

# **Resources for Building Resilience**

Articles to help you find your balance  
and stay steady and calm

# Welcome

We are delighted to share with you some inspiration to build the resilience needed in the face of change and uncertainty. The following articles have been previously published in Harvard Business Review.

## ***1. Building your Resilience in the Face of a Crisis***

Our emotional and psychological response to crises are natural and very human. But the truth is they often bring us more suffering by narrowing and cluttering our mind and keeping us from seeing clearly the best course of action. The way to overcome this natural tendency is to build our mental resilience through mindfulness.

## ***2. Senior Executives Get More Sleep Than Everyone Else***

Getting a good night's sleep is one of the most effective ways to boost your performance. We share five proven ways to improve the quality of your sleep.

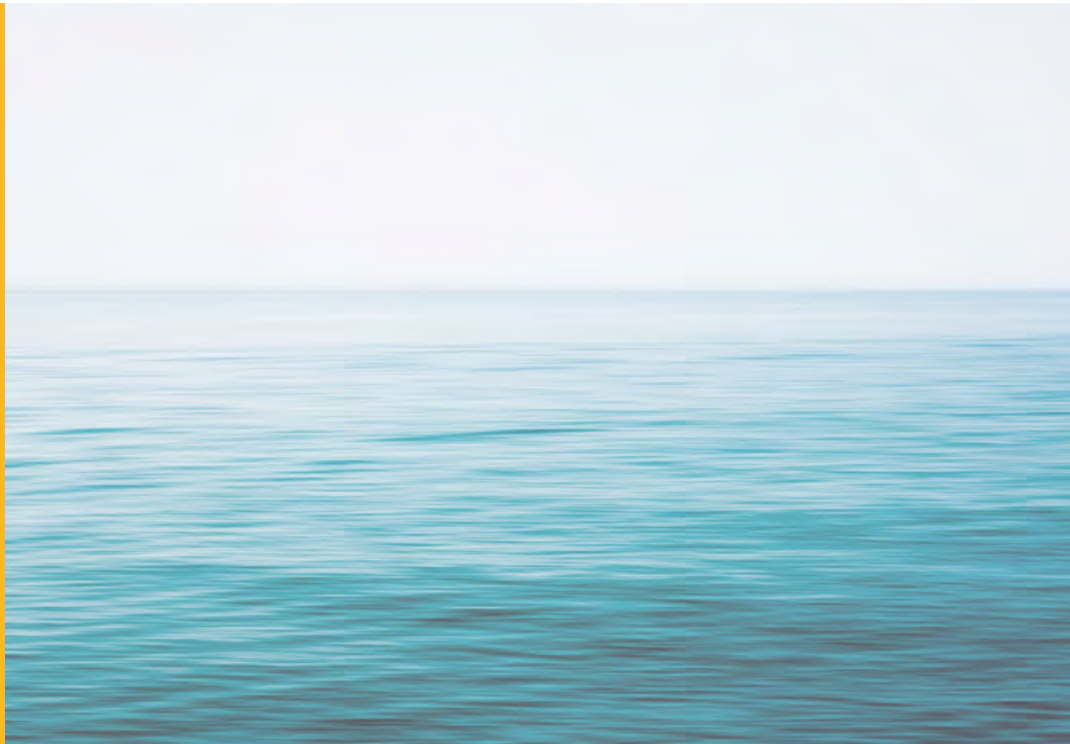
## ***3. Spending 10 Minutes a Day on Mindfulness Subtly Changes the Way You React to Everything***

Mindfulness has a positive impact on our physiology, psychology, and work performance. People who practice mindfulness report an increased quality of life.

# Build Your Resilience in the Face of a Crisis

Rasmus Hougaard, Jacqueline Carter and Moses Mohan

Originally published in **Harvard  
Business  
Review**



As the spread and far-reaching impacts of Covid-19 dominate the world news, we have all been witnessing and experiencing the parallel spread of worry, anxiety, and instability. Indeed, in a crisis, our mental state often seems only to exacerbate an already extremely challenging situation, becoming a major obstacle in itself. Why is this and how can we change it? As the CEO of a firm that brings mindfulness to companies to unlock new ways of thinking and working, let me share a bit about how the mind responds to crises, like the threat of a pandemic.

