

HEALTH CARE

a 2,500 year old Buddhist discipline. The ancient Eastern practice of mindfulness has moved from meditation retreats to the workplace.

“Mindfulness training is all over corporate America,” says Michelle Duffy, professor at the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota. She’s researched the role of mindfulness in business.

“The research is pretty compelling. With very little training, you can get strong outcomes for people. You see productivity increasing, burn-out decreasing, relationships improving.”

General Mills, United Health Group and Target are among the Minnesota companies that have embraced mindfulness training.

Duffy believes the practice, which focuses on breathing and centering, can counteract some of the harsher elements embedded in the DNA of a fast-paced, high tech workplace.

“We think we can manage being overloaded and doing multiple tasks but research says it’s unhealthy,” Duffy says. “Every time you ping into email, or read a text, you get a blast of dopamine, which makes you feel good. But you also get a pop

of cortisol, the stress hormone, and that makes you irritable. Mindfulness can help balance body and mind and promotes thinking more calmly. It’s a powerful intervention, and a cheap one.”

Even after Ken Barlow began treatment for his bipolar disorder, he kept his secret, including when he was hired by KSTP four years ago.

“I spent so much energy covering it up. Mental illness was a dirty word. I sent my wife to pick up my prescriptions because I was so ashamed someone would see me,” he says.

After he was diagnosed, Barlow learned his father began treatment for bipolar disorder at age 60. Barlow’s father never acknowledged his illness to his five sons, who learned of his condition only after his death at 68.

In his father’s memory, Barlow agreed to emcee a 2012 fundraising walk sponsored by NAMI.

“I was going to talk about my dad, but then I looked out at 4,000 people holding ‘Stop the Stigma’ signs and I saw I was promoting the chain of shame. I thought, I have to break it. That’s when I blurted it out.”

With the truth released, Barlow has be-

BIZ BRIEFING
RED WING SHOE COMPANY

HEADQUARTERS: Red Wing

INCEPTION: 1905

LEADERSHIP: Dave Murphy, CEO & president; Bill Sweasy, chairman of the board

EMPLOYEES: 2,300

REVENUE: Not disclosed

DESCRIPTION: Red Wing Shoe Company is a world leader in the design, production and marketing of work safety footwear and personal protective equipment (PPE).

WEB: redwingshoes.com

come the public face of bipolar disorder and a vocal advocate for living authentically with mental illness.

“The hardest thing I hear from people who have something like I do is they’re afraid to say anything. Their bosses might not be as understanding as mine are; they’ve supported me all the way and even encourage me to do speaking. From what I’m hearing, I think that’s rare.”

NAMI’s Sue Abderholden confirmed that not every employee who declares their mental illness would get the kind of consideration that Barlow has received.

“The stigma has lessened only slightly,” she says. “I hear from people who suspect they didn’t get a promotion after they disclosed, or fear they will lose their job if it’s discovered. It’s sad, because that keeps people from accessing treatment that could help them.”

DIVING INTO DRIVE: FINDING THE FIT TO ENHANCE PRODUCTIVITY

Nothing can bring on job angst more than feeling like a square peg in a round hole — or being on a team with a co-worker who meets that description.

Managers often use tests, tools, assessments and workplace measurements to help them put the right people in key positions.

Developed 30 years ago, the Kolbe Index is one tool that’s gained ground among employers seeking to enhance worker performance and morale.

“Employers want to set people up to be their most productive. They want to maximize talent; it’s energizing for a team when employees are in positions that align with their instinctive drive,” says Erin Werde, a certified Kolbe consultant and president of Affiance Coaching (affiancecoaching.com).

The Kolbe Index is a series of multiple choice questions that guide the test taker to reveal their instinctive patterns of behavior. Results measure the test-taker’s so-called ‘conative drive,’ identifying their natural way of taking action.

“People can certainly do jobs that go against their instincts. But if you’re in a position that leaves you stressed and frustrated, you won’t be your most productive,” Werde says.

Werde, 31, has administered the Kolbe Index to employees at businesses of all sizes, including in the construction, finance and medical device sectors. The assessments often begin with the leadership team. With dual master’s degrees in social work and public policy and a background in financial services, Werde is trained to interpret results to help pinpoint strengths in individuals and assist teams in ways to problem solve more effectively.

“People come to me when they say their team isn’t firing on all cylinders, or when they keep hiring the wrong person,” she says. “You need the improvisers and innovators to start a project, but you have to balance that with concrete skills to build on the ideas.”

Werde insists that businesses that make the effort to understand and utilize the unique talents of its workforce will be more likely to keep its stars on the rise.

“Job satisfaction is more important for this generation, and that’s being defined beyond economic factors. The landscape is really changing,” says Werde. “There are so many jobs on the market now; if workers don’t feel connected, they will move on.”



Erin Werde

BIZ BRIEFING
HEALTHPARTNERS

HEADQUARTERS: Bloomington

INCEPTION: 1957

LEADERSHIP: Mary Brainerd, president and CEO

EMPLOYEES: 22,500

REVENUE: \$5.5 billion

DESCRIPTION: HealthPartners is the largest consumer-governed, non-profit health care organization in the nation.

WEB: healthpartners.com