

General Mills has long been recognized as a great place to work – and for developing talent and leaders.

In 2009, General Mills ranked No. 3 in *Fortune* magazine's listing of the Global Top Companies for Leaders; No. 7 in *Training* magazine's ranking of top companies; and No. 12 in *BusinessWeek*'s listing of the Best Places to Launch a Career.

One reason the company has consistently fared so well is because it has aggressively pioneered the use and development of cutting-edge leadership programs. One of the newest, most popular initiatives has been the Mindful Leadership Program series.

The courses use a combination of mindfulness meditation, yoga and dialog to get leaders to develop the mind's capacity to pay attention – both to themselves and others – and to more clearly see what is happening in their lives.

Since the program began in 2006, more than 140 officers and directors have gone through the four-day core course – “Cultivating Leadership Presence through Mindfulness” – that is typically held at an offsite rural retreat site.

And another 150 have attended the other courses – “Catching Lightning: Innovation and Mindfulness” or “Mindful Leadership at Work.” While the courses may seem a bit new age for a stable Fortune 500 company that is home to Betty Crocker, the results have been impressive.

After the Mindful Leadership at Work (one session a week for seven weeks) course, survey research completed in 2009 showed that:

- 83 percent of participants said they often “take time each day to optimize my personal productivity” — up from 23 percent who said that before taking the course.
- 82 percent said they often “make time on most days to eliminate some tasks/meetings with limited productivity value” – up from 32 percent before the course.

And among experienced leaders participating in the Cultivating Leadership Presence course, 2009 research showed that:

- 80 percent reported a positive change in their ability to make better decisions with more clarity.
- 89 percent reported enhanced listening capabilities – to themselves and to others.



“Mindful leadership programs focus on training the leader to see and use a capability that is already part of who he or she is,” says Janice Marturano, vice president of Public Responsibility and deputy general counsel, who initiated the training. “Leaders who train in mindfulness begin to tap into this natural capability that can be cultivated and that ultimately expands a person’s repertoire of responses to each moment of the day.”

Marturano learned early from her father that the mind’s capabilities, like the body’s, could be developed. “The mental discipline of mindfulness training develops the mind’s ability to be focused and to notice the auto-pilot, fragmented way we live,” says Marturano.

Research has shown that in the age of cell phones, e-mails and texting, effective multi-tasking is a myth.

“The more people multi-task, the less efficient and creative they are at completing a task or solving complex problems,” says Marturano. “Our attention is constantly being bombarded. Mindfulness cultivates our ability to sustain attention for longer periods of time – to actively be in the moment in order to make clear decisions, to notice our propensity to react rather than ask ‘What’s called for now?’”



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JANICE MARTURANO, GENERAL MILLS VICE PRESIDENT  
WHO DEVELOPED THE MINDFULNESS PROGRAM

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The General Mills courses were developed jointly by Marturano and Saki Santorelli, executive director of the Center for Mindfulness, which is part of the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

“Leaders all over the planet are beginning to understand the benefits of purposefully learning to be more attentive and focused, non-reactive, and clear,” says Santorelli.

The courses were opened up to other organizations in 2008 and the response has been very positive. More than 20 different organizations and companies have sent leaders to the four-day program. They have

also become very popular within General Mills – not only for the benefits they have created at work, but also for improving participants’ home lives.

After one intense family exchange, a mother who had attended a mindfulness retreat used what she had just learned and suggested that everyone just stop and take a deep breath.

“At that point my 12-year-old paused, looked at me and said, ‘Who are you and what did you do with my mommy.’”