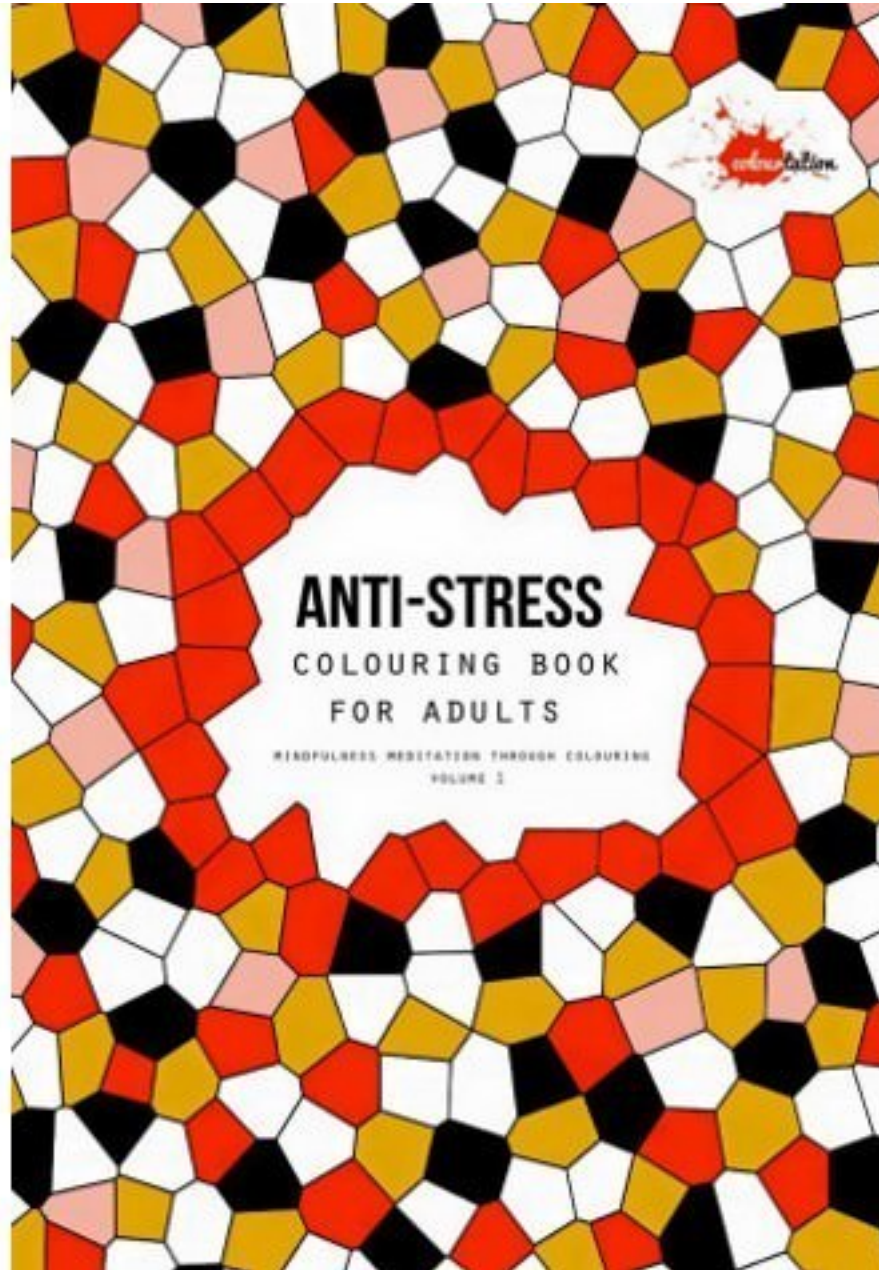


Businesses turn to colouring books for employees: Are they the key to a stress-free workplace?

ELOISE KEATING / Thursday, April 9 2015



It's something we all did as children, but the simple act of colouring in may be the key to reducing workplace stress and unlocking creative thinking in your business.

As colouring books for adults like Johanna Basford's *Secret Garden* rocket up bestseller lists, Melbourne neuropsychologist Dr Stan Rodski has developed a colouring-in book specifically for workers to de-stress in the workplace.

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Colouration is based on Rodski's research that found when individuals focus on colouring-in an image they are able to focus and change the behaviour of their brains.

Fairfax reports employees at ANZ Bank, Wesfarmers and Bupa have already begun using *Colouration*, but Rodski told *SmartCompany* this morning the potential benefits for small business owners and entrepreneurs from using the book are "huge".

"Three or four times a day, or for half an hour once a day, you can lose yourself in a creative activity, you become focused and if you focus on one thing, you can become happier and change the structure of your brain too," Rodski says.

As chief executive of MIND Peak Performance, Rodski has taught anti-stress techniques in companies such as Wesfarmers, ANZ and iSelect. He has also spent time working with sports clubs and athletes to help them achieve top performance.

“What I found continually over the years is as much as we are told to go meditate and relax, 9 in 10 people simply can’t do it or they try and then wonder if it works,” Rodski says.

“In my practice as well I have taught people how to relax, including in clinical situations ... So I applied some of that neuroscience technology to how the brain responds while colouring.”

Rodski says when someone is focused on colouring, their brain will produce alpha relax waves, instead of beta active waves. The level of adrenaline in the brain is reduced and the level of dopamine rises, in the same way someone relaxes while listening to music or watching a movie.

“I thought here is an idea. Let’s use some of the other principles the brain loves – the brain loves pattern, the brain loves repetition and habit – and put it all together in a colouring book that is non-competitive and focused,” Rodski says.

“It’s a simple idea but there is so much science behind it.”

