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David: ...maybe we should try it now? maybe you can walk me through it?

Loren: Yeah, I love this. Okay, but can you be vulnerable with me?

David: Oh. Yes.

Loren: Close your eyes-

David: Okay, I'm gonna do this, yeah.

Loren: We're gonna close our eyes and we're gonna feel really grounded. You can feel where your sit bones are on the stool, so you feel very grounded, you're safe, you're in a secure seat-

David: Sit bones is a really pleasant euphemism.

Loren: I think I have that just from yoga, but, your butt, you're really secure. You're comfortable, you're not falling off.

David: Can you comment on whether I'm doing ... If I'm going about this right?

Loren: You are in ideal form right now-

David: Okay, good.

Loren: ... but the goal is just to be relaxed, act like no one's watching and we don't have headphones on we're not in the middle of an interview.

Loren: And then we're just gonna breathe in and out through our nose really deeply ... a couple more times. Just getting super calm and quiet and deep inhales and deep exhales really help to just quiet the mind and just nourish your body from the inside.

David: You do kind of just get a little endorphin rush. You're like, "Oh yeah, I forgot to breathe for the last-"

Loren: Exactly. I haven't been breathing deeply all day.

David: "... eight hours."

Loren: Exactly. And then you get to build your own mantra. Just say them over and over again, or you can continue to go deeper and think about that whole pie of your life. What else is just really important to me? What else would create my dream life right now in all aspects of my life? And it's not to put pressure on yourself, it's just to be really nonjudgmental and just aware.

David: I'm just gonna keep going here.

Loren: You just keep going. Okay, the buzzer goes off-

David: I can open my eyes now?

Loren: Yeah, you can open your eyes and you're like ... Just take a really deep breath in and just be grateful; grateful that you're healthy, that you're here, that you have the time and awareness and intellect and vulnerability, to go inside yourself and say those things and be aware of yourself.

David: Do you think some people just aren't cut out for this? Whenever I do new age-y stuff, for lack of a better term, I feel it's sort of Woody Allen in Annie Hall when he goes to LA for a week and he can't even find any food to eat.

Loren: [laughter] Listen, it's whatever works for you.

David: I'm David Zax and welcome to Creativity Unlocked, the show designed to unleash your potential at work. Creativity Unlocked is a new collaboration between Fast Company and Microsoft 365. Today's episode: Head Games.

David: We live in a world that's constantly demanding us to be more creative, but also a world that seems designed to drain us of creativity. With endless meetings and deadlines and distractions, how do we find ways to step back and engage our imagination; to truly listen and build on a colleague's ideas; and to slow down so that we're faster on our feet when we need to be? So come join us as we explore the solutions that help some of Fast Company's Most Creative People.

David: Meditation. Maybe you know someone who does it; maybe you've tried it yourself. You've heard people talking about it; you've seen it in the movies of course. But could this spiritual practice also be the secret to unleashing creativity in your life and work? In this episode I'll be speaking to a few people who think so: people who find that meditation grounds them, recenters them, and even supercharges their focus and productivity.

David: Loren Brill is the founder of Sweet Loren's, an all natural baking company in New York. Her baking goods are in 6,000 grocery stores. That success didn't come overnight. It was hard work. Like any entrepreneur with a wildly growing business, Loren's life can get pretty hectic.

Loren: It's funny, baking in general is kind of meditative and therapeutic almost and calming, but at this point I'm not the one making the product. A lot of people when they hear about it in the beginning, they're like, "Oh, that must be cute, you're in your kitchen making cookie dough, it must be so sweet." And I'm like,

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there's nothing cute about this I mean, this is a real business. We're competing with some of the largest food companies in the world.

Loren: The bigger you get, the more exciting it is, but the more crazy and complex it becomes, and when you care so much, you really put your all into these decisions.

David: When did you start meditating?

Loren: I've been doing yoga for over 15 years. My mom did yoga forever before it was cool even, so I kind of grew up with her meditating and so I've been meditating on a certain level for over 15 years, but when I started my business is when I really started to build in a daily practice, because of just the chaos of running a company. I just realized that I really needed to find time within the day to keep myself centered and focused and relaxed; that was the tool to be able to handle the crazy of just life.

