

# in the know staying centered in times of uncertainty

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Notifications, family obligations, deadlines, world news in constant upheaval and a steady cascade of thoughts blur together beneath the constant hum of busyness. We drift through our days on autopilot, scarcely noticing the moment we're in. The start of a new year offers the opportunity to pause, reset and intentionally build new habits and routines.

Meditation is one practice that can support this shift in many ways. It's widely known for helping manage stress and anxiety by calming the parasympathetic nervous system and gently moving us out of fight-or-flight mode. It can improve sleep and focus, support heart and brain health, and even be beneficial for conditions like Alzheimer's. Beyond that, meditation can help ease chronic pain and reduce inflammation. Together, these benefits show just how deeply meditation can support both our mental and physical well-being.

These insights were shared by Tamara Levitt, head of mindfulness for the *Calm* app and narrator of *The Daily Calm*, during her keynote conversation with Ari Kaplan, a pension lawyer, at the 58th Annual Canadian Employee Benefits Conference. Kaplan, who maintains a regular mindfulness practice, said meditation has delivered a range of health benefits and improved his effectiveness as a lawyer, mediator and arbitrator. "It's not even something I'm doing consciously," he said. "It feels like I want to do those things."

He added that mindfulness can be especially relevant to pension and benefits trustees, who face the pressures of the high-stakes fiduciary responsibility. Mindfulness, Kaplan said, can help leaders identify biases and emotional reactions that might otherwise cloud judgment and influence critical decision making.

Levitt said she began practicing meditation 30 years ago, and she discovered it wasn't strange or cultish. She describes

mindfulness as "the practice of purposefully paying attention to the present moment in a nonjudgmental way." While the concept may appear straightforward, she acknowledged that it isn't easy to put into practice. Early on, she said, the stillness made it hard to stay focused, as her mind frequently drifted from one thought to another.

Levitt shared an insight from best-selling wellness author Elizabeth Lesser, who said, "One does not meditate in order to become a good meditator. We meditate to wake up and live and become skilled at the art of living."

She went on to explain that meditation is a formal practice, typically involving sitting or standing with the eyes closed while focusing attention on a single object—most often the breath, though it may also be a sensation or sound. This point of focus serves as an anchor, repeatedly bringing the mind back to the present moment and helping to train attention. "The presence that we cultivate when we are meditating," Levitt explained, "is what we call mindfulness."

Mindfulness, she added, extends beyond formal meditation. "We can do anything mindfully," she said. Whether conversing, washing dishes, working or walking. Practicing mindfulness, she explained, means noticing what's happening from moment to moment, being awake.

In times of uncertainty, Levitt said, we often feel ungrounded and jump to conclusions to protect ourselves. Constant change and stress, whether in high-pressure work environments or our personal lives, can feel unavoidable. Even meditating for just a few minutes at a time creates a small but powerful pause. That pause builds self-awareness, softens our attention and allows us to shift perspective, leading to clearer thinking, greater emotional regulation and increased resilience—so we're better able to ride out the tides of change.

