

## **Management By Coaching**

### **Improving Agency Performance**

#### *Stop Managing Time And Start Managing Energy*

If you're like most professionals, you probably use a variety of tools and techniques to manage your time effectively – but what about your energy? If you want to accomplish more and feel better when you leave the office at the end of the day, stop focusing on managing your time and start focusing on managing your energy.

Time is finite. No matter what you do there are only 24 hours in the day. Your energy, on the other hand, can be systematically expanded and regularly renewed. Think of your energy as if it was a bank account – you are either making deposits and building up your account or making withdrawals and depleting it. Managing your energy begins with a clear understanding of what builds your energy and what drains it. The exact formula is different for everyone.

The study of energy – once the domain of physicists, acupuncturists and new age philosophers – is now finding its way into the business world; and the findings are intriguing.

#### **The Link Between Energy Management And Performance**

According to an article in Harvard Business Review, major corporations like Ernst & Young, Wachovia Bank, Sony, ING Direct, and MasterCard are seeing strong benefits in teaching their executives and employees energy management skills.

The article cited an Energy Renewal Program that was tested in 12 regions of Wachovia Bank. On a measure called the “Big 3,” which reflects revenues from three

kinds of loans, the participants showed a year-over-year increase that was 13 percentage points greater than the control group in the first three months of the study. On “revenues from deposits,” the participants exceeded the control group’s year-over-year gain by 20% during that same period.

Most insurance organizations invest significant time and money in training. Due to the complexity of the business and CEU requirements, the emphasis is typically on the technical aspects of the job. Few companies focus on how to help their employees build and sustain their capacity to get work done. It’s simply assumed that people have the energy and capacity.

The Wachovia study provides compelling evidence that learning the skills of Energy Management increases people’s capacity to get more done in less time with a higher level of engagement and more sustainability.

As the soft market and weak economy put the pressure on insurance organizations, leaders are pushing themselves harder than ever just to keep up. Energy management can be a valuable tool in increasing personal and organizational energy and effectiveness.

### **The Four Components Of Energy Management**

When you hear the term “energy,” most people immediately focus on their physical energy. Physical energy is only one part of the equation. Managing energy effectively also means concentrating on the quality of your energy, your ability to channel that energy and energy that comes from the meaning and purpose of the work you do.

#### **Physical Energy: The Body**

We all know the importance of getting enough sleep, eating the right foods, relaxing and exercising. All too often the reality of life gets in the way of our best intentions. Work pressures cost us precious sleep. We rush to the office in the morning and the “breakfast of champions” ends up being a bagel or donut in the car or sitting at your desk. Lunch, rarely a pause in the action, is spent talking business, running errands

or trying to catch up on phone calls and emails. You leave work late and hurry home to keep family commitments. The day's exercise is limited to a quick walk with the dog before you fall into bed.

While the impact these behaviors have on our health is well-known, we seldom consider how they impact performance. That's because we live in a culture that equates relentless focus on work, multi-tasking, being connected 24/7, running 14 hours a day with high performance and productivity. In reality, the opposite is true. These behaviors deplete, not expand, energy. The body needs downtime in order to renew its energy supply – without that time, you're running on empty. Your ability to think clearly, make good decisions and interact well with people is severely hampered.

Here are four quick tips for maximizing your physical energy:

- **Take brief, but regular, breaks throughout the day.** Our bodies go through 90 – 120-minute cycles during which we move from a high-energy state into a physiological trough. Towards the end of the cycle, our bodies begin to crave recovery time. The body sends us a signal like yawning, difficulty concentrating, restlessness, or the desire to eat. Most of us ignore the signal and keep on working. This continues to drain your energy reservoir.
- **Have a “recharge” ritual.** The key is shifting gears and getting away from your work for a couple of minutes. The quality of the break, not the length, is what is important. Choose an activity that energizes you – whether it's taking a brisk walk around the block, playing Sudoku, talking to a loved one on the phone, listening to your IPOD, or doing some breathing exercises.
- **Eat for energy.** What you eat impacts your energy – some foods give you energy, while others slow you down. The carbs in your morning bagel or donut will give you a quick burst of energy; but without adding some protein, you'll have no endurance and be dragging by mid-morning. Some people need to eat smaller, more frequent

meals in order to sustain their energy. The key is paying attention to how what you eat makes you feel. WebMD.com. and other Web sources offer a wealth of information on eating to increase your energy.

- **Find a form of exercise you like and do it regularly.** Study after study shows that exercise increases – not depletes – energy and improves brain function. There are hundreds of ways to get exercise. Find one that is fun for you and fits your lifestyle. The more you enjoy the activity, the more likely you'll be to do it.