David: Mhm. So let's talk about you mediation routine.

Loren: Most mornings, I get up out of bed when my alarm clock goes off, I sit in the middle of my apartment on the floor, on carpet, so it's very comfortable, and I like to be near the window so that I can get sunshine and just light. I've just created my own mediation. I sit with my legs crossed, I close my eyes, I just sit up tall, I'm just very kind of open to receiving and feel very grounded at the same time and then I close my eyes and I just do my own meditation. I ask for abundance in everything in my life and all the things that I'm kind of working towards, and I become very aware of the things that I want in my life.

David: I tried to take up meditation maybe about a year ago and then I sort of dropped it after a while. I think part of the reason was that, I don't know, I felt I was doing it wrong, or I felt like "Well, fine, I have 10 minutes now on the subway, but that's not really meditation,"

Loren: There's no wrong or right way to do any of this. I think the goal of meditation is to really have a quiet time to ground yourself and to check in with yourself and we can all create different mantras that work for us and our own meditation that works for us.

Loren: If you want something bad enough, you'll make time for it, you'll make it happen. It inspires you and brings out the best in you and it just kind of coaches your mind to think about the most important things,. I will make time for that, every day.

David: I'm at least as excited to try Sweet Loren's as I am to try meditation.

Loren: Meditation. That's the dream, both of those in one day? I mean, come on.

David: Well, Loren, thank you so much for coming in and teaching me about meditation.

Loren: Thank you so much for having me.

David: I gotta get back on the wagon.

Loren: Yeah, I'm here. I will be your support system and I will help you get back on.

David: Thank you.

David: I wanted to learn more about this, so I invited the authors of a book called *Just Sit*, a book on meditation, to speak with me...

Beth: Hi.

Sukey: Hi, David.

David: You guys are pretty into meditation, I gather. Yes?

Sukey: We are.

Beth: We like to meditate.

David: You like wrote the book on it.

Beth: We wrote "A" book on it, for sure.

David: Don't be modest.

Beth: Okay, "The" book.

David: Together, Beth and Sukey have traveled the world to study meditation in every kind of classroom. They've been to Lakota sweat lodges. They've been to Ashrams and vision quests. They've been to oneness retreats. They've seen the whole kaleidoscope of meditation, all the forms it takes all over the world.

Beth: For starters, if you wanna look at some of the emotional benefits; meditation, once you've developed a practice, has a way of slowing your brain down so that you start to respond to situations, as opposed to reacting.

Beth: So in situations that might of either caused you to fly off the handle or do something stupid, or say something you regret; you get this little gift, similar to a pause.

Beth: You can actually explore what you're hearing. Even if it's only a nano-second longer than normal, but it's enough time to hear what the persons saying, and realize it's not coming at you with anger, or whatever you're reacting to it with. Instead, it takes all the power out of it. And that's kinda one of meditations bigger super powers, I think, that it gives you.

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- Beth: Because once you start developing that muscle, you walk in the world completely differently.
- Sukey: I actually had a doctor that recommended I meditate. Because my Mother had early onset Alzheimer's and she was like "Exercise is important, nutrition is important, but honestly if you don't start detoxing your thoughts; that's where all disease starts."
- David: Detoxing your thoughts?
- Sukey: Yeah. And to be honest, even though it was in my cultural soup and I even had a doctor telling me to do it; I was an on and off meditator. It wasn't till my thoughts got hijacked and I was in that rumination, and feeling sick because of my thoughts that it was one of the ways for me to sort of calm myself and pull myself back together.
- Sukey: I had this tool that could really help plug me back, so that I wasn't just ricocheting to every sort of emotional stimuli that was happening in my life. And having life experience, that sort of brought me to the cushion each time was its own blessing. Physical benefits are many, but also the emotional benefits are tremendous.
- David: We've talked about benefits in the abstract, but what concretely; because this is Fast Company, can meditation bring to the way you work?
- Beth: Well for starters ... studies have been done. Workplaces that have brought meditation in, have far less sick days, far more productivity, it's made huge differences in all sorts of workplaces; from big corporations to small mom-and-pop kind of. So, numbers wise, it makes a lot of sense to bring it in.
- Sukey: For the skeptics, Jon Kabat Zinn did a study of 20 minutes, twice a week for eight weeks and it showed that it changed the brain, the gray matter. And that the amygdala, which is your stress factor of the brain, has this beautiful dance with your prefrontal cortex, which is your decision maker. Then when you were actually meditating, you're feeding your prefrontal cortex and your sort of shrinking the amygdala.
- Sukey: So, in a work environment when stress is there, you want your employees to be able to make really good decisions. Ultimately, having this practice, is a way of developing and helping support better decision making. When your more present, more aware, there's not a lot of time wasted, because there's more clarity surrounding all of it.
- Beth: And people connect, and you connect with yourself. And the more you connect with yourself, you connect with your colleagues and your boss-