Even without a constant barrage of bad or worrisome news, your mind's natural tendency is to get distracted. Our most recent study found that 58% of employees reported an inability to regulate their attention at work. As the mind wanders, research has shown that it easily gets trapped into patterns and [negative thinking](#). During times of crisis — such as those we are living through now — this tendency is exacerbated, and the mind can become even more hooked by obsessive thinking, as well as feelings of fear and helplessness. It's why we find ourselves reading story after horrible story of quarantined passengers on a cruise ship, even though we've never stepped foot on a cruise ship, nor do we plan to.

When your mind gets stuck in this state, a chain reaction begins. Fear begins to narrow your field of vision, and it becomes harder to see the bigger picture and the positive, creative possibilities in front of you. As perspective shrinks, so too does our tendency to connect with others. Right now, the realities of how the coronavirus spreads can play into our worst fears about others and increase our feelings of isolation, which only adds fuel to our worries.

Watching the past month's turmoil unfold, I have been reminded of the old Buddhist parable of the second arrow. The Buddha once asked a student: "If a person is struck by an arrow, is it painful? If the person is struck by a second arrow, is it even more painful?" He then went on to explain, "In life, we cannot always control the first arrow. However, the second arrow is our reaction to the first. And with this second arrow comes the possibility of choice."

We are all experiencing the first arrow of the coronavirus these days. We are impacted by travel restrictions, plummeting stock prices, supply shortages etc. But the second arrow — anxiety about getting the virus ourselves, worry that our loved ones will get it, worries about financial implications and all the other dark scenarios flooding the news and social media — is to a large extent of our own making. In short, the first arrow causes unavoidable pain, and our resistance to it creates fertile ground for all the second arrows.

It's important to remember that these second arrows — our emotional and psychological response to crises — are natural and very human. But the truth is they often bring us more suffering by narrowing and cluttering our mind and keeping us from seeing clearly the best course of action.

The way to overcome this natural tendency is to build our mental resilience through mindfulness. Mental resilience, especially in challenging times like the present, means managing our minds in a way that increases our ability to face the first arrow and to break the second before it strikes us. Resilience is the skill of noticing our own thoughts, unhooking from the non-constructive ones, and rebalancing quickly. This skill can be nurtured and trained. Here are three effective strategies:

### **First, calm the mind.**

When you focus on calming and clearing your mind, you can pay attention to what is really going on around you and what is coming up within you. You can observe and manage your thoughts and catch them when they start to run away towards doomsday scenarios. You can hold your focus on what you choose (e.g. "Isn't it a gift to be able to work from home!") versus what pulls at you with each ping of a breaking news notification (e.g. "Oh no... the stock market has dropped again.").

This calm and present state is crucial. Right away, it helps keep the mind from wandering and getting hooked, and it reduces the pits of stress and worry that we can easily get stuck in. Even more importantly, the continued practice of unhooking and focusing our minds builds a muscle of resilience that will serve us time and time again. When we practice bringing ourselves back to the present moment, we deepen our capacity to cope and weather all sorts of crises, whether global or personal. [Fortunately, there are a number of free apps available to help calm your mind and increase your own mindfulness.]

### **Look out the window.**

Despair and fear can lead to overreactions. Often, it feels better to be doing something ... anything ... rather than sitting with uncomfortable emotions. In the past few weeks, I have felt disappointment and frustration with important business initiatives that have been adversely impacted by Covid-19. But I have been trying to meet this frustration with reflection versus immediate reaction. I know my mind has needed space to unhook from the swirl of bad news and to settle into a more stable position from which good planning and leadership can emerge. So, I have been trying to work less and to spend more time looking out my window and reflecting. In doing so, I have been able to find clearer answers about how best to move forward, both personally and as a leader.

## **Connect with others through compassion.**

Unfortunately, many of the circles of community that provide support in times of stress are now closed off to us as cities and governments work to contain the spread of the virus. Schools are shut down, events are cancelled, and businesses have enacted work-from-home policies and travel bans. The natural byproduct of this is a growing sense of isolation and separation from the people and groups who can best quell our fears and anxieties.

