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Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time

Key ideas from the [Harvard Business Review](#) article By Tony Schwartz, Catherine McCarthy

The Idea in Brief

Organizations are demanding ever-higher performance from their workforces. People are trying to comply, but the usual method--putting in longer hours--has backfired. They're getting exhausted, disengaged, and sick. And they're defecting to healthier job environments.

Longer days at the office don't work because time is a limited resource. But personal energy is renewable, say Schwartz and McCarthy. By fostering deceptively simple **rituals** that help employees regularly replenish their energy, organizations build workers' physical, emotional, and mental resilience. These rituals include taking brief breaks at specific intervals, expressing appreciation to others, reducing interruptions, and spending more time on activities people do best and enjoy most.

Help your employees systematically rejuvenate their personal energy, and the benefits go straight to your bottom line. Take Wachovia Bank: Participants in an energy renewal program produced 13 percentage points greater year-to-year in revenues from loans than a control group did. And they exceeded the control group's gains in revenues from deposits by 20percentage points.

The Idea in Practice

Schwartz and McCarthy recommend these practices for renewing four dimensions of personal energy:

Physical Energy

- Enhance your sleep by setting an earlier bedtime and reducing alcohol use.
- Reduce stress by engaging in cardiovascular activity at least three times a week and strength training at least once.
- Eat small meals and light snacks every three hours.
- Learn to notice signs of imminent energy flagging, including restlessness, yawning, hunger, and difficulty concentrating.
- Take brief but regular breaks, away from your desk, at 90- to 120-minute intervals throughout the day.

Emotional Energy

- Defuse negative emotions--irritability, impatience, anxiety, insecurity--through deep abdominal breathing.
- Fuel positive emotions in yourself and others by regularly expressing appreciation to others in detailed, specific terms through notes, e-mails, calls, or conversations.
- Look at upsetting situations through new lenses. Adopt a "reverse lens" to ask, "What would the other person in this conflict say, and how might he be right?" Use a "long lens" to ask, "How will I likely view this situation in six months?" Employ a "wide lens" to ask, "How can I grow and learn from this situation?"

Mental Energy

- Reduce interruptions by performing high-concentration tasks away from phones and e-mail.
- Respond to voice mails and e-mails at designated times during the day.
- Every night, identify the most important challenge for the next day. Then make it your first priority when you arrive at work in the morning.

Spiritual Energy

- Identify your "sweet spot" activities--those that give you feelings of effectiveness, effortless absorption, and fulfillment. Find ways to do more of these. One executive who hated doing sales reports delegated them to someone who loved that activity.
- Allocate time and energy to what you consider most important. For example, spend the last 20 minutes of your evening commute relaxing, so you can connect with your family once you're home.
- Live your core values. For instance, if consideration is important to you but you're perpetually late for meetings, practice intentionally showing up five minutes early for meetings.

How Companies Can Help

To support energy renewal rituals in your firm:

- Build "renewal rooms" where people can go to relax and refuel.
- Subsidize gym memberships.
- Encourage managers to gather employees for midday workouts.
- Suggest that people stop checking e-mails during meetings.
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