

## The Way We're Working Isn't Working Book Summary

The Way We're Working Isn't Working lays out a new value proposition. Rather than trying to get more out of employees, Schwartz and his co-authors argue, organizations are better served by investing in meeting their employees' multidimensional needs. Employees, in turn, are freed, fueled, and inspired to bring the best of themselves to work every day. Deeply grounded in the multidisciplinary science of high performance, The Way We're Working Isn't Working makes a compelling case for a new kind of workplace: an organization that invests in its people across all dimensions of their lives and rallies them around an inspiring purpose is actually investing in itself.

### Human Beings are Not Computers

The way we're working isn't working, in our own lives or for organizations. The relentless urgency that characterizes most corporate cultures undermines thoughtful deliberation, creativity, engagement, and sustainable high performance. We're not meant to operate in the same way machines do: at high speeds, for long periods of time, running multiple programs at the same time. Time is finite, but energy – the capacity to do work – can be expanded and regularly renewed. Human beings are designed to pulse between the expenditure and the intermittent renewal of energy.

### We Can't Change What We Don't Notice

Human beings have made extraordinary advances in science, medicine, and technology, but we've devoted remarkably little attention to understanding our inner world. We've accumulated vast knowledge but woefully little self-knowledge. Without a richer understanding of what motivates us—and what stands in our way—we will remain insufficiently equipped to take on the vastly more complex challenges ahead.

*“The real measure of people's effectiveness ought to be based on the value they create, not the number of hours they work.”*

### Physical energy:

- Physical energy is the foundation of all energy, and it is comprised of sleep, daytime rest, exercise, and nutrition:
  - Sleep: If physical energy is the foundation of all dimensions of energy, sleep is the foundation of physical energy. No single behavior more fundamentally influences our effectiveness in waking life. Sleep deprivation takes a powerful toll on our health, our emotional well-being, and our cognitive functioning.
  - Daytime rest: Intermittent renewal is critical to sustainable high performance. Over the course of a day, we oscillate every ninety minutes from a higher to lower level of arousal and alertness. These are called “ultradian” cycles. In effect, our bodies are asking for a break every ninety minutes. More often than not, we ignore these signals, especially in the face of high demand.
  - Exercise: Intense energy expenditure followed by deep recovery dramatically increases our capacity not just physically but also mentally and emotionally.

Too little movement, like too little sleep, weakens and diminishes us in all dimensions of our lives.

- Nutrition: From an energy perspective, the key to nutrition is maintaining a stable, steady level of blood sugar. Food is our primary source of glucose, and it fuels not just our bodies but also our brains. Many of the foods that we choose to eat provide a quick hit of energy but serve us poorly in the long term.
- The big mind-set shift leaders need to make is from focusing too much on competency, the skills necessary for a given job, and too little on capacity, the fuel people need in their tanks to bring their skills fully to life.
- Commuting can take a huge toll on people's productivity, draining their energy during the early-morning hours, when they might otherwise be most effective. Organizations serve their employees and themselves by allowing employees to commute during off hours or work from home

*“Building greater strength increases everything from metabolism to coordination to bone density to balance.”*

### **Emotional energy:**

- Emotional energy is important because how we feel profoundly influences how we perform. The problem is that much of the time we're not even aware of how we are feeling or what the impact those emotions are having on how we work. The more aware we are of what we're feeling, the more power we have to influence those feelings.
  - A trigger is an event, behavior, or circumstance that consistently prompts negative emotions and propels us into fight or flight—the Survival Zone. We're biologically wired to sense danger, and we all experience triggers every day, to greater and lesser degrees.
  - There are four basic ways we can feel at any given time over the course of a day.:
    - Performance Zone – high positive emotions, where we do our best work
      - We feel upbeat, energized, invigorated, in the zone, optimistic, confident, or engaged
    - Renewal Zone – low positive emotion, where we relax and renew our energy
      - We feel relaxed, tranquil, serene, peaceful, or carefree
- \* our goal should be to pulse between the Performance Zone and the Renewal Zone\**
- Survival Zone – high negative emotions, where we are high energy, but consumed or paralyzed by negative emotions
    - We feel impatient, judgmental, frustrated, angry, aggravated, anxious, fearful, or worried
  - Burnout Zone – low negative emotions, the zone of forced recovery
    - We feel exhausted, empty, sad, depressed, or hopeless
- \* To get from the Survival or Burnout Zone back into Performance, we always need to renew\**

- A trigger is an event, behavior, or circumstance that consistently prompts negative emotions and propels us into fight or flight—the Survival Zone. We’re biologically wired to sense danger, and we all experience triggers every day, to greater and lesser degrees. The Golden Rule of Triggers is “Whatever you feel compelled to do, don’t.” That means resisting the urge to act when you’re feeling triggered.
- A fact is something that can be objectively verified by any person. It is irrefutable. A story is something we create to make sense of the facts. We can’t change the facts, but we do have a choice about what we make of them.
- Every organization has a distinct emotional climate, and typically it’s set from the top. A leader is effectively the “chief energy officer.” The core responsibility of great leaders is to mobilize, focus, inspire, and regularly renew the energy of those they lead.