Rodski worked with a graphic designer to create the book, which contains 26 patterns and for \$20, comes with 12 colouring pencils. Another two books are also on the way.

While he says the images are “not childish”, individuals don’t have to be artists to benefit from the book either. The idea is an employee would take out the book to spend some time colouring in between other work activities.

“You can create your own patterns but you don’t have to be pushed creatively,” he says.

“You can just pick up a colour and decide to do a whole line of yellow or some circles.”

Rodski says research out of Harvard University also shows an individual’s stress level is not necessarily about what is going on in their life, but how many things they have going on at once, whether good or bad.

“If you have a million things going on, it can be hard to turn off for five minutes,” he says.

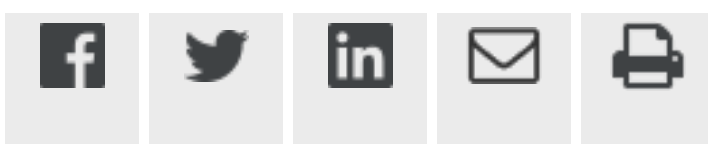
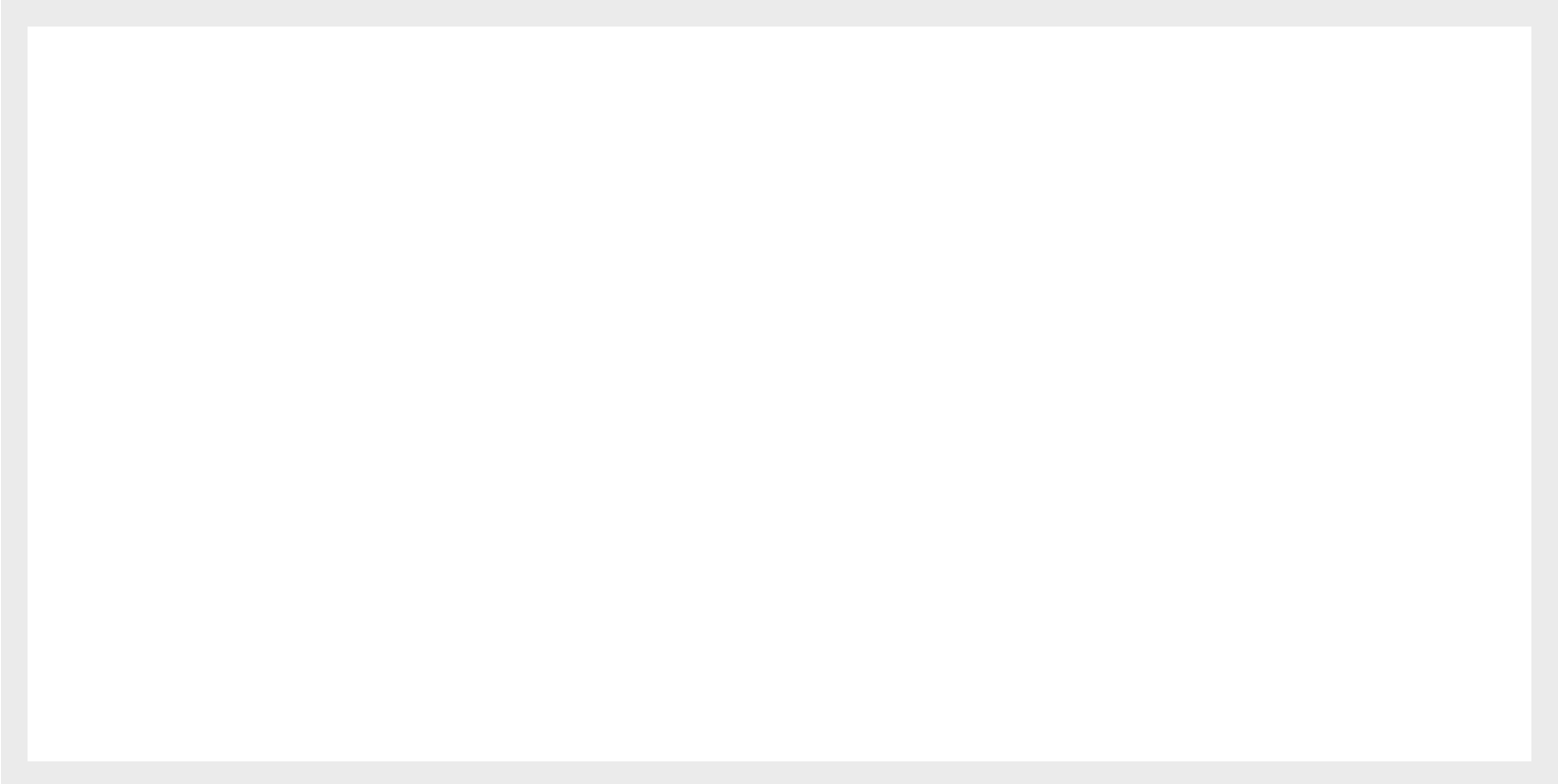
Rodski says for small business owners and entrepreneurs that get “caught up in the day to day of everything, it can be very hard to see the big picture”. That’s why it’s important to spend some time to “turn off and get the adrenaline out of your brain”.

While Rodski says adrenalin does have its place, reflecting entrepreneurs are naturally highly-driven people, he says his work with high-performing athletes taught him the best performance comes from those who are in a relaxed state.

"It adds creative thinking too," he says.

"And health is the issue here."

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Eloise Keating

Eloise Keating is the editor of SmartCompany. Previously, Eloise was news editor at Books+Publishing, the trade press for the Australian book industry.



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