### **The Quality of Your Energy: Your Emotions**

When you have an abundance of positive energy, you solve problems far more easily, relate to people more effectively and serve clients better. But when you're predominant energy is catabolic, which is negative, it is impossible to perform well or lead others.

Emotions determine the quality of our energy. The reality is most of us operate on automatic pilot – unaware of how our emotions work for and against us and how the catabolic energy of those around us depletes our energy. The more aware we are and the better control we have over our emotions, the more we can increase our positive energy. Here are four ways to increase your level of positive energy.

- **Listen closely to the stories you tell yourself** – Your energy level follows your thoughts. Imagine you're on your way to a meeting with a big account that you really need to win. You start worrying and thinking: "I'll never get this. They'll probably go with one of the major brokers. Firms like ours don't have a chance." The story you are telling yourself drains your positive energy and transmits the message "you're a loser." Change the story to one of the best accounts you ever won and how you felt that day. You'll completely shift your energy and the odds of winning the business.

- **Know your default tendency** – Your default tendency is the way you tend to perceive and react to the world around you. It fires without your even being conscious of it or noticing it. It is why we go on doing the same things we've always done, getting

pretty much the same results (and then we wonder why things don't change). Our default tendency is our familiar way of dealing with a problem; but often times, it's not the most effective. For example, let's say a problem arises at the office, your default tendency is to get angry and start asking a lot of questions about what went wrong. This depletes your energy and everyone else's involved.

Shifting your focus to finding the value in the situation and how you can use it to coach someone or make your operations run more smoothly creates positive energy. The key is knowing your default tendency and learning that you do have a choice about how you are going to react.

- **Know what gives you energy and what drains you** – During the course of your work day, watch for what gives energy and what pulls you down. Look for ways to eliminate or reduce the activities that drain you, and increase the ones that energize you.

- **Be conscious of the energy around you** – Research shows that the average person's energy level is 2.4 – which is in the catabolic or negative range. At this level people are dominated by worry, fear, doubt, and anger. In the business world, this frequently shows up as resistance to change, inertia, lack of initiative, indecision, in-fighting and an entitlement mindset. It is important to be aware of how powerful this energy is and how it can deplete you. Learn to recognize it and avoid being drawn in. (See Rough Notes: May 2008 Managing By Coaching)

### **The Mind: Focusing Your Energy**

You maximize your energy by fully focusing on a single task at a time. Multi-tasking drains energy and kills productivity. Research shows that it takes 25% longer to complete your primary task if you allow yourself to be interrupted. Many leaders report that they significantly enhance their productivity by:

- Using the first hour of the day for the most important priority rather than answering emails and returning phone calls. By 10 am you will already feel like you've had a productive day.
- Checking emails two to three times a day, rather than responding to every ping.
- Scheduling time on the calendar to tackle challenging, longer-term projects that often get lost in the day-to-day pressures of business.
- Designating a quiet place where they can work without distraction or interruption when they have a task that requires full concentration.

### **The Human Spirit: The Energy That Comes From Meaning And Purpose**

Energy expands exponentially when our lives are in sync with what we value. That means doing what we do best and enjoy most at work and consciously allocating energy to the areas of life we view as most important – whether it is work, family, health, fun or service to others.

Is your work fueling your energy? If not, think back to several situations in the past year when you were working on something and you felt effective, absorbed, enthused and satisfied? What was it about the work that energized you? How can you structure your job so that you do more of that kind of work?

Make a list of your priorities – in your business and personal life. Over the next several weeks, track how you allocate your time and energy. For most people, there is a clear divide between what they say is important and their day-to-day actions. The more effective you become at aligning your priorities and actions, the more you expand your energy.

### **Can A New Approach To Work – Work?**

Corporations that have tested the concept say “yes.” At Sony, several hundred leaders have embraced the principles of energy management. Over the next year, each of their direct reports will go through the program. Ernst & Young launched their energy management program in their busiest time of year – tax season. Most participants agreed it was their least stressful and most successful “busy season” ever. At Wachovia Bank, 71% of participants said their energy management program had noticeable or substantial impact on their productivity and performance.

In small businesses where leaders work so closely with their people, learning how to manage your own energy can have an immediate, significant and positive impact on your organization.

*Kimberly Paterson, CEC and Certified Energy Leadership Coach, is President of CIM ([www.cim-co.com](http://www.cim-co.com)), a marketing and consulting firm that works with property & casualty insurance agencies and company clients. She can be reached at [kpaterson@cim-co.com](mailto:kpaterson@cim-co.com).*