The present climate of fear can also create stigmas and judgments about who is to blame and who is to be avoided, along with a dark, survivalist “every person for him/herself” mindset and behaviors. We can easily forget our shared vulnerability and interdependence.

But meaningful connection can occur even from the recommended six feet of social distance between you and your neighbor — and it begins with compassion. Compassion is the intention to be of benefit to others and it starts in the mind. Practically speaking, compassion starts by asking yourself one question as you go about your day and connect — virtually and in person — with others: How can I help this person to have a better day?

With that simple question, amazing things begin to happen. The mind expands, the eyes open to who and what is really in front of us, and we see possibilities for ourselves and others that are rich with hope and ripe with opportunity.

This article was originally published in [Harvard Business Review](#).

# Senior Executives Get More Sleep Than Everyone Else

Rasmus Hougaard and Jacqueline Carter

Originally published in **Harvard Business Review**



It's no secret that most of us don't get enough sleep and suffer for it. If you're between the ages of 16 and 64, and don't get [seven to nine hours](#) of sleep per night, your logical reasoning, executive function, attention, and mood can be impaired. Worse, severe sleep deprivation can lead to depression, anxiety, and symptoms of paranoia. In the long run, sleep deprivation is a main contributor to the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Surprisingly, one group that doesn't need to heed these warnings is executives. [In our assessment](#) of 35,000 leaders and interviews with 250 more, we found that the more senior a person's role is, the more sleep they get.

There are two possible explanations for this. Either senior executives, with the help of assistants and hard-working middle managers, do less and take more time for sleep. Or senior executives have had the wisdom and discipline throughout their career to get enough sleep and thereby maintain a high performance level without burning out.

Our conclusion is that the latter is the case. "Sleep has always been foundational for my performance," Cees 't Hart, president and CEO of Carlsberg Group, shared with us. "And especially to perform in a way that is required by my current job, I need seven hours of sleep, every night. Of course, with intense travel and work

commitments, sometimes this is compromised, and when that happens, it comes with a cost. When I sleep less, I perform less.”

In contrast, our data found that 68% of nonexecutive leaders get five to seven hours of sleep per night. When there are not enough hours in the day, they steal some from the night. Many leaders stay up late to catch up on email or other tasks. According to our research, this tendency is widespread, regardless of gender.

This is a problem. For leaders, sleep is not a luxury. Research has found that there is a direct link between getting enough sleep and [leading effectively](#) and that sleep-deprived leaders are less [inspiring](#).

It used to be a badge of honor to brag about sleeping few hours, but our research should serve as inspiration for aspiring leaders to make sleep sacrosanct. The key message: If you want to be an effective leader, and rise in the ranks, get enough sleep.

Of course, it's one thing to make a commitment to go to bed early, and another to actually get seven or more hours of quality sleep. For many leaders, going to bed is only part of the problem. The other part is getting high-quality, restorative sleep.

Fortunately, a good night's sleep is not a random event; it's a trainable skill. Here are a few guidelines that will help you.

- **Catch the melatonin wave.** Go to bed when you're just starting to feel drowsy (usually between 10 PM and 11 PM). Melatonin, a natural hormone released from the pineal gland, deep inside your brain, makes you relax, feel drowsy, and ultimately fall asleep. If you learn to notice it and go with its flow, you'll enjoy falling asleep and have better-quality sleep during the night.

- **Avoid screens.** Turn off TVs, smartphones, and laptops at least 60 minutes before bed. Why? Each of those screens emits high levels of blue light rays. That blue light suppresses your pineal gland, and in turn, the production of melatonin. It's almost like your brain reads the blue light as if the sun is still up, when in reality the sun has probably been down for hours and you should be sleeping.

- **Enjoy only perceptual activities 60 minutes before bed.** Too much thinking is another enemy of late-evening drowsiness. Conceptual activities like intense conversations, replying to emails, working, or reading can arouse your attention and suppress your natural sleepiness. In contrast, perceptual activities like doing the dishes, going for a walk, or listening to music can help you better catch the wave of melatonin as it rises.

