

“The Power of Full Engagement”

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Kindle Notes by Dave Kraft

Energy, not time, is the fundamental currency of high performance. Without the right quantity, quality, focus and force of energy, we are compromised in any activity we undertake. Performance, health and happiness are grounded in the skillful management of energy. Leaders are the stewards of organizational energy—in companies, organizations and even in families. They inspire or demoralize others first by how effectively they manage their own energy and next by how well they mobilize, focus, invest and renew the collective energy of those they lead. Less than 30 percent of American workers are fully engaged at work, according to data collected by the Gallup Organization in early 2001. Energy is the X factor that makes it possible to fully ignite talent and skill.

PRINCIPLE 1: Full engagement requires drawing on four separate but related sources of energy: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.

PRINCIPLE 2: Because energy capacity diminishes both with overuse and with underuse, we must balance energy expenditure with intermittent energy renewal.

To maintain a powerful pulse in our lives, we must learn how to rhythmically spend and renew energy.

PRINCIPLE 3: To build capacity, we must push beyond our normal limits, training in the same systematic way that elite athletes do. We build emotional, mental and spiritual capacity in precisely the same way that we build physical capacity.

PRINCIPLE 4: Positive energy rituals—highly specific routines for managing energy—are the key to full engagement and sustained high performance.

A positive ritual is a behavior that becomes automatic over time—fueled by some deeply held value. Creating positive rituals is the most powerful means we have found to effectively manage energy in the service of full engagement. Making changes that endure, we have found, is a three-step process that we call Purpose-Truth-Action. All three are necessary and none is sufficient by itself. Our first challenge is to answer the question “How should I spend my energy in a way that is consistent with my deepest values? In the next stage of our process, Face the Truth, the first question we ask clients is how are you spending your energy now? The third step in your change process is to Take Action to close the gap between who you are and who you want to be—between how you manage your energy now and how you want to manage your energy to achieve whatever mission you are on. Examples include relying on junk food for bursts of energy; smoking or drinking to manage anxiety; furiously multitasking to meet demands; setting aside more challenging, long-term projects in favor of what feels immediately pressing and easier to accomplish, and devoting little energy to personal relationships. The costs of these choices and many others only show up over time.

As Aristotle said: “We are what we repeatedly do.”

The casual choices that we make each day, often without thinking much about them, can slowly lead to compromised energy, diminished performance and a progressively disengaged life. All performance barriers, we have found, are attributable to poor energy management—either in the form of insufficient energy renewal, insufficient energy capacity or, more typically, both. Energy is highly infectious, and negativity feeds on itself. Instead Roger lived his life from email to email, demand to demand, crisis to crisis. He rarely took breaks and his focus seemed to deteriorate as the day wore on.

The truth was that Roger now spent so much of his life responding to external demands that he had lost touch with any sense of what he really wanted from life. Balancing stress and recovery is critical not just in competitive sports, but also in managing energy in all facets of our lives. Cultures that encourage people to seek intermittent renewal not only inspire greater commitment, but also more productivity. The umbilical cord to work is longer than it’s ever been. “We must learn to establish stopping points in our days, inviolable times when we step off the track, cease processing information and shift our attention from achievement to restoration.

It is not the intensity of energy expenditure that produces burnout, impaired performance and physical breakdown, but rather the duration of expenditure without recovery. Our most fundamental need as human beings is to spend and recover energy. We call this oscillation. The opposite of oscillation is linearity: too much energy expenditure without recovery or too much recovery without sufficient energy expenditure.

Other than eating and breathing, sleeping is the most important source of recovery in our lives. The world’s best athletes all build highly structured recovery routines into their lives. The typical recommended exercise protocol is twenty to thirty minutes of continuous exercise, three to five days a week, at 60 to 85 percent of maximum heart rate. Full engagement requires the capacity to respond quickly and flexibly to whatever demands we face in our lives, but also to shut down and restore equilibrium quickly and efficiently. After interviewing a large sample of managers and their employees, the Gallup Organization found that no single factor more clearly predicts the productivity of an employee than his relationship with his direct superior. Effective emotional renewal puts us in a position to perform more effectively, especially under pressure.

We suggested to Erica that she could be more effective at work, personally and interpersonally, if she created more space between obligations and took specific time out to simply enjoy herself and to refuel emotionally. The capacity to stay appropriately focused and realistically optimistic depends on intermittently changing mental channels in order to rest and rejuvenate. “The greatest geniuses,” da Vinci told his patron, “sometimes accomplish more when they work less.” In his *Treatise on Painting*, da Vinci wrote, “It is a very good plan every now and then to go away and have a little relaxation.... When you come back to the work your judgment will be surer, since to remain constantly at work will cause you to lose the power of judgment.” The highest form of creativity depends on a rhythmic movement between engagement and disengagement, thinking and letting go, activity and rest.

Both sides of the equation are necessary, but neither is sufficient by itself. He told his staff that he was less interested in how much time they devoted to their jobs than in the quality of energy they brought to their tasks. Continuing to challenge the brain protects us from decline as we age. The simple truth was that Linda overestimated her capacity to efficiently meet the demands that she took on. Purpose is what lights us up, floats our boats and feeds our souls. Few of us are satisfied to be ordinary—in our work, our marriages, as parents, as children to aging parents and as contributors to our communities. Many of us sleepwalk through our lives, operating on automatic pilot most of the time. her obsession with getting everything right compromised her willingness to take risks and to exercise much creativity.

The point is that we feel more passion for and derive more pleasure from doing what we freely choose and most enjoy. Why were the most successful leaders also so consistently self-effacing, modest and eager to share credit? In part, it was that their humility gave others room to flourish. Whatever he did, he was either fully engaged or strategically disengaged. Since will and discipline are far more limited and precious resources than most of us realize, they must be called upon very selectively. The more exacting the challenge, the more rigorous our rituals need to be. “The biggest problem in American business today is the feeling that nothing is ever finished. There is no satisfaction to be derived from a job well done because there is always another demand to be met. We’re all running on an endless treadmill. ”When a ritual begins to feel empty, stale and even oppressive, the likely explanation is that it has lost its connection to deeply held values.

A broad and persuasive array of studies confirms that specificity of timing and precision of behavior dramatically increase the likelihood of success. The specificity and precision of rituals also makes it more likely that we will be able to produce them under pressure. Precision and specificity also help to assure that our rituals themselves remain fueled by our deepest values. If nothing succeeds like success, it is equally true that nothing fails like excess.

Our method is to build rituals in increments—focusing on one significant change at a time, and setting reachable goals at each step of the process. Having a target number is key.... Keeping track of your behavior each month means that you don’t slip up, because you know immediately whether your schedule is matching up with your priorities. ”falling short in implementing a particular ritual or achieving the outcome that you are seeking, several explanations are possible. It may be that the ritual isn’t grounded in a value or a vision that is truly compelling to you.