- Sukey: Better ideas happen and you have a synergy, and synchronicity and-- It's a practice that gives on so many levels.
- David: This podcast is called Creativity Unlocked. [laughter]
- David: You spontaneously said meditation can unlock creativity, so I wanna hear more about that.
- Sukey: When you can create a space that feels safe, where everyone can participate, you just never know where that ideas gonna come from. That creates this environment where it allows for spontaneous, creative combustion.
- Sukey: It sort of reduces that inner voice, that's there to condemn you... That sort of silences all those, so you can actually be present and share without the risk of ... projecting that onto everyone in the room.
- Beth: Or at least it gives you permission to notice it, and not give into it or be hijacked by it. When you can look at it, and it's just some random voice, and it doesn't have any power over you, you make a lot of space for a lot of creative work to come in. And it's like a free for all in your brain, of great stuff, great juices flowing, versus all these little naggy voices that keep you hijacked and in a spin that prevents you from actually getting anything done.
- Sukey: Because then it's like, "When your muse arrives", there's space. She doesn't have to compete with the inner critic.
- David: Your inner critic can just stop mansplaining the muse?
- Sukey: Exactly. Exactly.
- David: Should all human resources departments across the land, be really focusing on the mind as the next frontier?
- Beth: I think so. In the same way that workplaces really encourage people working out.
- David: And so, this isn't just obscure startups in Venice, California that are doing this?
- Beth: There's a lot of big, corporate, huge companies, that have now put meditation programs into the company. People can go on a daily or weekly basis and meditate.
- Beth: And we know someone at a massive industrial one, who literally changed the whole culture of the company. It went from being one of the last places you would expect employees to meditate, to where a ton of the employees are now meditators, and go on retreats, and the whole cultures changed.

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- David : Now that I had learned all the benefits of meditation, I had a greater appreciation of how the practice helped Loren Brill push through all the stresses of being an entrepreneur to launch her business, Sweet Loren's. I guess I wasn't all that surprised that an entrepreneur who had always loved yoga was doing meditation, but meditation was cropping up in some unusual places.
- David: PricewaterhouseCoopers, aka PwC. What is PwC?
- Mike: We provide consulting, assurance, and tax services to clients around the world.
- David: Mike Fenlon is the Chief People Officer at PwC.
- David: And that's a cooler way of saying HR, sort of?
- Mike: Yes, that's a cooler way of saying HR.
- David: [laughter]Ok. Great.
- David: At PwC, Mike implemented an unusual program as part of something PwC was calling Be Well, Work Well.
- David: First of all, how big of a component of your wellness program is the meditation?
- Mike: Well, we call it mindfulness. Meditation is a component, but our focus is broader. It's really intended to be holistic, so think mind, body, spirit.
- David: I know PwC is right across the street from the studio here, but I haven't had a chance to visit it. You know, when you walk in, is it a really relaxed kind of eastern temple vibe? Does it really feel like you're in Thailand when you walk into PwC?
- Mike: You can probably guess that that's not the case. Yeah, no. Listen, we all live in a world where demand exceeds capacity. So it's a very demanding business world we're in. I don't think that's unique to our firm.
- David: Just to make it vivid and concrete for the listeners at home, PwC, it's, would you say pretty corporate? Like, you walk in, it's cubicles, it's fluorescent lights, it's people hard at work hunched over computers, and so on.
- Mike: When I first joined PwC I remember, going to an offsite and everyone was dressed in a suit and tie.
- David: So, it should have been like a retreat, almost. People should have been in their Hawaiian shirts or whatever, but they were still in suit and tie.
- Mike: Yeah, that's right. That was a decade ago and it seems like a hundred years ago. As a firm, we're well over 150 years old. We were founded in London, so we

