



Inner Peace: The Key to Being More Productive at Work

By Ed Merck

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Throughout my middle years, I was a typical college chief financial officer. *Frame, direct, control* was my mantra. And while reasonably successful, I knew there just had to be more in the way of both self-satisfaction and job performance.

Then, at 46, along came my midlife crisis, which threw me into a full-scale search for inner peace. Once I found it, my happiness increased and, surprisingly, so did my productivity at work.

Early on in my quest, I realized that the common characterization of increased productivity — something like producing more widgets in less time — was too narrow. Instead, my working definition became: discover innovative solutions to difficult problems, especially those containing competing points of view. Or, my shorthand version: *stay open, be creative*.

Meanwhile, the standard definition for inner peace did work for me — finding serenity and calmness within, while maintaining it outwardly under stressful conditions. Here's how and, more importantly, how it can work for you:

Meditation to Nurture Inner Peace

For starters, I began a serious meditation practice as a way of nurturing the two primary capacities of inner peace: *acceptance of what is* and *letting go of rigid outcomes*.

Almost immediately, I found that getting better at accepting and letting go strengthened my capacity to stay open and be creative at work — yes, my definition of becoming more productive at work.

The two, for me, were ultimately inseparable. So, I willingly traded in my old mantra (*frame, direct, control*) for my new one (*pause, accept, let go*).

Then came the test. Our college president retired, leaving behind years of discontent by my colleagues over depressed faculty salaries. Things got contentious quickly with all sides — faculty, trustees and staff — digging into their positions.



At one point, the campus nearly shut down with faculty distracted from their core teaching responsibilities in order to picket trustee meetings. I sided with the trustees, which made my campus life personally intolerable. Even the dining room at lunch hour felt like a war zone. I've never experienced such an unproductive work environment.

The Question He Asked Himself

Then, while working late in my office one night, I sat back in utter frustration and asked myself: "So, what if you embraced the very practice you are promoting? What if you let go of your entrenched point of view while bringing greater acceptance to the faculty's perspective? Why not try to pause, accept, let go?"

Flash.

In a moment of inspiration, my now more inclusive outlook — a direct result of gains in inner peace — revealed how to reconcile warring positions through a series of mutually reinforcing incentives. Under my guidance, all stakeholders came together to create a plan that turned out to be wildly successful, and is still mostly in place 25 years later. It has even been adopted by several other colleges and universities nationwide.

We all went back to work, student learning resumed uninterrupted and the campus as a whole returned to being productive.

My lesson? The creative solution to workplace productivity had been there all along. I just needed to drop more deeply into a place of inner peace before I could *see* it.

6 Tips to Enhance Your Practice of Inner Peace

Here are six tips for enhancing your practice of inner peace:

Meditate It's the most efficient and effective tool for developing inner peace. Mindfulness meditation is particularly useful, since it is the art of awakening to what is. Over time, there emerges a heightened sense of alertness without reactivity, better clarity and focus and improved communications — all essential capacities in promoting workplace productivity.

Once an emerging fad, meditation has become mainstream at companies like Google, Apple, Nike, AOL and Yahoo and many others that incorporate its training and daily practice into their employee development strategy.



Embrace “Dialogue” By that, I don’t mean “small d” dialogue, as in conversation. Rather, Dialogue is a team-learning tool championed by the quantum physicist David Bohm to expand “shared meaning” (a synonym for group inner peace). It has been used extensively to develop

deep trust among team members and a richer understanding of the uniqueness and importance of each member’s point of view.

I relied heavily on Dialogue to extend my own personal advances in inner peace to my management team. For more about Dialogue, read David Bohm’s *On Dialogue*.

Accept what is The only choice we really have is to either enjoy the serenity that comes from accepting what is or suffer the agony of being in an ongoing argument with life. The issue, of course, is that this is not as easy as it sounds, especially in a culture that teaches belief in control. But it sure is worth the effort.

Practice equanimity It’s that blissful place of being engaged without reactivity. Muting our temptation to be judgmental is key. You want to try to keep yourself from saying: “I am right, she is wrong.”

Indifference doesn’t work, since it disconnects us from ourselves and thus from the experience. My suggestion is to get in habit of saying to yourself: any point of view is too small for the whole truth — including mine.

Cultivate “Don’t Know Mind” This is also known as “Beginner’s Mind.” A mental state at the core of Zen Buddhism, Don’t Know Mind encourages openness and curiosity to whatever is before us. Inner peace comes partly from a sense of freedom — freedom from the constraints of having to be right, of needing to have control of thinking we “know.”

It’s back to letting go, and this time I’m talking about letting go of the big one: an overly rigid sense of self. For more on Don’t Know Mind, read this *Not Knowing* article by Gil Fronsdal, a co-teacher for the Insight Meditation Center in Redwood City, Calif.

Practice concentration It promotes improved focus and a sense of calm. Think of this as attentiveness training that unifies the mind and helps facilitate higher levels of consciousness. It is the gateway to expanded awareness, which is a synonym for inner peace. For more about practicing concentration, read *The Path of Concentration & Mindfulness* by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, an American Buddhist monk.



Finding the Balance

Over the years, I've learned that major improvements in happiness and/or workplace productivity will not come from inventing yet another mousetrap or a more detailed strategic plan. Instead, they come from intentionally cultivating the state of inner peace.

I hope you'll find that exquisite balance of energy and stillness as it manifests in both your inner and outer worlds.

Ed Merck, author of [*Sailing the Mystery*](#), is a former software entrepreneur and chief financial officer who retired at 63, set sail and began his journey into life's remaining chapters. He is currently a Life-Transition Coach and can be reached at findpurposeafterwork.com.