

# How hope beats mindfulness when times are tough

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A recent study finds that hope appears to be more beneficial than mindfulness at helping people manage stress and stay professionally engaged during periods of prolonged stress at work. The study

underscores the importance of looking ahead, rather than living "in the moment," during hard times.

The paper, "Work-related Resilience, Engagement and Wellbeing Among Music Industry Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Multiwave Model of Mindfulness and Hope," is [published](#) in the journal *Stress and Health*.

Mindfulness refers to the ability of an individual to focus attention on the present, in a way that is open, curious and not judgmental. Essentially, the ability to be fully in the moment.

"There's a lot of discussion about the benefits of [mindfulness](#), but it poses two challenges when you're going through periods of [stress](#)," says Tom Zagencyk, co-author of a paper on the work and a professor of management in North Carolina State University's Poole College of Management. "First, it's hard to be mindful when you're experiencing stress. Second, if it's a truly difficult time, you don't necessarily want to dwell too much on the experience you're going through."

"Because hope is inherently forward looking, while mindfulness is about appreciating your current circumstances, we wanted to see how each of these two mindsets influenced people's well-being and professional attitudes during difficult times," Zagencyk says. "The COVID pandemic presented us with an unfortunate, but useful, opportunity to explore this topic. And we chose to focus on the performing arts since that sector was particularly hard hit by the pandemic."

For the study, researchers recruited 247 [professional musicians](#) from the organization MusiCares to take two surveys, one month apart. The first survey was given in September 2021. In addition to collecting broad demographic data, study participants were asked about their thoughts and experiences at the beginning of the pandemic—March to August

2020. They were also asked questions aimed at capturing how hopeful and mindful they were from September 2020 through March 2021.

The second survey was given in October 2021 and asked study participants questions aimed at capturing work engagement, work tensions, how positive their emotions were, and the extent to which they were experiencing distress.

The researchers then used [statistical techniques](#) to identify relationships between hope, mindfulness, and outcomes related to their personal well-being and attitudes toward work.

"Fundamentally, our findings tell us that hope was associated with people being happy, and mindfulness was not," says Kristin Scott, study co-author and a professor of management at Clemson University. "And when people are hopeful—and happy—they experience less distress, are more engaged with their work, and feel less tension related to their professional lives."

"Being mindful can be tremendously valuable—there are certainly advantages to living in the moment," says Sharon Sheridan, study co-author and an assistant professor of management at Clemson. "But it's important to maintain a hopeful outlook—particularly during periods of prolonged stress. People should be hopeful while being mindful—hold on to the idea that there's a light at the end of the tunnel."

While the study focused on musicians during an extreme set of circumstances, the researchers think there is a takeaway message that is relevant across industry sectors.

"Whenever we have high levels of job stress, it's important to be hopeful and forward looking," says Emily Ferrise, study co-author and a Ph.D. student at Clemson. "And to the extent possible, there is real value for

any organization to incorporate hope and forward thinking into their [corporate culture](#)—through job conditions, organizational communications, etc."

"Every work sector experiences periods of high stress," says Zagenczyk. "And every company should be invested in having happy employees who are engaged with their work."

**More information:** Kristin L. Scott et al, Work-related resilience, engagement and wellbeing among music industry workers during the Covid-19 pandemic: A multiwave model of mindfulness and hope, *Stress and Health* (2024). [DOI: 10.1002/smi.3466](https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.3466)

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