have a long, long culture, tradition, and history. It's a strong culture but, like anything, culture has to evolve. Ours has evolved very, very deliberately over those years, since when I joined the firm.

David: Okay. It's 150 years old. It's British in origin. It has hundreds of thousands of employees and it works with a lot of major financial firms, for instance. It's hard to imagine something that potentially could be stuffier than that, almost.

Mike: No doubt that would be the stereotype or the perception.

David: Right. So when you come in and you say, "Oh, yeah. We're going to start meditating now." How does that conversation unfold? Were you laughed out of the room?

Mike: You know, it's interesting. For many years we'd been running a program called Discover. This was a program that we offer what we call our senior associates. The program is not some sort of corporate training program where you're going to learn skills. It's actually about you. Discover, in the sense of, "What is your purpose? What's the direction you want to take your life in? How can you fulfill your potential?" So part of that work included practices around mindfulness and meditation.

Mike: We reached a tipping point, I think, when a lot of our people were saying, "It's time to go from experiences in a retreat setting, experiences in a training program. How do we bring this into our DNA of our culture, our everyday culture?" We made a decision about a year ago that it was time to do just that.

David: [So Mike sent an email blast asking for people throughout the company to get involved. Adam Clayman, an associate in New York remembers getting that email.](#)

Adam: A word popped out at me, "meditation," so I opened the link, I looked through it, and they were saying that they were piloting this eight-week-long program... They're saying "apply here," and I'm thinking to myself, "Alright, well nobody's gonna apply to this, it's meditation, it still kind of has that stigma, of well that's kind of weird and hippy-dippy, and I'm not going to do that..."

David: [This was not how Adam expected to reconnect with meditation, but he went for it. Adam first discovered meditation on a trip to Thailand, but when he got back to New York and started his career, he dropped meditation. The eight-week trial was a great success, so much so, in fact, that Adam wanted to bring meditation to his entire team.](#)

Adam: There's a whole PwC meditation group that came out of that, and they're responsible for putting on these different events. So you can just pop into our office, if you're a PwC employee, and go through a 20-minute meditation session. And this is weekly.

David: The 20 of you came together and said, "How do we expand the benefits to PwC writ large"?

Adam: I guess I took it a step further than other people in that class, right? I told myself that I wanted to bring this on to my audit team, and we were working pretty long hours so I decided that I was going to start this meditation, guided meditation sessions at the office, so I went ahead. It started initially with just my team, and-

David: Did you have to get anyone's approval for this, or did you just do it?

Adam: No, I mean I told my manager, "Hey, I'm interested..."

David: And so you guys are now the monks of PricewaterhouseCooper.

Adam: We are, we are. That's what they call us, yes.

David: When you first implemented this meditation group and people started coming and appreciating it, what did you observe both in yourself and in your team in terms of what impact that had on your work?

Adam: The first thing I realized is it was difficult for people. I wouldn't say it's normal for someone to just sit down for five minutes, close your eyes and be able to enjoy that. Our brains are so busy and so constantly you're preoccupied doing something that that initial step was difficult. But as I started to do it, it's a practice, and just like anything it gets better as you go along, and they started to realize even if it's for five seconds out of the five minutes, that five seconds was so beneficial. Just to be able to reset, recharge your batteries and set this calm intention for the rest of the day.

David: I'm wondering if you can make vivid for me, like walk me through a moment, when you were just really at peak stress, and then you kinda, you slunk away, you did a meditation, and it really made all the difference for you.

