

Google's Jolly Good Fellow

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ABSTRACT

In an interview, Chade-Meng Tan, Google Fellow, talked about emotional intelligence. Tan said the goal of the Search Inside Yourself program is to create the conditions for world peace in his lifetime. He figures that if they have inner peace, inner joy and compassion on a global scale, it will create the conditions that lead to world peace. The three main steps are: 1. attention training, 2. self-knowledge and self-mastery, and 3. pro-social mental habits. Once attention is trained, you will concentrate better. You develop the ability to calm the mind on command. In a crisis situation where everyone else is panicking and you alone can calm down enough to think, you will be perceived as a leader. HR professionals can teach mindfulness to employees first and foremost, by example. If you don't set that example, no matter what you teach them, it won't stick.

FULL TEXT

Headnote

Calm your mind for more-effective relationships and better leadership.

As one of the first engineers at Google, Chade-Meng Tan, like other engineers, had the generic job title of "software engineer." Then, as the company grew, the job title for the highest-ranking engineers became "Google Fellow."

Tan made a joke of it: "Why be a Google Fellow when you can be a Jolly Good Fellow?" The joke stuck, and his business cards now reflect his quirky title. It is befitting of a man whose current job description at Google is to help others learn about emotional intelligence or, as Tan puts it, "to enlighten minds, open hearts and create world peace."

Tan, author of the book *Search Inside Yourself* (HarperOne, 2012) and founder of the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute, teaches individuals how calming the mind can lead to more-effective relationships and better leadership.

What is the goal of the Search Inside Yourself program?

To create the conditions for world peace in my lifetime. I figure that if we have inner peace, inner joy and compassion on a global scale, it will create the conditions that lead to world peace. To do that, we need to align those qualities with the success of individuals and companies. If you teach people to be successful and profitable, inner peace, inner joy and compassion are the necessary and unavoidable side effects, and those three qualities will spread. The way to achieve that is emotional intelligence.

What are the main components of the program?

The three main steps are:

* Attention training. Attention training is the basis of all higher cognitive and emotional abilities. Specifically, the idea is to train attention to create a quality of mind that is calm and clear. That forms the foundation for emotional intelligence.

* Self-knowledge and self-mastery. Sharpened attention results in an ability to observe one's thoughts and emotions clearly and objectively from a thirdperson perspective. That creates a deep self-knowledge that eventually enables self-mastery.

* Pro-social mental habits. Qualities such as kindness and compassion can be created as mental habits. For instance, imagine whenever you meet anybody, your habitual, instinctive first thought is, "I wish for this person to be happy."

How can an individual become more mindful?

Practice mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness requires training. It's like doing a bicep curl; with meditation, you're strengthening muscles to increase the quality of attention. Try sitting with no agenda for one to two minutes. Once you are able to attend to the present moment, you can bring that state of alert relaxation to any situation.

In a society where cellphones and computers constantly vie for our attention, this sounds difficult. How does mindfulness fit in?

You're right. We have continuous partial attention. Attention training is the antidote to that problem. Once attention is trained, you will concentrate better. You develop the ability to calm the mind on command. In a crisis situation where everyone else is panicking and you alone can calm down enough to think, you will be perceived as a leader. It's a useful skill. When your attention no longer wanders so much, you find clarity. Emotional intelligence is highly trainable for almost everybody within seven weeks to a degree that is life-changing, if you practice daily.

How can mindfulness improve an employee's effectiveness?

One aspect is the ability to think clearly. That alone is extremely valuable.

Creativity is another aspect. If you are able to calm your mind, that helps in creative problem-solving.

The third is empathy. If you are more empathetic to a coworker, you are a better team player. And if you are able to understand and empathize with your boss-"What is my boss's priority?"-you are able to better serve your boss. Calming the mind makes a difference in a career.

How does mindfulness and self-knowledge improve leadership?

You become reliable. You become a center of stability for the team. There's nothing anyone can say to you that will trigger you. They trust you to listen and not blow up. They trust you not to make bad decisions because you can stay calm.

More important, you can become the type of leader who turns good organizations into great ones. Jim Collins, author of Good to Great [Harper Business, 2001], calls them "Level 5 Leaders." These leaders have two important qualities: humility and ambition. But the ambition is toward creating greater good, not toward inflating their own

egos.

There are meditative practices that can be used as part of the training for Level 5 Leaders that trains all three dimensions of compassion: the affective dimension ("I feel for you"), the cognitive dimension ("I understand you") and the motivational dimension ("I want to help you.")

The first two dimensions create the conditions for humility, and the last creates ambition for greater good in the world.

How can HR professionals teach mindfulness to employees?

First and foremost, by example. People don't remember what you tell them. They remember how you make them feel and your character. If you go to Search Inside Yourself training and you are calm and nice, people notice. Why does she radiate so much goodness? They want to know. If you don't set that example, no matter what you teach them, it won't stick.

Sidebar

ONLINE RESOURCES

For more information on Tan's work, including a link to his TED Talk, see the online version of this article at www.shrm.org/1113-Tan-mindfulness.

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