



# Employee well-being: A guide for managers and supervisors

## THE CASE FOR WELL-BEING:

Well-being, as defined by Tom Rath and Jim Harter (2010) is “the combination and interaction between our love of what we do each day, the vibrancy of our physical health, the security of our finances, the quality of our relationships and the pride we take in what we have contributed to our communities.” Employees with high levels of career well-being, who like what they do, are twice as likely to be thriving overall than those with lower levels of career well-being (Rath & Harter, 2010).

Employees who report high levels of career well-being enjoy have better health overall, lower annual health care costs, lower rates of absenteeism and presentism and lower rates of workplace injuries. They employees are vibrant, energized, creative, committed to the organization and more resilient in the face of change. Their energy is contagious. To remain viable, colleges need to attract and retain students, and to do that, colleges and universities need faculty and staff who are thriving and highly engaged. “Engaged, committed staff will be those whose enthusiasm for their subject and their job shines through and rubs off on students “(Carter & Evans, 2013).

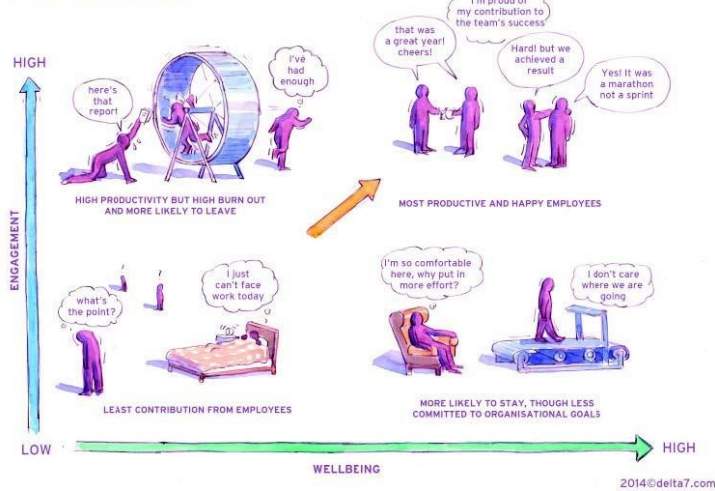
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## ENGAGEMENT AND WELL-BEING

### WELLBEING AND ENGAGEMENT



There is not one agreed upon definition of employee engagement so we will define engaged employees as “employees who are committed to their organization’s goals and values and motivated to contribute to organizational success” (Engage for Success, 2014). Engaged employees with high well-being have a stronger connection to the organization’s goals and values, are able to perform at high levels and more consistently, are less likely to experience burnout and are more enthusiastic, cheerful, optimistic and relaxed.

*“In today’s always-on environment, our ability to ‘stay well’ and maintain a fit attitude and frame of mind, has a huge impact on our engagement and performance” (Bersin, 2016).*

### 5 Principles of a culture of well-being:

- 1) Every employee understands how his/her work contributes to living the organization’s vision and purpose
- 2) Leadership is cohesive
- 3) Employees have meaning and purpose in their work
- 4) Rules are clear and apply to everyone
- 5) Clear communication is prioritized and valued (Ward, 2015)

### MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS ARE THE GATEKEEPERS OF WELL-BEING

Organizations have a responsibility to for creating and sustaining a work environment which facilitates and supports well-being. Creating and sustaining a culture of well-being does not come from the bottom up, but instead depends on leaders at all levels. Senior leaders, middle managers and direct line supervisors, all play a critical role in supporting employee well-being. While senior leadership support is critical, immediate managers and supervisors have more impact on employee well-being than does the institutional environment, the organizational leaders, or the work itself. (Beck & Harter, 2015). Managers and supervisors have the most day to day interaction with employees and therefore they are the primary gatekeepers of well-being.

Managers and supervisors have the ability to allocate resources such as space, time and in some instances, money. They are in position to lead by example, to be role models of well-being and to encourage their employees to engage in practices which support their own well-being both in and out of the workplace. Managers and supervisors have the authority to implement and uphold policies and procedures which either support or put up barriers to well-being. To truly support their people and organization to thrive, managers and supervisors need to shift their emphasis from getting more out of people to caring more about them, so they are motivated—and able—to bring more of themselves to work every day (Schwartz & McCarthy, 2007).



