

# Resource 6: Amplifying Contribution

## ONLINE RESOURCES

If the primary reason you go to work each day is to get paid, you are essentially being bribed. There is not a great way to sugarcoat this essential fact. If I pay you to do something and you do it only because I am paying you, that is not a partnership or relationship. There is simply no reason why anyone should have to work indefinitely for a paycheck alone. Sure, there will be times when this is necessary in almost all of our lives, but you have to push beyond the paycheck.

When I was in my twenties and in the early stages of my career, my wife's grandfather explained to me the old maxim about how "you work to live and no one lives to work." After he passed away a few years ago, I asked my wife for some more background about her grandfather's career and perspective.

She told me he worked as a civilian engineer on a military base all of his life. On many mornings, he would have to stop on his way into work to vomit; he dreaded going to work each day so much that he felt nauseated by the prospect. But like most people in his generation who lived through the Great Depression, he kept doing it every day to take care of and provide for the family he loved.

My learning from this is that while "working to live" may have sufficed in the early evolution of the relationship between people and organizations, it is not a sustainable way to think about things. You deserve a job that serves your life. You deserve a life that serves a job, career, calling, or higher purpose. None of these things need to be incompatible with one another.

### **Work to Live Doesn't Work**

The problem, to a large degree, is our own wildly low expectations. We go to school and gain the skills to find jobs in the most lucrative areas, even if they don't fit who we are or what we care about. We enter these jobs with the expectation of a paycheck and not much more. It is usually only after a few years (or sometimes decades) that we start to think about whether our efforts and lives are contributing to something larger.

Instead of asking questions about how our efforts serve the world in retirement, we need to start doing this as early as possible. Life and work are as closely intertwined as a couple in a marriage or partnership. If one side feels like they are not getting enough out of the partnership, they need to remedy the situation as soon as possible, or find a new one.

You deserve a job that serves your life. The key is to make a little progress every day as you continue to hone how your efforts can serve an organization and the world.

## **A New Relationship With Work Starts With You**

I am increasingly convinced that the vast majority of human talent is flat-out wasted. Our talents may be used on occasion, but most of us are not reaching anywhere near 100% of our potential on any given day. We are using closer to 20%, in my estimation.

Fortunately, many of us know what we want from our careers and lives—even if people around us are not asking this question as often as they should. This is why making work and life more sustainable starts with you as an individual. For many years, I was hopeful that big organizations and companies could be the primary catalyst for a more sustainable relationship between people and organizations. But I have given up on that notion. A sustainable work and life has to start with individuals, and then it can become a part of an organization's culture. Each of us needs to take ownership for examining whether being a part of a group or organization is also good for our health, wellbeing, family, finances, and relationships.

As we move toward this new world of work, there are sure to be great benefits but also new challenges. Fortunately, more of this equation is within your control than ever before.

## **Contribution Amplifiers**

There are several specific things you can do to make your job far more than a paycheck, starting today. The Contribution Amplifier test is one starting point to determine if your work is making an optimal contribution to your life. This brief assessment can be used as a personal measure to see how you are doing in each of the following five areas:

- **Experiences**
- **Freedom**
- **Finances**
- **Health**
- **Relationships**

This metric can also be used for ongoing tracking, for comparison with other groups, or for team discussion. You will notice that many of the conditions you are asked about may not be directly within your control. However, almost all of these questions are rooted in conditions that you, your manager, or leaders in your organization will be able to take action on. You should be able to see improvement in all five of these areas over time.

I have included a full list of the questions from the Contribution Amplifiers test at the end of each section that follows. I encourage you to use these questions for discussion. They may also be useful as diagnostic lists of things for organizations to work on over time if they want to fully engage their employees and, more so, invest in their total wellbeing. Because these five areas are essentially a list of optimal conditions for people to do their best work, the chapters that follow have a series of specific things you can do to see improvement in your work and life over time.

## **Experiences**

Experiences, both good and bad, can have a profound influence on our awareness about how our efforts can best serve the world. Work experiences can be a great way to home in on what you do best by process of elimination. When you have a natural knack for and enjoy a specific task or activity, make sure to take note. The key is to figure out how you can spend more time in these areas that resonate most.

