



The Google Guide to Inner Peace

When a software engineer started a personal development course, his colleagues were soon lining up to take part. *Deidre Donnelly* finds out why.

The Google offices are designed to nourish a spirit of innovation.



THE PERKS OF working at the world's largest internet search engine are legendary (think free lunches and massage chairs) but if you're a software developer, it gets even better. Google's "devs" are allowed to spend 20 percent of their work time researching whatever interests them, and for employee number 107, Chade-Meng Tan, this was self-actualisation. The time he put in soon paid off, as he created a seven-week personal development and leadership course, called Search Inside Yourself (SIY). The course, which is popular inside Google and out, aims to make people more productive, creative and happy, in three steps:

1 Raise Your Flagpole

Developing greater emotional intelligence, says Tan, begins with attention training. Simply, to grow on an emotional level, you need to teach your mind how to become clear and calm when you instruct it to. Tan compares the human mind to a flag: When it is surrounded by winds of emotion and conflict, your mind can remain firm, like a flagpole planted in the ground, with the aid of mindfulness. And since mindfulness improves everything from brain function to immunity, it's worth training your brain in this way. **Here's how:** In a comfortable position, simply bring your attention to your breathing for two minutes. Focus on the process of breathing. If your mind drifts, bring it back gently.

2 Take Charge of the Horse

Attention training through mindfulness meditation makes you notice emotions as they come and go, and see how they change. Scanning your interior landscape objectively, as if in the third person, brings self-knowledge. Once you watch what makes you tick, you'll notice emotions shift from being existential ("I'm angry") to experiential ("I *feel* angry"). It's empowering to realise you have a choice in whether to act out a feeling. Tan likens emotions to a wild horse: Once you tame it, you can ride it. **Here's how:** In the same pose, slowly scan your body for sensations – start with your head, move to your back, then your front; end with your entire body at once. Notice where you hold emotions in your body.

3 Develop Healthy Human Habits

Many of the Google employees who have taken the SIY course rave about their improved relationships. That's because part of the course deals with interpersonal intelligence. To extend inner peace outwards, we have to develop good habits, like kindness, in our interactions with others. While world peace may not be your priority, consider this: Studies show that the most likeable leaders, whether in business or the navy, lead best. "Goodwill is picked up unconsciously by others," explains Tan. Kindness towards others fosters trust and gets you support. **Here's how:** With each person you encounter, tell yourself: "This person has feelings, just like me. This person wants to be happy, like me. I wish for this person to be happy." **Q**