

A Guide for Faculty, Staff and Students

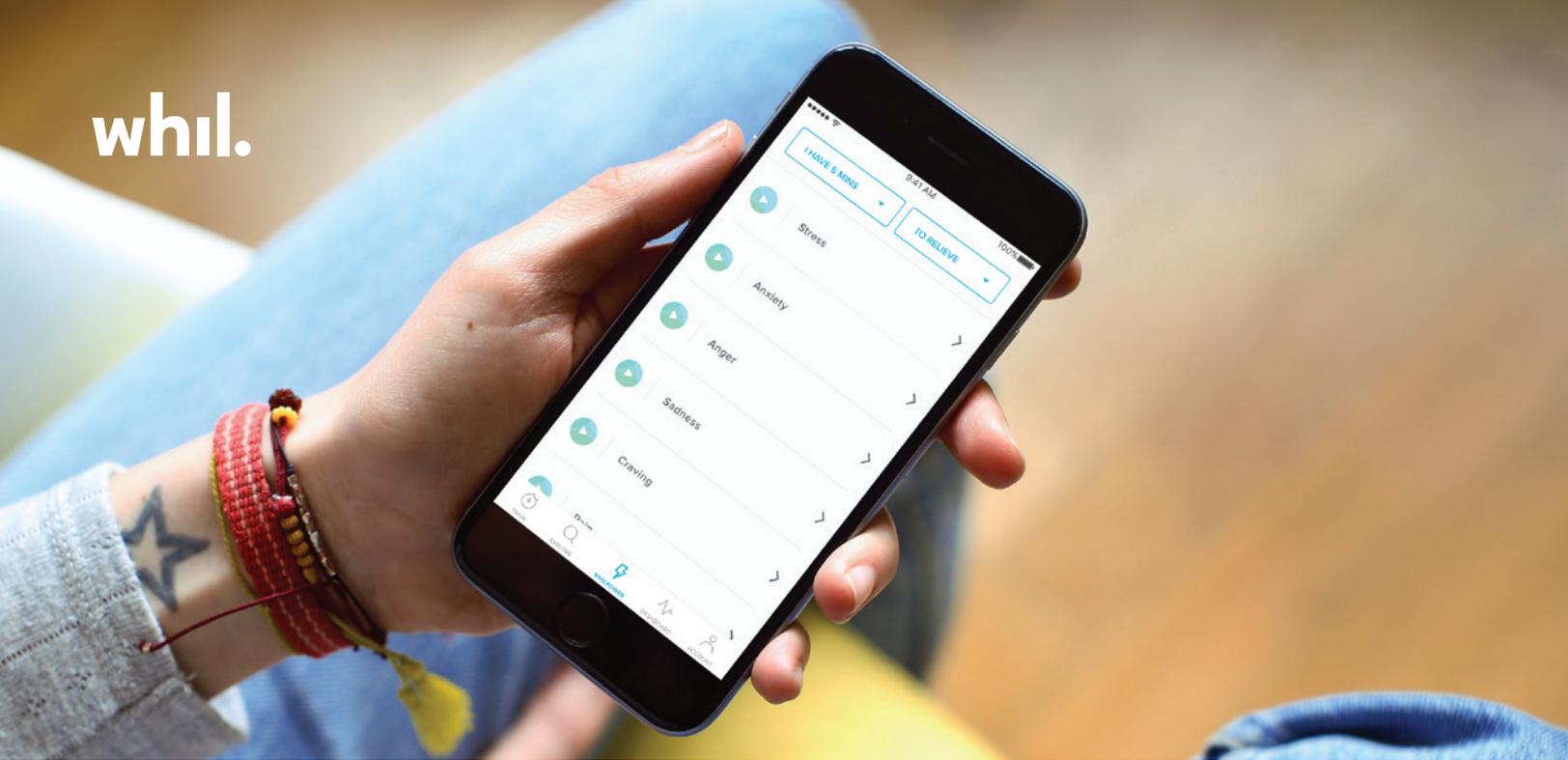
**whil.**

# Why Universities Are Embracing Mindfulness



Whil Full Guide





Whil is the leader in digital learning tools for peak performance training and wellbeing for youth.

This guide was created in collaboration with our friends at Holistic Life Foundation (HLF) and Inward Bound Mindfulness Education (iBme), two of the leading U.S. charities teaching mindfulness to young adults. It provides an overview of the science behind mindfulness training and highlights why it's

captured the attention of top educators across the globe. It's intended for educators who are not only interested in the performance and health benefits of mindfulness for faculty and students, but also want the proof points... just like us.

