

Frontline Supervisor

MIIA
Employee
Assistance
Program

1.800.451.1834



This Issue

Energy As A Commodity

"Energy, not time, is the fundamental currency of high performance."

—Jim Loehr, Tony Schwartz

Organizational Services

Management Consultation

- Employee Performance
- Change Management
- Workplace Trauma
- Conflict Resolution
- Layoff Support
- Lunch & Learn Seminars
- Management Trainings
- Organizational Stress

Employee Services

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- Anxiety
- Depression
- Family Issues

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- Financial
- Child Care
- Elder Care

Stress Management

- Personal Concerns
- Professional Issues

ENERGY: The Essential Personal and Professional Commodity

Energy is fuel. If your gas tank is empty, the car stands still. If you are personally on empty, you can't function either at home or at work. It is the cyclical nature of life that output and input, or activity and replenishment, must balance each other. When our lives and our workplaces are out of balance we will not function optimally. As authors Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz say in their groundbreaking book, *The Power of Full Engagement*, "The number of hours in a day is fixed, but the quantity and quality of energy available to us is not. It is our most precious resource. The more we take responsibility for the energy we bring to the world, the more empowered and productive we become."

What does it look like when your energy, or that of your employees, runs slack in the workplace?

It may take the form of a well planned meeting where a key player's energy level drops and he or she has to struggle to stay focused. It may look like a highly scheduled, hectic day where your energy turns negative, and you deal with your employees in an irritable, curt way. It may also be evident when you are twenty minutes late for an important lunch meeting with your boss because you were too easily distracted by some smaller problems and requests. Or you may see evidence of it on the evening of your significant other's birthday when you want to celebrate with dinner and flowers but are ultimately too tired to go out after work.

The results of data collected by the Gallup organization in 2001 showed that after six months on the job, only 38% of employees remained engaged in their jobs. After three years the figure dropped to 22%. Disengaged employees spread negativity to others in the workplace, and organizations pay a high price for this disengagement in lowered productivity, absenteeism, lateness, physical and emotional problems, and other "leaky-boat" phenomena.

"Should you find yourself in a chronically leaking boat, energy devoted to changing vessels is likely to be more productive than energy devoted to patching leaks." – Warren Buffett

So how do supervisors manage their own energy and positively contribute to inspiring and mobilizing their employees?

It starts with the basic premise of full engagement that Loehr and Schwartz describe as physical vigor, emotional connectedness, mental focus, and alignment with a purpose beyond that of self-interest. It is important to understand that personal energy is measured in terms of both quantity—low to high, and quality—negative to positive. When a supervisor has drawn on both high and positive energy resources, performance in the workplace will be characterized by employee qualities such as: invigorated, confident, challenged, joyful and connected.

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What are the essential resources for recovering lost energy?

We all know what they are: refreshing sleep, healthy foods, exercise, fresh air, quality downtime (such as meditation or reading), a favorite or newly acquired hobby, and quality time in important relationships. To drive home the point, Loehr and Schwartz quote studies that reveal Dupont's 47.5% reduction in absenteeism over a 6-year period for participants in a corporate fitness program. The journal *Ergonomics* says mental performance was better in fit rather than unfit individuals. Seventy-five percent of Union Pacific Railroad's employees felt that regular exercise improved their concentration and productivity at work.

"Failure is more frequently from want of energy than want of capital." -- Daniel Webster

Having identified basic sources of energy renewal, a second principle suggests that energy expenditure must be balanced with intermittent energy renewal. Loehr and Schwartz compare it to living like a sprinter. Push a lot of productive energy out there, aiming toward a goal. And then do things to renew and refresh. Our energy requirements include strength, endurance and flexibility. Not only do we need to renew our own energy but so do organizations and departments. Supervisors can build in "recovery breaks" and can include short inspirational visits with employees to build connections, help them stay interested, offer positive challenges, clarify problems, and seek input on solutions.

"Most people spend more time and energy going around problems than in trying to solve them." — Henry Ford

The word "stress" usually brings up negative connotations. But there are good stresses also. Physical, emotional, and mental challenges that push the limits of our capabilities are necessary for individual, departmental, and organizational growth. As the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche put it, "What does not destroy me makes me stronger." To stay engaged and to ensure the engagement of your employees, learn new things relevant to the work at hand, offer trainings, identify strengths in each individual and offer suitable challenges and responsibilities that enhance the quality of the products or services your department offers.

Finally, maximizing personal and organizational energy stands on a foundation of what Loehr and Schwartz call "positive energy rituals." Rituals are defined and structured behaviors that function in an automatic way. In areas of our lives where we function effectively we usually have unquestioned rituals, just like taking a shower before work. They occur on automatic pilot without having to use willpower or discipline to accomplish.

In order to implement positive rituals at work and to eliminate dysfunctional negative energy, supervisors first need to identify the critical purposes and visions that define the mission of the team or department. When employees buy into the values and goals, then it is possible to look honestly at what kind of energy is currently fueling the processes and procedures required to get to the goals. Only then can a supervisor engage employees more fully and identify the action steps necessary for the positive rituals that make the accomplishment of tasks and goals both more efficient and fulfilling.

"Goals help you channel your energy into action." — Les Brown