

The Big Ideas

CHAPTER ONE

More and More, Less and Less

The way we're working isn't working, in our own lives or for organizations. The relentless urgency that characterizes most corporate cultures undermines thoughtful deliberation, creativity, engagement, and sustainable high performance.

- The primary value exchange between most employers and employees is time for money. It's a thin, one-dimensional transaction that leaves both sides feeling unsatisfied.
- Rather than trying to get more out of people, organizations are better served by investing more in them and meeting their multidimensional needs in order to fuel greater engagement and more sustainable high performance.
- Human beings need four sources of energy to operate at their best: physical (sustainability), emotional (security), mental (self-expression), and spiritual (significance).
- It's not how much time we invest into our work that determines our productivity but rather the value we produce during the hours we work.
- We're not meant to operate in the same way machines do: at high speeds, for long periods of time, running multiple programs at the same time. Human beings are designed to pulse between the expenditure and the intermittent renewal of energy.

CHAPTER TWO

We Can't Change What We Don't Notice

Human beings have made extraordinary advances in science, medicine, and technology, but we've devoted remarkably little attention to understanding our inner world. We've accumulated vast knowledge but woefully little self-knowledge. Without a richer understanding of what motivates us—and what stands in our way—we will remain insufficiently equipped to take on the vastly more complex challenges ahead.

- Awareness is the key to recognizing the consequences of the choices we're making and their impact on others.
- We each have an infinite capacity for self-deception. We become skilled at denial because it helps us to avoid discomfort in the short term, but it exacts a toll in the long term.
- Learning to observe our feelings as they arise, rather than simply acting them out, allows us to make more reflective, intentional choices about how we want to show up in the world.
- We must learn to embrace opposites. By celebrating one set of qualities and undervaluing another—courage or prudence, confidence or humility, tenacity or flexibility—we lose access to essential dimensions of ourselves and others.
- Because all virtues are interconnected, any strength overused ultimately becomes a liability. Honesty without compassion, for example, is cruelty. We create the highest value not by focusing solely on our strengths or ignoring our weaknesses but by being attentive to both.

CHAPTER THREE

We're Creatures of Habit

Will and discipline are wildly overrated. Even when the need for change is obvious and our intentions are strong, we often fall short. Making changes that last requires building positive rituals—highly specific behaviors that become automatic over time and no longer require conscious intention.

- We are creatures of habit. Ninety-five percent of our behaviors occur automatically, unconsciously or in reaction to an external demand. Only 5 percent of our actions are consciously selected.
- Research suggests that we have one reservoir of will and discipline and it gets progressively depleted by each act of conscious will. Stress of any kind reduces our self-regulatory reserves.
- The more our behaviors are repeated and routinized, the more they occur without conscious effort and the less energy they require.
- The key to building successful rituals is to define the behaviors in a highly precise way and to do them at specific designated times.
- Resistance to making change is built into the process, and long-term success requires addressing the reasons we don't want to make any given change.

CHAPTER FOUR

Feeling the Pulse

Our most fundamental need is to spend and renew energy. Most of us spend more energy than we adequately renew. All systems in our body pulse rhythmically when we're healthy—heartbeat, brain waves, body temperature, blood pressure, and hormone levels.

- Even in sedentary jobs, physical energy is the foundation on which high performance rests. Failing to take care of ourselves physically ensures that we'll ultimately be suboptimal at whatever we do.
- Every activity in our lives has an energy consequence—eating, movement, sleep, work, and relationships.
- Maintenance and refueling are essential to sustainable high performance. The higher the demand we're facing, the greater and more frequent the need for renewal.
- We're most effective at work when we alternate between active forms of renewal, such as exercise and play, and more passive forms, such as meditation, napping, and sleep.

CHAPTER FIVE

Sleep or Die

If physical energy is the foundation of all dimensions of energy, sleep is the foundation of physical energy. No single behavior more fundamentally influences our effectiveness in waking life. Sleep deprivation takes a powerful toll on our health, our emotional well-being, and our cognitive functioning.

