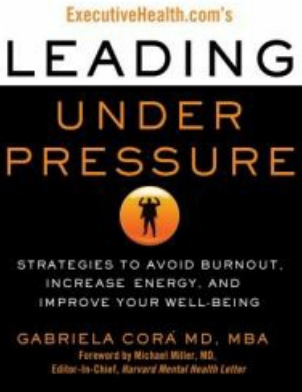


"Dr. Gabriela Cora depicts and addresses the most important challenges that executives and corporate professionals face in their daily practices. Obviously, this book is essential for everyone interested in the topic of health and well-being."
— Pedro Ruiz, M.D., Past President, American Psychiatric Association



Book ExecutiveHealth.com's Leading Under Pressure

Strategies to Avoid Burnout, Increase Energy, and Improve Your Well-being

Gabriela Cora
Career Press, 2010
Listen now

- play
- pause

00:00
00:00

Recommendation

Dr. Gabriela Cora, a medical doctor and corporate consultant, understands that high-level leaders face stress and pressure. She presents a handy, gut-check guide for your health and well-being. Cora includes tips, resources and checklists of stressors to help you assess your health on many levels. Her book is a manual for better health that keeps an eye on improving your work as well. While the writing could be clearer, her instructions for managing a demanding workload while attending to your physical, emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual needs ring true. Eight corporate leaders add their personal perspectives on healthy living. *BooksInShort* suggests this book to anyone with a stressful life who seeks a sense of wellness and well-being at work and at home.

Take-Aways

- Health is physical, emotional, cognitive, social and spiritual.
- All five areas must function well if you are to perform at your best.
- Harried business leaders attempting to accomplish everything may never find balance, but they can find health, well-being and success.
- Evaluate your physical and mental health. See a doctor, if needed.
- Try to control your chronic stressors. This will leave you with more energy for handling the uncontrollable acute issues.
- Chart your health as measured against your work efficiency.
- Correct problems before you move to new projects. Make a daily agenda.
- Improve your health before trying to improve your work performance.
- Follow the “AIM I AM” paradigm: Align, Integrate and Manage (AIM) to develop successful plans, and Improve, Achieve and Maintain (I AM) to reach individual goals.
- Follow the “AIM I AM” paradigm: Align, Integrate and Manage (AIM) to develop successful plans, and Improve, Achieve and Maintain (I AM) to reach individual goals.

Summary

A Fantasy: “Life-Work Balance”

Most executives and leaders cannot spin life and work into perfect equilibrium, but you can come close. A sound and thorough wellness plan can make the difference between happiness and disappointment. Such a plan includes learning how stress affects your body, checking your mental and physical health, and enacting strategies for working and living well. Constantly struggling for balance – travel, late nights, early meetings, weekend events, unending demands and scrolling to-do lists at home

and at work – makes you unwell. Symptoms might appear first as burnout or being unable to enjoy what you’ve worked to attain. But those can mutate into depression, chest pains, ulcers or other disorders. Avoiding the doctor to dodge the stigma of illness only makes any problems worse. Instead, work on wellness.

“Everyone who is leading under pressure needs to prioritize health, implement treatment as necessary, and improve lifestyle strategies.”

In a perfect world, people would divide their days into three equal parts: eight hours for work or study, eight hours for fun activities and eight hours for sleep. But you, and most people, live life far from these ideals. You work more than eight hours, skimp on sleep and have fun occasionally, if at all. Those living an unbalanced life might blame stress for their ailments. But, while stress might make symptoms worse, it does not cause illness. Evaluate your wellness by considering how you divide your day. Chart your time use for a month and reflect on how your stress levels and sense of well-being change with the hours of the day.

“Can we truly and effectively sustain ‘perfect’ attention, concentration and physical response times after extenuating days? The simple answer is: NO!”

Identify your sources of lower-level stress or “pressure points.” These stressors affect your well-being though they might not fall into the categories of either immediate or continuous stress. They could include fatigue, discord with family or friends, feeling alone or struggles to keep up with work. Pinpoint your top five sources of acute stress, such as divorce or a death in the family, and your top five sources of chronic stress – for example, repeated corporate downsizing or weekly reports due at work. All three types of stress combine to affect your happiness and health. Try to control the pressure points and manage the chronic stressors. This will leave you with more time and energy for handling the uncontrollable acute issues. Improve your resilience to manage stress.

