

THE FOUR FORGOTTEN NEEDS THAT  
ENERGIZE GREAT PERFORMANCE

# The Way We're Working ISN'T WORKING

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FROM THE CO-AUTHOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER  
THE POWER OF FULL ENGAGEMENT  
WITH JEAN GOMES AND CATHERINE MCCARTHY, PH.D.

## Book The Way We're Working Isn't Working

### The Four Forgotten Needs That Energize Great Performance

Tony Schwartz, Jean Gomes and Catherine McCarthy  
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### Recommendation

This is one of those rare books that details the wrong ways you're working without making you feel that the situation is hopelessly complex or beyond repair. Tony Schwartz (writing with Jean Gomes and Catherine McCarthy) offers interesting, practical advice to employers and employees alike on how to banish that "gerbil on a treadmill" feeling forever. With case studies from such companies as Ford, Sony and Ernst & Young, as well as helpful charts, graphs and exercises, this highly readable manual will make you think twice about how you and your employees work. Although it mentions lots of insider human resources (HR) methodologies – such as the ones in Gallup's employee engagement surveys – the book never bogs down in jargon. However, the author may need to revise and update it in a few years as the workplace becomes increasingly dependent upon technology. *BooksInShort* suggests this book to frustrated leaders, HR practitioners, overwhelmed employees and anyone who wants more control over his or her working and personal life.

### Take-Aways

- The "more, bigger, faster" workplace can make you feel less engaged, less creative and less thoughtful.
- Working frantically sabotages your performance and your happiness.
- What matters is the quality of your work, not the number of hours you work.
- Four areas of personal need – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual – shape your work and your life.
- Caring for yourself physically can help you work better and enjoy working more.
- Help your employees work in the emotionally secure "Performance" zone, not the daunting "Survival" zone.
- Focus on one task at a time. Constant, multiple demands undermine your abilities and peace of mind.
- Multitasking is counterproductive to your mental well-being.
- To fulfill their spiritual needs, people need to find meaning in their work.
- Companies that pay attention to their employees' physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs are more successful than those that don't.

### Summary

#### "More, Bigger, Faster"

Modern technology increases the workplace pressure to "do more and do it faster" by making you available to other people around the clock, whether you're away from the office, at home or even on vacation. Technology is supposed to make your work easier, but, paradoxically, it makes working life harder, because it causes workers to lose focus. Additionally, the structure of the average workday doesn't take advantage of your or your employees' mental and physical rhythms or performing strengths.

"The relentless urgency that characterizes most corporate cultures undermines creativity, quality, engagement, thoughtful deliberation and, ultimately, performance."

"The way we're working isn't working" because employers assume that their staffers function the way machines do: in a flat, linear fashion for long stretches at a time. But human beings are not computers. People perform best by working intensely for a period, then resting, then working and resting again – establishing an even pace of

moving between the two states. Yet companies often neglect workers' natural pacing and personal needs, leaving managers and their staffers to persevere even though they are struggling. To help people excel, address their four core needs:

1. **“Sustainability: Body”** – Recharging often to remain “healthy, fit and resilient.”
2. **“Security: Emotions”** – Feeling cherished, respected and loved.
3. **“Self-expression: Mind”** – Having the freedom to communicate openly. Employees need to be able to use their “unique skills and talent.”
4. **“Significance: Spirit”** – Finding a genuine “sense of meaning” at work.

“In a significant number of cases, people actually get worse at their jobs over time.”

Yet despite all the knowledge and information at their fingertips, most managers and workers are short on self-awareness; they often lack the instinct to know they must address their needs or join a company that does a better job of supporting its workforce. Often people charge through their days trying to accomplish more in less time with fewer resources. This relentless pace gives them no time to reflect on whether they're focusing, prioritizing and pursuing long-range goals that bring meaning to their work. As a result, after a period of time, employees tend to do their jobs less well. Employers who want to halt this vicious cycle should create corporate cultures that help their workers focus on their jobs and feel engaged without being pulled in different directions.

“In contrast to blind faith, false hope and magical thinking, realistic optimism balances a hopeful and positive perspective with a recognition that the desired outcome may or may not occur.”