Experiences are not simply about mandated education, certification, or qualifications. These things matter for many jobs and help to ensure quality, but the experience of work is also much broader. When you find work that enables you to take time for exploring, it simply exposes you to more experiences and paves the way for growth. Look for work opportunities that help you value time with friends, family, and even vacations. Try to find teams or roles that will allow you to dedicate even a small portion of your time to purely creative projects not related to your current daily routine.

### **Experience Rule #1: Start with intrinsic motivators.**

The most meaningful experiences and work are driven by things that motivate you internally. Researchers call these “intrinsic motivations” and differentiate them from extrinsic ones, which are the things you do for external rewards like money. To summarize a great deal of research on this topic, scientists are finding that intrinsic motivators are far more powerful because they stem from the meaningfulness you derive from your work. These are the things you would yearn to do even if there were no reward or compensation.

One study suggests that extrinsic motivators may cause problems even when paired with intrinsic motivators. This led the researchers to question the very common practice of trying to lure in military recruits with messages about paying for college instead of service to country. It also caused them to question things like motivating teachers with bonuses for higher achievement scores.

We need to think very differently about the fundamental experience of work. There are so many things we do as individuals and organizations that narrow work down to a bribe or financial transaction. It appears that every time we focus on these extrinsic rewards alone, it may demean our productivity and enjoyment of our work.

Consider the implications this holds for the work you do each day. Even if you think traditional incentives help motivate you, which they may initially, keep in mind that this is unlikely to be sustainable. That's why it is essential to find small ways to keep your best internal motivators at the forefront each day. Ideally you can literally see and interact with the people you serve. If not, find novel ways to bring their faces and stories into your work so it is a more fulfilling experience.

## **Experience Rule #2: Make meaning in a moment.**

Meaning is not some abstract concept that descends from above on a sunny afternoon. It is something you create with deliberate effort. Of all the small things you do in a day, mapping your work to a broader mission may be the most important. Until you are able to match your work with the meaning it creates at least once a day, it's likely you will be going through workdays on autopilot.

Creating meaningful experiences at work may sound like a big topic to tackle, but it can be simple, easy, and relevant to the people you serve. At their core, most jobs are created because they deliver a benefit to another person or society overall. Sometimes connecting all those dots to the end client or consumer who receives this benefit takes some time and work, but in most cases you should be able to get there.

Once you have an image in mind of the people or purpose you serve, think about something you could do to deliver a better product or service to these people. If you serve customers inside your organization, for example, consider how your interactions with them cascade and influence everything from product quality to customer satisfaction. See if you can find a time every day to see and acknowledge the positive influence you're having on at least one other person through your work. It may sound small, but connecting these brief moments with a bigger purpose counts.

### **Experience Rule #3: Use non-work experiences to improve work outcomes.**

Top employers realize that you do better work on the job when your organization encourages you to be involved in various activities outside of work. While this may sound counterintuitive, given that we all have a limited number of hours in a day, companies that work hard to get employees involved in community causes have more enthusiastic and loyal teams. And one study found that employees who are encouraged to engage in creative activities that have nothing to do with work, such as creative writing or other artistic projects, have better subsequent performance on the job.

Even if your organization does little to encourage you to participate in experiences like this beyond work, this is something you can take on yourself. I have yet to see an organization that will actively discourage teams from experiences that also benefit their community. It may be as simple as starting a conversation with a few colleagues and rallying people around an idea for something that could provide future motivation and a meaningful experience.

Start by looking for simple common interests, from athletics to the arts and your community. If you enjoy walking and getting outdoors, find a group for daily or weekly walk-and-talk sessions. If you are passionate about helping children in need, for example, look for colleagues who share this interest and figure out how you can build this contribution into your routine. Keep in mind that serving your community or strengthening the organizational network is in the organization's best interest.

### **Experience Rule #4: Force yourself to take time off every year.**

I continue to be mystified by the number of people who brag about never taking vacations or time away from work. It is similar to the phenomena of people not wanting to admit that they need more sleep. This is a particularly acute problem in the United States, where very few people even use the amount of vacation days allotted them because doing so is deeply stigmatized.

