

# It's High Time We Focus on Employee Energy

How energy versus time management can unlock employee performance

[www.bcx.co.za](http://www.bcx.co.za)

**BCX**

**Y**our organisation may invest in developing your employees' knowledge, skills and competence, and you may think that you're equipping them to make optimal use of their time. But are you helping your employees to build and sustain their energy?

We all know too well that time is finite. Yet it's deeply embedded in our mindsets and organisational life that human beings should be able to operate as computers do - at high speed, continuously running multiple programmes over long periods of time. However, a growing body of research suggests we're most productive when we move between periods of high focus and intermittent rest, not when we're putting in long hours. More organisations are realising that employee value shouldn't be measured by time spent sitting at a desk, but by the energy they're able to bring to the work they do and the resulting level of productivity they achieve.

This notion of energy management versus time management was popularised by American journalist Tony Schwartz in his best-selling book "The Way We're Working Isn't Working". In the book, he describes the four main sources of energy:

- The body; your physical energy – how healthy are you?
- Your emotions – how happy are you?
- The mind – how well can you focus on something?
- The spirit – why are you doing all of this? What is your purpose?

**According to Schwartz:** "Greater capacity [energy] makes it possible to get more done in less time at a higher level of engagement and with more sustainability."

## CASE STUDY: Wachovia Bank

Tony Schwartz and his team took a group of employees at Wachovia Bank through a pilot energy management programme, focusing on specific strategies for strengthening one of the four main dimensions of energy. Their performance at work was measured against that of a control group.

## RESULTS

The participants in the energy management programme:

- Outperformed the controls on a series of financial metrics [such as the value of loans they generated].
- Reported substantial improvements in their customer relationships, their engagement with work, and their personal satisfaction.
- 68% reported that the programme had a positive impact on their relationships with clients and customers.
- 71% said that it had a noticeable or substantial positive impact on their productivity and performance.

## The Body

Your physical energy is your 'base', as you need to take care of your body first before you start working on other energy dimensions.

The first step is to identify energy-sapping behaviours such as poor diet, lack of exercise, and lack of sleep. These practices diminish basic energy levels as well as an individual's ability to focus their attention and manage their emotions.

Optimal physical energy is achieved through:

- **Nutrition** - Do you maintain a sustainable level of glucose in your bloodstream?
- **Fitness** - How well are you able to transport oxygen through your body?
- **Sleep** - Do you get enough sleep to renew your body?
- **Renewal** - How do you renew your energy levels throughout the day?

The next step involves identifying rituals for building and renewing physical energy. Some of the ways of doing this include:

- Eating nutritious meals and snacks regularly.
- Making fitness a habit.
- Taking a daily nap.
- Building a reading habit.
- Beginning a meditation habit.
- Conducting any ritual that allows you to disengage from work.

### Did you know?

The value of breaks throughout the day is grounded in our physiology. "Ultradian rhythms" are 90- to 120-minute cycles during which our bodies slowly move from a high-energy state into a physiological trough. At the end of each cycle, the body craves a period of recovery. That's why intermittent renewal breaks (even as short as a few minutes) result in better and more sustainable performance.

## The Emotions

Your emotional energy has a significant impact on the quality of your work. It follows that when you are able to take control of your emotions, you're able to improve the quality of your energy, despite any external pressures you may be facing.

When you're feeling stressed (and even as part of your daily ritual, regardless of how you are feeling), try stabilising your emotions by:

- Going for a short walk.
- Taking deep breaths - exhaling slowly induces recovery and relaxation.
- Sending a positive or uplifting message to a coworker.
- Change the way you view the events in your life - try asking yourself "how will I view this situation in six months?", or "How can I learn and grow from this experience?".

It's also important to learn to recognise the kinds of events that trigger your negative emotive so that you're better able to control them.

## The Mind

As we go about our daily tasks, many of us are guilty of multitasking. What we know now is that multitasking undermines productivity. In fact, any temporary shift in attention from one task to another can increase the amount of time needed to complete the primary task by up to 25%!

