



## Energy Management for Peak Performance

**P**eak performance is not what it used to be, according to leaders, managers, and employees who report teetering on the brink of burnout. And it's not just individuals: entire organizations are at risk.

Within the first seven weeks of 2021, Harvard Business Review published six articles on the topic, including how the pandemic contributes to burnout, how to recognize burnout, and how to fight burnout. But instead, what if we could avoid burnout and maintain peak performance?

Although burnout is not classified as a medical condition or mental disorder (DSM-5), in 2019—pre-pandemic—the World Health Organization (WHO) re-defined the occupational phenomenon of burnout in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). According to the WHO, “burnout is a syndrome... resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed,” and includes three dimensions:

1. Feeling of energy depletion
2. Feeling of negativity/cynicism related to personal occupation or increasing mental distancing from occupation
3. Reduced professional/occupational efficacy

Typically, we avoid burnout by taking breaks: we enjoy several weeks of vacation, spend time away, and de-stress with a change of scenery and energizing activities. But for many, this has not been an option during the past year. Add to that virtual offices and work from home (WFH) practices, and stay-cations don't recharge us like we need. Reaching and maintaining peak performance, for individuals and organizations, requires ongoing daily energy management.

### Four Dimensions

**E**nergy has four dimensions: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual (or ritual). We draw

### A Message from Nancy...

Let me ask you:

- Are the people on your team engaged and committed or just collecting a pay check?
- Do you have the right people in the right seats on the bus? Are *you* in the right seat?
- Is the high cost of turnover eating away your organization's bottom-line?
- Are your processes and procedures (or lack thereof) delivering productive and efficient results?
- How comfortable are the members of your senior team managing and leading others?



In today's highly competitive environment, it's no surprise that “*what got you here may not get you there.*”

At **Proffitt Management Solutions** we are fully committed to providing a unique blend of team and individual development and executive coaching sessions where participants achieve more focus, a sense of purpose, and better results in their leadership roles.

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energy from each dimension, which we must replenish. To build our strength and expand our energy capacity (stamina/resilience) we must stretch ourselves beyond our usual limits and allow for rest. This cycle is referred to as stress and recovery.

Consider the behaviors of professional athletes. Often, the difference between those who are highly successful and those who are not is an ability to manage and conserve energy for peak performance. While it might appear silly on the surface, elite players use certain rituals to help them remain focused and manage negative emotions. They understand this vital energy management component and requirement for peak performance.

Leaders, managers, and entire organizations can apply these same principles to their daily routines and operations. The key to recuperation is to create specific positive energy replenishing rituals.

## Manage Your Physical Energy

**W**e know that too much stress without recuperation can deplete our energy, and wreak havoc on our health. Left unchecked, our body's natural cortisol response can actually weaken our immune system. Add to that overeating, and we block energy production.

To jump start your motivation and boost your physical energy:

- **Move your body.** Even if it's only a minute of stretching, jumping up and down, or a turn about a room, corridor, or neighborhood, it can generate good feelings and elevate your mood.
- **Identify SMART Stretch Goals.** Your physical SMART goals can (and should) be related to activities and exercise, food and drink consumption, rest and relaxation, and wellness checkups with your medical care provider. (Yes, many of us have allowed these to lapse this year.) Like a big, hairy, audacious goal (BHAG), your stretch goal should be something you dream of achieving and is beyond your current capacity. In other words, you have no real idea of how to get it accomplished. If you do know how to get it done, then it's not really a stretch goal.
- **Create healthy habits and routines** that support your goals. If you find yourself lacking the motivation, willpower, or discipline to complete the activities that will help you reach your goals, don't feel bad. The reality is making a decision and taking action depletes our mental and physical energy. To conserve precious brain energy, create healthy habits and routines that are automatic and eliminate decision-making.

While it typically may be managers who succumb to burnout most frequently, no one is exempt. Idealists, perfectionists, and the highly conscientious who are dedicated and committed to doing well are particularly vulnerable. As a leader or manager, help your employees boost their physical energy:

- Ensure work environments are safe.
- Invest in building, equipment, and systems maintenance and needed upgrades.
- Learn to recognize the warning signs of burnout, before it happens. Are your direct reports easily annoyed? Are they expressing impatience or discontent? Now is not the time to ignore it. Explore with empathy and curiosity.

Peak performance requires attention to physical energy, especially when under intense pressures. And while it may seem like simple common sense, we often fail to follow it.

## Manage Your Mental Energy

**A**lthough many occupations and roles require time for decision making, we don't build in time for rest, workout breaks, and thinking. Anyone who has had to make frequent, critical decisions throughout the day understands the importance of this. One of the most productive ways to think is during exercise.

