The Power of Full Engagement
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The Big Idea


Its thesis is that management of our energy determines how fully engaged we are to life. The book proposes to manage energy by identifying the source of the problem, i.e. whether there is a problem with one's physical, spiritual, emotional, or mental energy. Each is interdependent of the other so it is important to identify the problem. It also advocates the use of positive rituals to enact lasting change.

The basis of the book is the authors' experience in training professional athletes like tennis players (Pete Sampras, Monica Seles), golfers (Mark O'Meara, Ernie Els), boxers and hockey players. Instead of focusing on technical skills, the authors focused on these athletes' energy management skills. Thus a new breed of athletes emerged: the “Corporate Athletes.”

Chapter 1 - Fully Engaged: Energy, Not Time, Is Our Most Precious Resource

We live in busy times. We constantly chase after time. We feel worn-out and exhausted after a day's work.

Yet this need not be so. Even though a day holds only twenty-four hours, how we invest our energy within fixed time constraints determines how fully and happily we live our lives.

Several principles mold a fully engaged person:

- Full engagement entails drawing from the four aspects of energy: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual
- A balance must be struck between energy expenditure and energy renewal
- Pushing ourselves beyond our normal limits also expands our capacity
- Continued high performance and full engagement rely upon very specific routines when managing energy
- Lasting change may only be attainable through three steps:
  1. Defining one's purpose,
  2. Facing the truth about oneself, and
  3. Taking action

Chapter 2 - The Disengaged Life of Roger B.

On the surface, Roger B.’s lived a good life. He had a good job and a loving family.
But beneath it all lay fundamental problems. Once a rising star in his field, in recent years his work suffered. He needed to address issues of being overweight and hypertensive and also needed regular exercise. He hardly spent emotionally substantial time with his wife who, apart from being busy with her own job, also took care of her mother stricken with Alzheimer's disease. Roger's fatigue took its toll on his daughters with whom he spent little quality time with. He had no time for friends. This was hardly the life he wanted for himself.

Chapter 3 - The Pulse of High Performance: Balancing Stress and Recovery

A fully engaged life builds upon the balance and management of stress and recovery. Flauvius Philostratus (A.D. 170-245) advanced this method of performance maximization for Greek athletes. Today, elite athletes use the same work-rest ratio in their training.

The dynamics of stress and recovery also affect one mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The expenditure of energy causes us to draw from our energy reservoir. Recovering energy fills up the reservoir. Not enough recovery from too much expenditure of energy results in breakdown and burnout. Similarly, weakness and atrophy come about from too much recovery without ample stress. Therefore, full engagement requires a balance between work and rest in all aspects of our lives.

The pulse of life oscillates as may be evidenced in our biology. Our daily rest and activity fall within approximately twenty-four hours. Scientific evidence shows that both our sleep and waking patterns may be further broken down into 1.5 to 2 hour cycles. After the 90 to 120 minute time period of work, the body begins to long for a period of rest, signaled by hunger pangs, tension, having difficulty concentrating, etc. Oftentimes, we crave for artificial means of creating waves in our lives when we lack sufficient energy such as relying on coffee, alcohol, and drugs.

The importance of the work-rest dynamic may be seen in the performance of professional tennis players. They play better when they develop highly focused and efficient routines to recover their energy. In doing so, they derive immense energy renewal in a short period of time. In other words, life ought not be run as a marathon that is long and drawn out, but rather as a series of sprints.

It is important to one’s growth to push oneself beyond capacity, to experience stress beyond the normal limit, perhaps enduring some slight pain. One must be willing to endure short-term pain for a long-term reward. But it is equally important to allow oneself time for sufficient recovery.

Chapter 4 - Physical Energy: Fueling the Fire

Our physical energy fuels all our activities. At its most fundamental level, we derive this energy through the interaction of oxygen and glucose, i.e. how we breathe, what we eat, how much we sleep, and how fit we are.

