

FOREWORD

We're capable of so much more than we realize.

Most of us know precious little about what makes it possible to achieve and sustain excellence, especially as the volume and complexity of demand in our lives rise relentlessly. Rather than finding ways to increase and regularly renew our capacity, we unconsciously conspire with the organizations that employ us to get more done by systematically running ourselves down.

Ironically, a growing body of research suggests that each of us has the potential to be excellent at almost anything if we make the right moves. The first key is fierce intentionality about managing the four key sources of energy that fuel us: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

If you already work out regularly, eat well, take regular breaks throughout the day, sleep at least seven to eight hours a night, spend sufficient quality time with your loved ones, manage high stress gracefully, bounce back quickly in the face of setbacks and disappointments, focus easily on the most important tasks in your life, feel consistently productive, and derive high satisfaction and meaning from your work—then you probably don't need this book.

If, on the other hand, you feel exhausted or overwhelmed at times, vulnerable to irritation, impatience, and anxiety, challenged to focus on one thing at a time, less satisfied with your life than you'd like to be, and in a constant race just to keep up, then this book has something to offer you.

In 2003, we founded The Energy Project to help organizations address the multidimensional needs of their employees. Since then, we've helped to energize tens of thousands of people at some of the most successful and innovative companies in the world.

During the past year, The Energy Project has been taking the pulse of the world at work. To date, more than 12,000 people from 73 countries have completed The Energy Audit™, an assessment that mea-

asures how well people are managing their personal energy in each of four dimensions: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. The results speak for themselves.

- Sixty-four percent of respondents sleep less than the seven to eight hours nearly all human beings require to feel fully rested.
- Seventy-three percent find it difficult to focus on one thing at a time.
- Sixty-four percent frequently find themselves feeling irritable, impatient, or anxious at work.
- Sixty-six percent report that their decisions at work are often more influenced by external demands than by a strong, clear sense of their own purpose.
- Sixty-one percent spend too little time doing what they do best and enjoy most.
- Eighty percent say they spend far too much time reacting to immediate demands, rather than focusing on activities with longer-term value and leverage.

It doesn't have to be this way.

The principles and practices we share in these pages are grounded in multidisciplinary research. Modern science has helped us to understand with ever more precision what it takes for people to be more productive at work and to live richer and more satisfying lives, even under conditions of high stress.

At the heart of this book is a simple principle: human beings are not designed to run like computers—at high speeds, continuously, for long periods of time. When we try to mimic the machines we're meant to run, they end up running us.

In fact, we're designed to pulse. Our most basic survival need is to spend and renew energy. We're hardwired to make waves—to be alert during the day and to sleep at night, but also to work at high intensity for limited periods of time and then rest and refuel. Instead, we lead increasingly linear lives, forever spending down our energy without fully or effectively renewing it.

Think of the difference between a marathoner and a sprinter. Marathoners engage in a long race with no finish line in sight. They liter-

ally can't afford to push themselves to their limits because if they did, they would collapse a short way into the race. Instead, they pace themselves; spending energy continuously, but rarely fully engaging. That's the way most of us live. It often feels as if we're pushing ourselves to our limits, but that's because we're slowly but inexorably depleting our resources over the course of each day.

Now think for a moment about the way sprinters operate. They approach the starting line, get into their crouches, look down the track 100 yards, or 200 yards, or 400 yards at most. They don't need to worry about whether or not to fully engage and exhaust themselves because that's exactly what they're meant to do.

The finish line is visible, it isn't far away, and when they get there, they're expected to rest and recover. Our lives are undeniably marathons, but the secret is to break our long and winding road into shorter sprints. By fully engaging in any given challenge for relatively short periods of time and then truly renewing every one of us is capable of getting more done, in less time, at a higher level of quality.

In addition to rejuvenation, the benefits of taking time to renew include creative breakthroughs, a broader and deeper perspective, and sufficient time to metabolize, savor, and learn from each sprint we undertake.

The same principles that apply to systematically building physical strength through weight training apply to building excellence in any domain. To increase the size of any muscle the best practice is to focus single-mindedly on the task, push past your current comfort zone for short periods of time, and then stop and rest.

Push yourself too hard or too continuously and the consequence will eventually be burnout and breakdown. Push yourself too little or too infrequently and no growth will occur.

To achieve excellence, we must practice the skill we're seeking to build over and over, deliberately, with periods of rest in between. At the same time, we must build the four underlying capacities that make excellence possible: strength and endurance (physical), high positive energy (emotional), control of attention (mental), and a compelling sense of purpose (spiritual).

Most of us spend very little time deliberately practicing anything. At the physical level, eighty percent of people around the world are sedentary, meaning we're spending far too little energy physically.

Emotionally, we unnecessarily dissipate energy in anxiety, anger, frustration, and impatience. Mentally, we fail to invest sufficient time in gaining more control of our attention. Spiritually, we focus very little energy in defining what matters most to us.

The way we're working isn't working for us, for our employers, or for our families. It's not the number of hours we work that determines how much value we create. Rather it's the quantity and quality of energy we bring to whatever hours we work. In the pages that follow, we lay out the systematic approach we've taken at The Energy Project to help tens of thousands of people reclaim their lives. By following this program, you will deliberately strengthen and renew your four key sources of energy so you can ultimately achieve sustainable excellence at anything.