Finding Help and Guidance

Stress and concerns about stress permeate the world of work. Some companies hire coaches to help employees manage stress. Coaching offers a worthy option if you’re healthy and hoping to improve your productivity. But if you’re already struggling with health issues, a business coach isn’t the best starting point for support. For medical or mental health problems, get full evaluations from proper health specialists and follow their suggestions, which should include education about their diagnoses, as well as “lifestyle strategies” for improving sleep and nutrition, and getting more exercise and relaxation. Seeking the right approach for your concerns – perhaps a balance of coaching and health care – will improve your “performance and productivity.”

“Life-work balance is a myth, a tempting fairy tale, an illusion that keeps us going as we are trying to contain our needs and wants into an ideal Zen perfection.”

Stress affects many illnesses, from headaches to diabetes to asthma. Avoiding or managing stress reduces sickness and improves both performance and productivity. Doctors don’t screen often for depression and anxiety, but those conditions account for much lost work time. Both can be treated, sometimes rather simply and with good results for returning to work successfully.

What Good Health Looks Like

It can be easy to forget all the aspects of maintaining good health. It’s much more than not being sick. According to the World Health Organization, health refers to your total physical, psychological and social fitness. Maintaining a unified approach that incorporates all three of these aspects can be challenging in today’s specialized medical world. Consider yourself as a system with various working parts. One dysfunction derails other aspects. Tend to each of these five main elements of individual well-being:

1. **“Physical”** – Food, sleep, exercise and relaxation.
2. **“Emotional”** – Strong relationships in which you can express your feelings.
3. **“Cognitive”** – Constant learning and the development of your vision of your future.
4. **“Social”** – Work within your community and the feeling of connection.
5. **“Spiritual”** – The nurturing of your values through religion, art or other means.

“Stress can be an inspiring source of energy, motivation and inspiration.”

The processes of work performance and productivity span all five areas, and all five areas affect them. Exercise increases your metabolism, which helps you deal with the usual daily emergencies.

Find Your “Health and Wealth Quadrant”

Evaluate your health and capacity to create prosperity based on your performance and productivity. Imagine a graph with an *x* axis rating your health from zero to 10 and a *y* axis rating a combination of your talents and abilities (your wealth-creating capability) from zero to 10. Plotting your position on the graph places you in one of four quadrants:

1. **“Low health, low performance and productivity”** – Address health concerns, visit a doctor and implement improvements. Make one work improvement at a time.
2. **“Low health, high performance and productivity”** – Evaluate your health. Check your life and work priorities, eat better, exercise and relax regularly.
3. **“High health, high performance and productivity”** – Recognize your healthy tools and use them to improve. Set specific goals in each area.
4. **“High health, low performance and productivity”** – Use your healthy practices and improve at work: Get training and specific feedback from your boss, and create a plan for achieving your goals.

Tips for Better Health and Work

To manage your efforts to improve your health and work performance, try the “AIM I AM” strategy. AIM stands for “Align, Integrate and Manage” a plan. I AM

means “Improve, Achieve and Maintain” each goal in your plan. The first half of this strategy deals with developing a successful plan. Leaders who align their personal and professional goals tend to lead happier, more balanced lives. If you want a healthier life, make a solid plan of action that aligns with your goals. Integrate that plan, committing to it throughout your daily life. Manage the plan; adjust it as needed to work for you. Let it serve as a basis for reaching your goals.

“Practice opening up to express your true feelings to your spouse, family and friends.”

The second half of this approach addresses your individual goals. Start by working to improve your cardiovascular health, for example. Establish a plan to move up from no exercise to 10 minutes per day of walking. Achieve it by walking daily, and then maintain that habit for a week before increasing your exercise time. Use a similar approach to improve your work quality. For instance, set up a scale by defining progress specifically; for example, moving from getting nothing done (0) to finishing all your tasks on time with little criticism from others (10).

“People who can be ‘busy on the outside and calm on the inside’ are capable of facing the toughest critical incidents.”

Other tactics to improve your work life include setting goals, correcting problems before moving to new projects, making a daily agenda, prioritizing important items only you can do and setting deadlines, with timetables for each step. Limit meetings and make sure that those you attend produce results. Soon you may consider adding a new venture to your life.