- **Avoid eating two hours before bed.** Most people know to avoid caffeine in the hours before going to bed, but in fact, eating anything can negatively impact your ability to get good sleep. Eating activates the flow of blood and sugar in the body, keeping your body and mind alert and awake. Not the ideal state for a good night's rest.

- **Practice five minutes of mindfulness when you go to bed.** Practicing mindfulness has proven to enhance [sleep quality](#). Do five minutes of it sitting on your bed before you go to sleep, as the last thing of the day. You can find simple instructions [here](#).

This article was originally published in [Harvard Business Review](#).

# Spending 10 Minutes a Day on Mindfulness Subtly Changes the Way You React to Everything

Rasmus Hougaard, Jacqueline Carter and Gitte Dybkjaer

Originally published in **Harvard Business Review**



Having trained thousands of leaders in the techniques of this ancient practice, we've seen over and over again that a diligent approach to mindfulness can help people create a one-second mental space between an event or stimulus and their response to it. One second may not sound like a lot, but it can be the difference between making a rushed decision that leads to failure and reaching a thoughtful conclusion that leads to increased performance. It's the difference between acting out of anger and applying due patience. It's a one-second lead over your mind, your emotions, your world.

Research has found that mindfulness training alters our brains and how we engage with ourselves, others, and our work. When practiced and applied, mindfulness fundamentally alters the operating system of the mind. Through repeated mindfulness practice, brain activity is redirected from ancient, reactionary parts of the brain, including the limbic system, to the newest, rational part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex.

In this way mindfulness practice decreases activity in the parts of the brain responsible for fight-or-flight and knee-jerk reactions while increasing activity in the part of the brain responsible for what's termed our *executive functioning*. This part of the brain, and the executive functioning skills it supports, is the control center for our thoughts, words, and actions. It's the center of logical thought and impulse control. Simply put, relying more on our executive functioning puts us firmly in the driver's seat of our minds, and by extension our lives.



One second can be the difference between achieving desired results or not. One second is all it takes to become less reactive and more in tune with the moment. In that one second lies the opportunity to improve the way you decide and direct, the way you engage and lead. That's an enormous advantage for leaders in fast-paced, high-pressure jobs.

Here are five easily implemented tips to help you become more mindful:

- **Practice 10 minutes of mindfulness training each day.** Most people find mornings the best time to practice mindfulness, but you can do it any time of day. You can find a 10-minute guided mindfulness training program, a short mindfulness training manual, and a link to a free downloadable mindfulness app [here](#). Try it for 4 weeks.
- **Avoid reading email first thing in the morning.** Our minds are generally most focused, creative, and expansive in the morning. This is the time to do focused, strategic work and have important conversations. If you read your email as you get up, your mind will get sidetracked and you'll begin the slide toward reactive leadership. Making email your first task of the day wastes the opportunity to use your mind at its highest potential. Try waiting at least 30 minutes, or even an hour, after you get to work before checking your inbox.
- **Turn off all notifications.** The notification alarms on your phone, tablet, and laptop are significant contributors to reactive leadership. They keep you mentally busy and put you under pressure, thereby triggering reactionary responses. They cause damage far more than they add value. Try this: For one week turn off all email notifications on all devices. Only check your email once every hour (or as often as responsibly needed for your job), but don't compulsively check messages as they roll into your inbox.
- **Stop multitasking.** It keeps your mind full, busy, and under pressure. It makes you reactive. Try to maintain focus on a single task, and then notice when you find your mind drifting off to another task — a sign that your brain wishes to multitask. When this happens, mentally shut down all the superfluous tasks entering your thoughts while maintaining focus on the task at hand.
- **Put it on your calendar.** Schedule a check-in with yourself every two weeks to assess how well you're doing with the previous four tips, or as a reminder to revisit this article to refresh your memory. Consider engaging one of your peers to do the same thing. This gives you a chance to assess each other, which can be both helpful and motivating.

We encourage you to give these tips a try. Although mindfulness isn't a magic pill, it will help you more actively select your responses and make calculated choices instead of succumbing to reactionary decisions.

This article was originally published in [Harvard Business Review](#).