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# What is Mindfulness Training?

Mindfulness is attention and situational awareness training to reduce stress, focus attention and perform in the present moment.

Universities are increasingly using mindfulness to manage anxiety, improve performance and to build kinder, more aware communities. And they see the unavoidable side effects of improving attendance, grades and test scores, while decreasing suspensions and dropout rates.

Students are turning to mindfulness to get to know themselves better (their emotions, thoughts and

values) and develop an awareness to move their actions from habit and compulsion to choice.

Mindfulness training is also often referred to as resilience training, brain training, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence training.

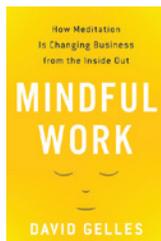
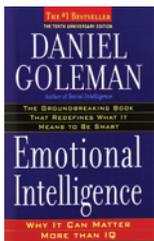
Whatever you call it, learning to be calm, cool and collected is one of the keys to increasing performance and resilience in modern times.

## Why is Everyone Talking About Mindfulness?

Our culture seems to be taken with the mindfulness movement these days. Leading universities use it to prepare students for academic and life success. Top sports teams use it to gain an edge. Fortune 500 businesses embrace it to help their employees reduce stress and lower absenteeism and other related healthcare costs. And people everywhere are embracing mindfulness as a tool to live healthier, happier and more engaged lives.



