

MAXIMIZING  
OUR ENERGY  
AT WORK TO  
REALIZE YOUR  
POTENTIAL

EPISODE TWO

---

THE WELLBEING LAB PODCAST SERIES FOR XERO

---



THEWELLBEINGLAB

A MICHELLEMCQUAID PROGRAM

## HOW ARE YOU DOING?

### 1. STEP ON THE PHYSICAL ENERGY SCALE

Think about your experiences and feelings at work over the last month and answer true or false for each of the following statements.

	TRUE	FALSE
I struggle to regularly get at least 7 – 8 hours sleep and I often wake up feeling tired.		
Lately, I frequently skip breakfast or lunch, or I settle for something that isn't very nutritious.		
Most weeks I don't exercise enough, meaning either cardiovascular training at least three times a week and strength training at least once a week or another form of doctor-recommended exercise program.		
I don't take regular breaks during the day to truly renew and recharge.		
I frequently find myself struggling to feel as energetic as I would like.		

### 2. APPLY YOUR PERMAH 3 POINT CHECK

Looking at your responses, answer the following questions:

- ☐ **How** do I feel about my results (the comfortable and the uncomfortable scores)?
- ☐ **Why** am I feeling this way?
- ☐ **Who** do I want to be as I step forward with this new insight? What wellbeing action do I want to prioritize to help maximize my energy now and help to realize my potential?

## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- Studies suggest that when our energy levels feel higher, we get more done in less time, our minds are sharper, we have better interactions with others, we exhibit better health, have fewer days of missed work, feel more positive, persist amid daily challenges without burning out, feel more satisfied with our jobs, and are more committed to our workplaces. For example, Tom Rath, one of the world's leading researchers on wellbeing in workplaces, has found that on days when our energy levels are higher, we also experience higher levels of engagement and wellbeing and that this spills over to doing more for the people we care about inside and outside of work.
- Unfortunately, researchers have found that most of us are struggling on a daily basis when it comes to maximizing our energy levels. For example, in one study when more than 10,000 participants were asked to think about their entire previous day, just 11% of people said they had a great deal of energy which makes it difficult to realize our potential.
- One of the reasons we struggle to maximize our energy is that we get stuck in that old "I'm too busy" trap and mistakenly think that our bodies run like a machine at a steady, consistent pace throughout the day until we go to bed. However, if you track a day or two of your life, you'll discover that like every other living creature on this planet your energy moves in waves of expending your energy and then needing to refuel your energy in order to continue thriving throughout the day.
- When it comes to learning to maximize our energy, it's important to note that we're all starting from very different physical places and that's okay. We don't need to be perfect physical specimens living perfect lives in order to maximize our energy. We just need to be willing to start playing with ways to make the best of what is available to us. Remember to hold onto your kindness mindset as you explore different recipes for thriving.
- The good news is that small choices about how you rest, move and eat can have a much bigger impact on your levels of energy than you might expect. In fact, it turns out that generally, we are pretty bad judges of how much looking after our body impacts our performance and our wellbeing.
- For example, while most of us assume that one less hour of sleep to finish off that report or to catch up with friends won't make that much difference to how we'll feel in the morning, some studies have found that losing ninety minutes of sleep is likely to reduce your daytime alertness by nearly one-third and that four hours of sleep loss produces the same level of impairment as drinking a six-pack of beer before work. The reality is that studies suggest about ninety-five percent of us need somewhere between seven and nine hours of sleep per night with a few of us needing a little more or less. Unfortunately, roughly two-thirds of us report that we don't get enough sleep and as a result, not only do we struggle to maximize our energy but it seems to be negatively impacting our health, our moods, our cognitive capacities, and our productivity.

