

## *Meditating in your power clothes*

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Published in the magazine *Metro* in the Philippines. May 2008.

There was a time when the symbol of the corporate leash was the necktie – which, quite symbolically also – you could remove, or at least loosen up, at the end of the workday. Today, we are connected to the workplace 24/7 through our laptops, Blackberries, and cellular phones. We can hold teleconferences and videoconferences. We have instant messaging and VoIP. We have 24-hour offices that serve clients in all time zones. We have 24/7 cable news. And we wonder why we feel depleted. Some of us become so wound up by the stresses of the day that we have difficulty sleeping. This in turn depletes our energy stores some more.

The work-life balance movement is a response to the demands of the modern workplace – fewer vacations, less workers, increasing workloads – and its consequent health disorders: sleep deficit, burnout, stress-related ailments, chronic fatigue.

Many organizations now recognize the increase in workplace stress and its impact on productivity. Slowly, companies are replacing physical fitness interventions like weight training and cardio classes initiated in decades past with tai chi, qi gong, stress management forums, and now, workplace meditation.

Vital Switch, a company based in Australia, teaches exercises that help workers manage stress and revitalize their inner reserves by using meditative techniques in the workplace. It was founded by Samantha Keen, a financial journalist, and Stefan Gorkiewicz, a former IT professional involved in production planning and control in Germany.

Keen had suffered from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) for five years. She had undergone various treatment programs before discovering meditation and finally overcame her illness. Gorkiewicz has had 7 years of intensive training in meditation and has been giving workshops the past 5 years.

Although many workshops exist on meditation, Vital Switch provides the worker with a suite of tools they could use right in the whirlwind of activity – the workplace.

“These techniques have been developed for people of the 21st Century,” says Keen. “They help busy people to learn how to focus, to get in touch with their own vitality and to bring more clarity into their lives. We also have exercises that people can use during the day, at work, at home, while in situations of conflict or pressure, while driving, or when you get tired and distracted. Therefore, Vital Switch teaches a lot more than meditation, although a lot of our work comes out of the principles of meditation.”

Although many of the techniques have to be learned through guided, experiential modules in their workshops, Keen shares a few pointers that could help shake off the workplace blues.

**When you haven't had your morning coffee or just came back from lunch:**

“Pay attention to your posture - sit up or stand up straight,” says Keen. You would be surprised how draining it is to constantly slouch over the computer, over a desk, or the car wheel. Sitting up straight immediately allows [your energy] to flow better. You will also notice when you pay attention to your posture that when your shoulders are back and your belly slightly forward, it is very hard to feel depressed or heavy in your body.”

**When faced with multiple deadlines, all labeled ASAP:**

“Breathe deeply into your body. Feel your breath even down in your belly, below the navel. Take extra time to prepare your state of mind and your energy so that when you approach the situation you are able to rest on a sense of inner calm. This sense of inner calm can be more easily maintained in situations of mental pressure if you have meditated in the morning. Even when you are busy, if you take 15 minutes at the beginning of each day, you will find it easier to approach those tasks with a clear sense of inner strength,” says Keen.

**When you disagree with your boss, your client or your officemate – or find them just plain disagreeable:**

Says Keen: “We love teaching people about workplace conflict, it is one of our strengths but it will happen in our advanced workshops. We teach people to be assertive and at the same time remain open, so they do not have to get angry in order to state a difference of opinion.”

“It is really important that people do learn how to handle workplace conflict,” she adds. “If they cannot come to our workshops: I would advise [them] to apply the posture rule here too. Stand up straight at all times. Another thing that can help is to learn a form of martial arts.”

**What organizations can do to bring down stress and fatigue levels and the resultant absenteeism:**

“We have a company that gives organizations the steps to reduce burnout, stress and fatigue. First would be to make sure employees are aware that looking after their own health and vitality is a good step to making the company more effective and more productive,” says Keen. “As Harvard University has said: Happy employees make happy customers.”

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*Vital Switch will be in Manila from May 12<sup>th</sup> to June 30, for the following workshops:*

- ☞ *May 25-31, Inner Space Interactive Sourcing (ISIS) workshop at the Lopez Center.*
- ☞ *June 7, Vital Switch Workshop on stress management at the ABS-CBN Building. to register*

☞ *For details contact: call 0918 963 2305 or email: [vitalswitch@yahoo.com](mailto:vitalswitch@yahoo.com); or visit their website for details: [www.vitalswitch.com](http://www.vitalswitch.com).*