Here's the problem with never taking time off: almost all of us need downtime to recharge physically and renew our thoughts and creativity. Contrary to what conventional wisdom says, your employer needs you to take this time in order to refresh your energy and ideas. You and your family can also benefit greatly from these experiences and dedicated time. And your colleagues will likely thank you as well, given that most people want and need to take this time off but avoid it because of implicit social pressures.

## Experience Rule #5: Literally disconnect.

It is getting increasingly difficult to disconnect by the year. With each season comes a new gadget that makes it even easier for anyone to reach you anywhere, anytime they want. This trend, which is unlikely to reverse itself, makes it even harder for everyone to have dedicated time to think, learn, relax, and share meaningful moments with friends or family.

Because technology will continue to get better at connecting us, we need to get better at purposefully disconnecting. If you think for a moment about all of the things that ding, vibrate, pop up on your lock screen, or find another way to vie for your attention, you will be amazed that you are still able to get anything done in a day. Ask yourself if all of those notifications deserve your immediate attention. I'm guessing that only a small portion really need to get to you right away.

At the very least, see if you can disable almost everything other than calls or urgent messages from loved ones on your devices when you are on vacation or taking a break from work. If you make the choice to spend time relaxing, determine how you can minimize the things that are likely create stress and distract from your downtime. Even aside from work-related messages, do your best to focus on the social feed coming from friends or family in your physical area instead of the one on your phone. Also consider disconnecting for periods throughout the day in order to do more productive work. The single easiest thing to do is respond to everything flying through your office or inbox. But that can be a trap, as it is increasingly easy to go through an entire day without focusing on anything more substantive.

These digital distractions are so tempting that to get focused on writing *Life's Great Question*, I resorted to replacing my smart phone with an old \$15 flip-phone. Creating that disconnection—removing the internet from my environment—made it so much easier to avoid the unnecessary distractions of checking email, scrolling through social feeds, and reading the latest political headlines. In hindsight, I see how little you miss when you tune out for even half a day.

I know some of this is dependent on your job, but most email does not necessitate an answer within 15 seconds (which is the national median). What's more, when you apologize for taking a day or two to respond to an email, it sets an unhealthy expectation for the future. Nor will a Facebook post go bad if it doesn't receive your like within the first two minutes. We need to condition ourselves to avoid many of these Pavlovian bells in order to focus on more substantive work and our most important relationships.

## CONTRIBUTION AMPLIFIERS: EXPERIENCES

1. Do you have almost all of the expertise, qualifications, certifications, and background you need in your current role?
2. Does the work you do allow you to gain valuable experience that you can build on and use more of in the future?
3. Does your work enable you to take time off without feeling the need to be connected while doing so?

# Freedom

The time you have in a single day is perhaps the most limited resource of all.

I was particularly struck by this thought while watching a recent interview with Warren Buffett and Bill Gates. When the topic turned to how two of the world's richest people manage their calendars, Gates asked Buffett to share the old-fashioned calendar he carries around with him in his pocket. As Gates thumbed through the calendar, he noted that an upcoming week had just three entries in total.

What follows is the rest of the conversation:

*Interviewer: So it taught you what, not to crowd yourself too much and give yourself time to read and think and . . .*

*GATES: Right. You control your time. And that sitting and thinking may be a much higher priority than a normal CEO, where's there all these demands and you feel like you need to go and see all these people. It's not a proxy of your seriousness that you fill every minute in your schedule.*

*BUFFETT: And people will want your time. I mean, it's the only thing you can't buy. I mean, I can buy anything I want, basically, but I can't buy time.*

*Interviewer: And so to have time is the most precious thing you can have.*

*BUFFETT: I better be careful with it. There is no way I will be able to buy more time.*

This is why having some form of input or control about the times when you work is important. Being able to structure and prioritize your day, even when you are working normal or fixed hours, can help to make things more enjoyable and efficient.

Even when you are not physically at a dedicated workspace, being able to determine how connected or disconnected you are through electronic communication matters a great deal. Ideally you should have as much input as possible about how you do your work, where you do your work, and when you work. Over time, try to structure your schedule to optimize the effort that goes into your work, relationships, and wellbeing. Ensure that you have enough time for both the people and projects that matter.



