During the past several years, a growing number of companies have discovered the advantages of offering their staff a chance to learn about mindfulness including the likes of Intel, Nike, Target, Genentech, Google, Facebook, eBay, Twitter, General Mills, Ford Motor Company, Kaiser Permanente, Aetna, Cargill, Plantronics, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters and Hearst Publications, to name just a few. In addition, government institutions are now embracing mindfulness, including the U.S. Marines and U.S. Forest Service. The British Parliament has also offered a mindfulness class to its politicians to help steady themselves before difficult and often emotional votes.

Below are three snapshots: Google's best in class program, Intel's impressive mindfulness offering and Medium's progressive mindful culture. Each is of differing size and life span. Proof that you don't need to be a younger generation company (or a start-up, for that matter) to embrace mindfulness.

**Mindfulness trains attention, heightens focus and increases creativity at Google**

Google has developed a highly innovative and impactful mindfulness program called Search Inside Yourself (S.I.Y.). I took the S.I.Y. program in 2013 and loved it. The 8-week class was envisioned and launched by Chade Meng-Tan, an early Google engineer and personal growth pioneer, to transform the work and lives of the best and brightest behind one of the most innovative, successful, and profitable businesses in the world. Created in collaboration with a Zen master, a CEO, a Stanford University scientist, Jon Kabat-Zinn (the founder of MBSR) and Daniel Goleman (the author of *Emotional Intelligence*), this program is grounded in science and expressed in a way that even the most skeptical, pragmatic, engineering-oriented brains at Google can process. Google launched
S.I.Y. in 2007 and has refined and tested the program since then, training more than 1,000 of its engineers and managers.

One of those individuals was Bill Duane, a former Google engineer who now heads up the company's Wellbeing and Sustainable High Performance Learning Programs. According to Bill: "To understand the functioning of emotion, it made it safe for me as an engineer, as a scientist, to believe it's possible to change these functions," Duane said. "Mindfulness is a way to hack this mechanism." In this poignant video, Bill speaks about neuroscience, managing emotions and "neural hacking," and how the practices helped him get through a number of highly stressful periods in his life--both at work and personally.

http://vimeo.com/89332988

While Google has not yet quantified the impact of S.I.Y. on employees who have taken the course, program participants report:

- "I know this sounds melodramatic, but I really think this course changed my life."
- "Learning to listen better, gain control over my temper and understand every situation better by learning to discern stories from reality."
- "I have completely changed in the way I react to stressors. I take the time to think through things and empathize with other people's situations before jumping to conclusions. I love the new me!"
- "Becoming more credible to customers because I am better at calmly overcoming objections during product demonstrations."
- "Being courageous and truthful."
- "I now see myself and the world through a kinder, more understanding set of eyes."
- "Focusing on many tasks, despite a fire hose of professional demands. I still face instant deadlines but they no longer freak me out."
- "Becoming calmer, more patient, better able to listen."
- "I work in a group that wasn't very communicative, and half of them work in Germany. What I appreciate about the class is not just learning to meditate but using it in real life. It's more about small attitudinal changes."
- "Becoming more creative."
- "I experienced personal tragedy - my brother's death - during the course of Search Inside Yourself, and [the class] enabled me to manage my grief in a positive way."
- "I think the benefit of something like S.I.Y. for anybody in any workplace is that any time you have people working together there is going to be dysfunction, people who do not communicate well."
Someone is always going to be a favorite — or not — and you can't be unhappy about it all the time.”

To learn more about S.I.Y., see the following links:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8fcqrNO7so

http://www.siybook.com

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/29/technology/google-course-asks-employees-to-take-a-deep-breathe.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

http://www.siyli.org/

**Better Engineering at Intel Through Mindfulness**

Like Google, Intel began its mindfulness program from the bottom up with a few committed people meeting regularly in a conference room to practice. Qua Veda, a research analyst at Intel, began the grass-roots effort to bring mindfulness to the company's workforce.

"A few years ago, people took multitasking to be a great virtue," Veda said. "But it's about finding that quiet, centered place within so you're functioning at a much higher level of performance.... It's not just about stress reduction but having a capacity for insight and awareness, and engaging on a whole new level."

