



Ruchika Sikri

Staying Mindful While Working From Home

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Hello, welcome back to the Optimal Performance Summit. I'm your host, Dr. Patrick Porter, our next guest is doing something she loves developing people in organizations at Google. Mindfulness and well being are two of her favorite things. And she loves to teach people how to do this in her position in leadership development at Google. So please help me. Welcome to the summit Ruchika Sikri to the summit, Ruchika, welcome to the summit.

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Thank you, Dr. Porter. It's great to be here with you today. See you again.

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Yeah, it's great to see you again. Tell us a little bit about when when we first met, you know, it kind of blew me away all the things they're doing at Google to help with mindfulness and help people stay, you know, basically mindful in take care of themselves and their mental well being, which kind of blew me away because you don't really think of that with corporations. And you've started that movement. So tell me a little bit about how that happened and how you got involved.

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Yeah, well, it started about 10 years ago, and before me, there were several people who contributed To that Dr. Porter. You know, one thing we realized at Google is that you know, the



one of the faculties in our whole body that we use the most is our brain, our minds, right? Like that's how this technology that is provided to billions of users around the world is created by people who work at Google through their brain and their mind their creativity. So we kind of charted the way to say, well, we provide a lot of options for people to take care of their physical health. We have great cafes, we have gyms for people to go and work out. But there was no place where people could go and get a mental break. You know, it's like we floss our teeth every day to keep our teeth healthy. It's almost like we need a Mental Floss. Right? So a few people got together at Google. And, you know, we just basically started meditating in a conference room. And that's how the community grew and grew and now it's like a full fledged program within our office. Department of people development at Google where we provide mindfulness and compassion, learning and training on 220,000 Googlers. All around the world.

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That's great. Now, when you're doing this when they're practicing what forms of mindfulness meditation are they doing right now? I mean, what are they all have different ones. Is there a specific one that you focus in on?

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Yeah, so primarily, we focus on secular and science based meditation techniques. Dr. Porter. And when we describe the types of meditation people do, we categorize it into two categories, essentially. One is meditation at the gym. When you sit down on a cushion or a chair every morning, every afternoon, whatever time is conducive to you, and practice even for five minutes. Just close your eyes, connect with your breath. And you know, just like let your mind relax and it doesn't relax right away. We know that you know, it. Just everything comes up for us. So you know, we have programs around helping people cultivate that skill, and that practice that helps us slow down. So that's what we call at the gym practice. And then we have in the moment practice that we teach practices, I would say, how do you eat mindfully, right? Like we have great cafes, people usually have are sitting with their phones and they're shoving food in their mouth. They don't even know how much we you know, they ate. So we've started mindful lunches program where Googlers can get together or just, you know, take a sheet of like, how do you do my lunch by yourself. And then we teach mindful listening, you know, when there are two people talking, you could be on a laptop or be distracted or thinking about what you're going to do for the next meeting, or you could be fully present. So we teach skills of active mindful listening, empathetic, listening to Googlers and several others like mindful walking. And you know, just like opening the key to the door of your home so you can make a good transition. So, in terms of the meditation practices, we teach a lot like we teach, you know, body scanning, you know, just progressive muscle relaxation, relaxation, or we teach just focus and attention practices, we just take, we teach open awareness to several practices are integrated into the program we teach it. Yeah, that's great.



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Now, I know there's a lot of research out there that shows that mindfulness actually can help build a better brain or a smarter brain. What have you been finding at Google is happening because I know there's a benefit to the people. But also, there's a benefit to the company in some ways, because these people are more resourceful and more creative. Like you're saying, what have you noticed?

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Yeah, I think, you know, it's safe to assume that we hire a lot of smart people at Google, right? Like, I remember 14 years ago, when I was interviewed, I had to go through eight to 10 interviews and then wait three months to get my final offer letter. So the rigorous process, you know, enables Google to hire a lot of smart people. But what happens is like when you're in the company or any organization for that matter, you start drinking from a firehose, there's a lot of information, a lot of creative talent all around, do you so you feel like kind of drowning in, you know, even though you're smart. So I think it's really important for people to take a pause and recognize how far they have made it and you know what's in front of them and cultivate that focus and attention, cultivate that ability to work effectively with each other, cultivate the ability to be inclusive, to be respectful of each other in order to be smart at work. So it's not just like how much code you can write, what products you're developing, how many products you're pushing out to the market, but it's like, how are you working as a leader? Are you a great team member? And I think, you know, mindfulness allows us to generate or cultivate is probably the right word. Self Awareness. You know, when we Really get to like, introspect and reflect and pause and calm down, more clarity emerges in our mind, which allows us to focus and be more attentive to a task to a team, or to a co worker, we might be sitting and working together with. So I think that all compounds itself to working smarter as compared to, you know, just like being on autopilot. The day begins and the day and I don't know what happened to my day where, you know, you can wake up in the morning, that's some intention, do a practice, and then design the day you want to live. So that's different, you know?

