

Energy and Success

Time Management

by Diane M. Eade

I would have cleaned the house, but after dealing with work, the kids, my spouse, and our social commitments, I just couldn't do another thing!

Sound familiar? Don't worry, you're not alone. Most of us have been there at one time or another. Of course, if the only thing we aren't getting to is cleaning the house, then things are probably going pretty well. What about those times, however, when your energy dips so low that even an evening at the movies sounds like too much effort? There are ways to support yourself so that you never need to feel that way again.

Energy is defined as "the capacity for vigorous activity; available power." When we watch children run circles around us, we may vaguely recall what it was like to have power available to us. As we watched my toddler nephew running around at a picnic recently, my sister remarked, "I get tired just looking at him!" If you share this sentiment, consider the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson: "The world belongs to the energetic."

ENERGY DRAINS AND GAINS

Okay, so now, you're totally depressed, and your energy level has reached an all-time low. They say that at least half of any solution is the clear identification of the source of the problem. Consider the various things that drain energy such as sickness, rainy days, poor diet (see Table). Make a list of your own energy drains. While this task may be a drain in and of itself, it will take you a long way toward the solution.

Now, let's turn the tables and think about the things that energize you, perhaps time alone, fruit, or exercise. Once you've identified your energizers, include them in your everyday life to optimize your power level. Since most of us spend a large portion of our time at work, it's there that we need to create as energizing an environment as possible.

What Makes You Feel Exhausted or Energized?

Exhausters	Energizers
Depressing news	Sunshine
Interpersonal hassles	Exercise/sports
Death	Children
Sickness	A new project
Overwork	An inspiring speech
Too many people around you	Laughter
Too few people around you	Fruit
A heavy meal	Coffee
Children	Music/concerts
Poor management	Theater/the Arts
A boring speech	Good friends
Alcohol/medication	Time alone
Rainy days	Meditation
Poor food choices	Chocolate/sugar
Chocolate/sugar rebound	New ideas

LOVE YOUR WORK

Work can be either the most powerful source of energy in our lives, or the biggest drain imaginable. Much of the difference in its effect has to do with our perspectives and attitudes about our work, yet many of us can no longer remember why we chose our professions. Think back and answer these questions:

- What made you become an NP or PA?
- What do you love about taking care of people?
- What originally attracted you to it?

Remember that our minds answer whatever questions we ask. If we consistently ask negative, whiney 'why' questions, we'll tend to answer with an energy-draining response. Ask yourself 'what' and 'how' questions so that you can focus your mind on more positive, productive responses.

BECOME CHILDLIKE AGAIN

Remember that wonderful toddler nephew of mine, running circles around everyone at the picnic? His curiosity about the world fueled his boundless energy as he bounced happily from one interest to another, unafraid to take risks. Take a lesson from him and unlearn all the dignified and adultlike behaviors that limit your actions and thoughts. Let loose occasionally. Obviously, this approach may not be very helpful in the emergency department or in surgery, but it may be helpful when you need an innovative way to relax irate patients who have been kept waiting too long.

Be careful, however, not to confuse innocence with childishness. Childish or silly behavior tends to irritate and zap the energy of those around you, so use good judgement in discerning between the two.

Another childhood habit worth reviving is nap (or quiet) time. Don't laugh. Like children, adults could benefit from a refreshing mid-day breather. Not necessarily a lights-out snooze on workdays, but just a few minutes of quiet with your eyes closed. Instead, we force ourselves to run on empty, totally exhausted, and waste enormous amounts of energy trying to accomplish things that we honestly don't have the energy to do. Too often we stay in this vicious circle for extended periods, and wind up blaming everything around us, rather than our own poor judgement, for our ineffectiveness and low energy.

Learn from children (just as they learn from everything around them), and you may be able to rejuvenate yourself and restore the passion for life that those little ones feel. To help you get started, make a list of activities that you enjoy. Then organize it into activities that can be completed in five minutes, 30 minutes, half a day, and a full day or longer. Finally, find ways to fit the activities into your immediate and long-term schedule.

