



Forget Time Management...Are You Managing Your Energy?

By Jean Maslanka Kelley

Phrases like “manage your time” and “do more with less” have become the buzzwords for this decade. The idea is that if you can manage your time well, you’ll be more productive in all areas of life. The only flaw in this thinking is that time is finite. In other words, you can manage time all you want and continually push yourself to get more done. But all this managing and pushing tires your brain, drains your spirit, and disengages your soul. That’s when mistakes occur and burnout ensues. The key, then, is not to simply manage your time, but also to manage your energy.

Unlike time, energy is restorable. And when you manage your energy well, you’ll have more energy for your priorities, whether they are personal or professional in nature. If you don’t manage your energy, you can’t manage your time. Sure, you can think about all the things you need to do and you can schedule them, but if you don’t have the energy to do the tasks, you won’t be able to accomplish them appropriately.

Realize, too, that managing your energy goes beyond work/life balance. While many people talk about work/life balance (devoting ample time to all areas of your life), few address those things that make life rich and fun. With so many things competing for your attention daily, you need to give attention to energy replenishment so you can devote the time your life’s priorities demand. This is why it’s important to manage your energy before you manage your time.

The Three Pillars of Energy Management

Keeping your energy in check means giving attention to your brain, your spirit, and your soul. Think of it like a three-legged stool. For the stool to be useful, you need all three legs. Remove one leg from the equation, and the stool topples over and is useless. The same is true for your energy. Therefore, to keep your energy replenished, implement the following suggestions into your daily life.

- **Stimulate Your Brain**

The human brain likes control and certainty, and it’s very good at predicting the next thing that is likely to happen based on the information it has. That’s why you often feel better when you perceive you have control over a situation and feel stressed if you think you have no control over events. Additionally, the brain is programmed to fear. This is a good thing, though, because the inborn fear is what has allowed our species to evolve. The only drawback to this natural fear is that the brain will take three pieces of information and make a story out of it—usually a negative one. This negative story becomes your reality until you get another piece of data. Talk about an energy drain on your brain!

In order to replenish your brain’s energy, do the following:

- Since your brain is part of your body, it needs to be fed the right food for optimum health. Eat three nutritious meals a day, exercise to increase the oxygen flow to your brain, and drink plenty of water to keep hydrated.
- Reconstruct your stories. You have to purposefully stop the story and seek out the missing pieces of information. For example, if you get an email from your boss telling you not to take part in a task you volunteered for, with no explanation why, you would likely think your boss doesn't believe you're capable of the task. In reality, your boss may need you for another task, he or she may think the task is not challenging enough for you, or your boss may simply not need any assistance on the task any longer. But you'll never know (and never stop the negative story) until you ask.
- Analyze what helps and hurts your thinking ability. For instance, do 200 emails staring at you first thing in the morning make you exhausted before you even start the day? If so, then don't do that task first thing. Do the most important things when you're alert and at your best, as those tasks will actually energize you so you can handle the stressful tasks later.
- Give yourself two hours a day for focused attention on a key project—the earlier in the day the better. No multi-tasking during this time! Whether you are a night or a morning person, the fact is that your brain is rested after your sleep, so this is the key time for focused attention and productivity.

- Awaken Your Spirit

The human spirit yearns to soar. The spirit enjoys lofty goals and challenging tasks to accomplish. How spirited someone is often relates to how purposeful he or she is. In fact, it's common that when people lose their purpose in life, they feel deflated and even depressed. Hence the phrase: "Her spirit was broken."

An energized spirit is what catapults you out of the mundane and into a new and exciting endeavor. In order to replenish your spirit's energy, do the following:

- Do one thing every day that makes your spirit soar. Whether it's reading poetry or listening to music, if you feel your spirit is fed by that, do it.
- Think about what you want to do in your life. Dream big! Give planned time to your future in order to nurture your spirit.
- Read things that stretch your mind. Your spirit wants to reach for the next best thing. Unleash the power of your spirit by exposing your mind to new things—even things that you feel are impossible to accomplish right now.
- Take time each day to think and concentrate. Many people are in knowledge-oriented jobs and need some degree of quiet time. So even though a particular task must get done, that task often requires planning and thinking. Your spirit can't gain energy to tackle big goals unless it has some quiet time to prepare. So let people know that you require quiet thinking time, and actually put this time in your schedule. If others know your needs and intentions, they will respect them.

- Feed Your Soul

The human soul likes the familiar, the deep, and the poignant. The soul likes ritual, doing the same thing at the same time every day. It also enjoys the simple things in life,

beauty, and nature. The soul is what connects you to life and to what is deeply meaningful to you.

In order to replenish your soul's energy, do the following:

- Clarify your intentions and plan what you want your tomorrow to be like before you go to bed. This allows your subconscious to work on your challenges and big decisions while you sleep.
- Take time for enchantment. Linger through a museum. Enjoy preparing a simple elegant meal. Go outside regularly and really look at nature. Your soul loves beauty and wants a connection with the earth.
- Experience the present fully. Focus on the things around you—the colors and textures. Be mindful of your current surroundings and activities rather than always trying to multi-task. Really engage in life in the moment. Feel yourself breathe.
- Build rituals for yourself and your family. Even something as simple as eating dinner at the same time every day is a ritual. Both your soul and your brain crave ritual and gain energy from it.

Energize!

By focusing on these three areas of your life—your brain, your spirit, and your soul—you'll gain the much needed energy to tackle life with enthusiasm and zest. With your energy fully replenished, time will no longer be an issue. You'll feel ready to handle anything that comes your way with ease...and you'll do it much faster. So make it a habit to stimulate your brain, awaken your spirit, and feed your soul. It's one investment in yourself you can't afford not to make.

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