

Stop Managing Your Time and Start Managing Your Energy

BY DR. ARIN N. REEVES

Dr. Arin N. Reeves, researcher, author, and leading advisor to many top executives, offers her advice on the energy deficit so many of us are experiencing.

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chieving high levels of success is not easy when you work in an uber competitive field that requires long hours every day and intense cognitive effort in a reality that is fraught with constant change and unpredictability.

You have more to do every day than you know you can get done that day. You

have accepted a certain level of exhaustion as necessary, but you are naturally starting to question if you have signed up to be perpetually exhausted. You are also starting to notice that when you are this exhausted, you are unable to appreciate the success you have achieved or approach the work that you love with enthusiasm.

Managing your time focuses your attention on getting more done in your increasingly busy days. Managing your energy focuses your attention on getting the right things done every day... and regaining that enthusiasm for what you do and the success you have achieved thus far. Time management may temporarily make you feel more efficient, but it traps you in a stressful cycle of scrambling to get more done every day that drains you of your enthusiasm for what you are doing and achieving. Energy management empowers you to think about how you use your time to be productive without feeling absolutely overwhelmed and drained.

Imagine the Difference

Imagine that you have a one-hour meeting scheduled for 9:00 a.m. Imagine if that meeting was with someone who was very negative and demanding. Imagine that this person is dismissive of your ideas or distracted with something else and barely paying attention to you. Imagine them not listening to what you are telling them and not answering any of the questions you need them to answer in order for you to finish a particular assignment. Imagine that just as the 60 minutes were wrapping up the person asks you to meet with them again at the end of the day so that you can review your progress on this assignment. Think about how you would feel after those 60 minutes. How much energy would you have as you move onto the next thing on your schedule? How much would you be looking forward to that meeting later in the day?

Now, imagine that same one-hour meeting scheduled for 9:00 a.m. with someone who is positive and engaged. Imagine that this person is completely focused on the conversation with you and listens thoughtfully as you update them on the assignment.



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Imagine that they answer your questions and talk you through a few different ways to tackle the next steps. As the meeting is wrapping up, the person asks you to meet with them later in the day to review your progress. How would you feel after these 60 minutes? How much energy would you have to move onto the next thing in your schedule? How much would you be looking forward to that meeting later in the day?

From a time-management lens, both of these scenarios would be weighed equally because they are both expenditures of 60 minutes in your day. However, these scenarios would be viewed very differently from an energy management lens in regard to where the meeting should fit within your day, what you should do immediately before and after the meeting, and how you should approach that meeting later in the day.

The first scenario is an energy-draining meeting. If you leave an energy-draining meeting and proceed with the rest of your day without acknowledging and neutralizing the energy drain, you will continue to feel depleted throughout the day. You will probably try and dedicate some time to making progress on the assignment, but you will either procrastinate working on it or work on it in a frustrated state, which will drain more of your energy. You will also probably dread the follow-up meeting all day and silently brainstorm multiple ways of getting out of that meeting or you may daydream about what you can do after the meeting to put this whole messy day behind you. Energy drains deplete your energy while they are happening, but they also continue to drain your energy when you think about them or anything related to them that you need to do in the future.

The second scenario is an energy-gaining meeting. When you leave an energy-gaining meeting you are buzzing with energy to move through your day. You are excited about working on this assignment and looking forward to the meeting later in the day. You make progress on this assignment and you have energy to work on other things during the day as well.

In these two scenarios the exact same number of hours worked would leave someone feeling vastly different at the end of the day. Time management can help you schedule efficiently, but it cannot help you work effectively or feel good while being productive.

