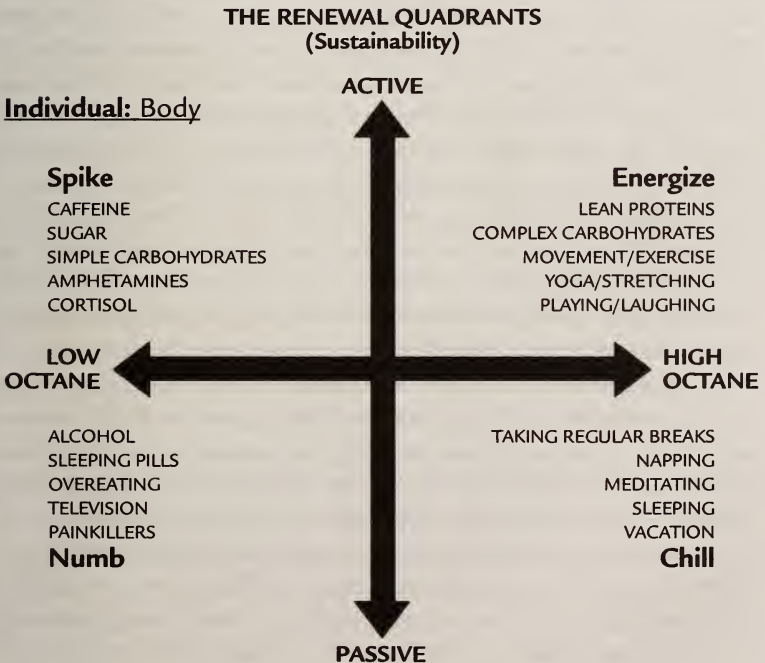


Feeling the Pulse

All the systems in our body pulse rhythmically when we're healthy—heart rate, brain waves, body temperature, blood pressure, hormone levels. "It would be reasonable," explains the chronobiologist Josephine Arendt, "to say that everything that happens in our bodies is rhythmic until proven otherwise." Our most fundamental need is to spend and renew energy. We breathe in, and we breathe out. We can't do one for very long without doing the other, and the more deeply we



do both, the better we operate, not just physically but also mentally and emotionally.

Obvious as it may seem to live in alignment with our inborn rhythms, we don't. The ethic of more, bigger, faster has prompted us to spend far more energy than we adequately renew, in a frenzied and largely futile effort to keep up with relentlessly rising demand. The quadrants on page 49 are a simple way to understand the rhythmic nature of optimal energy management at the physical level. The horizontal axis moves from the healthy, intentional behaviors on the right-hand side, which fuel and refuel physical energy, to the less healthy ones on the left-hand side. It is under intense demand, most commonly, that we default to the more expedient left-hand behaviors for a quick jolt of energy or to soothe and calm ourselves.

When we fail to get enough sleep and work for hours at a time without any breaks, we begin to rely more on caffeine, sugar, and other low-octane, short acting stimulants to keep us going during the day. As demands pile up, our body's own stress hormones—adrenaline, norepinephrine, cortisol—kick in, providing another source of speedy, short-term energy. The cost is that cortisol, in particular, becomes toxic to us when it circulates in our bodies for too long. It breaks down immune systems and increases the likelihood of disease.

As our stress levels spike and our anxiety levels rise, we also often overeat—especially sugars and fats—in a misguided effort to calm and comfort ourselves. Alternatively, we fail to eat at all, which only increases our edginess. When we get home, we may be physically exhausted, but we're often mentally and emotionally wired. We rely not just on food but also on alcohol to calm us down. Too tired to truly interact with our families, we turn instead to passive activities such as watching television, which is often a way to numb out rather than to truly renew or refuel. When we try to fall asleep, we begin ruminating about what went wrong today and the demands we face tomorrow sometimes we end up relying on sleep medications to knock us out. Too tired to exercise when we wake up, we settle instead for a jolt of caffeine. The previous day's cycle begins to recapitulate itself.

We squeeze into our cars to commute to jobs in which we sit at our desks for hours at a time. By working for too long, too continuously, and sleeping too little, we end up spending too much energy mentally and emotionally, with too little renewal. By sitting too long and eat-

ing too much, we don't spend enough energy physically. The consequence is that we lose endurance and strength, and we put on weight.