- Ninety-five percent of us require seven to eight hours of sleep a night to be fully rested. The average American sleeps between six and six and a half hours a night.
- Sleep is one of the first behaviors we're willing to sacrifice in the attempt to get more done. Numerous studies of great performers suggest that they sleep more, not less, than average.
- There is a powerful correlation between inadequate sleep and obesity. It's during sleep that we produce the hormone leptin, which signals satiety and helps us control how much we eat.
- The only truly viable solution to insufficient sleep is to go to bed earlier, in part by beginning to quiet down at least thirty to forty-five minutes before trying to sleep. Alcohol is a short-term sedative but may induce shallow sleep and less overall sleep time.

CHAPTER SIX

Making Waves

Intermittent renewal is critical to sustainable high performance. Over the course of a day, we oscillate every ninety minutes from a higher to lower level of arousal and alertness. These are called “ultradian” cycles. In effect, our bodies are asking for a break every ninety minutes. More often than not, we ignore these signals, especially in the face of high demand.

- The key to effective renewal is not how long we do it but how well we do it. As with any other capacity, we get better at effectively renewing by practicing it more systematically.
- Passive renewal—breathing deeply, meditating, listening to music, reading for pleasure—is about lowering physiological arousal. Active renewal is a different way of changing channels, by raising the heart rate through aerobic exercise, weight lifting, or more strenuous forms of yoga or Pilates.
- We are designed to sleep twice over the course of a twenty-four-hour period, the second time in the midafternoon. A short nap of twenty to thirty minutes can powerfully enhance performance over the subsequent two to three hours.
- Much as we perform better with multiple short cycles of rest during the day and an extended period of sleep every night, so research shows that we are healthier and more productive when we take regular vacations.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Use It or Lose It

Regular exercise, especially intense energy expenditure followed by deep recovery, dramatically increases our capacity not just physically but also mentally and emotionally. Too little movement, like too little sleep, weakens and diminishes us in all dimensions of our lives.

- Ideally, we should be doing some form of at least moderately intense physical activity six days a week for twenty to forty-five minutes a day. That time can be split between two or three sessions over the course of a day, so long as each one is at least ten minutes.
- Any movement is better than no movement, and even walking is effective in increasing our overall level of fitness.
- Steady-state aerobic training involves raising the heart rate for an extended period of time. Interval training—pushing the heart rate up to high levels for thirty to sixty seconds at a time and then recovering back to a resting rate—is an even more powerful way to build cardiovascular capacity.
- Strength training two to three times a week, is at least as important as endurance training. Building greater strength increases everything from metabolism to coordination to bone density to balance.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Less Is More

From an energy perspective, the key to nutrition is maintaining a stable, steady level of blood sugar. Food is our primary source of glucose, and it fuels not just our bodies but also our brains. Many of the foods that we choose to eat provide a quick hit of energy but serve us poorly in the long term.

- When our blood glucose levels spike too high or drop too low—when we eat too little for too long or too much at once—we function less efficiently at all levels.
- The simplest rule is to eat when you begin to feel hungry but never so much that you feel stuffed.
- Breakfast is especially crucial to regulating our blood sugar levels because it typically follows the longest number of hours we go without eating.
- Small, frequent meals serve us better than two or three large ones. To maintain a steady source of energy, it's best to eat something at least every three hours, or five to six times a day.
- Sugars and simple carbohydrates provide the least enduring sources of energy. Low-fat proteins and complex carbohydrates are the best source of energy.
- We cannot control our eating by resisting temptation, because we quickly burn down our reservoir of will. Instead, choose in advance what you intend to eat and try not to ever let yourself get too hungry.
- Don't deny yourself the pleasure of the foods you most enjoy—in small portions—even if they're not as nutritious. Avoiding certain foods altogether will eventually lead you to eat too much of them.

CHAPTER NINE

Creating a Culture That Pulses

If you're a leader or a manager, creating a new way of working begins with recognizing that renewal serves performance. You need to model renewal in your own behavior. At the same time, organizations must create policies, practices, and services that support and encourage people to eat right, work out regularly, renew intermittently, and get enough sleep.

