

FROM BUSINESS  
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TO BEING

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Carsten Waider

## FROM BUSINESS *to being*

This was the title of a documentary that came out in 2016. This film sheds light on the concept of mindfulness, societal contexts, and the current state of research. Along with interviews with managers who have escaped burnout by leaving their careers behind them, it contains a portrait of the Dalai Lama, the most prominent advocate of the principle of being. The title and the film itself are prime examples of a development that has grown exponentially in the developed industrial nations of the West. Practices such as yoga, meditation or Qigong have long since shaken off their esoterical labels and appear to be gaining more and more acceptance in the business world.

But what point is the title of the film, “from business to being,” trying to make? Is this “away from – towards” language a viable concept? What does “being” mean, anyway? Is it merely a coincidence that mindfulness practice is booming while, at the same time, businesses are experimenting with new forms of work organization (i.e. “new work”)? Or are they both an expression of an underlying momentum in business and society?

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CARSTEN WAIDER

Carsten Waider describes meditation as “inner observation of your personal operating system.” He himself meditates practically every day. Meditation enables him to observe the tendency of his mind to dwell either in the past or in the future, and through training, to effect change to such a degree that he spends more time in the here and now – the only place from where people can become truly effective. He considers it essential to experience this himself every day. Meditation is not about believing in anything or adhering to some dogma.

## BEING *as counter-concept*

Criticism of capitalism, which places the active, productive “self” above “being,” is by no means new. Erich Fromm, for example, published “To Have or to Be?” over 40 years ago, in 1976. Fromm’s arguments drew on the great and the wise from across different epochs and cultures: from Laozi to Heidegger, from Thomas Hobbes to Karl Marx.

Today – or so it seems – the principle of being does not need to be justified. Many see it simply as an alternative to the increasing acceleration and complexity of our business and private lives. It is questionable whether this is an active, conscious counter-concept or simply an involuntary shift in us that occurs when we are no longer able or willing in ourselves to keep up with the external pace.

In his most recent book, the forward-looking “Who We Were,” Roger Willemsen describes the impact on us of this concentration of stimuli. Never before has looking at people in public – in social situations, on the streets, having fun, doing things, traveling, communicating – so pointedly mirrored the impression that we are all absent, rejecting the here and now, running away from something, in some in-between zone, on the road, nebulized by a cloud of competing attentions.

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## BEING *and purpose*

The question is: What are we actually searching for, in all the things we do, how we act, how we consume? The answer that many contemporary cultural philosophers give: purpose. Purpose gives us the feeling of being integrated in a coherent time and meaning horizon. It helps, individually or collectively, to forge links between the past and the present; it enables us to combine events from the past into a consistent narrative and to give direction to our future. Purpose offers nothing less than coherence and orientation.

And we urgently need orientation. For we are experiencing a historic transition to a society that is generating a surplus of meaning and choice that has not been seen since the invention of printing.

This is where the principle of being, and with it the mindfulness movement, come into play, because it delivers the promise that we can experience purpose in the present. Without doing anything, with no preconditions, right now. All you need is conscious attentiveness.

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*Today it is considered proven that meditation has an effect on the entire body, slowing down cell aging and fostering empathy.*

## BEING *and mindfulness*

This can be cultivated through meditation. The most well-known form in the western world is mindfulness meditation, which was developed by the American molecular biologist and professor of behavioral medicine, Jon Kabat-Zinn. This is a non-religious method of practicing meditation adapted to modern cultural standards that combines elements of Hinduism and Buddhism with the insights of Western medicine. Kabat-Zinn had already recognized in the seventies that regular meditation prevented stress and burnout. A short time later, he founded the Stress Reduction Clinic, where he developed and taught MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction).

After almost 50 years of research into meditation, it has now been proven that meditation not only helps to reduce symptoms of stress and burnout, but also has an impact on the entire body, slowing down cell aging and fostering empathy. Meditation has long since gained a foothold in German universities, both as a field of research and as practical training for students, employees, and managers. Similar developments can also be observed in some commercial organizations. Here, it might be interesting to point to the most recent results of research carried out at the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig. Their research proves that mindfulness exercises help significantly improve leadership qualities such as concentration, creativity, clarity, and compassion.

## BEING *in practice*

The question is: Given the benefits promised by mindfulness, it can happen that, when they start learning how to meditate, people put themselves under undue pressure, as they typically have certain assumptions and preconceptions about what meditation should be like.

A widespread belief among the proponents of meditation is that it is essential to enter a thought-free state as quickly as possible. If this state isn't achieved quickly during meditation and instead people start thinking about their waking lives, they put themselves under more pressure. This is not very helpful. Fixed ideas of how to do meditation, how it works, and what the point of it is simply make it more exhausting.

The core technique behind mindfulness meditation is, however, to focus the concentration, such as on breathing. If you find your thoughts are starting to drift, simply return to this focus. If you want to integrate meditation into your everyday life, try to observe the following aspects:

1. *Free yourself from preconceptions about what meditation should be like. Instead, adopt an attitude of not knowing. Over time, this can lead to a great sense of lightness.*
2. *When you do something every day, it should be fun. Find a way that is good for you. Try new forms, such as silent sitting, yoga, or always going for the same walk.*
3. *Wherever possible, when you do it, always do the same thing. In this way, you do not have to cope with new or changing impressions, and it becomes easier to direct your attention inward. It enables external aspects to increasingly recede into the background and space for contemplation is created.*

*Anyone who tries to convince us that we have to decide between business and being is wrong.*

This “being in the present” is both starting point and goal. As described, the beneficial aspects and ingredients that constitute meditation are quite simple and unconditional.

Indeed, when done regularly, we become less susceptible to the constant battle for our attention waged by the social networks and the digital world, because we discover that there is a space within us that affords us a certain inner distance to “things going on outside,” opening up new insights for us. And this then shows us that we can play the game of life on our own terms.

Anyone who tries to convince us that we have to decide between *business* and *being* is wrong. In our view, the only question can be: What seems more beneficial, supportive, forward-looking, appealing to us? *Business* and *being*. That is our answer.

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MEDITATION INSTRUCTIONS

## 3 PHASES *of mindfulness*

*Settle into the moment.*

*Let yourself be just as you are now.*

*Be aware that meditation is first and foremost about permission: it is enough just to be.*

*Be yourself and be fully present in the here and now.*

*Wake up – into the present.*

*Breathe and only breathe, feel and only feel, hear and only hear.*

*This simple moment, just as it is, is enough.*

*Be fully present as you breathe, sense, hear.*

*Observe closely how things happen, how they happen of their own accord.*

*Breathing happens, sensations come and go all by themselves.*

*Noises come and go, hearing happens.*

*Thoughts also come and go, all by themselves.*

*Feel how things happen. Do not do.*

*Let yourself descend deeper and deeper into the moment.*

*Give yourself to it. Feel how things happen of their own accord.*

*And let things be.*

Once a quarter, we report on topics relating to the world of business, the economy, and society that we find of relevance to our work as consultants. These are topics which are ideal for exploring contexts that are both complex and not easy to grasp and, therefore, in our experience, need to be addressed in greater depth. Ultimately, the way in which we address the topics says a lot about how we see ourselves: as curious, unbiased consultants who are committed to making an impact.

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[www.leadership-development.de](http://www.leadership-development.de)

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