide, in the face of exactly the same stimuli. So it's all about learned patterns, which can burst out before our thinking brain deploys.

My mind is just too busy

Yes, most of us have a busy mind. If I ask you to sit quietly with a clear mind for 45 minutes, you're probably going to be thinking about all kinds of things. Our little-and-often approach gets around that.

Try this: right now, bring all your attention to the physical sensations of just one cycle of the breath – the in-breath, the out-breath, and the feeling you have at the end.

So there you are, you just practiced Simply Being Present. You can do it.

What's the 'Simply' bit about?

It's simple because:

- The exercises are quick to learn and easy to do
- We all have a clear mind, beneath all the mental clutter!
- We can learn to tune-in, almost instantly

What's the 'Being' bit about?

Being is a skill to learn, because:

- Most of us are relentlessly Doing, 24/7 - we rarely pause to just 'be'
- Yet when we stop, with awareness, we can refresh and get perspective
- With training, we'll become familiar with the open, clear mind, and gain the confidence to know that it's our baseline state

What's the 'Present' bit about?

Being present, now is:

- When life happens - rather than worrying about the past or the future
- When we'll spot opportunities, and innovate
- Being in the flow, where time seems to expand

Is it all about staying calm under pressure?

Yes it will create more calm. But it's more about creating **a moment of insight** before the unhelpful or unhealthy patterns get a chance to burst out. In that moment, we can mentally step back to tune-in with our 'better' self. It makes all the difference.

That's why we focus on these short practices. As one gets more used to Simply Being Present, one can tune-in almost instantly – right when the stress triggers occur.

Why do this programme?

Because it's effective, especially for busy professionals who may not be able to complete a standard mindfulness course.

It's workplace-focused, simple and practical, and based on short practices repeated often.

It's bespoke to each organisation in content and delivery.

This training is the unique culmination of 25 years experience in business and mindfulness.