- When it comes to eating wisely, often by the time we try to decide what to eat our energy levels are already at their lowest point making foods that are easy to grab, that gives us a quick surge of energy, or comfort us when we're tired, far more appealing. Studies have found, however, that when we do choose to eat wisely consistently, not only does it improve our immediate levels of energy, but it can also lift our mood and bolster our short-term and long-term health.
- And when it comes to being productive, we often mistakenly believe that the longer we're sitting, the more we're getting done but the truth is regular movement throughout our day is one of the keys to maximizing our energy. How much movement we need is still in debate, but the best way to think about this is that every extra opportunity you take to move counts, with studies finding that physical activity helps to restore your energy levels, releases soothing neurotransmitters that help your brain to learn and grow, improves your mood, and helps you to sleep better and to function better as well.
- Professors Edward Deci and Richard Ryan have found that there are three key methods to shape your levels of motivation and energy for changing your wellbeing behaviors. Firstly, you need autonomy – so make “want-to choices” about how you want to maximize your energy that are aligned with your values, draw on your strengths, and leave you feeling energized and satisfied. Secondly, you need to create opportunities for competence – so be sure to track your progress by creating feedback loops that help you to learn, grow and get better at improving your wellbeing. Finally, you need to enable relatedness – so buddy up and make sure you have the social support of a friend, a colleague, a coach, a trainer, a team or a group of people who can encourage you, hold you accountable, learn from what doesn't work and celebrate your successes.
- Our behaviors are highly contagious when it comes to improving our wellbeing. So help your teammates to remember that our bodies are not machines, but living systems that need opportunities to renew the energy that we're expending at work and find ways that you can help each other – like ordering healthy team lunches, talking walking meetings, not consistently sending late emails or scheduling early calls.

## WHAT CAN I TRY?

- **CREATE A BEDTIME ROUTINE** – Give yourself at least twenty minutes to wind down before bed with clear nighttime cues to help your body relax. Dim the lights. Lower the temperature by two to four degrees. Turn off electronics (smartphones, iPads, computers, and TVs or anything with blue LED light as it impacts your sleep hormones). Write down what's on your mind—especially unfinished to-dos or issues. Try some restorative yoga or meditate or read a book.
- **TOSS AND TURN** – Waking in the middle night is perfectly natural, given we've evolved to have what researchers call segregated sleeping, a first sleep and a second sleep with a short waking period in between. Rather than lying there anxiously watching the minutes tick by, try some slow breathing or meditation. If you need to sit up for twenty minutes, keep the lights low and read or listen to some relaxing music before heading back to bed. Studies have found this time can be the most relaxing time of your day, provided you're not worried about sleeping!
- **EAT LUNCH** – Don't go into your afternoons "hangry"! Studies have found that a short break away from your desk to eat something good for you at lunch will help you better contend with workplace stress, feel less exhausted and have more vigor. Try to avoid foods that are high in sugar – like white bread, which will give you a short burst of energy followed by a slump. Also, try to stay away from high-fat meals – like a juicy cheeseburger – that will make your digestive systems work harder and leave you feeling more groggy.
- **TRACK AND ADJUST** – Consider if what you are about to eat is a net gain or a net loss for your energy, based on what you know about all the ingredients. Then, keep servings small and indulgences rare (pick the moments you can afford the energy slumps), and you're likely to have less guilt, more enjoyment, and better health. Remember to ask yourself – What kind of energy do I need for the next few hours? Then choose wisely.
- **PACK A SNACK** – If you know you have a full day workshop or back to back meetings, pack some healthy options in your bag to get you through the day like nuts, protein balls, or fruit. Try to set your sights on foods that are good for your short-term energy and long-term health.
- **STEP IT UP** – Get a Fitbit or download a free app to your smartphone to start measuring the number of steps you take each day. Start small—aim for 5,000 steps, and work your way up to 10,000 steps per day (if you're doing other forms of exercise, most apps have ways to convert it into steps). Upload your report and track your steps online, which can show you your progress over time, and how you compare to others. Don't beat yourself up if you miss the goal—some days will be easier to get steps in than others; instead, think about how you can add a few more steps tomorrow.

- **DON'T BE A DESK DWELLER** – When you have no choice but to sit for several hours a day, at least break it up. Even two minutes of leisurely walking every sixty to ninety minutes are enough to stabilize your blood sugar levels and taking regular breaks has been found to improve your creativity, and productivity.
- **EXERCISE EARLY** – Just twenty minutes of moderate activity could significantly improve your mood for the next twelve hours. Exercising at the beginning of the day kickstarts your metabolism, helping you burn additional fat and improve your glucose tolerance. So start your day with a brisk walk, stop by the local gym, or hit your yoga mat.