- The big mind-set shift leaders need to make is from focusing too much on competency, the skills necessary for a given job, and too little on capacity, the fuel people need in their tanks to bring their skills fully to life.
- Commuting can take a huge toll on people's productivity, draining their energy during the early-morning hours, when they might otherwise be most effective. Organizations serve their employees and themselves by allowing employees to commute in off-hours or work from home.
- The collective energy of an organization follows a predictable path, and research suggests that there are optimal times of the week during which to take on the most challenging work and other times that makes sense for administrative tasks, for creative and strategic thinking, and for relationship building.

CHAPTER TEN

The War Between the States

How we feel profoundly influences how we perform. The problem is that much of the time we're not even aware of how we are feeling or what the impact those emotions are having on how we work and the people with whom we work. The more aware we are of what we're feeling, the more power we have to influence those feelings.

- There are four basic ways we can feel at any given time over the course of a day. They are depicted in what we call the Emotional Quadrants. The four states are: Performance Zone, Survival Zone, Recovery Zone, and Burnout Zone.
- The Performance Zone is the best place to be when you're working toward a clearly defined goal.
- Most of us spend a significant amount of time in the Survival Zone. This is where we default when we feel a sense of threat or danger. There are significant costs to our health, performance, and relationships from spending too much time in this zone.
- We think of leaders as "chief energy officers." The core challenge for leaders is to recruit, mobilize, inspire, focus, and regularly refuel the energy of those they lead.
- The antidote to falling reactively into the Survival Zone is to intentionally spend more time in the Renewal Zone.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

If You Ain't Got Pride, You Ain't Got Nothin'

A trigger is an event, behavior, or circumstance that consistently prompts negative emotions and propels us into fight or flight—the Survival Zone. We're biologically wired to sense danger, and we all experience triggers every day, to greater and lesser degrees.

- We readily notice what's wrong in our lives—and react to it automatically, often at a cost to more thoughtful deliberation and effectiveness.
- Gaining control of our triggers requires first becoming aware of the feelings that arise when we're triggered so that they don't take control of us before we can take control of them.
- The Golden Rule of Triggers is "Whatever you feel compelled to do, don't." That means resisting the urge to act when you're feeling triggered.
- Our core emotional need is to feel secure—to be valued and appreciated. The more we feel our value is at risk, the more energy we spend defending it and the less energy we have available to create value.
- The leader who is secure in his own value is freed to invest energy in empowering others and ultimately in fueling the organization's broader success.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Facts and the Stories We Tell

A fact is something that can be objectively verified by any person. It is irrefutable. A story is something we create to make sense of the facts. We can't change the facts, but we do have a choice about what we make of them.

- We can develop the capacity to influence the stories we tell ourselves, so that they empower rather than undermine us.
- Awareness by itself can powerfully diminish our reactivity. By simply being curious about how we're responding, we move from being the subject of our feelings to making them the object of our observation.
- Realistic optimism balances a hopeful and positive perspective with a recognition that the desired outcome may or may not occur. This view can serve as a fuel for exerting the maximum effort to influence the best possible outcome.
- When we default reactively to telling negative stories, we almost invariably assign ourselves the role of victim. It feels better not to blame ourselves for disappointments, but the victim role undermines our power to influence our circumstances. The alternative is to intentionally look for where our responsibility lies in any given situation—and then take remedial action on any part of it that we're in a position to influence.
- Counterintuitively, we're strongest when we can freely acknowledge our shortcomings alongside our strengths. By accepting the whole of who we are, we no longer have to defend our value so vigilantly. Instead, we can use the best of the feedback we get to learn and grow.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A New Value Proposition

Every organization has a distinct emotional climate, and typically it's set from the top. A leader is effectively the "chief energy officer." The core responsibility of great leaders is to mobilize, focus, inspire, and regularly renew the energy of those they lead.

