

## CMCP/KAISER CLE Marathon January 15, 2014

### **Meditation Workshop Outline**

This workshop qualifies for one hour of CLE credit for Prevention of Substance Abuse.

### **Introduction**

The workshop includes content delivery, silent and guided meditation practice, and Q&A at the end. We discuss the causes of addictive behaviors, how you can change behavior through awareness and choice, and how meditation can change your brain and make it easier for you to change your habitual response to discomfort.

### **Practice: Silent Meditation** (three minutes)

### **Why I teach meditation to lawyers**

- Virtually all of my lawyer coaching clients are under too much stress.
- Most lawyers do not have a consistent practice that allows them to reduce stress on a daily basis.
- Many of them “self-medicate” with alcohol or drugs because they think those things help them relax.
- Many law firms have cultures that accept, or even encourage, the use of alcohol.
- The proliferation of electronic devices has encouraged a culture of distraction.

### **Aversion and Attraction**

One perspective on addiction is that unconscious craving and unrelieved stress contribute to the problem. If you can become aware of the craving and have an alternative way to relieve stress, you can start on the road to recovery. The usual cycle consists of:

- Feeling of discomfort (anxiety, boredom, anger, depression) →
- Alleviate through some action (eat, drink, smoke, check email) →
- Repeat behavior, even if you don't find relief →
- Regret or other discomfort →
- Attempt to alleviate discomfort

### **How Does Meditation Actually Make a Difference?**

Even a small amount of regular mindfulness meditation can have an impact. Here are some of the advantages of having a regular meditation practice:

- It increases your ability to be present with your emotions.
- It allows you to stop thinking all the time. And by thinking, I mean that string of thoughts that includes worrying about what will happen next, what might happen today or tomorrow or next week or next year, or reliving an unpleasant situation that occurred in the past, and the endless loop that accompanies these worries.
- Meditation helps you release stress and recover from it.

- When you learn the technique of focusing on your breath, you can monitor your feelings throughout the day and continually release stress during the day.

### **Meditation Literally Changes the Brain**

The brain is primed to have negative feelings and easily tunes into negative experiences. In fact, it takes five positive interactions to undo a negative one. As your mind changes, your brain changes. And as your brain changes, your mind changes. Meditation can be instrumental in creating these changes.

Functional MRIs have shown the following changes in the brains of people who have practiced meditation extensively:

- Meditation strengthens the left prefrontal cortex, which is where happiness and positive emotions reside.
- When that side is strengthened, it can overwhelm the anxiety and negative emotions that are present in the right prefrontal cortex.
- Meditation reduces the cortical thinning that happens as we age, and even novice meditators show increased thickness in the cortical regions. (Novice – someone who meditates an average of 40 minutes a day).
- This increased thickness is related to sensory, auditory and visual perception, as well as internal perception (for example, the automatic monitoring of heart rate or breathing). Changes were found in the area of the brain that is essential for sustaining attention.

Daniel Goleman, the author of “Emotional Intelligence” and “Social Intelligence,” wanted to find out whether meditation could be used as an intervention for stress reactivity. What he found, and other studies have confirmed, is that the practice of meditation seems to speed the rate of physiological recovery from a stressor.

### **Practice: Guided Meditation** (ten minutes)

#### **Some Final Thoughts**

A regular meditation practice can help establish a steadiness of observation. When you become familiar with your particular habits of thought, you can notice what you keep paying attention to, and what obsessive thoughts, worries, plans, stories, and judgments keep showing up. All of these mind habits contribute to addictive behaviors. When you can undo the stories in your mind, you can relax. When you are in a relaxed state, you feel safer, and are able to make different choices.