*“The best leaders strike a balance between challenging their people to exceed themselves and regularly recognizing and rewarding their accomplishments.”*

#### **Mental energy:**

- Mental energy is the focus of our energy, critical right now because our attention is under siege. There is an inverse relationship between the increasing volume of information available to us and our ability to prioritize and make sense of it. We’ve lost control of our attention.
- When we default reactively or lazily to distraction, we diminish not just our cognitive capacity but also the depth of our experience and, ultimately, our effectiveness.
- Human beings are incapable of multitasking. Unlike computers, we’re hard-wired to undertake tasks sequentially, and our brains are not able to focus on two separate cognitive tasks at the same time.
- The first step in taking more control of our attention is recognizing the costs of distraction. Focused attention is a capacity like any other. Much like a muscle, it gets stronger with practice and weaker when it is not exercised.
- Logical, deductive, analytic attention is the province of the left hemisphere of the brain. There is a second kind of absorbed focus associated with the right hemisphere of the brain, which is typically undertrained and underdeveloped.
- The key capacities of the right hemisphere—creative and big-picture thinking, openness to learning, and empathy—are a largely untapped source of competitive advantage, both for individuals and for organizations.
- One of the best ways an organization can encourage both higher productivity and more innovation is to promote absorbed focus. Too often, employers collaborate with their employees to fracture their focus and distract their attention. Focus improves only when it becomes an explicit organizational priority. That requires creating policies and practices that support employees in focusing on one thing at a time.

*“The relentless urgency that characterizes most corporate cultures undermines creativity, quality, engagement, thoughtful deliberation and, ultimately, performance.”*

### Spiritual energy:

- Spiritual energy is the uniquely powerful source of energy we derive from deeply held values and a clear sense of purpose beyond our self-interest, which we embody in our everyday behaviors. Cultivating this source of energy requires effort and reflection, but it is also energizing and inspiring. Significance is not our birthright. We must find ways to invest our lives with meaning.
- The most powerful and embracing source of purpose is one that serves something beyond our self-interest. Adding value to others, and to the commons, is a unique source of energy. It's also increasingly critical to our survival
- Taking care of others at the expense of taking care of ourselves undermines our ability to fully achieve the highest purpose. In the spiritual dimension, as in all the others, we must renew ourselves regularly.
- To fuel spiritual energy, an organization must define a set of shared values and a purpose beyond its continuing profitability. That begins with asking itself a variation on the questions that we pose to individuals: "Who are we?" (What do we stand for?) and "What do we really want?" (What is the purpose we're here to serve beyond our own survival and success?).

*"An organization is a living organism, a human community that can reach its highest purpose only when each individual feels fully valued and fully vested in a shared purpose."*

### In Summary

#### Key Takeaways for Employees

*For employees to successfully manage their own energy, they need to keep these key ideas in mind as they tackle their day at the office and at home.*

- "More, bigger, faster" leads to less engagement, less innovation, and burnt out employees
- It's not the hours you work, it's the quality of your work and the energy you put into it
- Being aware of your energy management will allow you to make shifts in behavior to yield more impactful and higher quality work – in and out of the office
- You have the ability and power to manage your own energy on a day to day basis
- Fuel these core energy needs: physical energy, emotional energy, mental energy, and spiritual energy
- Self-care will allow you to meet your core energy needs
- Stay out of the Survival Zone and in the Performance Zone for optimal work
- Multitasking does not work – do one thing at a time to complete your work faster and at a higher quality
- Find meaning in your work to be more engaged and find a higher purpose

### Key Takeaways for Organizations

*For organizations to successfully manage the energy of their employees, they need to keep these key ideas in mind as they build policies, cultivate their culture, and develop their people.*

- It's not the hours you work, it's the quality of your work and the energy you put into it
- Being aware of your energy management will allow you to make shifts in behavior to yield more impactful and higher quality work – in and out of the office
- Focus on fueling the energy needs of your employees
- Organizations who do fuel their employees' energy needs will be more successful than those who do not: higher engagement, less turnover, higher employee loyalty, and more effective leadership
- Keep your employees out of the Survival Zone and in the Performance Zone
- Do not encourage multitasking
- Trust your people to do their best work in a way that works for them
- Appreciate your employees for their work and contributions
- Encourage good energy management behaviors and allow for employees to fuel their energy in a way that works best for them
- Connect your employees work to your organization's mission and remind them regularly how their work is directly impacting the lives of others