**Research** suggests that the average manager has fewer than seven hours per week of uninterrupted time to do deep versus shallow work.

### How to help the mind work more efficiently:

1. Fully focus for 90-120 minutes (try closing your email, turning off your phone, going to a quiet place, and letting people know that you're not to be disrupted during this time).

2. Take a proper break.
3. Fully focus on the next activity.
4. Each night, identify the most important challenge for the next day.
5. Tackle this task as a first priority in the morning (yes, before checking your email).

## The Human Spirit

The energy of the spirit is unleashed when someone's work gives them a sense of purpose and meaning. Being attentive to our own deeper needs increases our satisfaction and effectiveness at work, yet many of us fail to recognise purpose and meaning as potential sources of energy.

An inspired employee is twice more productive than a satisfied employee. Yet only one in eight employees is inspired.

To access the human spirit, people need to establish rituals and habits in three categories:

1. Doing what they do best and most enjoy doing at work.
2. Consciously allocating time and energy to the most important areas of their lives.
3. Incorporating their core values in their daily behaviours.

Addressing these three categories helps people move towards achieving a greater sense of satisfaction, alignment, and well-being in their lives, both on and off the job.

### Ideas to unlead spiritual energy:

- Clarify priorities, long-term goals, guiding principles
- Explore 'big ideas'
- Ask what really matters / what do you want to be remembered for?

## **A global workforce study by Towers Perrin looked at some 90,000 employees in eighteen countries:**

- Only 20% felt fully engaged with a sense of purpose and passion
- 40% were capable, but not fully committed
- 38% were disengaged

### **The effect on the bottom line:**

- Companies with the most engaged employees had a 19% increase in operating income, 28% growth in earnings per share for companies, and 90% of the employees had no plans to leave.
- Companies with the least engaged employees had a 32% decline in operating income, 11% reduction in earnings, and 50% of employees were considering leaving.

## **Approaching your organisation's energy management**

In today's digital workplace, the default mode is to strive for "more, bigger, faster". Of course, the technologies available to us create efficiencies and speed, but they also have the potential to overwhelm and distract us, undermining our overall performance and leaving both the organisation and its employees depleted rather than enriched.

To recharge their energy, employees need to take responsibility for changing energy-depleting behaviours, guided by their employers and leaders. Organisations need to invest in their employees across all aspects of their lives to help them build and sustain their energy, and thus their value. Instead of placing emphasis on getting more out of people, organisations need to shift to investing in their people, increasing their motivation and their productivity.

### **Some ideas to help employees recharge:**

- Like Sony has done, make it culturally acceptable for employees to take intermittent breaks, work out at midday, and answer email only at designated times.
- Build a "renewal rooms" where people can regularly go to relax and refuel.
- Institute a "no-meeting" period of time in the day.
- Make a company commitment to stop checking email during meetings.
- Give employees unstructured time to explore new ideas.

### **Equip your employees with enabling technology**

The digitalisation of your organisation can help you seamlessly weave together processes, systems, customers, partners and employees, creating an environment that removed barriers and limitations to work, helping your employees use their energy more efficiently.

Digitalisation is a social and business phenomenon is powered by the many incredible technologies that BCX has at its disposal today.

## **Sources:**

- **To Be More Productive, Try Managing Your Energy Instead of Your Time - Curiosity -**  
<https://curiosity.com/topics/to-be-more-productive-try-managing-your-energy-instead-of-your-time-curiosity/>
- **The Case for Investing More in People - Bain & Company**  
<https://www.bain.com/insights/the-case-for-investing-more-in-people-hbr/>
- **The Way We're Working Isn't Working - Tony Schwartz**  
<http://static.booktopia.com.au/pdf/9780857200488-1.pdf>
- **Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time - Harvard Business Review**  
<https://hbr.org/2007/10/manage-your-energy-not-your-time>