- The best leaders strike a balance between challenging their people to exceed themselves and regularly recognizing and rewarding their accomplishments.
- Leaders who default to negative emotions to motivate others may get the short-term performance they're seeking, but the costs over time are high.
- Because the impact of "bad" is stronger than "good," the first rule for an effective leader is the same as it is for doctors: above all else, do no harm. That means avoiding devaluing emotions such as anger, intimidation, disparagement, and shame.
- The most effective leaders are those who regularly recognize and show appreciation for the real accomplishments of their people.
- Leaders who avoid conflict often cause even more harm than those who are more direct. The key for leaders is to balance honesty and appreciation, always keeping in mind the value of the other person, even when being critical of a particular behavior.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A Poverty of Attention

Our attention is under siege. There is an inverse relationship between the increasing volume of information available to us and our ability to prioritize and make sense of it. We've lost control of our attention. When we default reactively or lazily to distraction, we diminish not just our cognitive capacity but also the depth of our experience and, ultimately, our effectiveness.

- Human beings are incapable of multitasking. Unlike computers, we're hard-wired to undertake tasks sequentially, and our brains are not able to focus on two separate cognitive tasks at the same time.
- We perform best when we're most singularly focused on a given task.
- Rather than setting our own agenda and sticking to it, we often react to the most immediate and visible demand on our attention. Prioritization is critical in the face of urgent demands.
- We retain information less effectively when we're presented with a great deal of it all at once. We do far better metabolizing information intermittently, in spaced cycles.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

One Thing at a Time

The first step in taking more control of our attention is recognizing the costs of distraction. Focused attention is a capacity like any other. Much like a muscle, it gets stronger with practice and weaker when it is not exercised.

- Two kinds of distraction fracture our attention. One is external—what's going on around us. The other is internal—the endless chatter of our own minds. We must learn to address both.
- The most common and relentless source of interruption in most workplaces is e-mail. Our pull to it is so powerful that we must learn to turn it off entirely when we are doing the sort of challenging work that requires deeply absorbed attention.
- Our responsiveness to distractions is powerfully influenced by our desire for connection and our resistance to discomfort. Gaining more control of our attention is intimately linked to our capacity to delay gratification. The safer and more secure we feel, the more focused attention we can allocate to our long-term goals.
- Whenever possible, we ought to put our attention in the service of what's most important. At a practical level, this requires that we set aside regular time to reflect on and define our priorities and focus on the most challenging ones, preferably at the start of our days when our energy is typically highest.
- We must also contend with relentless internal chatter in our own minds. Meditation is an age-old form of attentional practice that helps us focus on one thing at a time.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Cultivating the Whole Brain

Logical, deductive, analytic attention is the province of the left hemisphere of the brain. There is a second kind of absorbed focus associated with the right hemisphere of the brain, which is typically undertrained and underdeveloped.

- The key capacities of the right hemisphere—creative and big-picture thinking, openness to learning, and empathy—are a largely untapped source of competitive advantage, both for individuals and for organizations.
- Creative thinking can be trained systematically. Doing so paradoxically requires that we let go of conscious control of our thinking process, something most of us initially find very difficult to do.
- In right-hemisphere mode, we can be deeply absorbed in a task, but we pay attention in a different way—seeing both the whole and the parts, noticing patterns, embracing paradox, ambiguity and complexity.
- To activate the right hemisphere, we must intentionally set aside time to quiet the mind—through meditation, drawing, daydreaming, or other activities that don't demand logical sequencing or a specific outcome.
- The highest levels of thinking require both hemispheres, each playing different roles at different stages of the process. The better we understand these stages, the more systematically we can train and enhance creativity in ourselves and others.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Autonomy for Accountability

One of the best ways an organization can encourage both higher productivity and more innovation is to promote absorbed focus. Too often, employers collaborate with their employees to fracture their focus and distract their attention. Focus improves only when it becomes an explicit organizational priority. That requires creating policies and practices that support employees in focusing on one thing at a time.