Altering deeply entrenched workplace environments is difficult. To accomplish meaningful change in your workplace, establish positive new routines, such as setting aside time to brainstorm or to exercise. Employers and employees should make “key behaviors automatic” by phasing them in gradually and supporting them with deliberate repetition. Think of how musicians' abilities increase and become ingrained with continued practice, until a core of foundational skills supports their ability to improvise and interpret. To be effective, a ritual – like limiting meetings to an hour or conducting regular goal-setting sessions – must support workers' physical, emotional, mental and spiritual energy, and must be positive, specific and incremental.

“When something really matters, we bring vastly more energy to it: more focus, conviction, passion and perseverance.”

The pressures of today's workplace cause employees to expend more energy than they renew. Round-the-clock email, which presumes constant responsiveness and availability, makes stepping back, disengaging and refreshing nearly impossible. Tired or burned-out employees who need a jolt typically reach for energy sources that deplete them further, such as caffeine, sugar and alcohol. True energy renewal requires workers to change their behaviors in the four core areas. To gain the resulting improvement in performance, employers should support and enable these changes.

## Physical Needs

The body's circadian rhythm dictates that human beings must get enough sleep. Yet sleep is one of the first activities workers sacrifice when they're pressed. They don't recognize that cutting back on sleep makes them less productive, not more. Lack of sleep compromises thinking, learning and judgment. But people don't rest only at night. To stay energized, employees should take refreshing breaks throughout the day, usually after 90 minutes of intense work. Breaking or resting after an hour and a half of concentrating improves focus, productiveness and enjoyment. Deep breathing, meditation and vacation time can have the same renewing effect as sleep. Regular exercise plays an important role as well. It improves a person's health and increases circulation to the brain cells, which encourages clear thinking. Aerobics and strength training are equally important in an exercise regimen designed for personal renewal.

“Fitness improves cognitive capability and emotional well-being, two factors that powerfully influence performance and productivity.”

Eating right is essential to performance, yet the more, bigger, faster culture encourages people to eat quickly and unhealthily. They skip breakfast, reach for the wrong foods to get a quick burst of alertness and, in the process, put themselves at risk of obesity and diabetes. To change these behaviors and to increase their energy and productivity, workers should fuel themselves by eating small portions of healthy food throughout the day, focusing positively on the good foods they can eat rather than on the sugary, salty or fatty snacks they are not supposed to consume.

“Skillful management of our emotions creates the potential for better relationships and for greater effectiveness at work.”

Employers who are aware of how staff members' energy and physical condition relate to their productivity should focus on the quality – rather than the quantity – of the time workers spend at their jobs. Firms ought to provide “wellness” programs and other fitness initiatives as a path to higher productivity rather than as just a human resources benefit.

## Emotional Needs

Emotions can dictate how well or how ineffectively people work. Supervisors who recognize their employees' feelings and manage accordingly can foster improved productivity. Employees' feelings or emotional energy fall into four “zones”: “Survival, Burnout, Renewal” and “Performance.” Managers should help their employees avoid burnout and settle into the Performance zone, where they feel “calm, optimistic, challenged, engaged” and “invigorated.” To support your staff members this way, help them focus on accomplishing specific objectives.

“If you don't truly love what you do, simply being good at it will never be deeply energizing or satisfying.”

Too often, employees sink into Survival zone feelings. They become “impatient, irritable, frustrated, angry, defensive, fearful, anxious” and “worried.” This stems from negative circumstances, such as having too many tasks or working for leaders who manage with fear. Actually, anger and fear are counterproductive management tools. Negative emotions take a toll on employees' health, well-being and effectiveness. Leaders should strive to be “Chief Energy Officers,” urging employees to work in the Performance zone, inspiring them with positive emotions and helping them renew their energy and motivation. Managers should “first, do no harm”; they should not use negative emotions to motivate their employees to produce.

“We’re trained through our education to accumulate knowledge, build skills and seek a career. We’re rarely taught how, practically and intentionally, to develop a sense of purpose.”