Energy-Management Tips

1. Start assessing your energy as a measurable thing like time; but unlike time, it's a replenishable thing. Think of your energy level as falling somewhere on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 means that you are completely depleted and are incapable of anything other than taking a nap and 10 being you are at your most enthusiastic. Of course, we are not always going to be at a 9 or 10, but pay close attention to anything that consistently falls below a 4 or 5.
2. Assign values to different things you do over the course of your day. What drains your energy? What gives you an energy boost?
3. Look at what's on your calendar and assign values to everything that's calendared. Pay close attention to the days

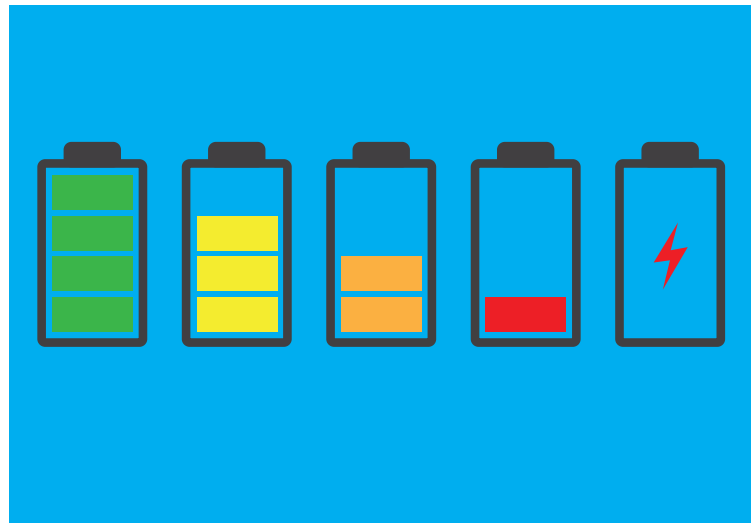
that have a lot of things that are valued at 5 or below.

4. Try and balance your days by shifting anything that can be shifted so that you can follow energy draining activities with energy-gaining activities. Yes, it would be great if you only had energy-gaining activities on your calendar, but realistically, all of our lives have energy drains that we have to manage. That said, if something is an extreme energy drain, ask yourself if there is a way to get it off your calendar.
5. Get lots of rest the night before an energy-draining day. Take care of yourself physically and emotionally so that you will have the resources you need to get through that energy draining day with grace.
6. Integrate energy management into your career-development strategies. Even if something looks like a successful step forward, it won't feel like success if it adds energy-draining activities to your life.
7. If you are a parent or have caretaking responsibilities for people, consider energy management throughout all aspects of your life. Energy management is the foundation of work-life balance no matter how you define work-life balance.
8. Think about energy management from the perspective of how much energy you ask of, or give,

to others. In the scenarios we explored at the beginning of this article, energy management helps you neutralize the drain you would feel from the first scenario. And, energy management also helps us recognize if we are the person draining someone's energy without realizing it. When we do things like being distracted in meetings where people need our attention or complain incessantly instead of working to solve a problem, we become the energy drains that others need to neutralize. As you are assessing your own energy drains and gains ask yourself how you can show up for other people as an energy gain.

Living through this pandemic and transitioning back into public work and community spaces has been an undeniable energy drainer. We are learning that it's been more draining for women, people of color, and people from other underrepresented communities. When your energy has been depleted in all the ways it has been depleted for some people over the past two years, it can be particularly difficult to start managing your energy from that place of deficit, but, energy management is the only way to recover from the energy deficit.

Stop managing your time and start managing your energy. You will be more productive, but more importantly, you will feel better as your productivity increases.. 📌



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A leading researcher, author, and advisor in the fields of leadership and inclusion, Dr. Arin Reeves studied business at DePaul University's College of Commerce, attended law school at University of Southern California and received her Ph.D. in Sociology from Northwestern University.

Dr. Reeves is a best-selling author of three books – “The Next IQ”, “One Size Never Fits All”, and “Smarter Than A Lie” – and she is the Managing Director of the research and advisory firm, Nextions, a new way of doing leadership and inclusion. Dr. Reeves has designed and led several comprehensive

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Before Nextions, Dr. Reeves practiced law for several years and served as an Adjunct Professor at Northwestern University where she taught classes on law and society.