

The Way We're Working Isn't Working

By Tony Schwartz

The defining ethic in the modern workplace is more, bigger, faster. More information than ever is available to us and the speed of every transaction has increased exponentially, prompting a sense of permanent urgency and endless distraction.

Tony Schwartz graphically describes how this relentless urgency undermines creativity, quality, engagement, thoughtful deliberation, and ultimately performance.

A growing body of research suggests that we're most productive when we move between periods of high focus and intermittent rest. Instead we live in a grey zone, constantly juggling activities but rarely fully engaged in or disengaged from any of them.

Most of us simply assume that human beings operate most productively in the same one-dimensional way that computers do: continuously, at high speeds, for long periods of time, running multiple programmes concurrently.

In 1993, Andres Ericsson, a professor at Florida State University conducted a study in the power of deliberate practice among violinists. Great performers, Ericsson's study suggests, work more intensely than most of us do but also recover more deeply. Solo practice, undertaken with high concentration, is especially exhausting. The best violinists generated the highest value by working intensely, without interruption, for no more than ninety minutes at a time and no more than four hours a day. They also recognised that it was essential to take time, intermittently, to rest and refuel.

Malcolm Gladwell, in his best selling *Outliers* confirms that “People at the very top don't just work harder, or even much harder than everyone else. They work much, much harder.”

Tony Schwartz explains that there is much more to Ericsson's research. He explains that where a computer just needs to be plugged into the wall socket, a human being has four energy needs to be met to operate at their best: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. By moving rhythmically between activity and renewal in each of these four dimensions we build our capacity to generate more and more value over time. More specifically he details these as:

- Physical – is about sustainability, being able to regularly renew and refuel to stay healthy and resilient. Taking care of yourself physically won't turn you into a great performer - it's just one piece of a more complex puzzle - but failing to do so assures that you can't ever perform at your best. We're more effective at work when we regularly renew, alternating between active forms such as exercise and play and more passive forms such as meditation and sleep.
- Emotional – feeling appreciated, secure and valued are key, after all how we feel profoundly affects how we perform. Fear and fury may be fuel for action but in most cases they undermine our performance. It's in our self-interest to cultivate positive emotions, not just because they make us feel good but also because they fuel productivity and effectiveness across all areas of our lives.

- Mental – this need, through self-expression and the freedom to develop one's unique talents, ensures peak performance. A poverty of attention is the biggest hindrance in this area. Is there any doubt that when your attention is under siege, how long do you stay focused on any one thing that you are doing? In the Ericsson study the most crucial ingredient of the most successful violinists, after motivation, was sustained, absorbed attention. The most common source of external distraction at work is e-mail. Think about how you could manage this more effectively so you are able to focus on the important project.
- Spiritual – or significance - who you are and what do you really want? These are perhaps life's biggest questions, about our values and purpose. Regularly ask yourself what you stand for and how you want to behave as a result? What specific action can you take to serve a purpose beyond your immediate self interest?

At the end of each chapter is a brief and helpful action plan to provoke positive change, identify new, good habits and yield lifelong benefits.

This book will make you think hard about how you live your life. And if you decide to reflect on the findings and follow the action plan, your team, your business and your family will benefit and ultimately of course you will gain the greatest benefits.

Do I hear some New Year Resolutions being made?

.....Tony Schwartz co-authored the bestseller *The Power of Full Engagement* (2003) and is the CEO of The Energy Project, bringing effective energy management coaching to organizations such as Google, Ford, Sony, Toyota, and the Los Angeles Police Department.

"Tony Schwartz has become a National Treasure, the champion of a new source of renewable energy--ourselves! The Way We're Working Isn't Working is a great combination of engaging intellectual foundations, intriguing research findings, and truly practical advice."

Robert Kegan, Ph.D., Harvard University School of Education and co-author of *Immunity to Change*

"The foundations of great leadership are self-awareness and thoughtful action, and the ideas in this book can be truly life-changing for both."

Evan Wittenberg, Head of Global Leadership Development, Google, Inc.

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