Breathing plays a crucial role in self-regulation as it helps us relax and draw energy. Aside from breathing, eating well also has important effects upon our physical energy. Both eating too little of the right kinds of food and eating too much of the wrong kinds of food have negative effects on our health and our physical and mental performance. It is important to eat foods that are rated low on the glycemic index, a measure of how quickly sugar is released into the bloodstream. Foods like whole grains and fruits are low on the index, release sugar more slowly into the bloodstream, and provide a steadier source of energy. It is good to have five to six low-calorie, highly nutritious meals throughout the day. Portion control, i.e. eating only as much as needed to sustain us for two to three hours, is also important. Finally, drinking an abundance of water throughout the day is crucial for the renewal of one's physical energy.
Examples of food rated according to their glycemic index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Almonds, apples, beans, cabbage, chicken, cherries, cottage cheese, eggs, milk, peanut butter, tomatoes, tuna, turkey</td>
<td>Apricots, bananas, some breads, canned fruit, cereal bars, chocolate, corn, granola, grapes, honey, mangoes, oatmeal, pasta, rice</td>
<td>Bagels, baked potatoes, cakes, cookies, French fries, graham crackers, pretzels, raisins, soda, sports drinks, watermelon</td>
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Sleep is our most important source of energy renewal. On average, people should get seven to eight hours of sleep per day. Numerous studies indicate that sleep deprivation has negative repercussions upon our energy levels and our performance. Our bodies undergo substantial growth and repair particularly during our deepest level of sleep.

Interval training is also seen to be crucial in improving cardiovascular fitness and mood. The key is to rhythmically raise and lower one’s heart rate. This type of training aims to build one’s energy capacity, tolerate more stress, and teach our bodies to recover more effectively. Building one’s strength, i.e. pushing oneself beyond the comfort zone, is important to maximizing one’s physical energy.

Chapter 5 - Emotional Energy: Transforming Threat into Challenge

Our emotions behave in a similar way to our muscles in that they perform their best after regular exercise and adequate recovery. Indeed, our physical and emotional energy are inextricably linked. The renewal of our physical energy helps fuel our emotional energy. Positive emotions, therefore, are beneficial while negative emotions are costly. Negative emotions such as depression and anger have been linked to problems such as back pain, headaches, heart disease, and cancer.

Surprisingly, very few people undertake activities that give them a sense of joy and deep satisfaction. It seems people shy away from these activities simply because they are enjoyable and therefore waste time. What they don’t understand is that these activities are not just enjoyable; they also help maintain energy levels at an optimum.

In times of emotional distress, two things may happen: our problems may overwhelm us or we may use them as a means for our emotional growth. We must gain resilience against naturally-occurring emotional waves. Developing healthy friendships with people becomes crucial for optimal performance, full engagement, and happiness. Therefore, it pays dividends to invest our time and energy in expending and renewing our emotional energy. Full emotional engagement entails having the ability to experience a whole range of feelings.

Chapter 6 - Mental Energy: Appropriate Focus and Realistic Optimism

Our ability to concentrate and focus on the task at hand has a significant impact on our performance. We must be able to move comfortably from internal to external focus, from large to small scale. Mental preparation, good time management, positive self-talk, and creativity are important to one’s mental energy. Exercising our mental muscles through expending and renewing energy is important in building our mental capacity.
Our success may be derived from our positive mental energy. This entails being realistic and optimistic at the same time. While negative energy may help us focus on detail, on a day to day basis and for a sustainable period of time, harnessing our positive mental energy serves our purposes more effectively than utilizing negative mental energy.

Following the book's mantra of balancing our expenditure and recovery of energy, it also follows that the same balance must be kept for our mental energy. The necessity of breaks may seem counter-intuitive in today's fast-paced culture but studies have shown this to be untrue. Several documented cases, Leonardo da Vinci included, indicate that we do our best work during our times of rest. Both the creative process and the functioning of our brains are oscillatory in nature. We attain our highest level of creativity when we move between mental activity and rest.

It may be said that the brain acts like a muscle: its capacity increases with use and atrophies with disuse. In a physical sense, our physical condition is closely linked to our mental capabilities. Physical exercise is mentally beneficial in that it drives more blood oxygen to the brain. By the same token, continually challenging the brain keeps it from deteriorating.