It's a healthy pulse we're really after. Think for a moment about the Indianapolis 500. The driver who wins that race isn't the one who drives the fastest, the longest, and most continuously. The winner is the one who drives at the highest speeds on the track but also makes the most efficient pit stops along the way to refuel, change the tires, and make mechanical adjustments and repairs. Maintenance and refueling are as critical to victory as racing itself. That's because the higher the demand, the greater and more frequent the need for renewal.

Much as that's true for cars, it's even more so for human beings. We're far more complex than any machine and we have vastly more moving parts. Still, most of us are more vigilant about refueling and maintaining our cars than we are about taking care of ourselves. When demand in our lives intensifies, our pattern is to hunker down and push harder, rather than to refuel more frequently. "We are usually unaware of [our] internal rhythms," writes Jennifer Ackerman in her book *Sex Sleep Eat Drink Dream*, "sensing them vividly only when we abuse them, during shift work, jet lag, or adjustment to daylight-savings time." In short, we're meant to pulse, but we lead increasingly linear lives, spending energy too continuously and renewing it too infrequently.

Consider Caleb, an accountant whose way of working is characteristic of many of our clients before we begin working with them. Caleb's job is always demanding, but between January and April, during the busy tax season, he switches into overdrive. His days can run as long as fifteen to sixteen hours, and it's rare that he takes a full day off.

Caleb likes to get to work early—no later than 7:30 A.M.—so he has some quiet time to himself before the office gets busy and the demands mount. His commute is an hour without traffic, so he typically awakens at 5:30 A.M., showers, dresses, and is out the door no later than 6:15 A.M. Neither his wife nor his two young children are up that early, and rather than eat breakfast alone, Caleb simply skips it. "I'm not really hungry that early anyway," he says. Instead, when he gets to his office, he treats himself to a grande latte at the Starbucks next to his firm's headquarters.

Much as Caleb would prefer to work out before heading for the

office—he was a competitive athlete in both high school and college—he can't imagine waking up any earlier than he already does. Nor are the evenings an option. By the time he gets home, even on an early night, he feels far too exhausted to consider physical exercise. A dry martini or a glass of wine seems far more appealing. After the tax season subsides, Caleb tries to get at least one workout in on the weekend, or he plays pickup basketball at a nearby park. Even those activities make him feel a little guilty, given how little time he has with his children during the week.

In addition to his own responsibilities to his primary client, a hedge fund, Caleb manages a team of just under a dozen more junior accountants. Caleb's day alternates between long hours in front of the computer at his desk and long meetings, often scheduled one after another, with no time in between. By 10 A.M. on most days, he begins to feel hungry and typically orders out for a second coffee and a muffin or a bagel. He rarely leaves his desk for lunch, ordering in from the deli instead or rushing down to the company cafeteria to grab something that he can take back upstairs. On most days, someone in the office brings in some cake, candy, or cookies. To jump-start his energy at midafternoon, Caleb usually grabs a sweet, which he washes down with another cup of coffee. During busy season, it isn't uncommon for his team to order in pizza three nights in a row, simply because it's the simplest and quickest solution.

Outside the busy season, Caleb typically arrives home between 8 and 8:30 P.M. and tries to get to bed by 11 P.M. During busy season, he rarely gets home before 11 and sometimes even midnight. Even though he's physically exhausted on those evenings, he often finds himself tossing and turning in bed for an hour. "I've just learned to do without much sleep," he says.

As we define it Caleb lives a life with almost no waves. From the time he arrives at work until he leaves at night, he spends mental and emotional energy continuously. Physically, he's almost completely sedentary—sitting behind the wheel of his car, at his desk, in a conference room or splayed out on a couch at home, where he often falls asleep and spends the night. He eats at erratic intervals and gets his energy in fleeting bursts from the caffeine and sugar that are central to his diet, especially when he's feeling rushed and under stress.

Our first goal with clients is to establish a physical foundation

that makes it possible for them to perform at their best. By short-changing themselves physically, they're trying to perform at a high level on low-octane fuel, and sometimes with virtually no fuel at all in their tanks. They fail to recognize that the way they treat of their bodies, day in and day out, directly influences how they feel, think and perform. Taking care of yourself physically won't turn you into a great performer—it's just one piece of a more complex puzzle—but failing to do so assures that you can't ever perform at your best.