### In Business



### In Sports



### In the Media





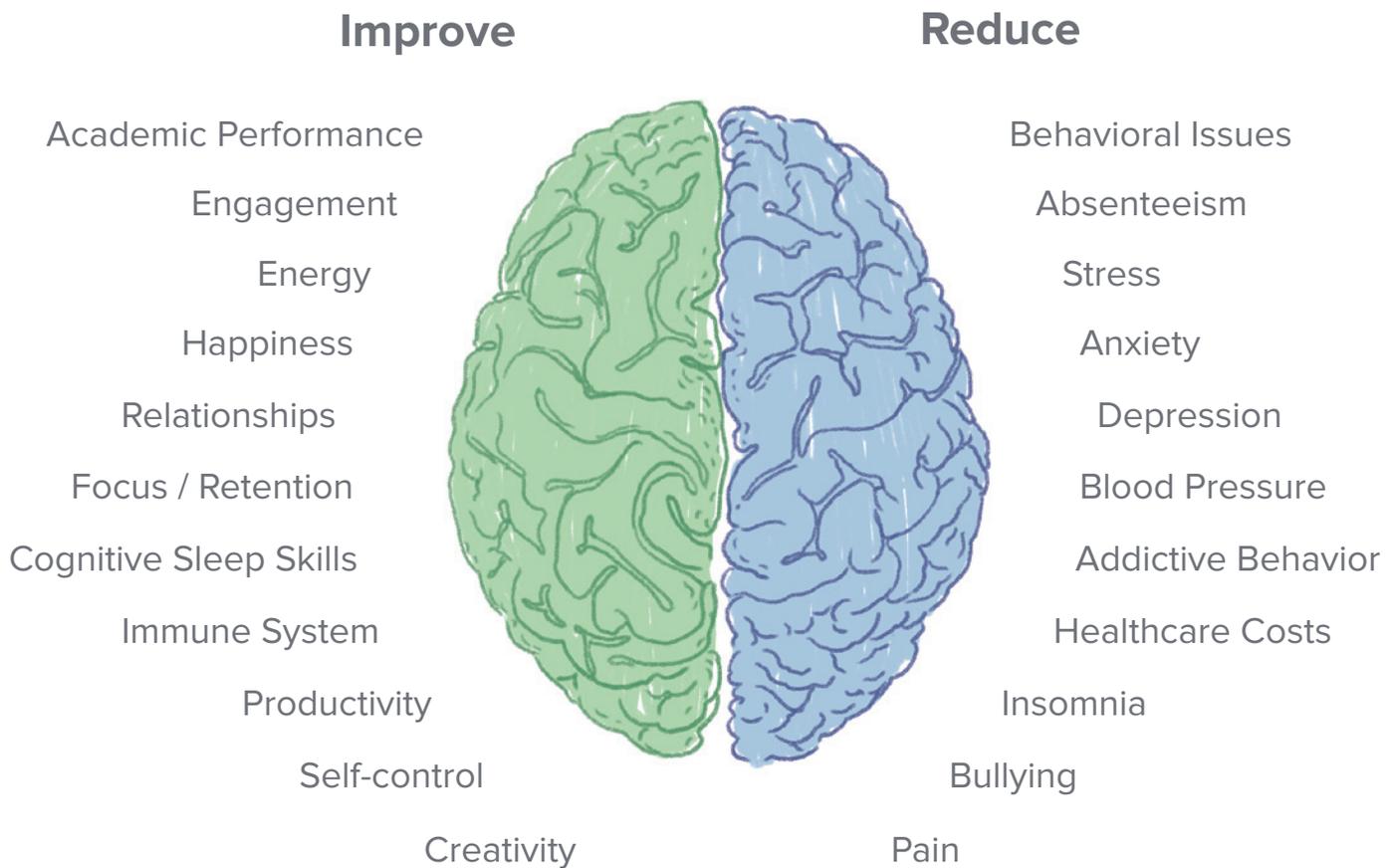
# Cue the Science

Thousands of studies have shown that mindfulness training reduces stress, anxiety and depression while improving the immune system and the cognitive skills that are **key to high performance**.

Much of this research focuses on **neuroplasticity** (the brain's ability to change in response to experience and training... like mindfulness

meditation) and the relationship between the “thinking brain” (prefrontal cortex) and the “emotional brain” (amygdala). When these two parts of the brain work together well, people act calm, thoughtful and reasonable. When they don't, people act stressed, unhappy and tend to lose their cool. Sound familiar?

## A Few of The Benefits of Mindfulness Brain Training





## WELLBEING

### Strengthen immunity:

After 8 weeks of mindfulness training, people showed decreased anxiety and significantly increased activity in the parts of their brains associated with positive emotions. They also developed more antibodies to the influenza vaccine (Davidson et al., 2003).

Recommended Whil Training: [Connect with Your Body](#)

### Calm yourself:

People with greater mindfulness training had less activity in the amygdala (the fight or flight trigger in the brain) while hearing negative distracting sounds. The more hours of training the practitioner had, the lower the activation in the amygdala (Brefczynski-Lewis et al., 2007).

Recommended Whil Training: [Calm Anxiety](#)



### Improve your mood:

Researchers at the University of Exeter, the University of Oxford, and the University of Cambridge tested 522 students between the ages of 12 and 16 who went through a nine-week introductory mindfulness course reported fewer symptoms of depression, lower stress levels, and greater well-being (Huffington Post, June 2013).

Recommended Whil Training: [Rise From Depression](#)

### Improve chronic stress-related conditions:

After 6 months of mindfulness training, 48% of veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) had clinically significant improvements in symptoms such as depression, behavioral activation and experiential avoidance (Kearney, 2013).

Recommended Whil Training: [Relieve Daily Stress](#)

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Successful mindfulness programs are going beyond science labs and school classrooms and becoming a popular news topic.

**Improve emotional wellbeing:** A study conducted by Felicia Huppert, a Professor of the Well-Being Institute at Cambridge University, found that there was a significant positive association between the amount of individual mindfulness practice outside the classroom and improvement in psychological wellbeing.

(The Journal of Positive Psychology, July, 2010)



## PERFORMANCE

### Curb the wandering mind:

Mindfulness training curbed mind wandering and improved cognitive function. College students who took a 2-week mindfulness training class did better on working memory tasks, saw a reduction in their distracting thoughts, and had 16 percentile points higher accuracy on the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) (Mrazek et al., 2013).

Recommended Whil Training: [Focus and Be Calm](#)

### Be happier and more energetic:

Professionals who practiced mindfulness reported less emotional exhaustion and greater job satisfaction (Hulsheger et al., 2012).

Recommended Whil Training: [Boost Your Energy](#)

### Improve cardiovascular health:

Mindfulness improves heart health, particularly shown in risk factors such as smoking, body mass index, fasting glucose and physical activity. Practitioners were 83% more likely to have good cardiovascular health (Loucks et al., 2014).

Recommended Whil Training: [Harness the Power of Breath](#)

**64%** of students dropouts are due to stress and other mental health issues.

### Feel better and show up:

Mindfulness training was linked to a 50% decrease in cold and flu symptoms and 76% decrease in absenteeism. Hard to be a baller when you're home sick (Barrett et al., 2012).