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Oh, that's great. I know that Googlers are known to be high achievers, I mean, you you, you get to there's 120,000 of them. That's all that's a big community of high achievers. So there's might be a lot of stress, when when they're doing that. In your case, you have a daily practice, right, that helps to organize it. So can you tell us a little bit about what your daily practices what you do during the course of your typical day like yesterday or the day before? Sometimes Like that,

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yeah, I'd love to share my daily practice basically foods, I wake up in the morning, I put my tea pot, you know, to get started, go getting my tea ready. And then it just brews the cheese slowly



when I go and I do breathing practices to begin with, you know, we call it pranayama as well in different traditions and cultures. And then I do yoga, I do put body stretching just to get my blood circulation, improve my body and mind lines. And then I do a 20 minutes sitting practice a sitting meditation practice. Most days I do it silently. But some days like my mind is so like just kind of running at very high speed. So I put on my headphones, and I use an app or take a YouTube video that I've shortlisted in my library, and then I just go through that meditation. So I would say that 30 minute, start of my day really defines how my day goes. I've been doing that for 15 plus years now, Dr. Porter, and I'm a completely different person since, you know, since since that time, so I give a lot of credit to my practice, for the transformations. That's out.

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That's great. So throughout the

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day, when people are we usually call it a brain break instead of a coffee break. But where do you Where do you find where do you find it works for you during the day that helps you to stay mindful and focused on what really is important.

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Yeah, going for a walk helps a lot. You know, right now we're all hooked up in our homes. A lot of us are taking multiple responsibilities of teaching our children being chefs to our family, working into and taking care of ourselves is so important, and it's not just that first 30 minutes. If I missed that, I think taking that 5/10 minutes break during the day, not using my phone while I'm eating food. Really spending quality time with my family and when we are eating or when we have playtime during the evening, and using that as a source of mindfulness for me. So this is what I mentioned that it's the end the moment practice that I do. But primarily, I had to name a couple of things that I do during the day is to eat mindfully and go for walks without looking at my phone or even like having no headphones. Just go listen to the birds chirping. Feel the wind on your face, it just refreshes you a lot. Yeah.

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That's great. So when you think about bringing this into corporations, where do you see the future of mindfulness in corporations and companies around the world?

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You know, I think it's become a necessity. It's not an optional thing anymore. Dr. Porter, I feel the way they are operating right now. We're using our minds much more than our physical body. I think we have to set an intention to use our physical body more carefully now. Otherwise, we could be glued to this chair all day, you know either taking work meetings, and you know, going



through articles or just scanning the whole web or answering messages or anything, right, like in the computer sucker thing. And it's so important to really pay attention to the mental well being of employees. And I know it is a very high priority at Google. And I know many of our other corporations are paying attention to it as well. When our mind is not working effectively, we are not our best selves. You know, we're not going to produce our best work, we're not going to be our best colleague to each other, we will not lead or manage the teams effectively. So it's become very, very important to take care of our brain and our mind. Meditation is one of the techniques to do it. And it's been proven scientifically now, for several years. I know that the research in the last 20 years has dramatically increased and It's just showing amazing results. In fact, I was just talking to my peer at the Center for Healthy Minds, Dr. Richie Davidson's organization. And they did a recent study on like, what, what are people doing to take care of themselves during this time. And they found that a lot of people are researching and looking into meditation as a source, even before approaching a therapist, for you know, psychological emotional well being help. And in my mind, like those two things are not replaceable. When we need a therapist, we should go find one because you know that that's always helpful for someone to have a conversation with, but at the same time for people to be tapping into knowing that there's some inner resource that we can look into, and which will always stay with us. The therapists will probably spend an hour with us, but you know, they're also recommending therapists are also recommending to do these practices a lot are now so I would strongly encourage The corporations to look at the latest research in science, it has proven impact on not just productivity, I think that's like just the first and the shortest, lowest hanging fruit if people want to cling on to it, but really like if you want to transform people into becoming great leaders of this world, I would say invest in mindfulness and meditation practices. And we've seen great results. You know, there's a whole community of almost 400 Googlers, who are encouraging their peers every day, they're standing up and helping people out to develop and cultivate this practice. I know that

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you're tapped a lot out there in the community because of your position in what you're doing at Google to help people take mindfulness into their corporations. Can you tell us a little bit about I know you have a plan for that, so maybe you can share that with our, our summit guests and they can kind of learn and maybe take that with them back to their own companies.

