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Why wellbeing is an often-ignored enabler of high performance

Investing in your wellbeing might just be the missing link to improving your productivity, resilience, creativity and relationships in business.

People that are well, do well. But we're doing a lot of 'doing', and not enough 'well'. Many of us still operate with the industrial age model of work, which focuses on and measures success by effort, productivity and revenue.

This means that people prioritize work first, and then attempt to fit health, wellbeing, rest and recovery into whatever time is left. The story we tell ourselves sounds something like this: "If I work hard and achieve my targets, then I deserve happiness and wellbeing."

But this equation is broken and backward and, as Founder of the corporate strategy firm Good Think, Shawn Achor's [work with Harvard University](#) shows with this mindset we never get to [wellbeing](#).

Every time we hit our targets; we increase our targets. We get a nice car; we want a bigger one. We get a good job; we want a better one.

In our race for more, we reduce ourselves to less

Our busy lifestyles keep us in a constant fight-or-flight state. Our body continuously pumps out adrenaline and cortisol designed to keep us safe from threats in short bursts, but not as our regular operating system.

When we're stressed and in survival mode, we can't perform well. Our brain prioritizes the resources needed to keep us safe from risks and threats, but in order to do this, it deprioritizes resources less essential to survival like perspective-taking, problem-solving and innovation.

We're wired and overtired

Pressure from economic and financial uncertainty on top of exhaustion from the COVID-19 pandemic and other external events are contributing to high levels of chronic stress, burnout and [mental health](#) issues around the globe.

Each of these conditions drains our energy, engagement and ability to function well.

Most of the leaders I work with are caught in the busyness treadmill, and with change and disruption happening faster, more frequently and more dramatically than we are used to, we are struggling to keep up.

We want better health, wellbeing and balance, but stay stuck frantically juggling the multiple balls in the air. We rarely shift back to a state of calm, to rest and replenish before the next amygdala hijack.

Continuing to do more of the same isn't working.

We need to flip our wellbeing-to-work equation

Over 10 years of research by Achor shows that when we prioritize wellbeing and happiness, we have better productivity, sales, creativity, relationships and resilience, and less burnout.

And at an organizational level, Kim Cameron's book *Positive Leadership: Strategies for Extraordinary Performance* details that it leads to better engagement, less turnover and higher performing businesses.

Our brains perform significantly better when we are positive, rather than when we are stressed or negative. And by investing in our health and wellbeing, and cultivating happiness and optimism first, we not only feel better, but we experience a performance advantage.

Change is challenging

Our brains have an inbuilt negativity bias that automatically scans the world for risks, threats and problems to keep us safe. It also prioritizes automatic thoughts, behaviors and routines that are known and efficient.

So [making change](#), regardless of how small it is, disrupts our comfortable ways of operating.

This is why it takes conscious effort, focused energy, and persistence to stay on track even when the change is something that we want and care deeply about.

Small, simple investments reap big returns

The best way to set ourselves up for wellbeing success is to consider it as an investment. Start small and start the day well when our energy and willpower is at its highest. Consider refining the way you approach your morning to include:

- **Grounding:** Focus the first 30 minutes of your day making progress on something that is important to you, connecting with your family, your fitness, education, or a hobby. Resist opening your device when the alarm goes off or letting the content from the rest of the world set the tone for your day
- **Moving:** Just 10 minutes of walking boosts your energy, fitness, emotional state, mental health and, when combined with nature and your pet or a friend, provides an oxytocin boost as well
- **Mindfulness practice:** Ten minutes of journaling, a mindfulness practice, meditation, or immersing yourself in music or an activity that brings flow, boosts focus, clarity and concentration
- **Boundary setting:** Treat yourself like the precious finite resource that you are

We're well overdue putting the healthy back into high performance. And research clearly shows that people who feel valued and that their wellbeing at work matters, perform better, are more engaged and stay longer.

To put it simply, people who are well, do well.

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