## **Freedom Rule #1: Being busy is not a sign of strength.**

A few years ago, I started forcing myself to pause before routinely telling someone how busy I was and instead say, as the reason I can't do something, "I am doing a poor job managing my time." Like many of my friends and colleagues, I had spent much of my career wearing busyness as a badge of honor. I did not realize the degree to which I had been confusing responding to things and seeming busy with making meaningful progress. This is a pattern I have seen and lived in workplaces time and time again.

It is natural to feel the need to appear busy in the context of an organization that pays you to be in a seat for a fixed number of hours. The underlying fear here is that if you appear to have everything under control—if it seems like things would not fall apart without you—your job may not be necessary. Yet in the modern workplace, the people we should be celebrating most are the ones who are able to do more in less time.

While I understand the reasons why busyness has become synonymous with importance, the result of trying to be busy all the time is a mismanaged life. If you spend your workdays in nonstop reaction mode, bouncing from one thing to another, it's unlikely you are focusing much time at all on more substantive pursuits. What's more, your attention and time are more likely to be fragmented at home if your days are that chaotic. So challenge yourself to be as efficient and effective as possible without falling into the trap of busyness.

## **Freedom Rule #2: Use attention to amplify time.**

When you need to do your best work, try focusing your attention first. The average person spends more than eight hours on a screen, receives more than 63,000 words of new information, and unlocks their smart phone more than 100 times each day. On average, fewer than three minutes go by before people at work are interrupted by a text or email message. And as I mentioned earlier on, most emails are responded to in about 15 seconds.

The problem with all these things that fragment our time into much smaller chunks is that the average worker loses more than a quarter of each day to distraction alone. Just one in five reported even having the ability to focus on one thing at a time during a typical workday. One detailed study found that even when people do appear to be paying attention, their mind is wandering about half of the time.

This would all be fine if mind-wandering was a productive and pleasant experience. But it is not. This distractedness makes people less happy, according to the most comprehensive study on the topic. What essentially happens is that trying to do everything leads you to do almost nothing of substance in a given day. This distraction subsequently decreases performance levels in terms of the quality of the products you create at work. In general, the human brain works better when it is highly focused.

Yet saying no to distractions is far easier said than done. I can rarely focus on anything for chunks of three or four hours; when I do, however, it results in some of the most peaceful and productive workdays of my life. And nothing ever falls apart in my absence (it may even seem to get better).

Start by eliminating any small distractions you can identify that detract from your daily focus. Then identify the things you do want to focus on that give you energy. Over time, build a list of things you plan to do less of for the sake of investing even more time and attention in the things that will matter most over time.

### **Freedom Rule #3: Work in waves.**

Across all of the studies I have read on human performance, the top performers in almost any occupation have one thing in common: they work in bursts, alternating between high performance and intentional periods of rest. In most of these cases, people who are very serious about being great at what they do have deliberate and methodical ways to manage the time and energy they invest within a given day. From athletes to musicians to software developers, they do intense and focused work and then take a complete break, often every hour.

Both the human brain and body need a little boost to recharge at set points throughout the day. One study of office workers found that the top 10% of performers treat periods of working like a sprint. They go intensely for 52 minutes on average and then take a complete break for 17 minutes on average, during which they usually go for a walk or tune out instead of engaging in online distractions.

I know from my work that my mind and body slow down if I don't at least stand up and stretch from a seated position every 20 or 30 minutes. When I am writing and walking (I use a treadmill desk almost all the time) I still need a brain break at least once per hour. Your ability to take these breaks and your need is likely to vary quite a bit based on the type of work do you do. What's important is that you put together a plan that creates discipline for breaking things up a bit. Doing so will be good for your creativity, productivity, health, and wellbeing.

### **Freedom Rule #4: Pick time over money.**

Showing up at your daughter's soccer game. Making it to an important dinner for your spouse. Attending an event honoring a colleague. These are the investments of time that pay off for many years down the road.

Consider this when looking for new homes, schools, and jobs. Let's say a new job offers to pay you 30% more, but it requires 50% more time on the road. If you have a family at home, this may not be worth the trade-off.

