

Please note! This is a self-archived version of the original article.

Huom! Tämä on rinnakkaistalenne.

To cite this Article / Käytä viittauksessa alkuperäistä lähdettä:

Lehtimäki, T. (2021) Getting things done by managing the energy levels. TAMKjournal, 23.11.2021.

URL: <https://sites.tuni.fi/tamk-pub/health/getting-things-done-by-managing-the-energy-levels-toni-lehtimaki/>

# Getting things done by managing the energy levels | Toni Lehtimäki

23.11.2021



Energy levels play an important role in high performance. People often take their energy for granted. However, we can significantly influence on our energy levels and capacity to get things done. In other words, energy levels can be increased. To perform at the highest level, you need to be physically energized, emotionally connected, mentally focused, and spiritually aligned with your deepest values. This study takes a theoretical perspective, how this can be achieved.

---

According to Loehr and Schwartz (2001, 2005) four different energy sources can be found in human beings. More precisely, these are the body, emotions, mind, and the spirit. Often, people take their energy for granted and do not pay much attention to it. However, each of these energy sources can be expanded and renewed. In other words, energy levels can be increased. We can significantly influence our capacity to get things done. One of the best ways to get more things done faster, better and in a more enjoyable way, is to increase the capacity of each of the four sources. (Schwartz & McCarthy 2007; Spence 2016.)

## Energy is Contagious

People need to be considered as entities if they want to continue to consistently perform on a prominent level. This state can be called the Ideal Performance State. Simply put, the best long-term performers can tap into positive energy on all four levels of their energy.

Cognitive capacity was the only thing that was important to have sustained high performance in organizations in the past (Loehr and Schwartz 2001, 2005). It was discovered later that emotional intelligence also plays a pivotal role when it comes to high performance. In recent years, a spiritual dimension has also been linked to high performance. In this dimension, deeper values, as well as a sense of meaning and purpose, have a positive impact on performance. In addition to these, physical capacity is something that should not be forgotten. All these four dimensions are paramount in sustaining high performance. What is more, they affect one another. (Loehr and Schwartz 2005.)

Taking all these four elements into consideration not only improves performance, but also enhances health and increases quality of life. Loehr and Schwartz (2005) argue that managing these energy levels is the key to high performance and personal renewal instead of managing time. According to Cameron (2012), positive energy benefits not only the individual, in that they perform better, but also others in that organization. Studies of network maps in organizations show that energy can also be contagious in a way that “being a positive energizer made individuals four times more likely to succeed than being at the center of an information or influence network” (Cameron 2012, 54). In the following sections, each element is outlined in more detail.

## **Physical Capacity**

It is known that insufficient nutrition, exercise, sleep, and recovery not only decrease individuals’ basic energy levels, but they also negatively influence the ability to manage emotions and focus attention. Nonetheless, people do not find enough ways to practice consistently healthy behaviors, even though they know how beneficial these habits would be for them. (Schwartz & McCarthy 2007.)

The foundation of all energy levels is built on the physical dimension. It is important to sleep enough and to have proper eating habits. Additionally, one needs to exercise regularly. People should become aware of the fact how much exercise, diet and sleep practices can affect energy levels in the first place. Secondly, as important as it is to be able to mobilize energy on demand, it is equally important to have enough time for recovery. According to Loehr and Schwartz (2001, 122), “chronic stress without recovery depletes energy reserves, leads to burnout and breakdown, and ultimately undermines performance”. Hence, the cycle between energy expenditure (stress) and energy renewal (recovery) is what matters here. In other words, stress is not a bad thing – actually, it is needed for high performance and is a stimulus for growth. However, it is pivotal to take care of recovery afterwards. One should learn and build rituals that foster this rhythmic cycle between stress and recovery in order to renew energy. (Loehr & Schwartz 2001; Spence 2016.) Positive energy rituals, specific routines for managing energy, are needed to achieve full engagement as well as sustained high performance (Loehr & Schwartz, 2005).

## **Emotional Capacity**

The quality of energy is embedded in emotional capacity. It creates the internal climate that drives the performance state. One should deal with one's emotions so that the quality of one's energy is improved. The first step is to become aware of emotions. How do you feel at various points during the day? What triggers these emotions? What is the impact of these emotions on, for example, the effectiveness of the work? People perform at their best when they have positive energy. It is interesting to note, though, that people cannot perform well under any other circumstances. (Schwartz & McCarthy 2007.) Positive emotions light up the energy that drives high performance. On the other hand, negative emotions such as frustration, impatience, anger, fear, resentment, and sadness drain energy. If negative emotions last for a longer period of time, they can become toxic and increase your heart rate, blood pressure and muscle tension, which in turn lower performance. (Loehr & Schwartz 2005.)

The same principles that apply to physical energy are valid here. "Access to the emotional muscles that best serve performance depends on creating a balance between exercising them regularly and intermittently seeking recovery" (Loehr & Schwartz, 2005, 72). In practice, according to Loehr and Schwartz (2005), the key muscles that promote positive emotions are self-confidence, self-regulation, social skills, and empathy. Additionally, patience, openness, trust and enjoyment play a supportive role.

