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You've Got the Power for Maximum Performance

Review by Chris Lauer

THE POWER OF FULL ENGAGEMENT

by Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz

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Many types of ideas cross through the busy intersection where self-help books and business books collide. Sometimes the titles are overly dramatic; other times they are short on timely facts and examples. Sometimes they are delivered with platitudes galore that evaporate quickly because they are missing the real substance needed to help business leaders do their jobs.

The thoughtful concepts found in *The Power of Full Engagement* are none of these. On the contrary, the principles described by co-authors Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz in *The Power of Full Engagement* offer readers many thought-provoking lessons that can be used instantly to improve their professional and personal lives.

Powerful Habits

The primary idea is plausible: Sustainable high performance is only possible when we find better, more habitual ways to positively expend and renew our personal energy. When we develop habits that are filled with positive physical, emotional, mental and spiritual experiences that are sometimes active and other times recovering, we improve our overall capacity to become fully engaged in our work and home lives.

When we are fully engaged, we have more physical energy and more positive emotional capacity, the authors explain. This is the best place to be whenever

we're doing anything that requires us to perform at our best, and *The Power of Full Engagement* presents a step-by-step approach to reaching that place where we can become more energized physically, more connected emotionally, more focused mentally and more aligned spiritually. Another name for this wonderful place is what most people would call a happy, well-balanced life.

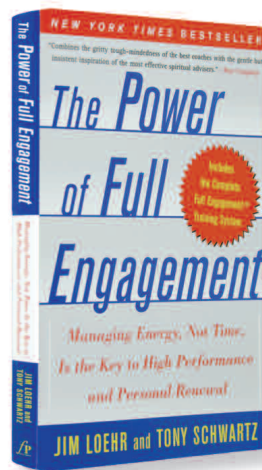
Lessons for Athletes

The lessons that Loehr and Schwartz impart in their book are taken from their experiences and research while working with former top athletes during the stars' careers. These remarkable people include tennis champion Monica Seles, golfers Ernie Els and Mark O'Meara, hockey players Eric Lindros and Mike Richter, boxer Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini, basketball players Nick Anderson and Grant Hill, and speed-skating Olympic gold medalist Dan Jansen.

While helping these athletes to become the best of the best, the authors discovered many secrets to getting the most from one's skills and talents. Although

Loehr and Schwartz never helped these sports stars work on backhands or slam dunks, they did help them master the ability to muster greater energy when a stressful moment required the athletes to operate at the peak of their capabilities.

Loehr, a psychologist, co-founded LGE Performance Systems, a training company where he serves as chairman and CEO. LGE helps executives, athletes and other people achieve full engagement in stressful environments. Loehr has also made a name for himself as the author of a dozen books, including



the best-seller *Stress for Success*.

Lessons for Company Leaders

One of the things that sets *The Power of Full Engagement* apart from Loehr's other books is the input of performance expert Schwartz, who pushes Loehr's lessons in a new direction aimed at company leaders. As an expert on harnessing the science of high performance to improve energy, engagement, focus and productivity, Schwartz serves as the president and founder of The Energy Project. Organizations such as Google, Ford, Sony, the Los Angeles Police Department and Save the Children have all benefited from the lessons they have learned while employing Schwartz and his team of consultants to help them improve their work.

Combining the knowledge and experiences of these two authors, *The Power of Full Engagement* offers readers a robust program for understanding and managing the necessary energy to not only develop enduring high performance, but also to build a healthy, happy and balanced life, inside and outside the workplace.

The Four Forms of Energy

To help their readers understand the dynamics of full engagement, the authors break down personal energy into its four basic components: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. In the clearest of terms, the authors explore the commonsense essence of professional energy by developing a set of principles that can be used to understand how the four parts of energy can be improved and tapped for better performance.

The first principle that the authors delve into states that full engagement requires us to use all four of our intertwined sources of energy. They add that when we master the needs that each of these sources addresses — sustainability (physical), security (emotional), self-expression (mental) and significance (spiritual) — we become better equipped to shift smoothly between moments when we require intense focus and the times when we need to renew our energies.

The second principle in Loehr and Schwartz's energy improvement process is the idea that we need to balance how we expend our energy with regular energy renewal. This is important because our energy capacity has a tendency to diminish when it is used

too little or too much. Of course, we all need to rest after working hard, but the authors' message goes deeper than that. They not only focus on ways to improve how we manage our energy, they also describe, at length, how energy in its four forms can be combined and expanded.

