

# Mindful Leadership Awareness Helps Deal with Negative Outcomes

Totem Report March 7, 2018

By Bret Anderson



**President Mark** opened the meeting and introduced **Carolyn Hojaboom** for the invocation. Carolyn related her personal history of recovery and success. In 2000, she was diagnosed with Stage Four ovarian cancer. Her doctor told her that she had three months to get her affairs in order. Inspired by a well known oncologist who noted that cancer survivors have similar characteristics, Carolyn decided to form her own cancer team which included an oncologist, a masseuse, and a yoga teacher. She was determined not to take a downward journey and learn to visualize her chemotherapy and actually direct the chemicals where to go

with her body. Our bodies, Carolyn reports, want to be whole. We have the tools to make this happen. She is still practicing mindfulness some eighteen years later.

**Linda Rough** gave us a little history about the song for the day, *God Bless America*, and with **Freeman Fong**'s expert accompaniment lead us in a meaningful rendition in E flat.

Mark welcomed visitors and recognized **Laurel James** for 26 years of perfect attendance.

**George Twiss** introduced new member, **Bartek Nowierski**. He has quite an impressive work history including eight years with designing programs for Google and seven years with Microsoft. Bartek hails from Poland and has coached three students who won international recognition for their work. He is a mixologist and loves snow boarding, chess, and bridge. If this was not enough, our new member is active in the Polish community and a member of Mensa. (Ken Grant says that he is as well, a member of Mensa, but this announcement was met with a few raised eyebrows.)



For this week's Foundation Flash, **Molly Carney** of Evergreen Treatment Center said thanks to Seattle #4 for a \$7000 grant. This money will be used to buy seven defibrillators. Evergreen treats more than 3000 people a year for opioid addiction. Since anti-opioid medication can effect the heart, these defibrillators will mean the difference between life and death for their patients.

President Mark introduced the Table Talk topic for the day. The question was, “what was the most daring thing that you have ever done?” At our table the responses included starting a business, adopting kids, retiring, hang gliding, crossing border from Paraguay to Brazil in a row boat, having a baby at 42, learning how to handle a dog sled in Alaska at age 69.



Next, President Mark introduced our main speaker, Dr. Astrid Pujari, who is an internist at Virginia Mason Medical Center. She integrates her western medical education (Tufts University) with herbal medicine and energy medicine. At VMMC, Dr. Pujari teaches classes on mindfulness to cancer patients.

Mindful Leadership: Today is about becoming aware.

Forbes Magazine lists the following as key leadership skills:

- self management
- strategic vision
- positive personal interaction and emotional IQ
- dealing with negative outcomes
- work life balance

Dr. Pujari assumes that a lot of us already have these skills. How easy is it to apply what you know when you get stressed out?

Why is it so hard to apply what we know? We need to have compassion for ourselves and get some ideas about what we can do. Stress is a fear response to life's dangers. These are the physiological responses that our body makes to stress:

- increased heart rate
- increased blood pressure
- increased adrenaline (meth mimics this )
- increased cortisol (blood sugar, weight gain, moodiness) like prednisonene
- hyper-alert (jittery and anxious)

When we have a frightening experience our fight-or-flight response takes over in our body. These are some of the consequences:

- pro-inflammatory chemicals
- increase muscle tension
- decrease in immune function
- decrease in digestion

Your body can't tell the difference between stress and fight-or-flight. Stress impairs our ability to think creatively and see the big picture. Your brain is made up of these parts which each have a specific function.

- Brain stem- basic system, breathing, heartbeat etc.
- Limbic system and amygdala- emotion, behavior, motivation, and fight or flight
- Prefrontal cortex- higher functions like viewing the whole picture and planning for the future

If you see a snake your response is to run away. This comes from the limbic system.



A slower reflex is to take in the details which go to our prefrontal cortex. Information is too detailed for a quick response, but helps form a long term plan. This takes place in the prefrontal cortex.

If you want to use your prefrontal cortex, you have to practice. Meditation helps develop the connection between the limbic system and the cortex. It trains the brain to react differently to stress and can improve a person's sense of well-being and physical health.

We are able do something about how we react to stress. The more that you develop this, the better your health will be. It also works against anxiety, depression and actual physical illnesses.

Dr. Pujari led us with several breathing exercise. This practice will help you to learn to relax and focus.

### **Exercise A**

Sit in the chair with feet flat on the ground. With your hands on your thighs, slouch down while letting your breath out through your nose. Then breathe in and sit back up. Repeat this several times.

### **Exercise B**

Do the same thing with your breathing and slouching but with hands on hips.

### **Exercise C**

Next, with hands on shoulders, turn to right to breathe in and turn to the left to breathe out. Relax for a few seconds and repeat the movement.

Now do the same thing but breath out on right and in on left.

### **Exercise D**

Clasp hands (finger tips curled over finger tips) in front of your face and then move them up over your head. Raise your arms straight up and breathe in on the way. Move your arms down and breathe out on the way down. Relax a bit then repeat.

### **Exercise E**

Clasp hands over your head with arms extended up and breathe in and out through your nose using short bursts powered by your belly.

### **Exercise F**

Breathe out all air in your lungs then breathe in and hold it. Now tighten all muscles in the body then breathe out slowly.

### **Exercise G**

Relax, close your eyes and breathe in and out through your nose. Imagine you are breathing in Peace. Imagine what Peace looks like.

Who feels different? That is one way to meditate.

If we meditate and learn to control our mind, this creates changes in the brain that allow you to better deal with stress. You will be more able to deal creatively with stressful situations. The amygdala is not allowed to just do only what it wants.

At the end of this session, President Mark commented that he felt like he was coming out of a massage. He closed the meeting by thanking all the supporters of Seattle Rotary online.

