

# yoga

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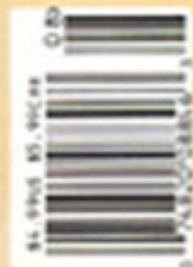
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AUGUST 2001

CAMEL POSE





As corporate America rolls out the mats in the workplace, it has discovered the value-added benefits of yoga. **By Russell Wild**

Photograph by Walter Smith

Yoga has found itself at the top of the corporate ladder, as these Wall Street executives can attest. From left: Pradeep Sambrani, Intel's CEO Anand Mohan, Mark Fisher, John Buckley, and Robert Barrera.

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not clumsily, popping in and out of positions with an occasional grunt. The group personality seems a perfect match for the dynamic Ashtanga Yoga taught with a whimsical touch by instructor Anita Goa.

"Breathe in, breathe out," she instructs her five pupils, giving away just a hint of her native Norwegian, which she intermittently abandons in favor of a comical, exaggerated Indian accent. "Downward Dog...Upward Dog...you look vedy goot. Doyou feel as goot as you look?" she asks. The men respond with a laugh. "Now, the Boat Pose," she says. "I'm scary to say...five times." The men's laughter trails off into self-deprecating moans. "Tied your own Boat Pose, nobody else's," says Goa. "A strong, relaxed Boat."

Barriera looks strong, although not especially relaxed. "I had this misconception that yoga was going to be a lot of sitting around meditating. To the contrary, it's a real physical challenge, a fabulous workout," he says. "As far as Anita is concerned, I fully expected her to be flexible, but I was amazed at how strong she is." Barriera and Maher are the veterans of the group. This is their second six-week session with Goa.

All five of these Wall Street executives are serious regulars at Body Maximus, where they've been lifting and pedaling their way to fitness for the past several years. Barriera and Maher were the first to give yoga a try, and their inaugural experience was so positive they helped recruit the three others. Not only that, but the five men have been chatting up the virtues of yoga to the other morning fitness buffs at Body Maximus, and there's expectation the class will grow.

"All these weight lifters could really benefit. Yoga is great for flexibility," says Bill Cox, pointing his chin toward the main room of the health club echoing with the sound of clanking iron. "For me, it's the first real stretching I've done in 38 years, my entire lifetime. After just a few classes, I can already tell the difference. Now, if I drop a pencil on the floor, I can stoop down to pick it up without looking like an 80-year-old man." The others nod in agreement. Dave Brewer adds that he has been plagued with back problems, but "they've hardly bothered me since I've started doing yoga."

Flexibility isn't the only benefit these five are receiving from the class. These are, after all, executives on Wall Street, inhabitants of the concrete jungle, and no strangers to stress. There are the long hours—they average 30 to 60 hours on the job each week—and then just the

nature of the jobs themselves. Cox, who spends his days on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, comments on the constant frenetic pace and the bombardment of negative energy, especially on the days the stock market plunges. Barriera says that long meetings and extensive travel are simply part of being an executive in corporate America. "Stress is omnipresent," he says.

Several of the men remark that the Ujjayi breathing (the slow, guttural, head-of-breath practiced in class) has been of particular value in cooling their overfired psychic jets throughout the hectic day. "Whenever things get to be too much, I stop and remember to do my Ujjayi breathing," says John Buckley. "It helps me to handle things, to not overreact."

Maher adds that his work entails a lot of tramping through overcrowded airports and squeezing into under-sized seats. "Doing the breathing on planes has made the travel a lot easier," he says. Brewer pipes in that he too finds the breathing very relaxing. "I don't think it has changed my whole personality—I'm still a Type A—but I like to think that it has had a positive effect on my style," which, he explains with some apology, can sometimes be a bit abrasive.

Goa flicks off the overhead fluorescent lights and ends the class with Corpse Pose. She rises the group after five minutes, and the men head for the showers. Goa sees them off with a big smile. "I teach all types," she says. "The great thing about executives is that when they commit to something, they do it. They're by nature very goal-oriented."

Fifteen minutes later, the men emerge from the lockers looking every bit as dapper as you'd expect office-bound Wall Street executives to be. "I feel good right now, limber and relaxed," says Maher.