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The Compassionate Coach: 6 Ways Mindfulness Can Help You Be More Compassionate (Part 2 of 2) by NADEGE ESTEBAN-FRUTOS

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The Compassionate Coach: 6 Ways Mindfulness Can Help You Be More Compassionate (Part 2 of 2)



If you missed part 1 of 2, [<click here>](#)

In recent years, the science of compassion has emerged. Now, we know more about the biology and the neurosciences of compassion : when we feel compassion, our heart rate slows down, our body secretes the “bonding hormone” oxytocin, and regions of the brain linked to empathy, caregiving, and feelings of pleasure are activated, which often results in our wanting to approach and care for other people.

We have also discovered some of its benefits on mental and physical health to those who

feel it.

And even some researches have demonstrated through MRI how compassion is a skill that we can strengthen through training. There are some programs that have been launched, mainly in the United States, around compassion like the “Compassion Cultivation Training” from “The Center for Compassion, Altruism Research and Education” (CCARE) at Stanford University School of Medicine and the “Cognitively-Based Compassion Training” from Emory University. Scientists are also looking for its application to the fields of education, medicine, business and government.

As written in my first article, compassion, as defined as an “emotional response of caring for and wanting to help those who are suffering (Batson, 1991), is different from empathy which is the “mirroring or understanding of another’s emotion” (Dacher Keltner, the Greater Good Science Center). So empathy relates more to the feeling part whereas compassion goes further with the desire to help and relieve the suffering of other.

According to Chade-Meng Tan, compassion has 3 components:

- the first one is the affective component, which can be translated by “I feel for you”,
- the second one is the cognitive component which is “I understand you”,
- the third one is the motivational component : “I want to help you”

In Meng’s definition, empathy is an essential element of compassion and would relate to the first component of compassion.

Knowing that, how practicing mindfulness will help you to bring the power of compassion into your coaching practice?

Numerous researches have already demonstrated the benefits of mindfulness on cognitive functions, on well-being and on mental and physical health. It is now proven that mindfulness - the awareness that arises when you pay attention to the present moment with certain attitudes - increases empathy and compassion for others and for oneself. *How?*

- Mindfulness practices train your mind to focus your attention on the present moment, whether it is on your breath, on your body or one of your senses for example. And this attention training is a sort of pre-requisite of compassion because compassion starts with you being able to focus on the coachee and most importantly to be able to notice, feel and understand the suffering of the coachee. As Daniel

Goleman says: ‘If you don’t take the first step of noticing, you don’t go down the path of compassion’.

- Mindfulness is not only just about paying attention, but also about how you pay attention. With mindfulness practice, we also cultivate “mindful attitudes” like curiosity, openness, non-judgement, acceptance, kindness, care. These attitudes helps to foster compassion toward yourself and others. In other words, “cultivate self-compassion, do it for your coachee!”
- Mindfulness helps you to develop your self-awareness that allows you to embrace your coachee’s suffering without reacting, avoiding, resisting. By being able to respond skillfully and resourcefully, your coachee will feel more confident to share his story with you.
- Mindfulness also helps you to develop your emotional intelligence: you are more aware of your own emotions and able to relate to them in a healthy way and you also get more attuned to the coachee’s emotions. It becomes easier for you, coach, to notice when you are starting to be submerged by the coachee’s emotions, to calm your mind and to stand back enough to be able to still help the coachee. So it’s about being receptive to your coachee’s emotions without adopting them.
- Stress and busyness have been proven to make us only focus on our own preoccupations and less on the needs of other people (cf. The Good Samaritan experiment by Darley and Batson in the 1970s). Mindfulness helps us to deal with stressful events and busyness. It also allows us to stay attuned to what’s happening around us in the present moment and connected to what is most important.
- Loving-kindness and compassion meditations are part of some mindfulness programs. One research has shown that compassion training improves the “psychological and physical well-being, prosocial behavior, positive emotion towards people as well as empathetic accuracy”. Another one has even proven that only after 2 weeks of training, there are already changes in the way our brain responds to people’s sufferings in the brain areas related to empathy and understanding others, emotion regulation (helps us to sense the coachee’s suffering without being overwhelmed by it) and positive emotions.

So, yes you can definitively build up your “compassion muscle”, and like any kind of learning, it requires practice, efforts and time to strengthen the related neural connection in your brain.

Quickly, you will reap very useful benefits for your coaching practice... as well as for you daily life, for the people around you and more globally to our society. One study suggests compassion is contagious, so if you want to be part of a more compassionate world, just do it! Imagine how the world would be different if we all learn this skill!

Bonus: Build your 'compassion' muscle right now by practicing these 3 activities:

- *Every day, every hour, randomly choose 2 persons that you meet, whether it is at work or outside. And secretly, wish them to feel happy and be healthy.*
- *"Before coaching session" routine: Arrive earlier, resist your urge to look at your phone and take the time to notice your breath, to feel your body and to connect with your surrounding for few minutes.*
- *"After coaching session" routine: Take a few minutes to reflect upon your session. Think how you talked and how you treated your coachee. How compassionate were you toward your coachee? How well did you do? What could you do better? What did you learn from that session?*

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