Recommended Whil Training: [Improve Your Day](#)

### Develop healthier eating habits:

Mindful eating strategies help weight loss and treating eating disorders. In a study of people suffering from binge-eating, the declines in bingeing and depression were significant. Additionally, it helped people enjoy their food more and have less sense of struggle about controlling their eating.

(Kristeller & Wolever, 2011).

Recommended Whil Training: [Healthy Eating](#)

**70%** of students report stress impacts their academic performance.





## RELATIONSHIPS

### Have better relationships:

Participants had an increase in size and activation of the prefrontal cortex (PFC) after mindfulness training. The PFC (“thinking brain”) plays an important role in regulating the “emotional” brain areas. Training the connection between the brain’s “thinking” and “feeling” areas allows for more stable emotional relationships (Farb et al., 2007).

Recommended Whil Training: [Extend Love to All](#)

### Improve self-control:

The insula is thicker in long-term mindfulness meditators. It’s the area of the brain involved in self-awareness and in processing information about the internal state of our body (Lazar et al., 2005).

Recommended Whil Training: [Understand Your Emotions](#)

1 in 10 students  
consider suicide;

30% feel too  
depressed to function.

### Take things less personally:

Practitioners were able to shift from over-reliance on their internal narratives on successes and failures to viewing life experiences with more objectivity. Imagine moving from “My performance means X about my worth” to “This success or failure is a fleeting experience not linked to my underlying worth” (Farb, et al., 2007).

Recommended Whil Training: [Be Fluid and Non-Reactive](#)

80% of faculty members report  
stress from high expectations.



## Improve insomnia:

In patients with insomnia, mindfulness training produced significant differences in sleep quality. It took them 22 minutes less time to fall asleep, and their total sleep time increased by at least 30 minutes. Down and out never looked so good (Garland, 2012).

Recommended Whil Training: [Overcome Sleep Obstacles](#)

## Get more quality sleep:

Two weeks of mindfulness practice produced steady improvements in sleep quality, sleep duration and mindfulness (Hulshager, Feinholt & Nubold, 2015).

Recommended Whil Training: [Ease into Sleep](#)

## Achieve deep rest:

Mindfulness results in what scientists call the relaxation response — a physiological state of deep rest induced by practices like meditation and yoga. So even if you're not getting enough sleep, you experience the deep rest your body needs for processes like energy metabolism and immune function (Harvard Medical School, 2013).

Recommended Whil Training: [Sleep Better](#)

## Reduce sleep dependance:

Sleep duration in long-term meditators was lower than control non-meditators and general population norms, with no apparent decrements in psychomotor vigilance task scores. Meaning that meditators who sleep less might not experience a decline in cognitive function like non-meditators who don't sleep well do (Kaul et al., 2010).

Recommended Whil Training: [Clear Your Mind](#)

## Replace your sleep medication:

Mindfulness has been shown to be as effective in beating insomnia as Lunesta, a prescription medication. Without a side of side effects. Results lasted even three months after the study (Gross et al., 2011).

Recommended Whil Training: [Prepare to Sleep](#)





# CAREER

## Calm the corporate warrior:

Just 4 short sessions of meditation training was shown to reduce fatigue and anxiety and significantly improve visuo-spatial processing (read the classroom), working memory (know the curriculum), and decision making (manage students with a clear and open mind) (Zeidan et al., 2010).

Recommended Whil Training: [Thrive in the Workplace](#)

## Be more innovative:

In a survey of leaders, 93% reported mindfulness training helped them create space for innovation.

Step 1: Learn to chill.

Step 2: Unlock your next big idea

(Institute for Mindful Leadership, 2011).

Recommended Whil Training: [Develop Curiosity](#)

## Improve attention:

Mindfulness participants were able to reduce their personal error rate and increase control over the distribution of limited brain resources to process more data. It's like getting more Random Access Memory (RAM) in your brain (Slagter et al., 2007).