It is hard for your family to thank you for making more money and providing more if you are not home very much. Look for a career that allows you to decide when it is more important to be with family in relation to what you need to be doing on the job. A career that provides more time and flexibility should also be good for your sleep and exercise schedule.

When asked, most people will tell you they prioritize time with family over work. Even the highest achievers I know will swear that time with their kids is a priority—even in comparison to a job they love. Yet when it's getting closer to time to put kids to bed and their spouse is calling from home, they are tempted to put in a few extra hours at work instead.

If you find yourself continually putting an extra hour of work ahead of an extra hour with family, start aligning what you say with what you do.

## **CONTRIBUTION AMPLIFIERS: FREEDOM**

1. Can you work remotely or from home as often as you think is best?
2. When you are working, do you get to prioritize your own time?
3. Do you have a great deal of control over when you work and the hours you are online and off-line?

## Finances

While money can often lead us in the wrong direction, having financial security is critically important. When we are worried about being able to pay bills or afford basic needs, it creates stress and uncertainty that can interfere with our ability to do almost anything else. The work you do should give you more financial security. It is this security, this confidence in your financial future, which can keep worries about money from getting in the way.

In addition to providing for basic needs, financial security from the work you do can improve the wellbeing of your family and social networks. Being able to spend on experiences in particular—such as outings, vacations, sporting events, or going out to dinner with friends—is one of the primary benefits of income earned from your work. What’s most important is that you save enough to pay for basics, spend more on experiences than material stuff, and eventually have enough to give back to people and organizations you care about deeply.

Money makes life a little easier. It does not alleviate all of life’s problems. Wealthy people still get stuck in traffic, have messy divorces, and often live stressful lives. This is why focusing on wealth in itself is a lousy goal. Once you have saved enough money for yourself, hoarding it does a disservice to society.

Money is intended to circulate. You make money for what you produce, put much of that money back into society through spending, and give money to causes you believe in so it can do even more. If you fail to keep money circulating, it will rot away in a bank account until you die. Remember, they do not carve your net worth into your headstone. They add words like “father” or “mentor” . . . not “rich guy.”

What you earn should always be put into the context of how you save, spend, and give. Save enough money. Spend it wisely. Give it generously. This will keep money circulating and create a positive cycle.

Financial security is far more important than raw wealth. The psychological sense of safety provided by money that is secure and managed well has the greatest effect on improving wellbeing. Your savings allow you to buy what you need and do what you want. This often puts food on the table and a roof over your head. It allows you to provide more safety, comfort, and security for your family.

Once you can afford a place to live and enough food to eat, money continues to serve a valuable purpose by alleviating stress. The more you are able to save, the less you need to worry about making future rent or mortgage payments. A little extra savings helps you afford things like insurance, healthcare, daycare, a car that is less likely to break down, or anything else that makes your days a little bit easier.

Eventually, saving enough money will allow you to do what you want to do, so you're not dependent on a paycheck from someone who wants you to do what they want you to do. Getting to this point can take decades, however—and it will take even longer if you don't get serious about saving and investing well today.

## **Financial Rule #1: Spend on people vs. stuff.**

Invest in relationships over material goods. When you are considering the purchase of an item, especially a relatively high-ticket one, ask yourself how it will benefit another person or your relationships. If you can clearly see how the money you are about to spend will increase the wellbeing of people around you, it is a sound investment.

Recent experiments show that people who feel better about their relationships and have a sense of being loved and accepted place significantly less value on monetary possessions. Researchers have found that strong relationships provide us with a sense of security and comfort, so we place far less emphasis on needing material goods to overcompensate for lack of quality relationships. The next time you're debating a major purchase in particular, make sure to ask yourself how it will benefit the people you care about. If it won't, think again and find a better way to spend your hard-earned money.

Behavioral economist Dr. Michael Norton has spent much of his career studying the relationship between our finances and our overall wellbeing. His most important finding? "If you think money can't buy happiness, you're not spending it right." One of the most common traps Norton has studied occurs when people think they can buy their way out of a rut in life by spending on themselves. Fortunately, Michael Norton's research points to the right ways to spend.

