

## Member's Quarterly

Fall 2022 Edition

### Ask The Expert

## What's Missing in High Performance?

*Don't overlook recovery*



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**Q** | We've noticed since the pandemic that our top performers are experiencing the side effects of high stress and burnout. How would you suggest dealing with this issue?

**A** | ***Leaders should consider providing skills training that enables their people to recover from the side effects of stress while they work.***

Yes, you read that right, work and recovery can exist together.

Keeping work and recovery separate is like working out without resting between sets or a chef who doesn't sharpen their knife. Willpower and skill will only take you so far before pushing the grind becomes hazardous to health and performance.

The reality is that stress is inevitable, whether it comes from work or personal reasons. Stress therein is eventually going to impact the workplace in a significant way (i.e., absenteeism, presenteeism, low engagement, the bottom line, etc.).

Why not shore up the workforce with a higher standard of preparedness for recovering from stress as if it was just as important as other work-related skills?

To do so, it is important to understand what is going on in the nervous system during periods of high performance and waves of high stress. When one recognizes the physiological need for balancing exertion (work) with periods of recovery, it is easier to see how periods of recovery can be leveraged to boost well-being and performance over the course of an average workday.

Contrary to traditional work ethics, where work is solely for work and time off is for recovery, the human nervous system is designed for continual rises and falls in cognition, energy levels, the need for recovery and much more. Examples of this can be seen by anyone who knows what it is like to hit that afternoon 'wall' or by recognizing the hours of the workday where they feel most productive.

In the short-term, rises and falls in cognition and energy levels are normal, however when under high pressure work and life stress, pushing through the daily grind begins to have bigger consequences:

- Fatigue or irritability become the norm.
- Unresolved stress disrupts cognitive abilities and decision making.
- Immune systems start breaking down.
- Muscle tension and risk for injury rises.
- Mental health issues start to surface.
- Work and life boundaries begin to blur.

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High performance often begets high stress. Therefore, if high performers want to stay at the top of their game, balancing high stress with skill in high-efficiency recovery is all but necessary for long-term success.

High efficiency recovery might look like:

- Taking micro-breaks to collect thoughts and contemplate priorities.
- Utilizing the power of the breath to release stress or cultivate focus.
- Short bouts of movement to release muscle tension or boost energy.
- Changing postures more frequently to stay limber while avoiding repetitive strain.
- A daily routine built to optimize sleep quality.

Some of these practices may seem too simple to be effective. The truth is that they are simple behaviours that trigger sophisticated responses in the nervous system. There is definitely some science to backing these strategies. Feel free to contact me should you wish to receive additional information in this area.

All in all, building skills in high-efficiency recovery is much like building any other skill—they are only as good as the habit they become. Repetition and proficiency are key, so beyond the benefits that can be found in one dose of recovery is a mountain of benefits that come from training and practicing the skill over time.

“There is virtue in work and there is virtue in rest. Use both and overlook neither.” – Alan Cohen

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