

Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom

The Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom (FDCW) is an international project of the FPMT, established in 2005, to help all beings lead a happier, more peaceful and meaningful life. It achieves this through providing educational programs and projects rooted in Buddhist philosophy and psychology yet suitable for people of all cultures and traditions. This collection of programs and projects comprises Universal Education for Compassion and Wisdom (UECW).

The Potential Project and Corporate-Based Mindfulness Training

By Allison Murdoch, director of Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom

Following our article in the January-March 2014 issue of *Mandala* about the structure of the Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom (FDCW), a look at The Potential Project offers a great example of how an FDCW-recognized program is reaching fresh audiences and putting Lama Yeshe's vision for "a new kind of universal education" into practice.

The driving force behind The Potential Project is Rasmus Hougaard, former director of Tong-nyi Nying-je Ling, the FPMT center in Copenhagen, Denmark. Working with FPMT lamas and meditation teachers, scientists and business people, Rasmus has developed a practical training program that presents authentic teachings on shamatha (calm abiding), vipassana (insight meditation) and ethics in a form and language that appeals to

professional people leading busy lives such as those working for major corporations like Nike, American Express, Google, KLM, Sony, AXA, Société Générale and McKinsey.

Rasmus is aiming to establish a gold standard in mindfulness training. One way he ensures this is by employing only facilitators who have had an established personal meditation practice over many years and who take part in both an initial training course and continuing professional development.

The staff at The Potential Project have now presented their Corporate-Based Mindfulness Training (CBMT) program to thousands of leaders and managers in the corporate, government and non-profit sectors worldwide, motivated by the wish to help them develop their positive qualities and to use their influence and power to bring about a happier and more peaceful world.

Origins of The Potential Project

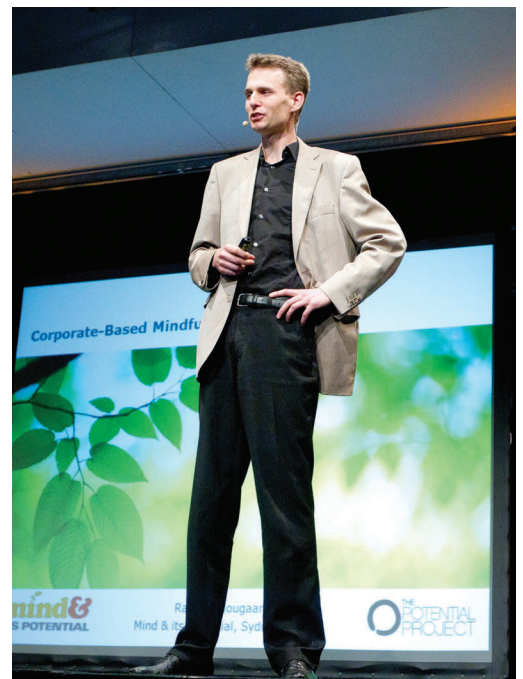
By Rasmus Hougaard, managing director of The Potential Project

In my first job, when I had to present mindfulness to an organization, I was really excited, because I was going to present to a group of (very busy!) people all this stuff about mindfulness that I had learned and had meant so much to me and changed my life.

I came into the room and for the whole morning I was just talking and sharing and having them sit down on the cushion to do the mindfulness training. But after the lunch break, no one came back! Now I can laugh, but back then it was painful.

As painful as it was, this lesson was very important for me because it taught me that the way that mindfulness is normally presented – the way I learned it and the way I taught it back then – did not really apply to people today who have busy work lives. I had to spend quite a number of years bringing together researchers, mindfulness teachers and business leaders to put together a program that worked for that audience.

*Rasmus Hougaard presenting at the Mind & Its Potential Conference, 2011.
Photo by Brendan Read, courtesy of The Potential Project.*





Rasmus Hougaard speaking at an Australian Human Resources Institute event, 2013.
Photo courtesy of The Potential Project.

Problems of the PAID World

I have spoken with leaders of many organizations and they have all reached a similar conclusion: no matter where we go – Asia, North America, Europe, etc. – many people experience something called the “PAID (Pressure, Always On, Information Overload, Distracted) world.”

Take a moment to reflect whether you have experienced this in the workplace: feeling **pressured** by deadlines and commitments; **always on** regarding electronic devices, email, Facebook, Twitter, mobile phones; dealing with **information overload**; and being surrounded by so much **distraction**, whether it is gadgets or the people around you. If you are someone who experiences this, mindfulness is a tool that can work for you.

The way we work has changed over the past few decades, and we are now required to deal with multiple sources of information all requiring our attention at the same time. There has been a lot of research done on the effects of multitasking on the

brain. For example, research conducted by Stanford University found that some of its downfalls are reduced efficiency, decreasing work quality, hampered creativity, lack of overview, reduced well-being and drained energy. Most importantly, it rewired the brain to make multitasking a default response.

There is, however, a more fundamental disadvantage to the PAID world. Edward Hallowell published a paper in the *Harvard Business Review* about how, over the past 20 years, people’s ability to pay attention has decreased. He states, “Modern office life and an increasingly common condition called ‘Attention Deficit Trait’ are turning steady executives into frenzied underachievers.” Gilbert Killingsworth has published research in the journal *Science* that found that in 46.9 percent of waking hours our attention is wandering.

The good news is that the brain can be trained, something that has been confirmed by the latest research in neuroscience. And we can benefit by practicing a mindfulness training that goes back thousands of years. This is what The Potential Project is about: as

we practice mindfulness, we get inner peace. When we are at peace with ourselves, it is very hard to be in conflict with others, so we improve our relationships. As a result, organizations become more wholesome and more easygoing, which are great things.

Successes in 2013

The past year has been a great one for The Potential Project. We have reached more people than ever before. A very rough calculation tells me that together we have presented mindfulness training to more than 5,000 people.

We have led extensive programs, workshops, conference keynotes and retreats from one side of the globe to the other: Sydney, Melbourne, Singapore, Hong Kong, Berlin, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki, Oslo, Amsterdam, Toronto, Calgary, New York and many other great cities.

We have been co-organizers of conferences along with Copenhagen Business School and Singapore Management University and have been presenting CBMT at events such as the national Australian Business Conference, the annual conference of the Australian Human Resources Institute, Mind & Its Potential, the Gawler Conference and many more.

Plans for 2014

Working with many larger clients around the world is in the pipeline. Conferences are being planned, and it will be a year of large expansion of our family, including the training of 20 new Potential Project people in North America. In all likelihood, we will hold a trainers' training in Europe in the third quarter of 2014, and by the end of the year, we are looking at strengthening our capacity in Asia and Australia. We will also be trialing an online version of our program.

2014 will also be the year when the CBMT book *One Second Ahead* will come out in English. First published in Denmark in 2013, it offers a clear path to developing a life of more clarity, kindness and effectiveness in the middle of a busy working life, based on the methods of shamatha and vipassana. ♦

Extracted from a presentation to the Singapore Management University in 2013.

Find out more at www.potentialproject.com.

For information about other FDCW-recognized learning programs, please visit www.compassionandwisdom.org.

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