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Yoga in the workplace: Less stress for success

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Breathe.

That's one course of action a Fort Myers commercial real estate firm decided to take to combat stress.

Once a week about a dozen employees of LandQwest Commercial turn to yoga to relax.

"They come in with their shoulders up to their ears," said Raquel Torres, spokeswoman for LandQwest Commercial. She is also a certified yoga instructor and teaches a gentle Kripalu-Hatha type yoga class.

"Everyone is stressed out and worried about the market," Torres said. "There is no room for that in yoga class."

The effects of falling housing values and rising foreclosures have caused anxious ripples throughout the real estate market. Employees find a peaceful respite in a yoga class offered at Alive and Well Holistic Center every week.

The management of LandQwest Commercial backed the yoga program to boost morale and fitness, said managing principal, Stephen Cunningham. He had never taken a yoga class before they started the program in March.

"This business is stressful," he said. "It allows our company the benefits of using yoga to deal with the challenges we face in the real estate world."

It's also helped him work on his flexibility, breathing and relaxation techniques, he said.

"It's a life lesson for me," he said.

Beth Cary, director of marketing at LandQwest, participated in most of the yoga classes. She works long hours.

"It's a good way to get out of here and relax," Carey said. She also uses the breathing techniques to decompress outside of class, she said.

The real estate firm is following a national trend toward lower impact exercise like pilates and yoga.

Daury Mikulaschek, an agent for Vision One Realty in Fort Myers, turned to Bikram or "Hot Yoga" eight months ago to combat stress. She struggles like most realtors in the current market.

The benefits have been so positive that she attends yoga class two or three times a week.

"After one and a half hours of yoga you don't feel the stress," she said. "If I could do this every

day I would be stress-free."

Sondra Mitchell, a yoga instructor at Health & Harmony Center in Fort Myers, agrees that yoga is the perfect stress-buster.

"It quiets the mind," she said. "It brings the mind and body together."

The 69-year-old instructor prescribes yoga for anyone who wants to relax, get a good night's sleep, become stronger and more flexible.

By focusing on your breath and your body, you don't have time to focus on your problems, she said.

"It's very distracting," she said. "You will also notice that you bring your breathing and your posture into your lifestyle."

The leaders of LandQwest Commercial want to send a message to employees that it cares about their stress levels, Cunningham said.

"This company is doing more than most to help in this environment," he said. "We wanted to offer something other than the company picnic and come together as a group. We're going to take it to a higher level."

The company would like to branch out to a bigger yoga studio and invite its clients and vendors to practice yoga.

"Yoga in the workplace encourages employees to maintain wellness on all levels," Torres said. "Yogic techniques like focusing on the breath can be highly effective to calming the mind, stimulating joy and increasing a more creative and prosperous energy flow."