SCHEDULING A HIGH-ENERGY WORKDAY

Too often, I hear that the workday has become a grind that wears people down. Healthcare can be particularly grueling, since you so often need to deal with people whose illness has robbed them of their energy. To address this challenge, consider structuring your workday so that it supports you.

Up and at 'em. Whenever possible, make sure that you get a solid 8 hours of sleep. Very few of us really perform at our best on less than that. Then, when you first wake up, take a few minutes to visualize your day. Imagine yourself operating at your peak, the way you would like to be.

Next, motivate yourself by reading an inspiring quote or passage; listening to upbeat, positive

music; or doing something that pumps you up.

Of course, motion creates emotion. Do something physical in the morning. If you're not an early morning exerciser, take a few minutes to stretch your body.

Once you're up and dressed, make sure that you take time for a balanced breakfast. It is essential if you are to operate at your peak.

Getting there is half the fun. Most of us need to go somewhere to reach our workplace. Too often, we allow our commute to become a hassle instead of a normal, expected part of our routine. First, I urge you to allow yourself extra time so that when "stuff happens" during the morning commute, as it inevitably does, you will be able to take this "stuff" in stride, without concern over being late.

Keep some upbeat audio tapes in the car. That way, if you do get stuck in traffic, you can listen to something motivating while you wait. During your commute mentally rehearse the day – the way you would like it to be. This may be very similar to the visualization that you did when you first woke up. It serves as a reinforcement of the positive attitude that will support your activities all day long.

With some luck, you'll arrive early and have the time to settle in before any patients arrive. This will help you to feel professional and prepared, and start things off on the right foot.

Take a lunch break. I know, you don't have time to break for lunch. Nonsense – you must make time, at least 20 to 30 minutes every single day. Take a few minutes each day, hopefully with a friend, but definitely away from your workstation. Eat light foods that give you energy, and to make certain that you relax a bit, talk about fun, light topics.

Go with the flow. Plan your day around your natural energy flow. If you are a 'morning' person, plan your most challenging work for early in the day when possible; if you are a late-day person, plan the opposite.

One of the keys to maintaining a high energy level all day is to learn when it is time for you to take a break or switch activities. Many of us push ourselves past our personal threshold, and then wonder why our day falls apart. Be aware of situations that can signal when it's time to take a break:

- When you have had to deal with a difficult personality;
- When you are feeling a sense of low motivation;
- When you are feeling particularly tense;
- When you are working on something that requires a high level of concentration;
- When you are working on a complex project; and
- Whenever you encounter a mental block.

When managed properly, a break will allow you to accomplish three things:

- Switch brain hemispheres. If you were working with numbers or details, look for something verbal or conceptual, like conversing with a patient, and vice versa.
- Release tension. Simple stretching or isometric exercises physically release the stress of the moment. So does laughter!
- Obtain oxygen. A few deep breaths go a long way to healing us. Take a moment to breathe deeply, all the way into the diaphragm to refresh your entire mind and body!

Ease into the evening. On the way home, review the day's successes. So often, we focus on what went wrong instead of what went right. Then use the commute as a time to prepare for the next part of your day. Visualize a wonderful evening. Perhaps a nice meal with the family, or an evening of performing tasks. Whatever it is, visualize it being the best experience possible.

During your commute, play some music that relaxes you. I actually made a tape with upbeat music on one side for my morning commute, and soft music on the flip side for my evening commute. Another trick I've discovered is running a quick errand on the way home. This is an excellent way to psychically separate yourself from the rigors of the workday, and is productive at the same time.

PARTING THOUGHTS

When I first started to take this advice, which I gathered from a variety of sources, it felt a little contrived and awkward. Now, several years later, it feels natural and positive. Remember that anything new feels uncomfortable at first, until we master it and make it our own. Have a great day!

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