

Fleur Heazlewood - Future of Work - March 31, 2022

Manage your energy rather than your time to boost your wellbeing and performance



In our race for more, we are reducing ourselves to less. And, for many of us, our health and wellbeing is the 'less', and the 'more' is an endless cycle of busyness, pursuit, and stress. We need energy to last the distance, to enable us to do everything that is important in our lives, to perform well and be at our best.

Most of us know that the foundations of our physical health and wellbeing include regular movement, nourishing nutrition, and nurturing sleep. However, too often we let 'life' get in the way of living with wellbeing.

But many of the leaders I work with caught up in a busyness treadmill, continuously rushed for time, and not getting through their never-ending to-do-lists. And with change and disruption happening faster and more frequently than ever before, it can be hard to see the wood for the trees. Working back late on a once-off project to finish a report becomes a pattern of working back late. Forgoing personal exercise time to ferry the kids to extra sporting activities becomes a pattern of deprioritising our fitness. And so on.

People that are well do well

Think of energy as the tank of fuel that keeps you going, or the battery that keeps you charged and performing. When your energy becomes drained, motivation becomes sluggish, and it is harder to get things done.

Optimal energy means having the energy to do what you want to do, to complete the things that are important to you and to do them when you want to do them. It means not burning time and energy in busyness, urgency, and distractions, and neglecting the important things.

But many of us approach our energy like a time equation. We start with the tasks that need to be done, rather than investing our time and energy into the things we care about.

Manage your energy not your time

Imagine you are trying to fit a mix of big rocks, pebbles, and sand into an empty jar.

If you start filling the jar by first adding the sand and then the pebbles, you will not have room for your rocks.

The big rocks symbolise the things that are the most important in your life. They represent the things that have real value: your health, your family, your partner. Even if everything else (the pebbles and the sand) was lost and only they remained, your life would still have meaning.

The pebbles represent the things in your life that are meaningful and matter but are not as critical, such as your job, house, and hobbies.

The sand represents everything else, the small stuff: material possessions, chores, and filler things such as watching television or browsing social media. These things don't mean much to your life as a whole and should be considered more like time fillers.

Wellbeing starts with prioritising you

Research shows that if we prioritise our wellbeing first, we become more creative, innovative, and productive as a result. In real life, this looks like investing our energy into our wellbeing priorities and values first, then streamlining, automating or delegating the busy tasks that drain our energy for little return.

I like to think of work and rest as the yin and yang of wellbeing. Both are complementary and opposing forces.

Work drives wellbeing in areas such as purpose, achievement, finances, and contribution. Rest includes wellbeing sources such as relaxation, breaks and flow-inducing activities. Both are necessary conditions for appreciating the other.

Try a personal energy audit

When was the last time that you stopped and took stock of the pattern of your days? I invite you to pause, breathe and create space to reflect. Identify the areas of your life that give you energy and the areas of your life that deplete it. Review what is important in your life and what isn't.

Deliberately choose and make adjustments to how you manage your day that better aligns your investment of energy and time to your big rocks, your priorities.

Choose to invest in your energy

Optimising energy is about ensuring balanced support and investment across our emotional, mental, and physical health. Energy examples include skills and activities like:

- **Physical energy:** food, water, sleep, incidental exercise
- **Emotional energy:** positive emotions from things we enjoy and find relaxing
- **Mental energy:** realistic, optimistic, and helpful thinking patterns
- **Social energy:** spending quality time with family and close friends
- **Spiritual energy:** aligning with purpose, passion, values, altruism.

Investing in your energy boosts both your wellbeing and your performance.

When you increase your overall energy, it's easier to continue to do your best under pressure and maintain a balanced approach to life. Because the reality is that wellbeing isn't a nice to have, it is necessary. It is necessary for our health, energy, connection, creativity, relationships, performance, and this list goes on.