

Dentons achieves 32% reduction in stress in European mindfulness

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Dentons has completed a pilot mindfulness program to help lawyers and professionals develop essential business skills, including the ability to manage emotions and stress more effectively. The NextMind program seeks to develop core elements of emotional intelligence – namely self-awareness, emotional self-regulation, social skills and empathy – through regular mindfulness meditation. Relying on the latest findings of neuroscience, cognitive science and psychology, the eight-week program combines elements of education, practice and open discussion.

The pilot program attracted close to 60 participants from across Europe. To measure the impact of the mindfulness practice, participants completed a self-assessment of their wellbeing and stress levels before and after the program. On average, they reported a reduction in stress of almost one third. They also reported a 75% improvement in social wellbeing, an 18% improvement in emotional wellbeing, and 16% improvement in self-efficacy. Based on these positive initial outcomes, Dentons plans to roll out the program more widely within Europe over the coming year.

Partner Karina Furga-Dąbrowska, Co-head of Dentons' Tax team in Warsaw, developed and delivered the innovative program in collaboration with mindfulness trainers from the Kalapa Leadership Academy. In addition to being a Tax partner, Ms. Furga-Dąbrowska recently completed a mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) training in the US, and is currently enrolled in a MBCT studies course at Oxford University's Department of Psychiatry.

A humanistic and scientific take on business

"The social competence and emotional intelligence of our lawyers and leaders are key to success in tomorrow's legal advisory market," observes Karina Furga-Dąbrowska. "More and more scientific research demonstrates that soft skills are in fact the new hard skills, and are essential in building and effectively running top-notch teams. A deliberate use of these tools in dealings with leaders, employees and clients helps organizations achieve a competitive edge and boosts the effectiveness of cooperation between teams. This is especially true of global, multicultural organizations such as Dentons."

The program addresses issues that often prove challenging to lawyers and professionals working under constant pressure of deadlines and expectations of achievement. Immersed in a highly demanding corporate culture, they can be overwhelmed with irreconcilable priorities. This chronic stress can leave professionals unable to concentrate properly and emotionally drained, leading to an increased risk of burnout, emotional distress and depression.

The NextMind program equips participants with tools that are useful in situations of acute stress and escalating conflict. Participants learn about the neuroscientific aspects of long-term stress, psychological pitfalls of perfectionism, social and business consequences of cognitive bias, and the hazards posed by multi-tasking.

Innovative approach by a law firm

NextMind is the first program of its kind to be launched by a global law firm on a European scale. The pilot program included participants from more than 12 countries, divided into three groups. The first two groups consisted of professionals from Dentons' office and shared service center in Warsaw, who attended the mindfulness workshops in person. The third group consisted of professionals from across Europe, who attended the training through online webinars. In addition, all participants were provided with an online knowledge platform and smartphone app to help them practice mindfulness on a regular basis.

In addition to the measurable improvement in stress management and wellbeing, the benefits of the program include greater self-awareness and increased emotional self-regulation, both instrumental in reducing emotional distress. Participants also learn to consciously focus their attention, a skill that translates into better concentration, improved precision and effectiveness in performing tasks, all of which help reduce the risk of error. Another tangible benefit is improvement in communication skills.

"Thanks to mindfulness meditation, we come to know ourselves and our emotions better, and are thus better able to consciously direct our actions," explains Karina Furga-Dąbrowska. "We also come to better understand the needs and emotions of others, which is key to better team management and the development of lasting trust-based relationships with clients. By exercising our mindfulness muscle we enhance our ability to concentrate, and thus our ability to arrive at correct conclusions and important decisions more quickly. And that ability is of fundamental importance in the kind of work lawyers do."

About Dentons

Dentons is the world's largest law firm, connecting talent to the world's challenges and opportunities in more than 75 countries. Dentons' legal and business solutions benefit from deep roots in our communities and award-winning advancements in client service, including Nextlaw, Dentons' innovation and strategic advisory services. Dentons' polycentric and purpose-driven approach, commitment to inclusion and diversity, and world-class talent challenge the status quo to advance client and community interests in the New Dynamic. www.dentons.com

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