According to Dr. Scott McGinnis, instructor of neurology at Harvard Medical School, "There's a lot of science behind this." Studies find that the parts of the brain responsible for memory and thinking are larger in people who exercise. Exercise also improves mood and sleep, which affect our mental energy.

Another way to replenish your mental energy is to take a break from the actual thinking: complete an unrelated task, play a simple game, daydream, or meditate. Varying activities to stimulate different parts of your brain creates more mental energy. Even simple changes like reversing items on your desk from the left to the right, and vice-versa, can boost mental energy, creativity, and innovation.

Studies also find a strong correlation between productivity and positive thinking. To boost mental energy, use these techniques:

- **Mental preparation:** Willingness and optimism are key for mental toughness. Identify, control, and manage emotions. Be aware, and curious.
- **Visualization:** See yourself succeed. Rehearse all the preparation and steps you will need to take to succeed. Visualize obstacles, and how you overcome them.
- **Meditation:** Develop a practice of mindfulness or meditation. Begin with short sessions that focus on your breath, and grow your practice.

- **Introspection:** What are your strengths? Where are your blind spots and bias? What is holding you back?
- **Reflection:** Make time to feel feelings, process new experiences and information, and reflect on lessons learned. Ask for help when you need it. It can be most helpful to work with an experienced, trusted advisor.

If you aren't already, consider providing spaces where employees can disengage for brief periods of time (5 - 60 minutes) to recharge their mental energy. To support a meditative atmosphere, create quiet zones with comfortable seating, floor cushions, and soft lighting. Discourage food and beverages, electronic devices, conversation, and other distractions.

## Manage Your Emotional Energy

We know we are running critically low in our emotional energy when negative emotions become predominant. Fortunately, there are ways to manage negativity and build positive emotions:

- **Give yourself permission to play, even at work.** Step-back, find the humor, and allow openness. Play with your senses: listen to people laughing, watch funny videos, color, play with words or phrases, anything that will help you engage a playful mindset or attitude. Play can energize you, help you see new patterns, spark your curiosity, and trigger ideas and innovation.
- **Phone a friend.** Sometimes, picking up the phone can be the last thing we want to do, but it can be the most beneficial. If you haven't already, hone this skill. Identify three people you could call if you needed someone to "just listen," and ask them if they would be open to receiving a call and maintaining confidentiality. Then, develop a practice of checking in. It can be a short call, "I'm just calling to call," or, "I'm just checking in."
- **Find a way to be of service to someone else.** When we spend too much time in our own heads it's easy to lose perspective and forget that we're not alone. Find a way to offer help or practice a random act of kindness.

Boost emotional energy in your organization:

- Provide resources through which people can express anger, disappointment, helplessness, hopelessness, defeat, and depression.
- Establish networks for executive peer support. Historically, these have been based on non-competing industries, but I wouldn't rule them out entirely. When confidentiality is respected, such networks can foster cooperation. A qualified coach

can also offer emotional support for executives, leaders, and managers.

- Ensure you are recognizing and celebrating small victories at work. Frustration, anger, or fear are toxic and can block peak performance. Good feelings are contagious and can replenish our emotional energy.

## Manage Your Spiritual Energy

Spiritual energy is your personal connection to your true values and deep sense of purpose. It relies on self-care and depends on taking care of others with profound respect. Spiritual energy draws upon rituals and a connection with a purpose greater than their own personal interests. Spiritual energy means honoring your values, paying attention to your gut instincts, and doing the right things.

A ritual is a sequence of activities. It can involve visualization or meditation and/or a sacred act or tradition. At its core, it is intentional, mindful, and personally meaningful.

Peak performance means deep involvement with purpose, values, self-examination, and the establishment of effective energy replenishing habits. There are three critical steps in this process:

1. **Defining true values** and what is most important to you, fostering a positive mind-set, and being unselfish.
2. **Being honest** about where you are now and recognizing, understanding, and overcoming obstacles, including excuses.
3. **Developing a plan and taking action** on three positive rituals that will replenish your spiritual energy level.

For those who switched to remote or virtual work this past year, daily rituals took on a new level of importance. Preparing and enjoying a cup of tea or coffee became much more mindful. Dressing in professional attire and changing at the end of the day gained importance. Even scheduling a weekly virtual brunch with friends helped to renew depleted spiritual energy. These rituals all serve to mark the cycles of time, the boundaries of roles, and our connection to other, an amazing source of passion, fortitude, and commitment..

In organizations, spiritual energy is gained from the leadership vision, the mission of the organization, and how each and every action supports the mission. It is renewed when we remind each other that we matter. Our organization would not be the same without each and every person. Take the time to remind others how important they are. See, hear, and be with them. Let them know they matter.



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