TRAINING TOOLKIT: MINDFUL EATING

AWAKEN FROM AUTOPILOT MODE
AWARE OF LABELING AND BIASES

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Future Thinking, Present Impact

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WHAT IS MINDFUL EATING?

Mindful Eating is an activity usually introduced in the first session of mindfulness programs. Still, it can be used as an independent activity to present the idea of **autopilot mode** and **labeling**. In our life, we are seldom aware of the subtle details in life. Our mind is **consistently wandering** but not attending to what we are doing. Labeling influences our **judgment** and **relevant behavior**. Awareness to autopilot mode and labeling improves our **performance** and **decision-making.** Mindful Eating is a thoughtful event to demonstrate these two ideas. It is suitable for corporate training and introduction to mindfulness practice.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Awaken from **autopilot mode**

- Be aware of the effect of **labeling** and **think more objectively**

WHY MINDFUL EATING?

- To introduce **mindfulness** in a **simple manner**

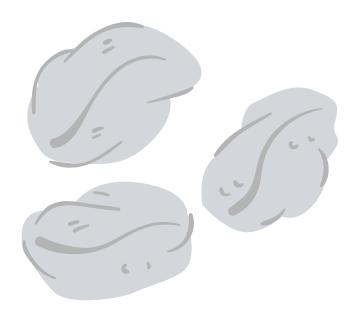- Prompt insightful **reflection** to daily life

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TIME AND GROUP SIZE

10 mins in total

1 - **10** people;
small group can facilitate discussion and reflection

MATERIAL

A small piece of food;
such as raisins or nuts;
can be prepared by participants or trainer

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STEPS

- Give the following instructions:

  - Put the food piece in the **palm**. Feel the food like this is your **first time** approaching it. How is the **texture** of it? Is it soft? Is it hard? How is it when you **slightly squeeze** it? Focus your full attention on how you are holding it.

  - Carefully **look** at the food. Examine its **color**, **luster and shape**. Turn the food pieces. Observe it with **different angles**. You can imagine it is your first time seeing it. Look at its **grooves** or **ridges**.

  - Put the food piece in front of your **nose**. How is its **scent**? It is totally fine if the food piece has no smell.

  - Put the food in your **mouth**. Notice where the food is placed. **Chew** it slowly. Examine the change of its taste and its shape. Pay attention to which **muscle** you are using. Observe the secretion of your saliva. Observe how your **mouth as a whole work** in chewing the food.

  - Do you notice your **impulse to swallow** your food? Simply observe the thought arisen in your mind. When swallowing it, observe how your muscles work together and the process of swallowing.

  - Finally, feel the **aftertaste** of the food. How does it feel? Observe if you have any **thoughts** or **emotion** after the food. Simply look at them. Experience it with your full attention

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SUGGESTED DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS

Could you share your experience of mindful eating?

How was it different from our daily eating experience?

How are you usually eat?

Have you ever eaten in such a mindful manner?

Do you eat more mindfully when you are tasting specific kinds of food?

What message do you think this activity is conveying?

Why is it important to be mindful?

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INSIGHT—

AUTOPILOT MODE

In reality, we seldom eat in a "mindful" manner. What we do usually is simply put our food into our mouth and swallow it. This is what we call **following an autopilot mode**. In an autopilot mode, we are not aware of what we are doing. Think about yesterday. How much time were you being **fully conscious** about what you were doing? Most of our actions and behaviors are **habitual** and **automatic**. While an "autopilot mode" is helpful in saving our limited cognitive resources, they may undermine our experience of life and could even be dysfunctional in some situations.

Is the food tastier when you are paying attention? Our experience is determined by our **attention**. Aware of and awakening from an autopilot mode allows us to experience our life in a different way.

When are they harmful? **Anger** may prompt us to shout at our boss. We freeze under **anxiety**. These reactions could be dysfunctional when we are facing confrontation or giving a presentation, which are very common in the workplace. The first step to alleviate the effect is to be **aware** of them. Simply knowing about the autopilot mode already can remind us how careless we could be.

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INSIGHT—

LABELING

While tasting **wine or any luxurious food**, we automatically turn on a mindful mode. While eating **cheaper snacks**, we adopt a casual way of eating. What makes them different? We create **labels** for food: expensive food, good food, cheap food, junk food... These label change our way of **making judgment** and our **behaviors**. By labeling, we already have **prior biases** towards different food.

The effect of labeling does not only happen on food but also on **people or events**. For people and events, we have much more labels, no matter appropriate or not. While these prior biases heavily affect our judgment and view, we **cannot act objectively** based on the relevant content, like that we do not decide how to taste the food by their taste but their price. Psychologists and behavioral economists study human **heuristics** and found that we cannot get rid of them easily.

Mindfulness provides us with a thinking method in a **meta-awareness** level. Similar to awakening from automatic mode, awareness of our irrational thoughts helps us to identify the **unconscious labeling** and judge more objectively. In a workplace setting, it is applicable to both **problem-solving** and **interpersonal communication**. We believe that this awareness or further practice in mindfulness could improve these two key elements to success in the business world.

WHY YOU MADE THIS DECK?

Thank you for going through the whole guide book! Hope you find this useful.

I am Peter Chan, the founder of TreeholeHK, a corporate training consultant that provides **psychology-based training solutions**.

These skills have been highly effective in my training practice — and I hope to share them with more L&D professionals so we can share the fruits from psychology research.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

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