

YOUR CREATIVE BRAIN
WHAT MAKES IT TICK

**Tango: Sexy, Sweaty
& Not What You Think**

**So You're in the Present
What Next?**

mindful

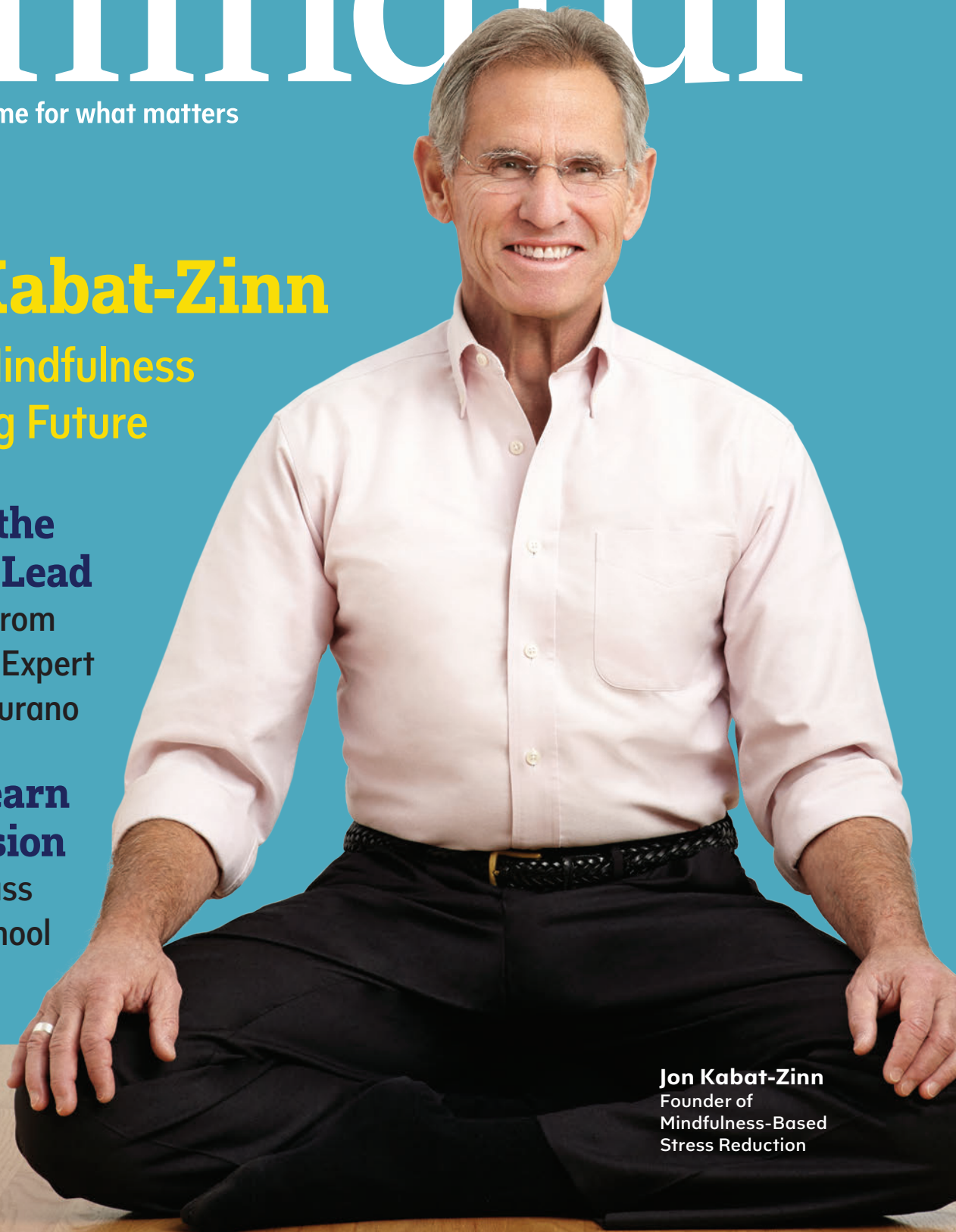
taking time for what matters

Why **Jon Kabat-Zinn**

Thinks Mindfulness
Has a Big Future

**Finding the
Space to Lead**
Strategies from
Leadership Expert
Janice Marturano

**Teens Learn
Compassion**
Hospice Class
for High School
Seniors



Jon Kabat-Zinn
Founder of
Mindfulness-Based
Stress Reduction

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now



Mindfulness practices help everyone involved in the bullying triad—the bully, the victim, and the witness.

