

Four Cylinders for Optimal Energy Management

Context

To be operating at our best and make good decisions, we need to have an appropriate level of energy. Imagine trying to run a race with blisters on your feet or performing to your best at a job interview when you have just received some bad news. To give and do your best, you have to be and feel at your best. Energy is fuel. Think of a time when you were totally excited, one hundred percent present, your mind was clear and ready and your heart open for whatever might come. You were in the zone.

Our energy can be divided into four types: Physical --- can I run another mile? Mental --- is my brain in the best state to think about this? Spiritual --- am I in alignment with my values and what's important to me? Emotional --- am I experiencing emotions that are draining my overall state or nurturing it? I call these energy types the Four Cylinders. Each cylinder is connected with activities that help keep the energy at high levels. These can include things like nutrition, exercise, rest, learning, certain people, relationships, specific activities, interests and other wellbeing practices. It is worth thinking about specific behaviors and activities you can undertake to replenish energy for best performance. Depletion in any of the four cylinders will affect your overall wellbeing, how productive you can be, the results you deliver or how long you can sustain your performance at a consistently high level. When the energy levels get very low in you risk burn out.

Each task requires a certain combination of type and levels of energy. Knowledge about what you are like when you are full of energy, combined with awareness about the state of these energies at any given moment, is an important part of a strategy for being most productive. It allows you to match the energy you have with a given task. When you know your top priorities or goals, you can quickly assess whether you have the right levels of energies to tackle them with success, whether the goal needs to be broken down or your energy level raised. Your mind routinely scans your energy levels anyway though it likely happens without your conscious awareness. The brain sends various signals letting you know what it needs to help you perform at your best. It may tell you to rest, to get fresh air, or to seek counsel.

Being effective means you take charge and responsibility for working at your true best and having healthy and effective strategies to keep yourself there at all times. The Four Cylinders exercise is a quick and powerful method for developing awareness about energy so that you can channel it effectively for high productivity. This will help you make the most of your time and get more achieved. The exercise is based on a simple rating scale technique to help you understand your energy states. When you are clear about your energy levels and the action you want to take, you can match tasks with energy levels or work to adjust your energy for a given task in a conscious way. Make the Four Cylinders part of your daily practice, especially when you are having to undertake a demanding task as well as when you simply want to check with your own wellbeing and restore.

Exercise

1. Learning about your energy states Think about something specific you achieved where you thought you worked at your best. It could be a presentation you gave, a course you mastered or a successful negotiation you pulled off. Given the four energies --- physical, mental, emotional and spiritual – what level of energy in percentage terms did you have when you were at your best?
2. Present moment energy awareness Now, tune into the present moment and give yourself a score between 0% and 100% to indicate where each of your energy cylinders is at 'right now'. Physical ____ Mental ____ Emotional ____ Spiritual ____
3. Balancing task and energy Consider the top three tasks or goals that you want to tackle at this time and write them down below. Think about the energy in each cylinder that is required to help you achieve each task to your best standard. You may want to give each energy a certain percentage like 25%, 50%, 75, 100%. Alternatively, you can just put a tick next to each cylinder that at the present moment feels sufficient to perform well overall and an x next to the cylinder that doesn't.

Task 1 _____ Physical ____ Mental
_____ Emotional ____ Spiritual ____

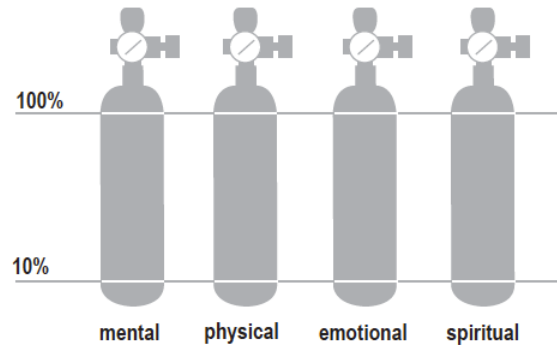
Task 2 _____ Physical ____ Mental
_____ Emotional ____ Spiritual ____

Task 3. _____ Physical ____ Mental
_____ Emotional ____ Spiritual ____



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NOTES:



Take away lessons

Having ample energy for action is key for high-level productivity. When you know what your best looks like and feels like you have a personal reference point. As you master this exercise, you will be able to assess your energy levels in seconds. This means you can quickly match tasks to your energy levels or focus attention on restoring your energy. If you cannot raise your energy to what is required, consider tackling another task whose demands match your current state or think about how to adjust the size of your task so it becomes doable. Either way, you will be most productive by being on top of your energy states. Some people really benefit from recording their energy levels in a journal over time. You may decide to track your energy each day over a two weeks period, or note your energy levels in the morning, midday and evening for few days. As you bring more awareness and attention to your body, you will develop greater sensitivity and insight about how energy states affect your overall performance and how you can help control them through specific activities. This will allow you to look after yourself well and deliver top-level results on a consistent basis.

Reflective questions to help you develop your thinking and action:

Q1. What does each cylinder feel like when it is at 100% for you? What cylinders are you using most and least? What difference would working on all four cylinders at 100% make to your overall productivity?

Q2. Looking at your cylinders right now, what do the four levels say about your general wellbeing and productivity? Which of your key tasks/goals are well matched to your current energy levels. Are these your high priority goals? If not, what do you need to do to prepare yourself to tackle your key goals?

Q3. Each cylinder requires specific activities that help replenish its level to your personal 100%. How do you normally replenish your cylinders other than through vacation? What else could you try to do when each cylinder is low?

Q4. If you look backwards in time over few months or even years, which cylinder do you neglect the most for yourself or people you work with or live with? What will help you remember to keep it at a high level?

