

Work BETTER; not harder or smarter

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Energy, not time, is the fundamental currency of high performance and the key to maintaining your resilience and getting through this busy season.

Planning is crucial to getting you through your day and season, but focusing on time management is only part of the answer, as not all hours are created equal. We are not machines and the time model is a machine model. Our challenge is to give the machines something brilliant to do; not be machines.

Think for a moment – why is that you can achieve more in one hour when you feel energetic, optimistic and engaged than you can in three hours when you're sleep-deprived? It's about managing your energy.

Ten hours of work when you're exhausted, cranky and distracted might be far less productive than three hours when you're 'in the zone'.

So let's start to focus less on hours and more on doing what it takes to make sure you're at your best.

Like an athlete

For most people, good work happens in sprints, not marathons. Time management skills don't address that.

Observe the athlete. They might train for long periods of time but the focus is not on monotonous hours of uninspired grind. For athletes, it's a focused explosion of effort followed by rest and planning before another all-out push. Their entire lives are designed around expanding, sustaining and renewing the energy they need to compete for short, focused periods of time.

At a practical level, athletes build very precise routines for managing energy in all spheres of their lives: eating and sleeping, working out and resting, summoning the appropriate emotions, mentally preparing and staying focused, and connecting regularly to the mission they have set for themselves.

Most of us spend little or no time systematically training in any of these dimensions but we are expected to perform at our best for eight, 10, and even 12 hours a day, so we need to focus on the proper use, renewal and maintenance of our energy.

- Facing a busy period?
- Got a long list of things to do and so little time to do them?
- Overcome by what has to be done in a very short space of time?
- Just looking at your list of activities drains your energy and resilience?
- Over hearing people say you have to work harder, not smarter?

Careful focus

There is an increasing amount of research focusing on the proper use and renewal of energy.

We know that every decision we take and every choice we make requires willpower and that afterwards our self-control is impaired. Think about it. Making decisions all day is tiring. While many of them are automatic and don't require much thinking, they all add up.

Ever had a moment when for some reason you 'have had enough' and just wish it would all 'just go away'? We need to re-energise, focus on the issues that will provide the greatest 'bang for the emotional buck' and stop sweating the small stuff.

To perform at your best, start to prioritise your choices and make sure your energy is focused.

How do you work?

When you perform different types of work is key. Do you wake up fresh, alert and energised, only to tackle minor issues that drain this energy and find yourself exhausted when bigger issues need to be faced? We need to think seriously about how to match our energy levels with our daily routines so we address the big challenges when our reserves of energy are high and deal with less taxing work when our reserves are lower.

We need strategies to build up energy and use this raw power on the 'big ticket' items.

It's not only at work of course. Ever been too tired to enjoy your 'down time'? Has low energy ever stopped you enjoying the

things that matter to you? Ever been so tired after a week of work and then a weekend of playing 'taxi' taking for your kids to their activities, that by the time your work routine starts again, you feel like you never left? Got that feeling of being in the treadmill and finding that it's starting to hurt?

What to do

The following are some suggestions you might be able to use to build up your energy and use it appropriately.

- Set real goals and targets. Work out what you want to achieve and what you want your legacy to be.
- Have a plan that outlines what has to be done, with an impact/urgency rating to help you focus on those things that have most impact on your goals, and schedule time to do what needs to be done in priority order.
- Get good-quality sleep. In busy periods, develop a sleep strategy. Nobody is at their best when exhausted.
- Know yourself and your body clock. Are you a morning or afternoon person? Understand your 'prime' hours and use them.
- Schedule meals and snacks to make sure you have the energy to do solid work and you're not hungry or sluggish when you need to perform.
- Develop and apply rituals that keep you positive and energised.
- Keep yourself talk-positive.
- Connect with others.
- When possible, recharge your batteries with a break of a minimum of four days.
- Schedule activities that recharge you.

Further Information:

'Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength', Roy Baumeister.

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