“The executive will conduct business much better if well-rested, refreshed, clear-minded, and with an accurate sense of perception.”

If you have to handle an emergency, evaluate the crisis, put it in perspective, and make sure your words and actions align. Focus on the present as you create a plan or put pre-existing plans into action. Stay positive and return to normalcy quickly. Don’t make sweeping changes during times of trouble. Rely on your existing core group for emotional support and help. Stay in touch with your support network during the crisis. Evaluate how you handled the situation, and use what you learned to plan for the future.

Business Health, Beyond Finances

Workers aren’t the only ones who do best when they’re healthy and well rounded. After scandals and bailouts, it’s clear that companies must be healthy, too. The five areas of business health are:

1. **Physical** – The firm’s structure and finances.
2. **Emotional** – An organization’s honesty, trust and atmosphere regarding support, feedback and related attitudes.
3. **Cognitive** – A sound company that offers training and learning, and business vision.
4. **Social** – Organizations that interact positively with their communities.
5. **Spiritual** – Employers and workers that align their values and ethics.

Find Your Organization’s Health and Wealth Quadrant

Like people, businesses can rank their health and wealth potential in four segments. If your firm has low health and low performance and productivity, focus on improving corporate health. Encourage your workers to unite to achieve this goal, and deal with performance and productivity afterward. With low health and high performance and productivity, again start with organizational health. Pinpoint and move through each troubled area, especially stress. With high health and high performance and productivity, figure out what works and continue doing it. Then set goals for getting stronger. If you have high health and low performance and productivity, recognize your healthy techniques and keep them in place as you set performance and productivity goals.

Tips from Leaders for Doing the Job

Eight leaders offer their ideas for living and working with well-being and balance:

1. **Brian Dyson, retired president, Coca-Cola** – “Stay calm” to handle many challenging assignments at once. Don’t lose perspective. Improve your focus by giving each issue your full attention, reaching a conclusion and moving on. Delegate tasks to double your productivity.
2. **Donna Shalala, president, University of Miami** – Aim for efficiency. Don’t rush or force decision-making. Robert Wagner, former New York mayor, taught Shalala that complicated problems sometimes reach a resolution in their own time. Get your rest. Learning to sleep despite pressing issues will mean that you make better decisions.
3. **Gary Hoover, entrepreneur** – Roadblocks are learning opportunities that lead to new ideas, says the founder of the first book superstore, Bookstop. When Hoover sought launch funding, he met with skepticism and rejection. Hoover adjusted his plans, persevered, and seven years later, Barnes & Noble bought his firm and transformed book shopping using his ideas. Everyone sulks after failure, but don’t sulk for too long. He cautions, asking, “Do you mope for 30 minutes or 30 days...or 30 years?”
4. **Janet Vergis, former president, Janssen Pharmaceuticals** – Leading isn’t easy, but passion makes it easier. Ask for expert help when making tough decisions, and focus on the big picture, even in crises.
5. **Gerry Czarniecki, crisis manager** – Accept the inevitable fear that accompanies a difficult task. Once you’re making decisions, ask if everyone is ready to pull off your seemingly beautiful plan before implementation. It won’t work unless your team is prepared and leaders are able to help.
6. **Marsha Firestone, founder, Women Presidents’ Organization** – Process any major setbacks; turn your recovery into something good. Getting passed over for a promotion at another women’s group prompted Firestone to start the WPO, which flourished. “The lesson I learned is I didn’t get what I thought I wanted,” she says. Instead, she created what she wanted and learned to have patience when things didn’t go her way.
7. **Leylani Cardoso, handbag designer** – This multitasking business owner and mother advises others to prioritize. Feel the emotions of a situation before seeking solutions. Decide what’s important to you, and figure out a way to make it happen. Work efficiently and delegate to avoid feeling overwhelmed.
8. **Nando Parrado, Uruguayan businessman** – Parrado, who survived 72 days in the Andes Mountains after a plane crash that killed his mother and sister, says to appreciate life and keep it in perspective. He ranks businesses fifth in importance behind family, friends, his dogs and sports.

About the Author

Psychiatrist **Gabriela Cora** founded the Executive Health & Wealth Institute.