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Yeah, for sure. It's more of an observation. A quarter of my own journey and transformation. And that I've also seen manifest in the way we have actually established these practices at Google. So I kind of talked about it in that there are four important components of integrating establishing, and scaling mindfulness practices at your workplace. You know, no effort is small. You know, when we started 10 years ago, it was like one engineer or two engineers sitting in a



conference room, sharing like the value of meditation and actually sitting down and practicing it. Those engineers or you know, Googlers, would invite speakers, authors and guests to come and share information with us, which just had like 50/60 people come and that interest started bubbling up. So what in my mind like the four pillars that are really important is to share information with people you don't need a \$1 million budget to start mindfulness program in your organization right away. You don't have money A YouTube talk that sits in a community and watch that right? Give knowledge to people. That's number one pillar that I see. The second one is to practice what you're learning. It's true for anything, even if you're taking guitar lessons you can get to theory, but you got to practice it in order to learn guitar. So similarly with mindfulness and meditation on why it's good, how it's done, practice it. The third pillar is like, establish a community. You know, I was more encouraged with a commitment I made to go and practice every Thursday 1012 years ago at Google, in a community and I stuck to that practice, because I felt I have accountability towards that. So establish a community of people who are interested, passionate curious about this. And then finally, the service, you know, just provide provide guidance to people so that they can also serve in this space. So for example, you know, we have hundred teachers at Google. These are regular Googlers, who are engineers, product managers. salespeople finance people, what they do is they teach these skills to other Googlers. So we don't have to hire a lot of external help, when we give them the teacher training so that they can bring the validity of like the transformation, they feel that they want to bring it to their other colleagues who are open and ready for it too. So I'll just outline it again, give information, share knowledge. Second is practice that knowledge. Third is develop a community around it. And then fourth, is to bring that sense of service and giving to share this amazing tale that you've learned with others as well.

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Can you can you share with us a few of the breakthroughs that have happened at Google? Because through this meditation process, because you know, when you look at it, workplace stress, they say is 100 \$90 billion problem we have out there? And a lot of the stress I mean, stress, they know exacerbates other illnesses. So what are you finding there? What are the successes you're finding at Google, or that you can share?

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Yeah, there's that high interest in taking these programs Dr. Porter is like the number one indicator that people are looking at this as a resource for their well being. I mean, the stress these days comes from within the organization, but also externally there are just a lot of factors right now we're in the middle of a pandemic, right? And never ever perience phenomenon for at least three foot, you know, or like a large population of this planet. That's stressful, you know, politics, the wars happening between the countries that terrorism, all of these are causing, we bring that into work, work stress, we take it back in our home. So you know, I think it's so



important for companies to like pay attention to what how do we bring in relief from that perspective and keep people in the preventative care zone as much as possible? And I really feel like, you know, unless you've advanced on your health risk, like you're in mid crisis zone to high crisis zone, you know, definitely take a help from a professional therapist or a doctor. You know, don't cut corners there. But like if you're feeling good, you know, you're like mildly stressed, you're feeling a bit of a burnout. Look for other ways, eat healthy exercise, meditate. You know, it all helps all of this comes together to help. So that's what like I think the proposition here is to enable people as far as we can keep people in the preventative care zones by providing these programs. I think the companies have a huge potential to cut down on the cost related to stress when people find themselves in mid prices. And

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I know that you're a big advocate or Google is as well, of giving tips while people right now like you said, people are at home, they're working, they they sit down, they say sitting is the new smoking because people are moving their body our body works best and it's great that you do yoga. Our research have shown that people that dance yoga, or do Tai Chi their nervous systems function, the best But while they're sitting at the computer, I know Google has some tools. So maybe you can explain what those tools are that people can use. They can set them up and things of that nature.

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Yeah. So, uh, in terms of, you know, the avenues we have to physically move, you know, a lot of teams are actually holding accountability with each other to say, like, let's, you know, do Fitbit walking points or Apple Watch walking points, right? So they compete with each other to see like, how much walking they're doing, enabling people to actually take work, walking meetings, like you could, you don't need to be on a screen all the time. If it's a one on one with someone you trust and you work with every day. Get on the phone, put on your earphones, go for a walk. So get that physical movement in. At Google, we're also seeing a lot of amazing people who are trained Zumba trainers, they're yoga teachers. They are, you know, bar teachers. They're offering classes just like you know, we have mindfulness volunteers. We have movement volunteers as well. So they're offering those classes to them. Colleagues so you could actually put it on your calendar. And you know, wake up every morning at eight o'clock or, you know, wind down your day at 4pm. Because I'm going to end my day with a Zumba class today, and people can tune in. So those are some of the ways we're enabling people to move. We have personal training options available if you want to just have a coach training over zoom, cause like we're having a conversation right now. And several other ways, you know that Google has also invested a lot in health and fitness of this whole world, you know, like the way we look at things that Google is like, we we think all our employees are our users. If you think about it, right? Like, if we can take care of them, the employees can create those kind of products for the



users of COBOL as well. So it's not so that's the inspiration around movement, eating well exercising and meditating.