Over time, interest among employees grew and the Awake@Intel Program was born. The training promotes stress reduction in a culture where employees “...feel that if they weren’t stressed it would mean they’re not working hard enough.” According to Lindsay Van Driel, an operations manager in Intel’s Business Client Platform division, "It’s Intel culture. We are very driven, and we have a corporate culture in which it is accepted to overload yourself and work into the night and not take breaks during the day.”

To date, more than 1,500 employees have gone through the 9-week Awake@Intel training program that meets for 90 minutes/session. According to feedback from participants, the results include "improved well-being, creativity and focus, reduced feelings of stress and stronger engagement in meetings and projects."
One recent success story at Intel is how mindfulness training led engineers to a product breakthrough on a set of PC hardware features for Intel vPro. According to Brian Cockrell, a software engineer in the business client group at Intel:

"We were trying to get a two-stage boot to work wirelessly," he explained. "We said we'd do mindful engineering for a couple of hours. We turned off cellphones, IM and Outlook. Over a couple of mindfulness periods, we nailed it. It was a breakthrough." Cockrell added that his group would have solved the problem over the course of a couple of months, but never as quickly as it did by using mindfulness techniques. "I was amazed at how quickly we solved it," he said. "It was a real eye-opener."

Below are links to two insightful articles on Intel's impressive program:

http://www.intelfreepress.com/news/better-engineering-through-meditation-mindfulness/7021


**Building a mindful organization and culture from the bottom-up at Medium**

Medium is Twitter co-founder Evan Williams’ latest venture (Medium is a next generation online publishing tool that helps people collaborate by sharing ideas and stories that are longer than 140 characters). Not only is Medium introducing a game-changing way of sharing stories, but also it is creating a mindful organization and culture from the bottom-up.

At this year's Wisdom 2.0 event, I heard Medium's Head of Change Strategy, Jonathan Rosenfeld, speak about the practices that have been integrated at the company. Jonathan's talk was at Medium's new office space in downtown San Francisco so I had an opportunity to see the environment the company has created for its employees. The space is impressive to say the least, and it reflects the start-up's unique culture. Several engineers also spoke about the impact of mindfulness in their lives both at work and at home, as well as on the company culture. Medium's organizational practices around building a mindful company are trailblazing, especially when applied to a rapidly scaling technology company. Here's what makes Medium so special:

- First and foremost, all mindfulness practices at Medium are optional so employees don't feel forced to do them. This is critical to understand - and communicate - because the practices may not be for everyone.
• Medium invites a meditation teacher to the office three times a week to lead an opt-in teaching that also includes a meditation session.

• Medium has an annual mindfulness and meditation retreat.

• Medium offers a benefit where it covers each employee + 1 to attend one meditation retreat annually. The Leadership Team recently used this benefit to attend a meditation retreat together.

Even more impressive, is that Medium's organizational practices go deeper still. The company has introduced Holacracy to the organization, which is a "distributed authority system – a set of 'rules of the game' that bake empowerment into the core of the organization, rather than being vested at the top of a hierarchy." One of the key principles of Holacracy involves processing tension. To this end, employees are encouraged to bring up "stuff" and make the implicit explicit so that the company can take advantage of everyone’s perspective and ideas. Friction is mitigated when people are seen and heard.

Medium has developed a shared vocabulary to support a mindful organization. Employees regularly use words such as “tension,” “energize” and “objection” (which are Holacracy terms). They also integrate language from mindfulness teachings like “pausing,” “being present,” “clinging” and “aware” into their day-to-day communications.

Holacracy and Mindfulness practices go hand-in-hand. Jonathan spoke about introducing “change elements” — structures inserted into an existing organization to help it evolve to a higher level of functioning. These structures are a form of "productive disruption." Specifically:

• Identification – If something did not go well, a person could comment only if he or she had experienced a similar difficulty. In this way, the dialogue becomes an act of compassion.

• Appreciation – If a person thought a colleague did something great, he or she could give an appreciation, which is seen as an act of generosity.