Adam: So it was the year-end closing, we were trying to wrap up all of our testing, and there's -- we have to do 10 days of work in 3 days, basically, so that classic story: computer shut down, nothing saved, lost hours of work. Here I am, in my head I just wanna curse at myself and yell and scream, but I took a step back. A simple, like five-minute meditation I think it was, and I was able to just kinda reset.

Adam: What I like about it is you can come out of it and no matter how stressful the situation, there's this reset button that if you are able to find. If you realize how important this is in the big picture of things, in the grand scheme, and I thought to myself, "Alright, well, it's not that big of a deal. I can move on. I was able to just kind of reset and go back to my normal job, so.

David: And redo the four hours of work that you lost.

Adam: And redo the four hours of work. [laughter]

David: [So Mike how has the program at PwC grown?](#)

Mike: What we did was we asked all of our people to begin by doing a self-assessment and identify one thing they want to work on, and then create a team plan. That was just a few months ago, last October, November. Today we have over 5,200 teams that have created plans. It's blown our minds. It's beyond anything, really, we imagined.

Mike: In that short period of time we're already hearing from clients, clients that didn't know we were doing this, necessarily, but suddenly started to experience a difference in their interactions with our teams, with our people. One CFO asked, "Well, how could I get my people involved? How could my team engage with you around this," because they're seeing a difference.

David: Wait. So a client, the CFO of a client of yours came in and said, "Hey, the people who we're working with at PwC, all of a sudden they're really zen. What's going on here?" Is that what you're saying?

Mike: Yeah. I don't know that he used the word zen.

David: Okay.

Mike: But the point is, he noticed a difference in the interactions. So it's been really powerful, the stories we're hearing of how people are working differently, incorporating whether it's a standing meeting. Maybe we're going to have a coaching discussion but instead of sitting in an office we decide to walk around the block and have that conversation. We've learned the key to changing culture exists not in solitary training and people doing their best on their own, but really engaging communities.

Mike: The point I want to make is, it's not just sort of meditating on a mountaintop, but it's bringing mindfulness practices into how we work, each and every day. It's about inclusion, it's about belonging, it's about creating an environment where everyone can contribute to their fullest.

Mike: You do this because you want to be a better person, a better leader. You want to be successful. You want to create an environment where you are able to get to the best solutions, the best decisions, where there's innovation.

David: [OK this may seem daunting but if you're wondering how to get started with meditation yourself...](#)

Beth: Sit right now.

David: Sit right now.

Beth: Yeah, do it right now, or do it when the episode ends, or in the next 15 minutes when you have a place, space, time. Two minutes, just focus on your breath for two minutes and close your eyes; and when thoughts come in notice them, and just notice them and let them go. And see how you feel after two minutes.

Sukey: I tell friends who have no time, which I believe you, we all have sort of busy lives. I'm like, "Well, you brush your teeth twice a day", I hope. You brush your teeth, 'cause you don't want your teeth to rot. Well take two minutes before or after brushing your teeth to meditate. That's a spark time, something you already do. Because, it's not un-similar to brushing your teeth, we do it to detox our brain, so our brain doesn't rot.

David: That's really clever. So, piggyback a quick version onto a habit you already have. I may try that.

David: Well I'm more convinced than ever that meditation can be an essential tool to help you stay balanced and creative at work and just to improve your life. In an era of information overload, of constant multitasking, I see the value of focusing on just one thing at a time: your breath for instance, or a simple calming phrase that you repeat again and again. I also see the value of focusing relentlessly on the present rather than revisiting the past or worrying about the future. So maybe try it.

David Zax: Across three episodes, we've explored three very different ways to unlock one's creativity: walking, improv comedy, and meditation. Each of these practices we've seen have helped people in business unlock their own creativity and maybe it could help you too. Thanks again for joining us. I'm David Zax from Fast Company and Creativity Unlocked is a collaboration between Fast Company and Microsoft 365. Microsoft 365 is a family of offerings designed to unlock the creativity and ingenuity of everyone in an organization. The show is a production of the Fast Co Works team including Chuck Salter, Casie Lesser, and Shannon Boerner. Our editor is Laura Morris, our music was created by Chuck Lindo. Special thanks to studio center and to Chris Arbisi.