

Wall Street Bosses, Tiger Woods Meditate to Focus, Stay Calm

By Nadja Brandt



[More Photos/Details](#)

Oct. 22 (Bloomberg) -- **Goldman Sachs Group Inc.** supervisory-board member William George is known for preaching the mantra of profitability. In his spare time, he chants a different kind of mantra while reclining on his leather airplane

seat.

"The very best time to meditate is on a plane," says George, 66, who likes to close his eyes and breathe deeply as soon as the jet engines start to hum. "I have to go to Europe a lot. If I land at 8 a.m., meditation gives me an opportunity to get deep rest and refocus before my board meeting at 10."

Like George, Bob Shapiro, former Monsanto Co. chief executive, also meditates regularly. They share their tranquility with such unlikely meditation practitioners as golf champion **Tiger Woods**, who has discussed it in news conferences, and **Ford Motor Co.** Chairman **William Ford**, according to his spokesman Oscar Suris.

An increasing number of those hitting the cushion are players in corporate America, looking to more unconventional practices to calm frayed nerves at a time when the Dow Jones Industrial Average had its biggest drop since the Great Depression and financial institutions are declaring bankruptcy after the collapse of the U.S. subprime-mortgage market.

"If you don't have a meditation practice, you're going to suffer unnecessarily subjectively, and objectively you will make bad decisions; that sums up the story," says a teacher who goes by the single name of **Shinzen**. "In life, pain is unavoidable but suffering is optional."

Shinzen, 64, has been a meditation instructor for 34 years. He has taught so-called mindfulness meditation at **Green Mountain Coffee Roasters Inc.** and to its founder **Robert Stiller**. The Waterbury, Vermont-based company has a dedicated meditation room where Shinzen instructs regularly.

Mental Pause

Goldman's George, who started to meditate in 1974 and has been doing so twice a day since then, took his practice to work. During his time as chief executive officer at **Medtronic Inc.** he encouraged employees to give it a try. One of the company's conference rooms was dedicated for sitting, giving employees the opportunity to take a mental break during their busy days.

“Meditation has been integral in my career; it is the single best thing that happened to me in terms of my leadership,” says George, who also sits on the supervisory boards of **Exxon Mobil Corp.** and **Novartis AG** and is a professor of management practices at **Harvard Business School.** “Meditation enables one to focus on what is really important; and I haven't had high blood pressure since the 1970s.”

Shapiro, 70, chief executive of Monsanto until the company's acquisition by Pharmacia & Upjohn Inc. in March 2000, started to hit the cushion in the mid-1990s after talking to an old college friend from Harvard and practicing meditator. Soon after, Shapiro sent out an e-mail, inviting employees to a two-day silent meditation retreat.

Ton of Burnout

“As a business person, I noticed a number of people I knew pretty well who really picked up on it, people who perhaps had come into it with some degree of skepticism and found the experience useful,” Shapiro says.

Shapiro subsequently dedicated rooms at Monsanto for employees to take time for sitting and contemplation.

Meditation in corporate America should maybe be more than an expression of an executive's good will or personal interest. Companies lose an estimated \$300 billion annually to lowered productivity, absenteeism, health care and related costs stemming from stress, according to a study by the **American Institute of Stress.** Stress-related ailments account for upwards of 60 percent of all doctor visits, according to the study.

“The stress right now is enormous; how it'll manifest has yet to be seen but I am sure there'll be a ton of burnout,” says Herbert Benson, associate professor of medicine at **Harvard Medical School.** “Without question, this is the most important time for these types of practices.”

Meditating Googlers

Google Inc. has recognized the advantages of eastern traditions. The owner of

the world's most popular Internet search engine has had regular meditation sittings for the past two years at its London, Pittsburgh, Mountain View, California, Sydney and New York locations. In addition, the company in October 2007 initiated a "search inside yourself" meditation and mindfulness course.

"Emotional intelligence is a crucial skill in life, and it's as important at Google as anywhere else I can think of," says Peter Allen, director at Google University, in an e-mailed response. "Increasing our self-awareness and our emotional intelligence helps us do things better."

Deepak Chopra

Even Cheetos maker Frito-Lay turned to some non-western ways. The unit of **PepsiCo Inc.** recently invited **Deepak Chopra**, a spiritual teacher, author and adjunct professor at the **Kellogg School of Management** to talk to its employees. As part of his lecture, Chopra led attendees in a series of meditation exercises, he says in a telephone interview.

"If you have a meditation practice, you can be much more effective in a meeting," says Green Mountain Coffee's Stiller, 65. "Meditation helps develop your abilities to focus better and to accomplish your tasks." Shares in the company have climbed 267 percent over the past four years.

"Meditation helps to create calm at will or focus at will," says Maria Gonzalez, a 17-year meditation veteran and president of Toronto-based **Argonauta Strategic Alliances Consulting Inc.** "That's something you need to be able to do if there are millions of dollars at stake." Gonzalez, 50, has been advising organizations on strategic alliances, including **Barclays Plc** and **Bank of Montreal**.

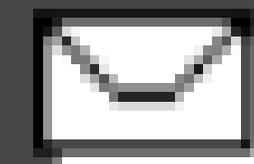
MedWorks Corporate Meditation Programs, based in Brookline, Massachusetts, is one of several companies that specialize in teaching employees and executives in one-hour seminars. Richard Geller, 56, its founder, has taught at such companies as **Adidas AG's** Reebok unit and **Genzyme Corp.** Demand has increased since the market turmoil started, he says.

"I think meditation in these times has an important role to play," says Goldman's George. "If you take Wall Street versus **Warren Buffett**. He has made much wiser decisions than Wall Street has. Now, I don't know if he's a meditator, but he's calm, thoughtful and he stays clear. Wall Street's trading floor is exactly the opposite."

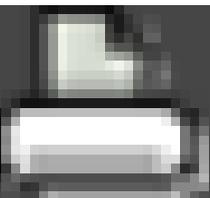
To contact the reporter on the story: **Nadja Brandt** in Los Angeles at nbrandt@bloomberg.net.

Last Updated: October 22, 2008 00:01 EDT

[News tools](#)



[Email this article](#)



[Printer friendly format](#)