## SOME OF OUR FAVORITE APPS

- **EAT, MOVE, SLEEP** – Tom Rath's website gives you a free 30-day wellbeing plan tailored to your needs and has an app to track it at [www.eatmovesleep.org](http://www.eatmovesleep.org).
- **SLEEP CYCLE** – This app tracks and analyzes your sleep patterns. Choose your wake-up time, and the app will gently stir you from your slumber during your lightest phase of sleep to ensure that you wake up feeling rested, refreshed, and ready for the day ahead.
- **SWAP IT DON'T STOP IT** – shows you how to make smarter food choices from swapping sweets for nuts, to getting more exercise in your day, along with ways to shop smart, save calories and even how to join local exercise classes. You can track your progress and set alerts to remind you when its time to make a swap.
- **GREEN SMOOTHIES** – lots of good green smoothie recipes you can use to get all the good foods you need in a day.
- **iSTEPLOG** – This app is like having a mini pedometer in your pocket. Launched by Australian charity 10,000 Steps, it keeps a tally of how much you move each day which you can sync to the website to keep track of your progress.
- **7 MINUTE WORK OUT** – Scientifically-tested, high intensity work out with no equipment needed. Even seven minutes help, but you can do multiple rounds for a more effective workout.
- **FROM COUCH TO 5K** – Get your running shoes on! Over six weeks this app gets you running a little bit more every few days. An easy way to create a running habit.
- **POCKET YOGA HD** – Simple-to-follow illustrations to guide you through the yoga moves. Select from 27 different sessions, including various yoga practices. And don't miss the session that shows you how to burn fat while keeping your mind at rest.
- **HEADSPACE** – An introduction to meditation featuring a 10 session, 10-minute class. Includes progress reports, reminders and rewards. Introductory features are free.

## YOUR INDIVIDUAL CHALLENGE

### 1. CHOOSE A SMALL CHANGE TO HELP MAXIMIZE YOUR ENERGY

Think back to your results and PERMAH 3 point check when you stepped on the physical energy scale.

Review the suggested evidence-based actions you can try and choose one want-to action you'd like to take to improve your wellbeing this week to get closer toward realizing your potential (if there is nothing on this list that appeals, create your own!).

### 2. COMPLETE YOUR SDT GUIDE FOR SUCCESS

To ensure you have the motivation to follow through on your chosen action, complete the SDT Guide for Success steps below:



**What's your  
WANT-TO CHOICE?**



**How will you  
TRACK YOUR PROGRESS?**



**Who will you  
BUDDY UP WITH?**

For example, if you've chosen to exercise more make a WANT-TO CHOICE about the kind of exercise you'd like to do, when and for how long. Find a way to TRACK YOUR PROGRESS, for example, an app like Couch-To-5k if you're running. And BUDDY UP by asking someone to check in on how you're doing every few days.

## YOUR TEAM CHALLENGE

### 1. PUT ENERGY ON YOUR NEXT AGENDA

To help improve psychological safety in your team, put finding ways to maximize your team energy on your next meeting agenda. Spend five or ten minutes brainstorming free or affordable ways you'd like to support each other when it comes to looking after your physical health so you can each move toward realize your potential.

Then as a team vote on the top three want-to ideas to prioritize.

### 2. COMPLETE YOUR TEAM SDT GUIDE FOR SUCCESS

To ensure you have the motivation to follow through on your chosen actions, complete the SDT Guide for Success steps below for each of the priorities you've chosen:



**What's your  
WANT-TO CHOICE?**



**How will you  
TRACK YOUR PROGRESS?**



**Who will you  
BUDDY UP WITH?**

For example, if you've made a WANT-TO CHOICE about trying to have more walking meetings then note this down. Find a way to TRACK YOUR PROGRESS, for example, set up a chart team members can log their walking meetings on for some accountability and competitive spirit. And BUDDY UP by checking in on how you're all doing at the next team meeting.



## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

- **Watch this interview** with Tom Rath on the small changes you can make to maximize your energy.
- **Get your free personalized eat, move, sleep plan** from Tom Rath's website.
- **Get your free team discussion guide** from Tom Rath to help you talk about ways you can help each other to eat, move and sleep better.
- **Listen to this podcast** with Richard Ryan on self-determination theory and how you can stay motivated at work.
- **Grab these Wellbeing Cards** for small, practical ways you can improve each of the PERMAH pillars.