

Peak performance: strategies for boosting your effectiveness

Optimising your health will not only make you more productive at work: it will give you energy, clarity and vitality that will enrich every area of your life



Dr John Briffa

While commercial success depends in part on business skills and strategy, it also relies on individual wellbeing and vitality. Maintaining the energy levels required to perform at peak, even in challenging environments, is key for productivity and an essential element for individuals wanting to live and work successfully and sustainably.

Our mental and physical state is influenced by a range of factors including nutrition, sleep and physical activity. What follows is a selection of simple strategies that I have found to be consistently effective for boosting energy, effectiveness and sustainability, providing wide-ranging benefits for individuals and businesses alike.

Fluid thinking

The body is about two-thirds water, and the brain is even more watery than that. Studies show that even very mild dehydration can impair our vitality and cognitive abilities, including concentration and critical thinking.

You're no doubt familiar with the idea that we should drink two litres/eight glasses of water each day. Yet fluid needs vary from individual to individual (for example, does someone weighing 100kg need the same as someone weighing substantially less?), as well as circumstances such as temperature and levels of activity.



Many people find their best ideas come to them not while they're thinking on a problem, but while in transit

The right amount of fluid to drink is the amount that it takes to ensure we are well hydrated, whatever our size and situation. Some people imagine that thirst is the best indicator of our need to drink. The problem is by the time someone is noticeably thirsty, they are usually dehydrated well beyond the point where performance has been affected.

A better guide to the state of our hydration is the colour of our urine. My advice is to drink enough fluid to keep our urine colour pale yellow throughout the course of the day, whatever the circumstances.

Sleep is not productive, but it is key to productivity

Sleep restores our energy and prepares us physiologically and psychologically for the next day. A common prescription is to ensure we get eight hours a night. But, as with fluid requirements, sleep needs vary from person to person, and can even vary from time to time.

I encourage people to gauge

whether their sleep needs are being met by looking for symptoms of 'sleep debt', such as regularly waking 'artificially' to the sound of an alarm, not feeling well rested on waking, and the use of a phone's snooze function.

Anyone suspecting they may be running chronically short on sleep might do well to address this. While a very consistent sleep schedule is recommended for optimal sleep, I find in practice hardly anyone in employment can get close to such a thing, particularly if they have hopes of some sort of social life.

Plus, I'm a great believer in catching up on sleep when time, commitments and situation allow. The sleep scientists tell us we cannot catch up on sleep, but my experience with thousands of individuals tells me otherwise: the vast majority of people short of sleep are instantly revived by getting more shut-eye. Sticking to a schedule robs us of the potential to recoup sleep in this way, though.

During the working week, sleeping in is not normally an option,

frantic morning schedules being what they are. So the best tactic is simply to go to bed earlier when we can. This is unlikely to work if the thought around this is "sleep is a waste of time" and "my life is over". The mindset needs to be more that while sleep is not productive, it is essential for productivity and performance, and at the same time is helping us to have healthier, energised and more fulfilling lives.

Easy on the alcohol?

I've noticed over the last couple of decades that it's become increasingly acceptable not to end up utterly ruined at work-related dinners and functions. At the same time, it seems very few business executives have taken the pledge. So some of us have settled on drinking moderately on certain occasions.

This looks like a happy middle ground on the surface, but the issue is that, generally speaking, even quite small amounts of alcohol tend to disrupt sleep quality, particularly in the second half of the night.

My experience is that usually a couple of glasses of wine will be all it takes for someone to feel significantly less well rested in the morning compared to if they had not drunk at all.

While there may be pleasure to be had from drinking, often this is outweighed by the pain endured the next day. While common medical advice is to spread alcohol out or drink little and often, what I've found over the years is that this jeopardises performance and sustainability. What experience tells me works way better for most people is to confine drinking mainly to the weekend, and drink as little as possible during the week.

Movement matters

We are reminded endlessly about the virtues of physical exercise, but there's no doubt that some of us can struggle to find the time to fit it in, particularly when we're busy at work. A common issue is imagining that we're not really going to get benefit unless we're exercising quite intensely for an extended period of time.

Actually, studies suggest that walking has considerable benefits for health and wellbeing, with evidence linking consistent moderate activity with reduced risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, as well as delayed death. Walking, in the short term, can improve and boost mental function and creativity (many people find their best ideas come to them not while they're thinking on a problem, but while in transit).

Some form of more intense physical activity, perhaps including something with a resistance component, can be helpful too. This does not require going to the gym, though, and it can sometimes help to be mindful of Bruce Lee's advice that "long-term consistency trumps short-term intensity".

A decent set of press-ups and squats, a home-based circuit such as the 7-Minute Workout, or three or four rounds of sun salutations if you're into yoga, are all good and can usually be fitted into a morning routine with relative ease.

Dr John Briffa is a medical doctor specialising in the optimisation of wellbeing, performance and resilience. He is the author of nine books, including *A Great Day at the Office - 10 Simple Strategies for Maximising Your Energy and Getting the Best Out of Yourself and Your Day (Fourth Estate)*. Dr Briffa will be speaking at IMI's National Management Conference on September 26

Reading green? Find solutions on the bookshelf

To go more in-depth about putting sustainability at the heart of your business, and how to get your business performing sustainably at pace, we at IMI's Knowledge Centre have chosen a selection of books that do more than just lay out a philosophy on how we should combat climate change – and instead offer real solutions



Mathew Kelleher



Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming

BY KATHARINE WILKINSON

A result of an international coalition of leading researchers, scientists and policymakers, senior writer Katharine Wilkinson's *Drawdown* is one of the first real attempts to offer a set of realistic and economically viable solutions to climate change.