Recommended Whil Training: [Experience Peace of Mind](#)



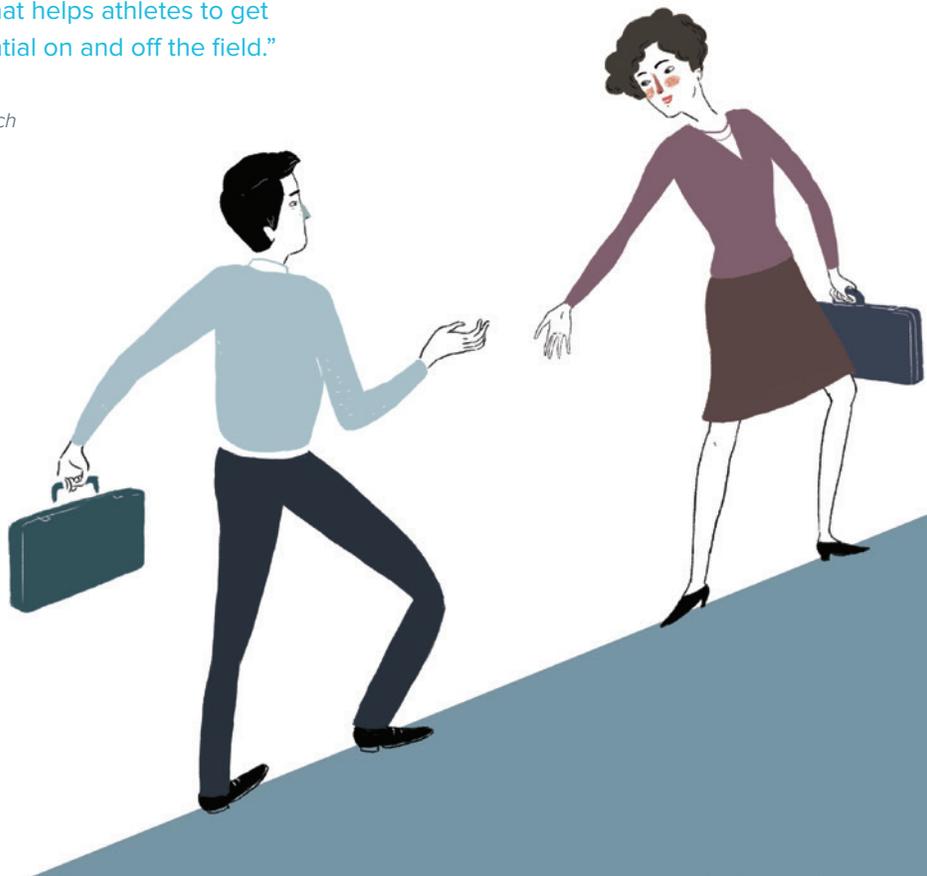
Meditation, more than any other factor, has been the reason for what success I've had."

**Ray Dallo,**  
*Bridgewater Associates Founder*



Simply put, mindfulness occurs when you become more aware of your thoughts. That grit is a characteristic that helps athletes to get closer to their full potential on and off the field."

**Pete Carroll,**  
*Seattle Seahawks Head Coach*



## Regulate your cortisol levels:

Women with breast cancer who practiced yoga had the steepest decline in their cortisol levels across the day, as compared to those who were assigned to the stretching or control group

(Chandwani et al., 2014).

Recommended Whil Training: [Breathe and Stretch](#)

## Enhance strength and flexibility:

Research shows that yoga can significantly enhance muscular strength and body flexibility

(Woodyard, 2011).

Recommended Whil Training: [Loosen Hips and Hamstrings](#)

## Lower risk of heart disease:

A review of yoga and cardiovascular disease found that yoga may help improve heart health as much as conventional exercise, such as brisk walking

(Chu, Gotink & Yeh, 2014).

Recommended Whil Training: [Destress Your Body](#)

Every day, you're training your brain whether you know it or not. Why not start being intentional about it?

## Ease back pain:

A 2013 meta-analysis of yoga for low back pain found that individuals who practice yoga regularly significantly reduce short- and long-term low back pain, and back pain-specific disability

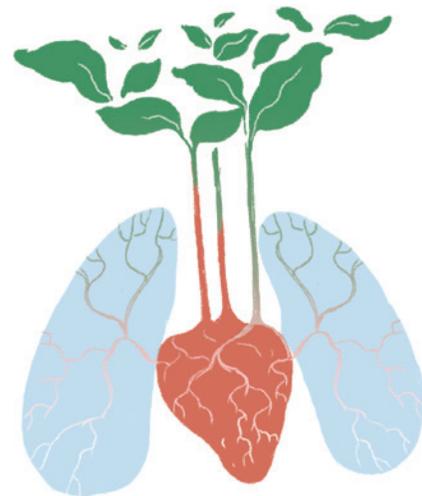
(Cramer et al., 2013).

