



Delta Gamma Well Aware

Encompasses eight dimensions: Social, Spiritual, Physical, Emotional, Vocational, Intellectual, Financial and Leadership Development

Strategies for Performing at our Peak

As collegians and alumnae we struggle to constantly and consistently perform at a high level at school, in the work place, and in our homes. It is difficult to meet the many demands placed upon us let alone feel renewed, refreshed, and confident throughout the day. Jim Loehr (2001 & 2003) examined this notion – how do we constantly and consistently perform at our best? His research indicates we must consider the whole person – the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual self – to reach our ideal performance state.

Two important principles ground this notion. First, we must balance energy expenditure (stress) with energy renewal (recovery). Both play an important role and must be incorporated into our daily routines, even energy expenditure (stress). Think of an athlete. It is essential that an athlete be physically strong and resilient. Often athletes accomplish this aim through lifting weights, placing stress on her or his muscles, coupled with significant recovery time, typically 48 hours without stressing these same muscles. So how do we accomplish this same notion outside of the athletic world? Loehr suggests that we incorporate daily rituals into our routines to promote and expand our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual capacity, promoting the oscillation between energy expenditure and energy renewal, the second principle.

Physical Capacity

Our bodies are our fundamental source of energy and provide us with the foundation to perform at our peak. This includes proper physical activity, healthy sleeping habits, and eating appropriately.

- Proper physical activity - Finding the space within your daily routine to devote to physical activity ensures the necessary energy expenditure essential for maximum performance. This may include getting up fifteen minutes earlier to take a quick jog or spending some of your lunch hour taking a short, brisk walk.
- Healthy sleeping habits – Adequate sleep, specifically seven to eight hours of sleep, provides the necessary recovery time our bodies need for maximum performance. Some strategies to ensure we get adequate sleep include cease responding to emails after 9:00 pm to promote our body moving toward relaxation, minimize distractions just before bed time, and create a consistent sleeping routine.
- Eating appropriately - Eating several light meals throughout the day yields better results than skipping breakfast and eating a large meal in the evenings. Our bodies need constant nutritional energy to perform at our peak. Therefore, skipping breakfast does not jumpstart our day and provide the framework for high productivity. Likewise, eating a large meal causes our body to direct large amounts of energy to digestion, taking energy away from our other work. Creating rituals to promote healthy eating may include bringing several small, healthy snacks to work or developing a weekly grocery run to ensure your home is full of high-energy foods.

Emotional Capacity

Our emotional outlook has a direct effect on our performance meaning negative emotions drain our energy while positive emotions create energy. Overtime negative emotions elevate our heart rate and blood pressure, increase muscle tension, and constrict vision, inhibiting our performance. So how do we create rituals to promote positive emotions, versus negative emotions?

- Become self-aware – We must notice and recognize when negative emotions invade our thoughts. Particularly take notice when your back begins to tense or vision becomes blurry as these are signs of stress often brought on by negativity. Once you recognize these signs, create a ritual to address such as taking long, deep breaths, gradually relaxing your muscles beginning with your feet working to your head, or reframing the negative situation into a positive.
- Listen to music – Music ignites the right, intuitive side of the brain shifting attention away from the rational left side helping us to realign our obsessions.
- Use positive body language – Acting a certain emotion such as confident or elation directly impacts the physiology associated with the real emotion. Therefore if you enter a situation with positive thoughts, our body will become renewed with energy.
- Creating space for close relationships – Creating clear boundaries between work, school, and daily tasks and relationships create the necessary recovery time to perform better when at work or school. This means even if we spend less time at work/school and devote more time to our relationships we will be more productive when at work because we created space for our body to renew its energy. For some this has meant stopping all form of work after 8:00 pm and spending time with her husband or setting aside two hours in the afternoon to hang out with a friend.

Mental Capacity

Mental capacity centers around improvement on focus, time management, and critical thinking skills. The strategies below provide examples of how to incorporate daily rituals in our routines to promote recovery:

- Meditation – Identify fifteen minute each day to sit quietly and breathe deeply. This promotes energy recovery because it silences the mind allowing it to re-center and re-focus.
- Take frequent breaks – Research indicates that our minds do not perform at our peak when we attempt to plow through work for several straight hours without a break. Instead our brains need recovery time and a chance to renew its energy. Research suggests we should break every 90 to 120 minutes.
- Incorporate non-cognitive tasks into our work - Have you ever wondered why excellent thoughts come to you in the shower, while jogging, or gardening? This is because your mind and body are in recovery mode, igniting the more creative, right side of your brain, silencing the rational left side.
- Visualization – Much like thinking positively, if you visualize yourself achieving an outcome it will infuse positive thoughts, creating the physiology associated with positive emotions. Therefore, when you sit down to write your English paper or accomplish an important or difficult task, visualize the outcome and your ability to accomplish it.

Spiritual Capacity

Spirituality is not associated with religion but rather means tapping into your values system and finding a sense of purpose and meaning in your life. This often means connecting with something outside of our selves. The following rituals promote spiritual capacity:

- Reflection – Pause and take a look inside yourself to notice and identify your deepest values. This could come through meditation, journaling, or service. The key is carving out time daily for reflection and prioritize it appropriately.
- Take a moment and pause – Simply take a moment each day to stop working and thinking and just be. For some this has meant stopping at a park each day on his or her way home from work or school or

getting up 15 minutes earlier each morning to enjoy coffee without the distraction of others or the television.

Incorporating daily rituals to increase your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual capacity will increase your performance and enable you to achieve more significant, productive results. The balance of energy expenditure and energy renewal is key. For many this means focusing more on energy expenditure (especially physical and spiritual capacity) while ensuring we create space for energy renewal in terms of emotional and mental capacity.

Resources

For more information on the notion of high performance and full engagement visit <http://hpinstitute.com/>.

For more information on service opportunities to increase your spiritual capacity visit <http://servenet.org/> or www.volunteer.gov/gov.

For more information on nutrition to expand your physical capacity visit <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/>.

References

Loehr, J. & Schwartz, T. (2003). *The power of full engagement: Managing energy, not time is the key to high performance and personal renewal*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Loehr, J. (2001). The making of a corporate athlete. *Harvard Business Review*, (79)1.

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