



# Modern Business, Ancient Wisdom

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## What is an Ancient Wisdom?




An idea that has arisen repeatedly throughout the ages, **unchanged** except for the language that makes it relevant to its time and place.

- Consider the unchanged message spanning many thousands of years in the quotes on the next page:



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1. 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC – Buddha says “As we think, so we become.”
  2. 400 BC – Plato says “The unexamined life is not worth living.”
  3. 1300 – Meister Eckhart says “People should not consider so much what they are to *do*, as what they *are*.”
  4. 1900 – William James says "Human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives."
  5. 1970 – Anwar Sadat says “He who cannot change the very fabric of his thought will never be able to change reality.”



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## Ancient Wisdom as an Idea



- These quotes all point to an ancient wisdom that is based on the idea of “turning within”.
- The ancient wisdom I believe to be relevant to modern business is the idea that we must turn within if we are to find truth, see reality and uncover a worthwhile life.



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# Modern Business



- Business, for the purpose of this presentation, is defined as “activity that occupies”. This could include:
  - Full time child rearing
  - An active retirement
  - The student life
  - A corporate career
  - Self employment

and any other combination of activities with which a person chooses to be regularly occupied.



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## What defines “Modern” business



- Business as we know it has been progressively evolving for about the last 150 years, since industrialisation.
- I propose the term “modern” business best applies to the last 15 years, which is the timeframe within which we have seen emerging technologies change the way work is done, eg.
  - Mobile phones make us contactable 24 hours/7 days
  - Internet puts a world of information at our fingertips



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# How technology creates modern business



Modern business has been the key to:

- Globalisation - work can be done anywhere in the world and connected into a larger flow of work eg. Indian call centres.
- Empowerment - we have access to real time information, and we can express views about it in real time through low cost global internet connections. People no longer have to wait for leadership to act as the conduit for information and opinions.

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## Modern Business is defined by:



Rapid change

Complexity

Uncertainty

Consider these trends:

- We experience the same change in 1 day now as our grandparents experienced in 1 year.
- A new web site is created every 15 seconds.
- A new technology is developed every 15 minutes.
- A new product/service is offered every 15 days.
- 80% of the technology that will exist in 2020 has not been thought of yet.
- 70% of the jobs that will exist in 2020 do not currently exist.

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# Busyness in business



- Busy = “full of activity”

There are two types of busyness

- **Healthy**
  - Productive, engaged, focused, rewarding, in the zone
- **Unhealthy**
  - Overwhelming, distracted, unproductive, tiring, unrewarding

If healthy busyness is “full of activity”, unhealthy busyness is overflowing. Consider a juggler who has just a couple too many balls thrown into the mix and starts dropping them, chasing them, running in circles trying to pick them up while keeping some in the air.



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## Busyness – have we reached a tipping point?



- The environment in which we find ourselves in modern business has crossed a threshold so that we are now seeing more of the second type of busyness – unhealthy busyness is becoming a lifestyle pandemic.
- Consider some of the reported effects on the following page.



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## Busyness – a lifestyle pandemic?



- Stress and heavy workloads resulting in work absence are estimated to cost the state (QLD) almost \$221 million per year.
- 23% of adults aged between 30 and 60 have decided, in the past 10 years, to change their lives in a way that involves earning less money.
- Personality disorders occur more frequently in industrial countries than less developed ones.
- 79% of Australian workers lost sleep thinking about work or found themselves obsessing about work in their personal time.
- 3 out of 4 women suffer from Hurried Woman Syndrome – juggling work and a hectic family life.
- 20% more heart attacks happen at the start of the week.
- The rate of depression is soaring so rapidly that by 2020 it is expected to be the most critical health problem facing Western countries (and the second behind cardiovascular disease by 2010).



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## The Busy Mind



- The silent threat that sits hidden within this emerging habit of busyness is the potential long term and permanent impact on mental states.
- To explore this further we must consider how the mind works.
- The first crucial piece of information is the reversal, in the 1990s, of the view that the adult brain, once formed, ceases to grow. It is now recognised that the brain continues to grow new neurons and will adapt and change in response to its environment. This is called plasticity.