Consider this simple example from Norton's research: If you just go out right now and buy a coffee for yourself, this act does nothing for your own wellbeing. But if you buy a coffee for someone else, it boosts your wellbeing and the other person's happiness in parallel. His takeaway after conducting this research is that we are leaving a huge amount of happiness on the table by primarily spending on ourselves. If you want to maximize the use of your money and your overall happiness at the same time, start thinking about how you can spend it on other people.

## **Financial Rule #2: Put experiences first.**

Think back on some of the most memorable vacations, trips, events, and experiences throughout your life. As you reflect on these moments, you may notice how much joy reflecting on time spent with people who matter brings (even years later). The best experiences create memories and wellbeing that last for years and decades to come.

This may be the single most important discovery about how to use money effectively: there is no better use of your financial resources than spending them on meaningful experiences with other people. Consider, for a moment, everything that occurs when you are planning a trip with loved ones. If you plan a vacation well in advance, you get several months of anticipation. You look forward to this experience before it even occurs. Then you have the actual time away with friends or loved ones, as well as the value from the trip itself. This is followed by (ideally) many years of fond memories after the vacation.

Compare all of this goodwill with the cheap thrill of buying a new shirt for yourself, or even a new car. These may give you a small spike in happiness immediately after the purchase, but your excitement over the purchase of a new car fades quickly when you're sitting in traffic the following Monday morning. Even small experiences, such as buying dinner for your spouse or taking your kids to a sporting event, are a much better use of your financial resources.

## **Financial Rule #3: Buy time.**

It turns out another thing you can buy with money is time. Emerging evidence suggests that people who spend money on time-saving services report having greater wellbeing. When researchers assign people to randomly spend \$40 on a time-saving purchase during the weekend, it increases their happiness more than spending that same \$40 on a material purchase. And as this study's lead author, Elizabeth Dunn, puts it, "The benefits of buying time aren't just for wealthy people." These effects hold true across the income spectrum.

Yet even people with the most disposable income often do a poor job of using their financial resources in order to maximize wellbeing. When researchers surveyed 850 millionaires, nearly half the group reported that they spend no money at all on outsourcing tasks they dislike. As Dunn summarized, "Lots of research has shown that people benefit from buying their way into pleasant experiences, but our research suggests people should also consider buying their way out of unpleasant experiences."

## **Financial Rule #4: Give to grow.**

Giving money away makes you happier than spending it on yourself. Even if you do not account for the happiness you create (for the person receiving the gift), the act of giving does more for you than buying for yourself.

The good news is that you don't need a lot of money to produce happiness by giving. All it takes is a little effort. Simply doing something for another person buys you and them a bit of happiness. It may be listening to a friend intently for a half hour. A few encouraging words to a colleague. Reading a book to a child. These gifts of your time and attention may have even more value than material goods.

This is the central learning from a large body of research that has emerged in the last decade: Giving creates happiness. Doing something for another person creates more happiness for you and them, and it sets a chain of events in motion that increases the wellbeing of your entire network. There is no better use of your next thought, act, or deed than to direct it toward another human being. This will always have a better return than focusing inward.

Human beings are not born to be selfish. You were born to share, give, and enjoy doing so. While some conventional wisdom would suggest that, even as children, we are predisposed to keep things to ourselves, new research suggests that this idea is patently false.

Even two-year-old children increase their own happiness by sharing what they receive instead of keeping it to themselves. When a team of researchers studied this phenomenon with a group of toddlers, using small edible treats, they made a few surprising discoveries. Not only do children enjoy giving more than receiving, they also are happier giving away their own treats (which, presumably, have more emotional value).

The enjoyment of giving is apparently woven into our nature as human beings. When you help another person, it gives them a little emotional boost. Then you get one as well. This sets chain reactions in motion—which helps us to grow as a society. So the next time you need a little push to do something kind for another person, take a cue from these two-year-olds who do it by nature.

## **CONTRIBUTION AMPLIFIERS: FINANCES**

1. As a result of your work, are you able to afford basic needs and also spend on things you want?
2. Does the work you do give you more confidence in your financial future?
3. Do you have greater financial security because of the work you do today?



## Health

Despite our historically low expectations, people can and should be healthier because of the work they do each day. When someone leaves work with far less physical energy, this creates a downward spiral where things get progressively worse and are not sustainable. In contrast, if you have a day where you are able to leave work with at least as much physical energy as you had earlier in the day, this creates an upward cycle that energizes your interactions with friends and family members as well.