- Key organizational practices that drive better focus include creating clarity around when people are expected to respond to e-mail; banning e-mail in meetings; encouraging firm start and stop times for meetings; and encouraging intermittent rest and renewal during the day.
- Open-plan offices may save companies money and break down hierarchy, but they also drive people to distraction and reduce productivity.
- The ideal workplace offers people the quiet and privacy of a separate office, along with more comfortable, informal environments for more collaborative work.
- Organizations that set aside separate spaces for creative thinking make a statement about the priority they've accorded innovation.
- Most people focus better when they're given more freedom to choose where and when they do their work and are held accountable only for the value they deliver.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Who Are You, and What Do You Really Want?

Spiritual energy is the uniquely powerful source of energy we derive from deeply held values and a clear sense of purpose beyond our self-interest, which we embody in our everyday behaviors. Cultivating this source of energy requires effort and reflection, but it is also energizing and inspiring. Significance is not our birthright. We must find ways to invest our lives with meaning.

- Deeply held values define the person you aspire to be. They're what we're rooted in and what we stand for—an internal compass that helps us navigate the storms and the choices we all inevitably face.
- A clearly defined purpose ties our values to concrete actions that transform our aspirations into actions.
- We cultivate spiritual energy most effectively by moving between the inner work of defining and regularly reflecting on our values and the outer work of bringing our intentions to life in our everyday behaviors.
- Spiritual practice requires not just cultivating our best selves but also recognizing our basest instincts—and then having the courage to resist expedient choices in favor of ones that are consistent with our deepest values.
- False humility is manipulation aimed at winning praise. Genuine humility frees us of the need to protect an image or stand above others, allowing us instead to accept, embrace, and learn from our limitations.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

We're All in This Together

The most powerful and embracing source of purpose is one that serves something beyond our self-interest. Adding value to others, and to the commons, is a unique source of energy. It's also increasingly critical to our survival.

- We experience purpose most viscerally in the form of positive emotions. We all bring more energy to the activities we most enjoy, and enjoyment itself sustains our energy.
- Once you've defined what you most enjoy doing and do best, the spiritual challenge is to put those skills in the service of something beyond your immediate self-interest.
- Purpose provides a way to extend our sphere of influence not through the accumulation and exercise of power but by giving us a clear route to adding value to others.
- No job automatically provides a purpose, and no job precludes our finding a way to express our purpose through it. The role we fill isn't the route to purpose. Rather, it's the approach we take to whatever work we do.
- Taking care of others at the expense of taking care of ourselves undermines our ability to fully achieve the highest purpose. In the spiritual dimension, as in all the others, we must renew ourselves regularly.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Purpose for Passion

To fuel spiritual energy, an organization must define a set of shared values and a purpose beyond its continuing profitability. That begins with asking itself a variation on the questions that we pose to individuals: “Who are we?” (What do we stand for?) and “What do we really want?” (What is the purpose we’re here to serve beyond our own survival and success?).

- There is a deep disconnect between what many companies say they stand for and what they actually do. This disconnect takes a toll on employee engagement, on productivity, and ultimately on organizational success.
- An organization is a living organism, a human community that can reach its highest purpose only when each individual feels fully valued and fully vested in a shared purpose.
- An organization that invests in its people across all dimensions of their lives—and rallies them around an inspiring purpose—is actually investing in itself. As individuals grow and increase their capacity, the organism as a whole becomes stronger.
- The most universally despised of all qualities among leaders is egocentricity—selfishness and self-absorption.
- The best evidence of an organization’s values and purpose is to consider the behavior of its leaders. Transactional leaders focus narrowly on the “what”—how to get things done. Transformational and servant leaders are more focused on the purpose of their actions and on meeting the needs of their employees.
- Most employees are less inspired by a leader’s personal charisma than by a compelling purpose to rally around every day. The most admired and effective leaders are those with the most inspiring vision and the greatest humility about themselves.
- A new way of working ultimately requires an evolutionary shift in the center of gravity in our lives—from “me” to “us.”