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## ARTICLE HEALTH

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*by Liane Davey*

HEALTH

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As a manager, leading in this era of change, urgency, and accountability requires so much. You need the energy to be fully present even as you're fretting about the 72 emails piling up in your in-box. You need the patience to be empathetic when facing resistance from your employees. You need the wherewithal to be creative instead of defaulting to tried-and-true approaches. You need the self-control to be open and vulnerable without losing your team's confidence. And you need the endurance to be present, patient, creative, and controlled day after day and week after week. In sum, you need tremendous fortitude.

Although most leaders I interact with have a sense of the fortitude, energy, and stamina they require to be successful, few of them make investments to bolster those things. Is that true for you too? You know that sufficient sleep, proper nutrition, physical exercise, human connection, and time to relax are important, but do you carve out time for them? Or, like many of the leaders I advise, do you tell yourself, “It’s so busy, I can’t afford to...(spend seven hours sleeping, or stop to get lunch, or keep up with hobbies).” That framing, which casts investments in your resilience as *contrary* to the best interests of your organization, is doing both you and your organization a great disservice.

It’s time to take those hackneyed words, “our people are our greatest asset,” to heart. If you are an important asset, how could depriving, devaluing, and depreciating that asset by running it in harsh conditions, powering it with improper fuel, and neglecting routine maintenance possibly be good for your organization? Let’s cut to the chase: It’s not.

Take sleep. The [CDC](#) says that one-third of American adults don’t get sufficient sleep. If you’re in a stressful managerial role, I suspect you’re among that group. Your reasons for forgoing sufficient sleep might seem logical: Before going to bed, you need to respond to the emails that came in while you were in meetings all day; you need to cut off an hour of sleep in the morning to read the material for your 8AM meeting with your boss; you have to schedule a conference call with the Hong Kong team at 11 PM. There are lots of reasons to shortchange your sleep that seem very reasonable on the surface.

Now consider the other side of the coin. At the very least, sleep loss hinders your cognitive capacity by degrading your alertness and attention. You might argue that your venti coffee is all you need to perk yourself up again. It depends. [Research](#) shows that stimulants are reasonably effective at reducing the effects of sleep deprivation on standard, rule-based tasks, but they are *not* helpful when it comes to tasks that require creativity or divergent thinking. If your organization is counting on you for more than menial, routine tasks, you might want to reconsider whether squeezing more into today is worth sacrificing what you can contribute tomorrow.

And rest is only one of the investments you need to make to keep your machine in top form. You need to eat the kind of food that will fuel your prefrontal cortex, where much of a manager’s action happens. If you’re trying to survive by eating fast food on the go, you won’t have what you need to maintain your energy and focus throughout a very long day. You also need to hydrate to stay on top of your game. [Multiple studies](#) have shown that even mild dehydration can affect both thinking (memory and attention) and mood (tension and anxiety). Add to the list exercise and some time to relax and reflect, and you’ll have the energy, patience, creativity, and endurance to successfully lead your team.

And what if you need that best version of you now? What if you’re sleep-deprived, hungry, and tired, but you’ve got an important meeting in 20 minutes? It’s possible to get your energy level up in a pinch. Try one of the techniques below to boost your micro-resilience.

If that meeting in 20 minutes is a one-on-one with a colleague or a direct report, try doing a “walk and talk” instead of sitting down. A walking meeting is a great way to create a free-flowing conversation. It is an especially good idea if you need to have a contentious conversation, because reducing eye contact can make those difficult conversations a little easier. If your walk can be around trees or grass, all the better. That will not only make your meeting more effective but will also put some gas in the tank for the next one.

Another option if you’re feeling spent and wishing someone would scoop you up and carry you to Friday is to find someone in the office whom you can help. Grab a colleague and a coffee and provide some coaching or mentoring. [Recent research](#) suggests that being empathetic to others and helping them reframe their situation aids your own emotional regulation.

If you’re feeling an emotional hijack as your resilience is waning, take a moment to hit the reset button. First, name the emotion you’re experiencing; that will make it less powerful. Next, take a deep breath by exhaling as much as you can and then relaxing to let the air refill your lungs. Use a sensory cue to evoke more-positive emotions. Listen to a great song while walking to your next meeting. Grab a butterscotch candy and think of your granddad. If my energy is low when I’m facilitating, I find a discrete moment to put on my favorite lip balm; the berry scent is an immediate pick-me-up.

You can also boost your micro-resilience with a quick reconnection to what matters most to you. Add a sticker to your laptop, put a string around your wrist, load an inspirational quote onto the lock screen of your phone, or do something similar to give yourself a tiny mid-meeting reminder of the bigger picture.

Your resilience is a high-priority business issue if you’re leading a team through the stress of our fast-paced world. When you invest in proper sleep, nutrition, exercise, and play, you’ll have the self-control to manage your reactions, the energy to be fully present, the patience to listen and empathize, the wherewithal to reject your defaults and make good decisions, and the stamina to keep it all up for weeks or months. When those investments seem easier said than done, choose a quick micro-resilience technique as a pick-me-up. Investing in your resilience isn’t indulgent; it’s mission-critical.

From now on, tell yourself, “It’s so busy at work right now, I can’t afford NOT to take care of myself!”

*Editor’s Note: We updated this article on 8/20/20 to remove a reference to a research study that has been called into question.*

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