Chapter 7 - Spiritual Energy: He Who Has a Why to Live

Our spirituality motivates us on what to spend our energy on. Spiritual here refers not to the religious sense, but rather to our connection to a deeply-held set of values and a higher purpose beyond our selves. In this case, character is the key muscle of spirituality. This refers to our commitment and courage to live our lives based on our values.

In order to build our character, we must continuously seek out ways to reconnect with those values we consider important. A disconnection from these beliefs may leave us feeling lost and confused. Activities such as walking, listening to music, prayer, or meditation may help us reconnect with ourselves and remind us of our values.

The key to being fully spiritually engaged is not to expand our scope beyond ourselves but to look at the needs of other people. Subordinating our interests for a higher cause helps give one a deeper sense of self-worth and meaning. Spiritual work is both highly demanding and yet overly rewarding. The power of the human spirit has shown to override even the most severe physical limitations.

Chapter 8 - Defining Purpose: The Rules of Engagement

Our sense of purpose may be drawn from our spiritual energy. This sense of purpose is the final destination of our lives while all our actions act as a vehicle through which we may attain our purpose. Full engagement entails feeling deeply connected with our values and building our lives upon them. A strong sense of purpose that takes root in our lives is crucial to withstanding life's inevitable storms.

Purpose is a powerful and enduring source of energy. It must move from being negative to positive. It must move from being extrinsically motivated (ex. focusing on things we don't need like money and power) to being intrinsically motivated (ex. engaging in activities for their own inherent value). It must also shift its focus from fulfilling our own desires to serving to a greater purpose. To achieve all this, reflection and honesty to oneself are essential to clarifying our values and our purpose in life.

Purpose is nothing without something that anchors it firmly. It is our values upon which our purpose is built. They are the standards upon which we manage our energy. Vision statements declare how we intend to invest our energy.
Chapter 9 - Face the Truth: How Are You Managing Your Energy Now?

An important key to managing one's energy is distinguishing between who we are and who we want to be. Honestly facing who we are is a starting point for change. Guilt, anger, frustration, insecurity and greed are better off put aside as these hinder one's ability to accept one's limitations and provide unreasonable bias for bettering one's self, an activity more deserving of energy expenditure. Dodging the truth consumes a great amount of energy. It is a form of disengagement designed to protect our self esteem. While it may bring temporary relief, it is only by being honest with yourself that you attain lasting comfort. In the same way, “numbing out” or not feeling anything is but a form of denial. Intellectualizing is debilitating as it is only a means of cognitively acknowledging the truth but not experiencing it emotionally. Pessimism, or perpetually looking at the worst in every situation, is harmful. Voluntarily being blind to ourselves is akin to having only a narrow view of ourselves. We must make honest inquiries of ourselves. We must not fall prey to the common error of regarding our interpretations and opinions as truths. These interpretations and opinions are a narrow and rigid perspective of the world, not beneficial to anyone. They are certainly not beneficial to you.

Chapter 10 - Taking Action: The Power of Positive Rituals

Rituals are valuable for three reasons:

1. They help ensure effective management of energy.
2. They reduce our reliance on our discipline to maintain action.
3. They help us convey what matters most to us.

Successfully achieving one's goals rely on engaging in positive rituals. Energy spent on self-control and disciplining ourselves to perform some sort of action draws from the same limited sources of energy the rest of our other actions also does. To be able to better utilize this limited energy, formulating patterns of action that are aimed at using the least of our will and determination is essential. These patterns of action are what are called “rituals.” These rituals, upon practice, become a means to conserve energy, energy that may be used for other, better purposes.

Formulating our rituals may be drawn from our deepest values. They may be aimed at furthering a purpose or ensuring that we do not derail from it.

At the core, rituals help ensure a natural balance between energy expenditure and energy renewal. The greater the challenge, the more rigorous our rituals ought to be. Furthermore, to derive lasting change, we must focus on making one significant change at a time, implementing one ritual at a time.

Chapter 11 - The Reengaged Life of Roger B.

At the heart of Roger's problem lay issues of a forgotten vision and set of values. He formulated a concrete and compelling vision of his life as it should be. This fueled his actions and determination to develop lasting change. With the help of a finely developed set of rituals, Roger B's life gained new momentum and direction.