Recommended Whil Training: [Relieve Muscle Tension](#)

## Curb hypertension:

A systematic review of 17 randomized controlled trials found 11 studies that linked regular yoga practice to significantly greater reductions in systolic BP compared to pharmacotherapy, breath awareness, health education, no treatment or usual care (Hagins et al., 2013).

Recommended Whil Training: [Unwind](#)



# What Educators Are Saying About the Success of Mindfulness in Universities

“These (mindfulness) findings are likely to be of great interest to our overstretched schools who are trying to find simple, cost-effective and engaging ways to promote the resilience of their students — and of their staff too -- at times when adolescence is becoming increasingly challenging, staff under considerable stress, and schools under a good deal of pressure to deliver on all fronts.”

**Katherine Weare, Professor and Researcher,  
University of Exeter.**

“Psychological well-being has been linked to better learning, social relationships and academic performance, so the enhancement of well-being is likely to improve a range of outcomes in the school context.”

**Felicia Huppert, Research Professor,  
University of Cambridge.**

“These (inner city Baltimore) children are exposed to high levels of chronic stress, and research shows that those kinds of ongoing stressors can impair kids’ ability to regulate thoughts and emotions. We think this kind of (Holistic Life Foundation mindfulness) program has the potential to help kids increase their ability to control emotions and intrusive thoughts, and put themselves on a more positive pathway.”

**Mark Greenberg, Director, Prevention Research Center  
at Pennsylvania State University**

“For a long time the definition of success for our members (independent schools) was mainly focused on the academic part. But now the research is stressing the importance of developing these noncognitive skills.”

**Amada Torres, Vice President, National Association of  
U.S. Independent Schools**

## Who is Whil?

**Whil Concepts, Inc. (“Whil”)** is a digital training system for stress resilience, mindfulness and sleep. It was created from five years of research and twenty years of experience managing innovation, disruption and stress in high performance cultures. Our platform provides 200+ self-directed digital training programs leveraging decades of research in adult learning, neuroscience, mindfulness and positive psychology.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE  
WHIL RESOURCES](#)

## Contact Us

To find out more about how Whil’s digital mindfulness, resilience and sleep training can improve outcomes for your employees and company, contact [info@whil.com](mailto:info@whil.com).

Because life is stressful and we’re here to help.

*The Whil Team*

[GET A DEMO](#)

## About the Authors



**Joe Burton** is the founder and CEO of Whil Concepts, Inc. (“Whil”), a digital training platform helping employees to reduce stress, increase resilience and improve their sleep and performance. He’s an entrepreneur in scientific wellbeing, former President of Headspace and spent fifteen years as a global COO in public companies. Joe is an alumnus of Harvard Business School and regular contributor to Forbes, Business Insider and The Huffington Post. He’s worked in over 50 countries and travels the world speaking on topics including disruption, culture, employee safety and mindfulness as competitive advantage. Joe is also a certified Search Inside Yourself instructor. He discovered mindfulness as a super stressed executive after dismissing it as “definitely not for me” and it changed his life.



**Dr. Tara Cousineau, PhD**, is a clinical psychologist and researcher. She is the founder of BodiMojo, Inc., a health communications research firm that develops and evaluates wellness interventions for youth and families. Dr. Cousineau is a 2016-2017 Community Leadership Fellow at the Center for Mindfulness and Compassion, Cambridge Health Alliance, in Somerville, MA. She is participating a two-year mindfulness teacher training program with Tara Brach, PhD, and Jack Kornfield, PhD. She is a former global advisor to the Dove Self-Esteem Project with the social mission to improve girl’s body confidence, and co-author of DSEP’s Mindful Me educational materials. Dr. Cousineau is currently writing a book, *The Kindness Cure: Using the Science of Compassion to Heal Your Heart and Your World* (New Harbinger Publications, 2018).



**Dr. Paul Friga** is a Clinical Associate Professor at the Kenan-Flagler School of Business at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He teaches courses in management consulting and strategy and serves as Director of the S.T.A.R. Program – overseeing 25 semester long consulting projects with MBA students. Dr. Friga researches strategic decision-making, knowledge transfer, intuition, management consulting processes and entrepreneurship. He presents and consults around the world and is the author of *The McKinsey Mind* and *The McKinsey Engagement*.