John Weiser, forty-five, is the president for the Television Division of Sony Pictures Entertainment. As much as anyone with whom we've worked, Weiser has intentionally created a wavy, rhythmic way of life. He is asleep most nights by 10 P.M. at the latest, and he gets a minimum of seven hours of sleep. "If I get any less, I've learned I'm not where I should be mentally the next day," he says. "Earlier in my career, there were times when I couldn't turn my mind off. I'd only get four or five hours of sleep, and I'd grind through the next day, but I knew I was operating at seventy percent."

Today, Weiser wakes up at 5 A.M., before his wife and kids. "That's when I've chosen to have my alone time," he says. "It's when I take care of myself and build up my energy for the day ahead." By 5:30 A.M., he's at the gym on the Sony lot. He alternates among weight training, classes, and cardiovascular exercise for the next hour and a half. "Early morning in the gym is my foundation," he explains. "I feed off the positive energy I get from working out. It's how I get myself going, so when I'm done I can focus on everything else—clients, deals, the company, and the people who work for me."

"When someone walks up to me during the day smiling, looking healthy and happy and confident, it lifts me up and it lights up the room. That's what I try to do when I walk into a room. Getting my sleep and working out gives me good energy, and people respond to that in a really obvious way. They're energized by it."

Weiser also tries to build two twenty-minute meditation sessions into his workdays. "I've long since learned that I can handle more at work when I meditate," he explains. "I'm better with people, and I'm more focused and productive as a result. My assistant treats it as if I'm in a meeting that can't be disturbed." Weiser rarely misses a morning meditation, but given the unexpected demands that arise as the day wears on, he fits in his afternoon meditation only about half the time.

"When I miss it," he says, "I always wish I'd done it, because I feel a hundred percent better when I do, and I'm always calmer and more productive for the rest of the day."

Weiser is also a careful eater, and he focuses intentionally on foods that provide the most sustaining sources of energy, mostly proteins and complex carbohydrates. When he came to our first session, he brought along a jar of peanut butter, just to be certain that he'd have one of the staple foods he depends on to sustain his energy.

"People have a million different excuses why they don't eat the right food or why they skip meals," Weiser explains. "It's crazy to think the right kinds of food will be available to you 24/7. I think through where I'm going to be during the day and what I'm going to need to eat. It's no different than getting in a car for a trip from Los Angeles to Las Vegas and thinking in advance about where you're going to stop for gas along the way. If you don't, you're going to find yourself running out of gas looking around and realizing you're in the desert." We urge our clients to pack food for any situation in which they're not sure what they'll find to eat, especially when they're traveling and find themselves in airports, surrounded only by junk food. Weiser's solution when he travels is to pack nuts, fruits, or even protein powder, which he can mix in a cup with water and drink wherever he is.

The final way that Weiser ensures that he balances energy expenditure with energy renewal is that he leaves work for home early enough to spend time with his family. Because he is highly focused, he gets a great deal done in the hours he is working. He almost never takes work home, nor does he look at e-mail there. Instead, he reserves the period between arriving home and bedtime for his wife and two young children. "I get time for myself in the morning," he says, "and the early evening is for my family. The truth is I need time for myself and time for them, and I get energized by both."

Weiser has figured out intuitively what all of us need to do systematically. We're more effective at work when we regularly renew, and we're at our best when we alternate between active forms of renewal, such as exercise and play, and more passive forms, such as meditation and sleep.

CHAPTER FOUR ACTION STEPS

- Review the Renewal Quadrants on page 49. How well are you managing your physical energy? Do you spend more time on the right side of the quadrants or the left?
- Think about how you behave when demand is high. Do you tend to push yourself harder, eat more and worse, and sleep and exercise less? Do you work long hours without taking breaks? Each of these is a form of linear behavior. We're at our best when we pulse. How can you build a better balance between energy expenditure and energy renewal into your days?
- Identify what you currently do to recharge or refuel yourself during the course of your day at work. Based on what you've learned in this chapter, what can you do to better ensure that you get both active *and* passive forms of renewal over the course of the day?