*“Your first and foremost job as a leader is to take charge of your own energy and then help to orchestrate the energy of those around you.” - Peter Drucker*

## MANAGING ENERGY, NOT TIME

Energy, not time, is the most valuable of our human resources. It is “the fundamental currency of high performance” (Loehr, 2017). To support employees’ well-being and engagement, managers and supervisors must move away from focusing so much on how employees spend and manage their time, and instead support employees to manage their energy. Unlike time, energy is not finite. If managed well, energy can be renewed on an ongoing basis. When we focus too much on time, and doing more, and don’t focus on energy and energy renewal, we burn out and this takes a toll on every area of our health and our life.

Employees who effectively manage their energy across all four domains: mental, spiritual, physical and emotional (Loehr & Schwartz, 2003) are able to work at a high level of performance. They are creative and resilient in the face of the change and are willing and able to go the extra mile. They are enthusiastic and have a positive attitude, and this positive attitude is infectious. These are the people who inspire others and who others want to be around. When asked, most people will say that the thing they like best about their job is the people they work with. Being surrounded by positive people makes work all that much more of a place that people want to be. Managers and supervisors have significant influence on whether or not their people are positive and thriving or not, and thriving employees make the work of managers and supervisors that much more pleasurable and rewarding.

## 8 Daily Habits of Highly Successful People:

- 1) Get up early to tackle their most important priorities
- 2) Read for education or self-improvement
- 3) Allocate time for focused thinking
- 4) Exercise
- 5) Spend time with people who inspire them
- 6) Pursue their own goals
- 7) Get at least seven hours of sleep most nights
- 8) Avoid time wasters and focus on the things that most align with their core values (Ward, 2017).

#### 4 STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE FLOW

- 1) **Minimize distractions:** As much as possible, set up the environment to minimize distractions. This may mean moving to a quiet space where you are not likely to be interrupted by phone calls or coworkers needing your attention.
- 2) **Set a timer:** Human beings work best in short bursts of time. Set a timer for 25 minutes and focus on just one task. After the 25 minutes are up, take a five minute break and repeat the sequence.
- 3) **Focus on one task at a time:** Contrary to popular belief, multitasking is not at all efficient. Every time our brain switches from one activity to the next, we lose time as our brain needs to rewind and catch back up to where we left off. Multitasking is a great way to quickly drain our mental energy.
- 4) **Get enough sleep:** Don't skimp when it comes to sleep. Seven to nine hours every night is critical to enable the brain to recharge. (Patterson, 2018).

## MENTAL ENERGY

Mental energy is about our ability to focus in an absorbed way. This ability to focus is critical for one to enter into a state of peak performance referred to as flow. When in flow, we lose track of time, we work effortlessly, we focus solely on the task and aren't interrupted by extraneous thoughts (Phillips, 2013). To support flow states we must take advantage of times when our energy is highest and must structure our work in such a way as to capitalize on this energy. For example, if we are a morning person and experience high energy in the morning, we should tackle projects that require creative thinking during this time and save more mundane tasks for later in the day when our energy is lower.

Managers and supervisors can support flow states and the mental energy of their employees by empowering employees to organize their work in such a way as to take full advantage of their optimal energy. Managers and supervisors can encourage employees to move to a quiet space when they need to focus, and support the employee to make decisions about how best to utilize their time. Managers and supervisors can manage expectations around email and other communications and not contact employees outside of scheduled work hours.

## SPIRITUAL ENERGY

Spiritual energy is about having a sense of meaning and purpose in work and in life. A sense of meaning and purpose is essential for human beings to flourish. Flourishing, as described by Dr. Martin Seligman, rests on five pillars: positive emotions, engagement, meaning and purpose, meaningful relationships and achievement (Seligman, 2011). Employees who are flourishing miss fewer days of work, have clearer goals, higher resilience, stronger relationships, less risk of chronic disease and lower health care utilization (Keyes, 2007).

Leaders can support their employees' spiritual energy by communicating a vision that is clear, consistent, and inspiring, and by communicating to employees how their work contributes to the vision. Praise, recognition and reward should be tied back to the organizational values further reinforce the employees' contribution to these values. Developing and maintaining rituals of gratitude, appreciation, and celebration show employees that they are valued and cared for. Managers and supervisors can encourage autonomy and self-determination and empower employees to take on new projects and encourage every employee to be a leader. Fostering collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships builds a strong team that allows the employee to feel a part of something bigger than themselves. Managers and supervisors can encourage [job crafting](#) to allow for people to utilize their strengths and connect their work to their own values and the values of the organization.