The book describes the 100 solutions with the biggest potential impacts on global warming. Taking an almost utilitarian approach to each solution, *Drawdown* looks at the carbon impact it would provide, the relative costs and saving, the path to adoption and how it would work.

Using only solutions that are already in place and understood in detail, the list of solutions suddenly makes changing the path our climate is on a matter of political will rather than scientific ingenuity.

The term 'drawdown' is the scientific term for when the world's level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere peaks and begins to decline. While the Amazon burns, this moment seems more than a distance away but, when the solutions are laid out in practical and plain terms like in this book, a (sustainable) light can start to be seen at the end of the tunnel.

Katharine Wilkinson will be giving a keynote address at IMI's National Management Conference on September 26.



The Battle to Do Good: Inside McDonald's Sustainability Journey

BY BOB LANGERT

One of corporate America's global behemoths, McDonald's has long been a lightning rod for controversial issues when it comes to the environment.

From the late 1980s in particular, McDonald's had running battles with NGOs and interest groups around their packaging, waste, recycling, deforestation and animal welfare practices – never mind the obesity epidemic.

The *Battle to Do Good*, by former McDonald's executive Bob Langert, takes you behind the scenes of the boardroom strategies and tactics that were employed then, and still are today.

A fascinating clash between ethics and profits, and how the clash really resided in the heads of executives, not on the balance sheets.



This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate

BY NAOMI KLEIN

The international bestseller *This Changes Everything* could be one of the defining books of our era – and one of the most optimistic. While radically transforming the economic system we have today sounds like a recipe for chaos, Naomi Klein instead focuses on how what we build could be radically better, as well as different. This is one of the first glimpses of a potential new economy centred around the climate and not profit.

The power of sustainable customer loyalty

Avoid the easy pitfalls of gimmickry, and instead concentrate on the small stuff if you want your customers to stay loyal



David Meade

Customer loyalty is one of those buzzwords that is bandied around every sales meeting and boardroom, yet most organisations fail to grasp how to generate, nurture and cultivate this valuable source of revenue.

The cheapest and most valuable leads are the ones that are already in your address book, yet very little seems to be known about what makes a customer buy from us again and again.

So misunderstood is this golden egg-laying goose that many organisations have come to erroneously confuse constant contact with loyalty; they think if they continue to send out sales letters, make courtesy calls and distribute email newsletters that their customers are engaged and therefore more likely to prop up their balance sheets all year long.

Beware the quick fix

When faced with the challenge of building loyalty, even the most experienced

organisations tend to fall into the well-trodden and vastly ineffective track of "the gimmick". Offering returning customers a discount for a second order, an attractive bulk deal, or even a free gift all seem like viable options.

In truth, though, unless the customer specifically asked for some incentive, they're probably already fairly satisfied with your pricing model. Instead of encouraging a more engaged relationship with your clients, it may serve to debase the perceived value and quality of your product line-up and reduce the buying decision to "cheapest deal wins".

Even the term "loyal" is misleading. Loyalty implies that customers need to be attracted and seduced, at any cost, via some cleverly invented scheme when in truth loyalty is in more about retention than invention.

Retaining an already won client is less about the carrot and more about the likelihood that they'll stick with your offering over any other when you've met their expectations. You can't put a price on a promise, and the first step to retaining a client is keeping yours. According to Gartner, roughly 20 per cent of your current client base are generating 80 per cent of your profits, so the key for any business



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to survive and grow is to build sustainable sales stream from within your existing set of customers.

So how do we build and retain loyal customers that continue to buy from us again and again? According to recent research, it's much simpler than you might have hoped.

Punch me, please

Coffee and sandwich bars are my office, and when I'm not at an event I can most likely be found surfing the circuit of free wifi-offering coffee shops in the city. I've accumulated an embarrassingly large collection of heavily punctuated loyalty cards to prove it.

Every time I order a sandwich at one of my regular stops, I get a single 'smiley' shaped punch on my card and the server explains that I get a free lunch after ten punches.

When I've had three sandwiches and three smiley faces, my progress could be seen in two ways – I'm either already 30 per cent of the way to getting my promised free meal, or I've 70 per cent to go.

The question is, which of these two views is more likely to compel me to get that card filled with the holes? Which view is more likely to make me return again and again to get that elusive free meal?

The answer comes when the customer moves from one step to the next and, crucially, how they perceive that progress. If I feel I'm making progress I'm happy, no matter how long the ultimate journey seems to be.

Test it and see

Recent research has found that a person's likelihood to successfully achieve a goal of any kind is enhanced if they focus on the small incremental progress they have achieved so far, rather than the large amount of effort that may be left.

According to the Chicago School of Business, one possible explanation for why focusing on even a small point of progress might increase motivation is because the impact of each action can appear larger. An action that

instil loyalty?

The first group, who were focusing on their incremental progress, were twice as likely to be retained as a customer and return to get their card stamped when compared to the group whose cards were already punched. Not only were they more likely to come back but, more interestingly, they returned sooner and more frequently – on average returning four days sooner than the punched group.

By focusing on what's been done, and not what's left to do, we can increase customer loyalty by almost double, leading to a more active sales team, and demonstrably better sales over time. Even line managers will find that emphasising the smaller steps that their team is taking towards performance targets is more effective than focusing on the finish line.

Leadership outcome

The corporate implications of these findings are huge. Put simply, whether your goal is to improve your organisation's ability to retain existing customers, to increase the likelihood of your sales team reaching their monthly yield, or to simply motivate someone (including you) to finish something they've started, remember to focus on what's been done, not what's left to do.

You've already taken the first step on the road by reading this, after all, so that's probably 30 per cent of the work done – right?

David Meade will deliver an opening address at IMI's 2019 National Management Conference