

GPU workers find meditation makes them healthier and more productive

By Susan C. Stein

Engle/Times Correspondent

Suppose someone told you he knew a way to relieve the stress in your life, improve your health, enhance your relationships both at work and at home — and it would take you only about 30 minutes a day.

Would you think it was too good to be true?

Over a year ago, 50 GPU employees decided to see if they could reduce the tension they were experiencing because of changes in the energy industry by attending a workshop on stress reduction using meditation.

They found meditation not only helped reduce stress at work, it also relieved elevated blood pressure and cholesterol levels, reduced headaches, promoted more restful sleep and helped them be better spouses and parents.

"It sounded like it was something that was 'touchy-feely,'" Robert Evans, a senior buyer who has been with GPU for 25 years, said about the program when it was first introduced.

According to Evans, daily meditation has boosted his energy level, relieved tension he sometimes feels in his neck and lowered his blood pressure.

"I am a believer now," he said, adding there are no drawbacks to meditation.

"It is a relief valve, a tool to take control of yourself," Evans said. "I know personally that it has helped me."

The meditation program was the

idea of Jeff Sturm, GPU director of materials and services.

"I saw an increase in the stress level, and I was looking for a tool to reduce that stress level," Sturm said.

He said he had read that too much stress impairs the immune system and affects the quality of family life, decision-making abilities and relationships.

After attending a lecture on meditation given by Greg Schweitzer of Stress Reduction Resources, Sinking Spring, Sturm felt he had the answer.

Employees from his department were invited to attend a one-hour introduction to meditation by Schweitzer in the GPU office building.

"The feedback we got was extremely positive," Sturm said. "I had a number of people come up to me and thank me for trying to do something about the stress level."

Forty of the 50 employees who attended the workshop signed up to begin the individual training sessions with Schweitzer.

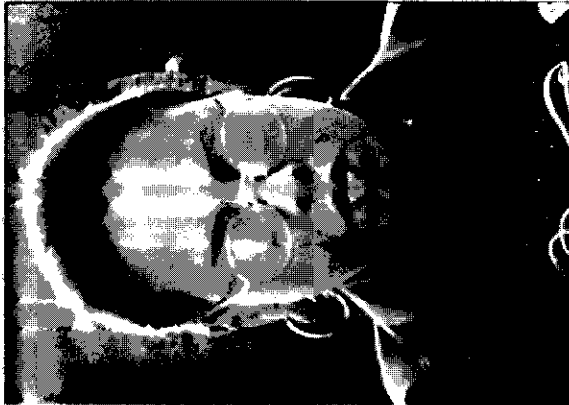
Instruction continued for four days, with each session lasting approximately 90 minutes. Over a year, 80 additional employees have gone through training.

Many of the employees meditate once or twice during the workday either in their offices or in a 144-square-foot storage room recently converted into a Quiet Room for the purpose.

Schweitzer also participates in



Thirty-four GPU employees take part in a meditation seminar during their lunch break.



Nina Beverly of Shillington meditates.

How meditation can help

- Reduce stress.
- Increase creativity and intelligence.
- Improve memory and learning ability.
- Increase energy.
- Increase inner calmness.
- Reduce insomnia.
- Increase happiness and self-esteem.
- Reduce anxiety and depression.
- Improve health.
- Promote a younger biological age.

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Source: Greg Schweitzer of Stress Reduction Resources, Sinking Spring.

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monthly meetings in which employees meditate as a group.

"This is a lifelong tool we've given people," said Sturm, who added that meditation has helped him see things more clearly.

"It helps you to catch your breath," Sturm said. "You can isolate a problem, and it's gone."

Jane Heatwole, a human resources assistant and an employee of 16 years, said she meditates twice a day — once at work and the other at home.

"After I meditate," she said, "it put things into better perspective. I think clearer, and I feel more productive. It is a wonderful tool."

Meditation also has decreased her sinus headaches by an estimated 70 percent, she said, and has helped her sleep more restfully.

"I had trouble sleeping," Heatwole said. "Meditation has helped to calm me down."

Ron Grosch, an administrator of fleet services and a 28-year employee, said meditation has given him the most value for the time he has spent doing it as compared to other types of exercises he has tried.

"If I had to pick one activity," he said, "I would meditate."

"I love it. It has helped me tremendously at my busy job and personally. I'm trying to get my wife to try it."

The GPU employees said meditation also has bridged the gap between management and staff, and shows that GPU cares for its employees.

"It's helped to build trust," Grosch said.

"It builds a common bond," Heatwole said. "I feel a closeness to everyone."



Larry Wentzel of Hamburg meditates with fellow GPU employees during a stress reduction seminar on their lunch break.

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