Janice Houlihan, left, and Laura Bakosh, cofounders of the nonprofit organization Inner Explorer, which offers mindfulness programs for schools.



NEXT TIME you drink something today, drink it with gusto. Take a moment to really appreciate the refreshment (what a great word!). Find more on Twitter @mindinterrupter

Why Do Bullies Bully?

Everyone knows how harmful bullying is. Even bullies know, because many of them experienced the suffering of being bullied themselves. So why does it persist?

Laura Bakosh and Janice Houlihan are cofounders of the nonprofit organization Inner Explorer, which offers mindfulness programs for schools. They don't think a copy of *Lord of the Flies* is enough to answer that question.

The need is as urgent as ever. Despite the proliferation of anti-bullying programs and legislation in America, high rates of bullying persist. Incidents of repeated aggression and intimidation among children—some leading to suicide—continue to push their way into the nightly news. Bakosh and Houlihan say they know why anti-bullying efforts haven't worked and how to address the problem more effectively.

The cofounders of the Franklin, Massachusetts-based organization have been reviewing years of research about anti-bullying programs. They say many initiatives are

ineffective. While they may seem comprehensive—students learn how to define bullying, that the behavior is unacceptable, where to find help, etc.—this knowledge isn't always helpful in the heat of the moment. In the moment when someone is being bullied, Bakosh says, “the emotional response is so strong that it overcomes the intellectual knowing.”

The gap needs to be bridged between what students know and what they do. For that to happen, children need to be able to regulate themselves in a way that brings out their innate competencies—compassion, kindness, and empathy.

“Mindfulness brings us closer to those innate skills and allows us the opportunity to bring them forth, to close that gap,” says Bakosh. “It's really the discipline of the daily practice that is going to help in a way that's sustainable.”

Over time, Houlihan explains, mindfulness practices help everyone involved in the bullying triad—the bully, the victim, and the witness. By connecting with their deeper selves, bullies are more likely to develop awareness and the ability to regulate emotional responses by pausing before

they act. Victims develop resilience, and because of their newly developed self-confidence may become less of a target. Lastly, bystanders develop a greater sense of compassion, which can inspire them to take action to help a victim.

In classrooms that implemented Inner Explorer's mindfulness programs, early results show an estimated 50% reduction in reactive behavior.

Bakosh and Houlihan have research to back up their claims. During the 2012-13 school year, Inner Explorer conducted a randomized controlled trial of the kindergarten through fifth-grade classrooms that implemented their mindfulness programs. Early results show an estimated 50% reduction in reactive behavior. Bullying incidents, broken out as a separate category, were also reduced by half.

Inner Explorer programs are based on the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction pro-

gram and are audio-guided, allowing students and teachers to easily practice together for about 10 minutes every day. To date, there are instructors in 111 preschool and elementary classrooms in 12 schools in California, Illinois, Ohio, Massachusetts, and New York teaching the program. Inner Explorer is in the process of creating programs for middle school and high school students as well. Houlihan says every institution that has sampled the programs so far has wanted to increase the number of classrooms involved.

Inner Explorer could be described as the latest chapter in Bakosh and Houlihan's 43-year friendship, which began in the first grade. It's the result of their long-standing desire to run a business together that could “make a difference in the world.” Before they partnered on Inner Explorer, both women worked in corporate America. Houlihan went on to earn a master's degree in education, and Bakosh, who has been a mindfulness practitioner for 20 years and is an MBSR teacher, has a master's in transpersonal psychology. ●



As part of the Inner Explorer program, children learn to slow themselves down and regulate their emotions.



OVERHEARD

“It's more important to be kind than clever and good-looking.”

—Ricky Gervais, as Derek, from the Netflix series of the same name

STILL IMAGE COURTESY OF INNER EXPLORER