As an example, too high demands or unexpected tough challenges can cause negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, and frustration. Thus, the fight-or-flight mode kicks in, narrowing one's focus, and this drains people's energy. It is hard to think clearly, logically, and reflectively. It is vital to be able to manage emotions in a way that emotions can promote working and not hinder it. This can be achieved by transforming the inner experience of threat under stress into a positive one of challenge. When people learn to identify their emotions and recognize the events that trigger negative emotions, they are able to achieve greater capacity to take control of their emotions and their reactions. Hence, they are capable of better handling stressful situations. (Loehr & Schwartz 2005; Lahtinen & Rantanen 2019.)

## **Mental Capacity**

Mental capacity consists of e.g., concentration and focus as well as time management. Simply put, focus includes energy invested in the service of a particular goal. Anything that distracts our attention to the task at hand dissipates energy. (Loehr & Schwartz 2001.) Mental capacity can be regarded as the ability to produce new thoughts in new situations and solve new challenges successfully. The more we use our brain the better it will become. Our brains like new challenges and they feel healthy when they learn new things in general. (Leppänen & Rauhala 2012.) The key supportive muscles that promote mental energy are mental preparation, visualization, positive self-talk, effective time management and creativity (Loehr & Schwartz 2005).

Nowadays multitasking is considered a necessity in the face of today's demanding work life, but it weakens productivity. There is a phenomenon so-called switching time. Distractions are costly. A temporary shift in attention from one task to another like stopping to answer an e-mail or take a phone call, for instance increases the amount of time necessary to finish the primary task by as much as 25%. It is better for the brain and the mind to focus for a certain period, for example for 90–120 minutes at a time, before taking a break and after that fully focusing on the next task. (Schwartz & McCarthy 2007.)

# Spiritual Capacity

In this context, spiritual does not refer to religion. Rather, it is just the connection to a deeply held set of values and to a purpose beyond self-interest. The spiritual capacity is a powerful source of motivation, focus, determination, and resilience. (Loehr & Schwartz, 2001.) It promotes passion, perseverance, and commitment. People can tap into this source of energy when their everyday activities are in line with their deepest values. This gives them a sense of meaning and purpose. (Schwartz & McCarthy 2007.) Personal character and the courage to live in accordance with one's deepest values is the key muscle that serves this set of energy (Loehr & Schwartz 2005).

## Conclusion

Four different energy sources can be found. These are physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. The physical dimension is the foundation of all energy levels. It is important to have enough sleep, to have right eating habits, and exercise regularly. As important as it is to be able to mobilize energy on demand, it is equally important to have enough time for recovery. The cycle between energy expenditure (stress) and energy renewal (recovery) is what really matters.

The quantity and quality of energy is our most precious resource, and it matters a lot in high performance.

The quality of energy is embedded in emotional capacity. Positive emotions light up the energy that drives high performance. The key muscles that promote positive emotions are self-confidence, self-regulation, social skills, and empathy. Mental capacity, on the other hand, includes concentration and focus as well as time management. Mental capacity can be regarded as the ability to produce new thoughts in new situations and solve new challenges successfully. Finally, the spiritual capacity is a strong source of motivation, focus, determination, and resilience. People can tap into this source of energy when their everyday activities are in line with their deepest values. This in turn gives them a sense of meaning and purpose. To conclude, it is equally important to take all energy levels into account, in order to perform high level in a sustainable way in the long run.

---

## References

Cameron, K. 2012. Positive Leadership. Strategies for Extraordinary Performance. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Updated and Expanded. Oakland: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Lahtinen, A. & Rantanen, J. 2019. Tunnetaidot opetustyössä. Opas haastaviin tilanteisiin. Jyväskylä: PS-Kustannus.

Leppänen, M. & Rauhala, I. 2012. Johda ihmistä. Psykologiaa johtajille. 3. painos. Helsinki: Talentum Media Oy.

Loehr, J. & Schwartz, T. 2001. The making of a Corporate Athlete. Harvard Business Review. 1/2001. Read on 1.10.2021. <https://hbr.org/2001/01/the-making-of-a-corporate-athlete>

Loehr, J. & Schwartz, T. 2005. The Power of Full Engagement. Managing energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal. New York: The Free Press, A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Schwartz, T. & McCarthy, C. 2007. Managing Yourself. Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time. Harvard Business Review. 10/2007. Read on 1.10.2021. <https://hbr.org/2007/10/manage-your-energy-not-your-time>

Spence, G. 2016. Coaching for Optimal Functioning. In Van Nieuwerburgh, C. (ed). Coaching in Professional Context. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 11–28.

---

## Author

Currently Toni Lehtimäki is one of the coaches of Proakatemia. Additionally, he is a Ph.D. student at the University of Vaasa. He is passionate about bringing leadership and positive psychology together in his studies.

Photo: Jonne Renvall/University of Tampere