## PHYSICAL ENERGY

Taking care of our body and sustaining high levels of physical energy are critical in sustaining high levels of energy overall. Without physical energy it is very hard to focus on anything else. When our physical energy is low, it is difficult to process information, to problem solve, to be creative, or to communicate effectively. To operate at peak performance, we have to have physical energy.

To support our physical energy and be able to go hard, we have to work smarter and allocate time for rest and renewal. Human beings work best by engaging in ninety minute sprints followed by a short period of rest. “Working in 90-minute bursts allows you to correlate your maximum energy levels with your task list, which then gives your productivity a major boost. You’re working with your body instead of against it” (Altrogge, 2019). Engaging in regular physical activity, consuming a healthy, whole-foods diet, staying well hydrated, and getting enough sleep are all essential to managing our physical energy.

To support their own physical energy and that of their employees, managers and supervisors must encourage and

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*“The organization must take responsibility for building a work environment which facilitates and supports fitness: from exercise to food to work environment to management.” (Bersin, 2016)*

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## EMOTIONAL ENERGY

Emotional energy centers on emotional intelligence and managing our emotions. People are most energized and creative when they are in a positive emotional state. To maintain positive emotional states, we have to first be aware of how we are feeling throughout the day. When we are able to recognize our emotions we can respond to them appropriately and effectively. Author Susan David (2016) coined the phrase “emotional agility” to describe the process of recognizing our thoughts and emotions, labeling and accepting our thoughts and emotions, accepting them, and acting on our values. “Emotional agility can help people alleviate stress, reduce errors, become more innovative, and improve job performance” (David & Congleton, 2013).

Managers and supervisors can support the emotional energy of their employees by being emotionally agile, by talking about their feelings, and by behaving in ways which align with their own core values and the values of the organization. Managers and supervisors should be optimistic and positive and should show appreciation in personal, meaningful, specific ways. They should ask for, encourage, and make changes based on feedback from their employees when possible. They should support autonomy, self-determination and mastery by encouraging employees to take the lead or be the expert when possible by giving employees the freedom to set their own path to task or project completion. Managers and supervisors should create an environment of [psychological safety](#), one that invites discussion and collaboration. Leaders should also invest in getting to know their people on a more personal level, including their values and motivations. To do this, managers and supervisors must be willing to share about themselves, as to get trust, one must first extend trust (Kouzes & Posner, 2010). Managers and supervisors should encourage employees to set a personal well-being related goal as part of their annual performance review as this demonstrate care and concern for the whole person and not just the person as an employee. Leaders should support employees to find ways to [utilize their strengths](#) and encourage employees to share their successes with their team.

*“The task of leadership is not to put greatness into people, but to elicit it, for the greatness is there already.” - John Buchan*



## ADDITIONAL READING

Bradberry, T. and Greaves, J., (2009). *Emotional intelligence 2.0*. San Diego, CA: TalentSmart.

Cashman, K. (2008). *Leadership from the inside out: Becoming a leader for life*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Goleman, D. (2013). *Primal leadership: Unleashing the power of emotional intelligence*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

Kouzes, J. M. and Posner, B. Z. (2010). *The leadership challenge, 5th ed.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Zander, B. and Zander, R. (2000). *The art of possibility*. Boston, MA: Harvard Review Press.

## Green Mountain Higher Education Consortium (GMHEC)

Green Mountain Higher Education Consortium (GMHEC) is a collaborative endeavor of three Vermont Colleges: Champlain College, Middlebury College and Saint Michael’s College and our friend, Norwich University. The goal of the GMHEC is to create and foster collaborative endeavors among member institutions by serving as an agent for economic and educational initiatives that bring value to all. This partnership is determined to find ways to reduce administrative costs and improve services common to all three institutions. In turn, this will create greater efficiency and help to reduce costs over the long term which will benefit our higher education community. For more information about GMHEC go to our website at [www.gmhec.org](http://www.gmhec.org).