The Need for Flexibility

To start, they point out that strength, endurance, flexibility and resilience are the primary markers of physical capacity. They explain that these markers also apply to the other types of energy as well. For example, we can become more fully engaged by increasing our flexibility not just physically, but mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

To stretch ourselves mentally, we must spend more time flexing our mental capacity by moving between rational and intuitive thought patterns. Embracing multiple points of view can also help us sustain our focus over time and develop stronger concentra-

tion skills. Likewise, becoming less emotionally rigid by resisting defensiveness and exploring a wider range of emotions can help us rebound faster when faced with disappointments and frustrations. Similarly, spiritual flexibility does not mean giving up our values and beliefs. It simply means being more tolerant of the values and beliefs of other people when they are different from our own. If other people have beliefs that don't hurt anyone, the authors write, we can improve our own spiritual strength by respecting their beliefs just as we want them to respect ours.

The Exercise-Performance Connection

While showing us how to regulate our energy through periods of intense work interspersed with focused periods of replenishing rest, *The Power of Full Engagement* also offers many smart facts and examples that support its lessons. For example, the authors go further than simply stating, "Strength and cardiovascular training have a powerful impact on health, on energy levels and performance." They also present numerous studies and statistics that back up their claims.

To link the connection between fitness and energy improvement to the working world, they point out that DuPont reduced absenteeism over a six-year period by providing its employees with a corporate fitness program. One of the added benefits of that

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program was that participants used 14 percent fewer disability days than those who did not participate in the program. In other words, DuPont saved a total of nearly 12,000 disability days by creating the program.

The authors also cite another study that demonstrates the exercise-performance connection: The journal *Ergonomics* reported, “Fit workers committed 27 percent fewer errors on tasks involving concentration and short-term memory as compared to un-fit workers.” With statistics and studies like these filling their book, Loehr and Schwartz provide readers with powerful encouragement to make physical exercise a regular habit.

Exercising Emotional Energy

The authors write, “Physical energy is the raw fuel for igniting our emotional skills and talents.” When our physical muscles are in tune, our emotional muscles are better able to serve us when we need to do our best work. How do we exercise our emotional muscles? The authors write that we can overcome our lack of confidence and impatience — two signs of weak or insufficient emotional muscles — when we learn how to control and balance our emotional energy.

The Power of Full Engagement has just as many real-life stories and statistics on the importance of balanced emotional energy as those describing the importance of balanced physical energy. For example, after showing how the more emotionally controlled Jimmy Connors was able to create a longer tennis career than the more emotionally charged John McEnroe, the authors offer some insightful findings from the Gallup Organization. They write, “Gallup found that the key drivers of productivity for employees include whether they feel cared for by a supervisor or someone at work.” Employees require praise and recognition at work to operate at their best. Therefore, it makes sense that managers need to be able to exhibit high levels of positive mental energy at work to manage their people more effectively.

In other words, a leader whose emotional energy is better balanced and controlled is more likely to be able to communicate praise and recognition to employees than a manager who displays less confidence and exhibits more negative emotional energy.

Useful examples of people who display anxiety and rigidity show readers the detrimental effects of negative emotions on careers and organizations. Through these individuals, the authors encourage readers to explore deeper and higher-quality emotional renewal to balance out emotionally challenging situations. One

important lesson they impart: Don’t rely on television to provide you with quality emotional renewal. Researchers point out that television is more likely to create anxiety and low-level depression. Instead, seek more nourishing forms of emotional recovery, such as sports, museums, concerts and quiet times alone after intense days surrounded by other people. Look into your personal interests and choose the right one for you. By tapping into positive forms of emotional energy, we can find the confidence, control, interpersonal effectiveness and empathy that lead to improved performance.

Balancing Mental Energy

Concentration is a vital part of Loehr and Schwartz’s recipe for performance improvement and full engagement. They write that mental energy is just as important as physical energy to attain the ability to concentrate on an important task. Mental energy, they explain, comes from more than just sustained concentration; it is also derived from the exercise received when we move our thinking between narrow thoughts and broad ideas. We must also be able to focus between our internal cognition and our external observations. Reaching an optimum level of concentration also requires the “realistic optimism” that allows us to see reality as it really is while still moving toward our intended goals.

