

in a nutshell

fresh ideas for developing international leaders and teams



LEADERSHIP

Energy is the Future, Not Time Management

Managing your energy improves financial metrics, customer relationships and productivity

Every month, I hear at least one executive say how their leaders are being pushed harder and harder. There is a sense of reaching a point of overload, with all the negative business and personal results that flow from it.

Time is a finite resource; but personal energy is different. There are only 24 hours a day. We cannot expand the number of hours in a day – even if we want to. On the other hand, energy – defined as the capacity to work – can be expanded, not infinitely, but more so than time.

Many managers, academics and gurus have spent years going down the wrong path by telling us to optimise the use of our time. Instead, we should be managing our energy. **To get more done we have to focus on the company's capacity for work, not time management.**

I've been looking at new research which shows that "energy managing" companies perform better (than "time managing" companies).

Their key financial metrics are up to 20% higher. In addition, 68% of the "energy managers" improved their relationships with customers and 71% substantially raised their productivity.

It is for executives and managers to create an environment where people have energy-boosting rituals, for example, taking regular breaks, eating healthily at lunchtime and having a sense of control over their tasks. From a leadership perspective, this starts with **getting the organisational mindset right.**

Are you managing people's time or people's energy?

Is it possible in your company for people to:

1. Take 15–20 minute breaks at different times of the day?
2. Organize at least half of their day around team priorities?
3. Easily suggest how to make a process more efficient?
4. Have a maximum of three priorities per day and have some space to work on them without being interrupted?
5. Openly discuss individual and team behaviours that create stress, e.g. challenging a boss who only gives negative feedback?
6. Take physical exercise at lunchtime?
7. Have active pauses (e.g. going for a short walk) in the morning and the afternoon?
8. Answer e-mails at specific times that they choose?
9. Get a healthy meal at lunchtime in or near the office?

If you said "Yes" to most of the questions, your company probably has a culture of managing energy. In contrast, "No" to most questions means you're probably managing time.

#1 Clarify priorities and accept you can't do everything. Nobody can do everything, but many people think they can. Or worse, they want to please other people by trying to be superhuman. The best executives help their people to focus on the essential priorities, and ignore the unnecessary tasks. Tip: this is a fluid state which requires regular review and clear communication.

#2 Put time and energy into the areas of your life which are important. This could be at work, with family, serving the community, taking physical exercise.

#3 Make sure people can see you investing the

time. This is not to boost your ego, but to show them that it is important to do this.

#4 Make time in the day for employees to re-energise. Forcing them to do something will probably not work. Encouraging them to take action will.

#5 Lead by example. It is an old saying but totally true when it comes to managing energy.

The paradox for productivity is not about leaders squeezing more out of their people. It is investing more in them, by creating the conditions where they want to bring more of themselves to work.

TEAMS

Avoiding the Vortex of Negative Energy

The ignorance of hero-leaders and blind teams can create a fatal trap; here's how to avoid it

There is a fantasy in lots of business books which blinds teams, and especially hero-leaders. The fantasy is the story of leadership as a fight to win against all probability, in extreme situations.

Shackleton's failed Antarctic expedition. Ghandi's protest of peaceful resistance. Martin Luther-King's dream of racial equality. These are stories of brave, heroic people. Very often, business is not like this. Nobody I have ever worked with has been shot, had their family members arrested and tortured or survived on cold ice-flows. Most people are not in a life or death situation. They go home at six o'clock. They simply have long-term low energy.

The team's job is to recognise the costs of these energy-depleting behaviours, then to take the responsibility to change them.

When I first met her, Mary was leading the controlling department of a large multinational. The people worked hard: 10-12 hours a day, with half of the department regularly taking work home in the evenings. Three quarters of them felt constantly tired and only had time for family at the weekends. This led to feelings of guilt – as one person put it, "I hardly ever see my kids in the evenings" – and dissatisfaction.

Mary's story is nothing new. **Faced with work overload, individual team members go into "fight or flight mode"**, i.e. either they battle to get the job done, using lots of energy (fight) or they accept defeat and try to escape, which also uses a lot of energy (flight).

It's easy to identify a group in flight or fight mode by the high level of negative emotions.

People are less patient, easily annoyed or offended, anxious and insecure. They tend to play to the rules (at least those rules they like) and are less open to new ideas, which makes any change difficult.

When a team fails to manage its energy, it becomes almost impossible to think clearly or logically or reflectively. This uses more energy

solution – a big new goal, a new structure or process. Already unable to think clearly about the consequences, too tired to resist and desperate to see improvements, the team agrees. This is fatal. It simply increases the pressure and the negative spiral.

The leader's mistake is failing to diagnose the real problem: low energy.

Getting more energy starts by recognising the trigger events. The team needs to work on its individual and group awareness. The heroic act is to open up at a time when you feel like closing up. This is the path to reversing the negative spiral and introducing positive emotions. It helps to **consider four elements: body, emotions, thoughts and spirit.**

Initially, for the body it means taking breaks, moving and taking exercise and eating healthily. For the emotions, it can be breathing exercises or meditation, or saying thank-you to colleague – this appreciation builds positive emotions. For thoughts and spirit it is about setting priorities, understanding what people on the team like to do and giving them the opportunity to do it. Moreover, it is about consistency, doing it every day. Because these small daily steps grow into a greater sense of alignment within the team. In fact, the research shows higher individual and team satisfaction and engagement (i.e. higher energy levels) when people do these things.

In short, it is time to dump the hero-leader and the blind followers. It is an old-fashioned fantasy. The future belongs to those who raise energy and create a positive spiral from the inside-out.



and causes even more relationship problems. At this point a team like Mary's enters a downward vortex.

It is obvious that the team faces a crisis. It needs help to get out of this negative spiral. But what most inexperienced leaders and teams do next is exactly what they shouldn't do. Like in a Hollywood action film, the "hero-leader" appears with a quick-fix