Employers and employees alike should try not to react reflexively to “triggers” – situations that appear to threaten them individually. Instead, they should try to recognize triggers when they occur and take a moment to think about them before responding. So, for example, if you are upset at a co-worker, do not fire off an angry email or assume the worst about your colleague’s motivations. “Whatever you feel compelled to do, don’t.” Separate the facts of what is happening from your assumptions. Control your internal narrative and try to achieve a sense of “realistic optimism” about your working situation.

## Mental Needs

Workers must take control of their attention spans when competing projects undermine their ability to focus, improve their performance or achieve their own standards. Sitting quietly to figure things out is contrary to the human tendency to attend to urgent, intrusive questions, people or situations – the demanding email that arrives or the clamoring phone that rings and rings. “Multitasking” is the fashionable way to address these interrupters, but it doesn’t work; almost no one performs well by doing many chores at once.

“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.”

To build their attention spans, teach your employees the difference between “internal” and “external” distractions. Internal interruptions are “the endless chatter” in their thoughts, while external ones invade the environment around them. To conquer external distractions, construct new “rituals” around such interrupters as email. For example, your working group could disallow after-hour or weekend work-related calls or email messages.

“This is not just about a new way of working, it’s also about a different way of life.”

Employees can learn to turn off their minds’ internal chatter by slowing down, breathing rhythmically or practicing “mindful meditation.” People can train themselves to think with their entire brain, not just the left hemisphere, which is the locus of logic and reason. The more creative right brain is good for “big-picture” thinking, but the work environment often shortchanges that perspective. Workers often become so busy trying to handle daily tasks that they can’t focus on long-range goals. Managers can encourage more right-brain thinking and help their staffers achieve focus by shortening meetings and centering them on single topics or goals; organizing the physical workplace with a mix of open space, cubicles and private offices; restricting email response times; and offering flexible schedules.

## Spiritual Needs

Employees work more effectively and are more engaged when they believe that their work matters – that it has a higher purpose. While a paycheck has obvious practical value, it does not ultimately provide satisfaction. Self-aware workers should take regular stock of their goals and values, so they can identify and pursue the facets of their jobs that give their working lives deeper meaning. They also can nurture their spirituality in the way they relate to others by striving to behave at their best instead of giving in to blame, rationalizations and denial.

To be content, employees should seek opportunities to do what they love rather than spending their days doing work they dislike. A person does not have to choose between what will put food on the table and what will provide fulfillment. Working people who make conscious “intentional” decisions to follow their interests and passions can change their personal and professional lives. For example, opting to spend more time with family members enriches everyone involved. Pursuing what you love best at work is self-fulfilling, leads to high-quality performance and opens the door for better pay.

People also find spiritual satisfaction by pursuing unselfish goals, like reaching out to others. This doesn’t necessarily mean dishing out meals at a soup kitchen. Managers serve others by helping people see the value in their work, whether that means highlighting its intrinsic value or its merit as an important means to an end. While some jobs might not carry deep meaning, the money earned can help the worker accomplish meaningful goals. Such purposefulness can make even difficult, frustrating jobs worthwhile.

## “Do the Right Thing”

Organizations that recognize and attempt to meet their employees’ four core needs enjoy better reputations, more effective leadership and more workforce loyalty than those that don’t. Leaders may believe that investing in their employees’ well-being is risky – and it is if they focus on long-term benefits rather than short-term accomplishments or if they make discomfiting changes to their corporate cultures. But the rewards are worth the investment. To help employees work in a way that works, employers should:

1. Proactively encourage workers to care for themselves physically.
2. Regularly thank their staff members to make it clear that they are appreciated.
3. Trust people to work effectively and to make good decisions.
4. Let your employees know every day that their work makes a difference in the lives of others.

Employers who follow these practices can be certain that they are doing the right thing.

## About the Authors

**Tony Schwartz** is founder and president of The Energy Project, which helps people achieve high performance. **Jean Gomes** is its chairman and **Catherine McCarthy** is its COO. Schwartz also wrote *The Power of Full Engagement* and *What Really Matters*. A former *New York Times* reporter and *Newsweek* editor, he is the co-author of *The Art of the Deal* with Donald Trump.