

Meditation: here's why you should consider this

Meditation can help our brains and our bodies in ways that empower us to make better decisions and tap into our creativity. No wonder it's so popular among the affluent! Here's how to make meditation work for you.



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Key takeaways

- Meditation can improve mental clarity — helping you make better decisions that can boost your health and your wealth.
- Start slow — just five minutes a day can have a positive cumulative effect over time.
- Listening to music with one beat per second and a ringing bell every four seconds can deepen the experience.

One of the most interesting things discovered about successful people is that they tend to meditate regularly. More important, they credit meditation as a driver of their incredible success!

That may come as a big surprise to those of us who are “left brain” folks who prefer logic, data and hard numbers. But it's become very clear that meditation isn't some “soft” activity that offers little in the way of practical benefits. To the contrary, meditation can help driven professionals and busy families achieve better overall results.

To learn how you can bring meditation into your own life and get real, tangible benefits from it, we reached out to a meditation master — Jason Campbell, co-founder of Zen Wellness. Campbell has more than 20 years' experience teaching meditation, tai chi, yoga and martial arts. He also teaches entrepreneurs through his Zen Business Bootcamps and composes music for meditation.

Here's some of Campbell's best advice.

Why meditate?

Before you can commit to meditate, it's helpful to know “what's in it” for you. For starters, says Campbell, how about lower blood pressure, increased feelings of calmness, increased levels of the brain's feel-good chemicals dopamine and serotonin, lower levels of cortisol (the stress hormone), a slowing of the brain's aging process, better sleep, and greater creativity?

Campbell boils meditation down to what he calls the snow globe analogy. When you shake up a snow globe, the snow flies everywhere — there's no clarity, only a swirling mass of stuff. But once the turbidity settles, clarity re-emerges. Our brains work in much the same way — especially if you're intelligent and successful and have a lot of mental “balls in the air.” Says Campbell: “If you can get into the habit of making your body still and connecting with your breath, you strengthen the nervous system and better regulate your emotions. This reduces mental turbidity, giving you greater mental clarity.”

If you think you don't need more mental clarity, you might want to think again. A famous study done by Microsoft a few years ago found that an average person's attention span has dropped from 12 seconds to eight seconds — less than the attention span of the typical goldfish!

Important: Greater mental clarity is more than a nice bonus in life. You can gain tremendous benefits from additional mental clarity, especially if you're a driven entrepreneur or a key decision-maker at your firm (or you want to become one!). Those benefits include the following.

- A longer attention span
- Calmer and more productive interactions with partners, team members, employers and others
- Increased happiness and productivity
- Greater creativity — empowering you to find better solutions to issues and challenges you face at work and in life

One of the benefits we like most as entrepreneurs is the ability to break out of repetitive thought loops. Campbell explains: “Most of our thoughts during a given day are the same thoughts we had the day before. Our brains get in a repetitive loop of thoughts and inner commentaries to ourselves. Meditation helps you break out of that loop, so you end up having to deal with fewer thoughts throughout your day and allowing new ideas to get through. So I’m not surprised to learn that the affluent tend to meditate — they especially can’t afford to get stuck in a loop, given all the things they have to deal with.”

Getting started — and sticking with it

Meditation isn’t exactly under the radar anymore or seen as a “crunchy hippie” pursuit. The bookshelves are full of meditation guides, and plenty of people have given meditation a shot. That said, most people don’t stick with it long enough to enjoy the benefits it offers.

Campbell has advice to get started on the right foot: go slow — just five minutes per day at the beginning. His reasoning is simple: “most everybody can invest five minutes a day in themselves. And over time, there’s a cumulative effect. The first week of daily five-minute meditations, you may not feel anything. But once you get to day seven or eight, and you get some momentum and rhythm going, you start to feel what I call the space between action and reaction.”

It’s that little space or gap that starts helping the brain be more focused, calmer, more creative and less knee-jerk reactive. “Meditation can give you a small break from the incessant stream of thoughts running through your head all day long. That space opens up your mind to new possibilities that can’t get through when there’s too much clutter,” he says.

Think about it like this: have you ever been obsessing over a problem that you just can’t solve, and the answer comes to you when you’re no longer actively thinking about the problem? You may be in the shower or mowing the lawn when — bam! — the solution pops into your mind. Meditation helps the brain do that more consistently and “on purpose” rather than by happenstance.

Pro tip. To help you get started, don’t think of meditation as something done by monks sitting alone in mountain retreats tucked away from the world. Instead, realize that meditation can be, and is, done by busy people who are engaged in important activities and who want to boost their clarity and alertness.

Over time, you might start boosting your meditation time from five minutes per session to ten minutes. Alternatively, you can do five minutes in the morning, five minutes after lunch and five minutes before bedtime.



Music matters

You can also incorporate music into your meditation. The ideal music contains one beat per second, which can regulate and slow the heart, thereby improving conditions for successful meditation. Campbell composes music with a bell ringing every four seconds — which signals when to inhale and exhale. “Sit still for one song (five minutes) and breathe with the bell,” he says.

(But before you think this is a sales pitch, be aware that he gives away much of that music for free on sites like Amazon and SoundCloud. It's also available via iTunes, YouTube and most streaming platforms, or you can go to www.zenwellness.com/music for free downloads.)

Avoiding pitfalls

As with a diet or a workout routine, meditation can quickly get jettisoned when we feel busier than usual or under stress from deadlines and life in general. To maintain a disciplined approach to meditation, take note of the following.

- **Don't worry if you miss a day or two.** Five minutes each day is a great goal to start with. But let's face it: you're going to miss a day or two, especially at the beginning when you're just getting going. Don't beat yourself up about it. Tell yourself going in that you will get distracted sometimes. “The important part isn't that you skip a day — it's how fast you get back into the habit of meditating,” says Campbell.
- **Don't stop just because you have a “bad” meditation session.** Sometimes, says Campbell, your meditation efforts won't give you clarity — the mental turbidity will remain. Don't get discouraged. Understand going into meditation that it doesn't work every single time. “That's important if you're a driven businessperson, especially, because you tend to be so focused on results and ROI,” he notes. “If you give up because the results aren't there every time, that turbidity just gets more set in.”

Next steps

Clearly you don't need to be in an idyllic setting and in just the right pose to start down the meditation path. Pledge to spend five minutes today sitting quietly and breathing in and out every four seconds. There's a famous Chinese proverb that says, “The journey of 1,000 miles begins with one step.” Take that first step today — and you could find yourself on a journey that leads to better wealth, better health and your best life.

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Falkenberg-Poetz & Pidhirniak Wealth

Eric Falkenberg-Poetz B.Comm, CIM®, FCSI®

Wealth Advisor, Investment Advisor

Eric.Falkenberg-Poetz@RichardsonWealth.com

Michael Pidhirniak CFP®, CIM®

Wealth Advisor, Investment Advisor

Michael.Pidhirniak@RichardsonWealth.com

Anne Marie Jess BA (Hons), CIM®

Associate Investment Advisor

Anne-Marie.Jess@RichardsonWealth.com

Mikayla Penner BBA

Associate

Mikayla.Penner@RichardsonWealth.com

Carly Kalynchuk B.Comm

Assistant

Carly.Kalynchuk@RichardsonWealth.com

www.FPPW.ca

To setup an appointment, please contact Carly Kalynchuk at Carly.Kalynchuk@RichardsonWealth.com or toll-free at 1.866.205.3550 or locally at 780.409.7764.



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