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## Examples of brain plasticity



- London cabbies must learn all roads by memory. A study revealed that the cabbies' hippocampus (spacial part of the brain) became enlarged after their 2 years of study, with size being directly related to the length of experience.
- A study of playing piano revealed that people who imagined playing the piano for a defined period per day (just like actual practice) showed increased activity in the relevant part of the brain.
- Emerging research on meditators shows that they have increased activity in the part of the brain associated with positive emotions, and increased cortical thickening of the matter protecting neurons.
- In people exposed to long term stress, the part of the brain associated with fear and anxiety actually gets bigger, and new neurons stop forming.

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## Effects of busyness on the brain



- Multitasking can cause “pseudo-ADD”. Those affected by pseudo-ADD constantly seek new information and have difficulties in concentrating on its content.
- Tapping away on a mobile phone or checking email temporarily knocks up to 10 points off the user’s IQ. This is a similar effect to a wakeful night.
- When attention is divided as in multitasking, activity in the frontal lobes drops. Additionally, the benefits from each activity are reduced eg. students studying with music on in the background learn less.

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## Importance of the brain



- The frontal lobes are responsible for planning, organising, correcting, controlling and generating options.
- Frontal lobes are first part of the brain to shut down and deteriorate with stress.
- Unhealthy busyness generates effects consistent with frontal lobe brain damage eg. insensitivity, absentmindedness, lack of spontaneity, inability to sustain focused attention, failure to realise consequences of your action.

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## Impact of training the mind for busyness



- Because it is plastic and trainable, when we “practice” busyness, the brain starts rewiring for that activity.
- Once trained for busyness, the brain naturally gravitates toward this type of activity.
- We potentially (possibly unconsciously) create an environment that “feeds” the busy mind, eg. constant switching between issues with no long term concentration.
- This does not allow us to absorb, analyse, reflect, investigate – all important parts of understanding reality.
- We become mindless...



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## How Ancient Wisdom can help



- The idea of “turning within” is a most powerful remedy to the busy mind.
- “Turning within” in this context means training the mind.
- Mindlessness = not paying attention
- **Mindfulness** = “paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally”.
- Mindfulness counteracts the effects of the busy mind by training the **attention** to become fit, healthy and responsive, in much the same way as we train our bodies.



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# Effects of Mindfulness



Studies show that mindfulness training has these effects:

- The likelihood of relapse for depression drops from 60% to 30% after 1 year, and from 66% to 22% after 3 years.
- People who practice mindfulness for only 8 weeks show a 50% increase in immunity response to flu vaccine.
- Medical conditions such as psoriasis heal at 4 times the normal rate.
- Long term meditators did the best at recognising emotion in facial expressions.
- Meditation stimulates sustained activity in the left prefrontal cortex, the site associated with happiness. Long term meditators are found to register off the scale on happiness.



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## Mindfulness enhances:

- Energy
- Focus
- Resilience
- Adaptiveness
- Creativity
- Readiness to act
- Learning
- Decision making
- Memory

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## Training for mindfulness



- Practical mindfulness can be used to train the mind on the everyday activities eg. training the attention to focus on listening when engaged in a meeting (rather than letting the mind play with how to respond before the person has finished speaking).
- Meditation is a proactive training regime, building up peak fitness and health in readiness to face the everyday activities with greater mindfulness.



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# Ancient wisdom in business applications



- Harry M Miller (Celebrity Management Firm)  
Daily meditation in the workplace for 1.5 hours with voluntary participation “One of the secrets I have in business is that I listen intently and try to separate myself from what’s going on so I can serve my clients best and hear things that other people don’t.” Harry
- Meditation rooms in workplaces eg. A transport company in Melbourne.
- The emergence of key business leaders talking about their meditation practice in business magazines.
- Some of our own clients have requested the introduction of meditation as part of leadership programs, once they realise the implications of modern business and busyness on the mind.

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## Motivation for your mind training plan



"As you walk and eat and travel, be where you are.  
Otherwise you will miss most of your life."

Buddha

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