The authors explain that our mental energy must be balanced between expenditure and recovery, in the same way that emotional and physical energy require a focused balance. The interplay between these three types of energy is more than a shift from one to another. They actually feed on one another. The authors write that poor physical health, such as lack of sleep or physical fitness, and poor emotional health, such as anxiety or anger, have a negative impact on optimism as well. When we are stressed by difficult circumstances, their negative impacts will increase unless we do the work that keeps us balanced between expending energy and recovering energy.

The Important Role of Spiritual Energy

While the spiritual part of Loehr and Schwartz’s energy management program might raise the most eyebrows, it is actually the most important element in their four-part dissection of engagement’s core. Thankfully, there is no denomination behind their advice. Instead, the spirituality they write about involves the inner workings of a person’s life. These include such integral pieces of the human puzzle as values, purpose, truthfulness and accountability. Although these topics are often difficult to define

without slipping into platitudes and clichés, the authors accurately and professionally describe how spiritual energy can be tapped as a powerful source of passion, perseverance, commitment, integrity and honesty.

By offering straightforward examples of people who have made mistakes and found better ways through personal introspection, Loehr and Schwartz describe role models for spiritual growth that is not mired in divisive dogma or polemics. The spiritual energy they describe also fluctuates between expended energy and energy renewal. The authors explore the interconnected nature of these two aspects of spiritual energy and show how balanced spiritual energy can help anyone “override even severe limitations of physical energy.” This type of hopeful message offers readers an added boost that can help put peak performance within their reach.

The Training System

Learning about the dynamics of the four energies that lead to greater performance is enlightening, but putting them all together into a useful program of daily habits is an even more important task. Thankfully, Loehr and Schwartz provide a training system that turns the knowledge they impart into a regular regimen of rituals that can help readers benefit from the lessons. Behaviors are just as important as the information that feeds them, so the authors help readers create “positive energy rituals” that adapt their book’s broad principles into daily or weekly routines.

Negative habits slow us down. Likewise, positive habits push us ahead. The authors write that rituals serve as the foundation on which we can rely when the storms of circumstances buffet and bruise us when we least expect it. They point out that pilots, CEOs, athletes and soldiers all rely on positive rituals to manage their energies. These rituals help them achieve their goals even in the most trying times of their lives, whether on the battlefield, in the boardroom or

before the final buzzer.

The trick is to master the art of moving “rhythmically between stress and recovery,” the authors write. By building strong, positive rituals that balance all four energies into every aspect of our lives, we are better prepared when stress rears its ugly head.

Good habits and positive rituals provide the practice we need so we’ll be able to continue to move forward through tough circumstances. They prepare our bodies and minds so we can conjure high performance whenever it is required. These rituals also provide structures for our lives on which we can rely when we need them most.

Creating Rituals to Improve Self-Control

Although they are extremely personal, since they must serve our own, unique needs, energy management rituals can be constructed fairly easily. For example, the authors point out, one couple simply developed the energy renewing habit of setting aside an hour and a half to talk together, uninterrupted, every Saturday morning. It might have been difficult to do this at first, with a bevy of demands flying at them from all directions whenever Saturday rolled around, but setting limits, changing habits and adjusting roles allowed them to work it out.

The key to these types of rituals is creating precise and specific behaviors that improve our self-control. When we master the when, where and how of our behaviors, the authors explain, we don’t have to worry about getting things done. We easily reach our goals because we have created the rituals that tap into the four sources of energy that take us where we want to go. We connect to our purpose and values by making those connections a habit.

Loehr and Schwartz expertly frame the creation of these vital habits in a positive, compelling light. The result is a powerful guidebook to a better, and more engaged, personal and professional life. ●

The authors: Jim Loehr, Ed.D., is the chairman and CEO of LGE Performance Systems and is recognized worldwide for his contributions to the field of performance psychology. He has worked with hundreds of world-class athletes, as well as with police departments, SWAT teams, emergency service workers and the FBI’s elite Hostage Rescue team. He has authored 12 books, including *Stress for Success* and *Toughness Training for Sports*.

Tony Schwartz is the founder and president of The Energy Project whose mission is to ignite a fire in the hearts of organizations and their leaders. He is the author of three other books, including *Art of the Deal* with Donald Trump, *What Really Matters: Searching for Wisdom in America* and *Work in Progress* with Michael Eisner. (Tony@TheEnergyProject.com)

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