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That's great. I know that we spoke a little bit earlier before about something called mindful breaks, and tell us how I know that it's actually a pretty The app, the Google platform, so maybe you can tell us about that a little bit.

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Yeah, I will share two tips on that actually three that are integrated in Google products. And this was created and inspired by our mindfulness programs internally, that now people said, Oh, I want to actually develop a product around that. So they have created a Chrome extension called mindful break. And you can just go to Chrome extension, mindful break, and you will be able to download it every 15 to 20 minutes, you can take a break, by setting reminders over there. If you don't want to do that just type breathing exercise on Google browser. And it can give you a little widget which will help you breathe, breathe in, breathe out, it will calm your nervous system down. Breathing is a very effective tool to do that. And then third, if you have Google Home or Android phone, you can set up your systems to give you mindful tips. So you can say hey, system, give me a mindfulness tip and then it'll say something Nice that you know how to connect with your mind and body in the moment.

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This is great. I really appreciate you sharing all of this with us about what's happening at Google behind the scenes but your life's going. Before we end the summit conversation here. Do you have anything else that you share with? Whether it's you share it with your fellow Googlers? Are you share when you're on the platform speaking around the world that could help our optimal performance people that are on the summit here today?

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Yeah, yeah, I would just say, Twitter, I wish everybody Well, I think taking care of our body and mind is not a luxury, it's a necessity. So do invest in that, as a mother, as a co worker, as a leader. I feel that I benefit others through my body and mind by taking care of it first. You know, if I don't do my meditation and yoga, I'm very cranky with my kids all day, and that doesn't leave a good feeling in my heart at the end of the day. I don't get creative. have ideas if I'm not exercising regularly or going for walks, I think my most creative ideas come when I'm out for a walk or in the nature to go for a hike to something. These are all free tools available to you This world is a beautiful place to just get out and, and learn and make lots of friends. It's just challenging right now. I think social connections are so important. And we're seeing a big wave of loneliness is striking all of us, especially these times, we make time to call a friend to video



call, you know, share updates on social media but not get sucked into it. So that you know you feel energized, all of that is great for you. So that's what I would say. In my mind. There are three things, three basic components of eating right, exercising, and taking care of your mind. These three things if you can get an order, you will see a significant impact, positive impact in your life.

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That's great. So those of you watching, remember, if you're if you have a company, if they can do it at Google, I'm sure you can find a way to do it there. If you're an employee, maybe send this link to your employer and say, Hey, you should listen to Richie Jaya and see if we can implement if you're willing to raise your hand and say, hey, I want to be the first it started at Google with one volunteer saying, hey, go get somebody, let's share how we can do this. Let's start meditating at work. Let's start making mindfulness breaks. Like we're saying here, don't have your phones at meals. I mean, we started doing that in our home a long time ago, because especially with the grandkids, or when they come over, we don't want to teach them any bad habits, you know, as far as doing that. So my kids grew up without all the screens. So it was a little bit different. But now you've got to be careful of all that. So we have to balance those things, which is kind of unusual for for someone Googler to say that we should take a like a detox from our digital systems and get back out there and start moving, which is great. I mean, that's the way it should be. So I want to thank you again for being on on the summit. This valuable I hope that the summit people take note that, you know, you can go out and take your 30 setup your day like just doing take your 30 minutes or 10 minutes or 20 minutes, some way to set up your day so that you take control of the day, instead of the day controlling you get out do some kind of form of meditation doesn't have to be Brain Tap, you can be doing whatever meditation you might just get settled in, get focused, go for a walk and get your body moving. If you can, like we always tell people, yoga, tai chi or dance, you know, you don't have to even dance well don't do anything things well just get your body moving. And so again, thank you for being part of the summit. We appreciate your time and your energy and your knowledge that you've shared with us today. And hopefully, the summit participants will will take heed and start doing these meditations at work. Since we spent a third of our time there anyway, we might as well you know, get a little bit of fun out of it as well. Okay, if you're waiting for the next speaker, please just go down, click the link the next week. We'll be right with you. God bless you. We'll talk to you soon.