Improving levels of physical energy you derive from work starts with making a conscious effort to eat better, move more, and get more sleep. Make sure you have the opportunity to eat healthier foods throughout the day, ones that sustain your energy through the afternoon and evening. Find ways to work while you are moving around, even if that means pacing in small circles in a meeting or while you're on a phone call. Arrange your schedule so you can get at least seven to eight hours of sound sleep each night. If you start to lead by example in putting your own physical health first, others will follow your lead and everyone will establish a more sustainable routine.

### **Health Rule #1: Put your health first, for the sake of others.**

Throughout my research, I have noticed that some of the most caring and well intended people also tend to have the worst physical health. From corporate leaders to nurses and teachers, they have spent decades putting everyone else's needs in front of their own. Yet when I've asked those same people what they think it takes to be their very best at work for the sake of serving others, they are usually quick to make the connection they could do more by investing additional time on the front end in their own health and wellbeing.

If you want to have a sustainable influence on your family, friends, and work, you simply need to put your health and daily energy ahead of all else. On days when you are fatigued from working nonstop, getting by on snack food, and being almost completely inactive, you have almost no chance of being as effective for the people you care about and serve. Fortunately, making changes to optimize energy in your daily routine does not require some overwhelming plan. It can start with your next choice.

Of all the strategies I've explored for better health over my lifetime, one has led to the most practical change by far, and it's this: instead of worrying about how my daily choices connect with lowering all of my risks of cancers and heart disease, I look for healthy choices that can boost my energy levels in subsequent hours. When I have an important day ahead with meetings or presentations, I budget even more time for sleep to make sure I can get a solid eight hours (even if it takes me ten hours in bed to get there when traveling).

I also tried to budget time for some (even brief) activity, like a walk or jog, first thing in the morning. My motivation is much higher to do this knowing that I'll be in a better mood and my thinking will be sharper throughout the morning and afternoon as a result of this activity. I base decisions about what to eat throughout the day on what foods will help me sustain my energy later on. When I am able to avoid temptation and pull this off, it leads to a far better night's sleep and a head start on the next day.

The challenge is that when things go wrong with your eating, moving, or sleeping, just one of these areas can throw everything else off for the day. So try to think about the way these three essential elements of health influence one another. When you need to be your very best for the people you care about most, make sure the way you eat, move, and sleep supports your efforts.

## **Health Rule #2: Make every meal or snack a net gain.**

Not all calories are created equal. Every time you have a snack, meal, or drink, you make a small but consequential choice. If you choose a healthier salad over fried chicken and French fries, that is a net gain that affords you more energy later in the day. If you opt for sugary soda instead of water later in the day, that is a net loss.

Eating well is a lot easier when you start with the right foods. I know there is a lot of conflicting advice on various diets and fads, but there's actually remarkable consensus on some of the most basic elements of healthy eating. Eating right does not need to be overly complicated; you just have to boil it down to the basics.

It's probably a good idea to avoid fried foods as much as possible. Eat fewer refined carbohydrates. Eliminate almost all added sugar. Instead, build meals around vegetables. Eat whole fruits or berries instead of sweets for dessert. Drink more water, tea, and coffee instead of sodas or any sweetened drinks.

## **Health Rule #3: Rearrange your environment to avoid temptation**

While this may sound laughably obvious, we simply eat more of what we see more. Human beings have become remarkably adept at falling into default choices. Especially when it comes to dietary habits, we follow the path of least resistance. While this may sound like a flaw, it can also be exploited to improve the choices you make throughout the day.

This actually starts with the things you purchase at the store. While you are at the grocery store, see if you can avoid many of the center aisles loaded with packaged foods and refined carbohydrates. (I know personally that if I even walk through these aisles, bags of peanut butter-filled pretzels ends up jumping into my cart.) Instead, spend most of your time at the store on the outskirts filled with produce and healthier items.

Next, organize the foods you have out in your home, from your kitchen to your pantry to your counter, so better choices are more visible and accessible. Hide poor choices in places where you're less likely to see them, or just throw them out. Make sure your office or work environment has healthy options that are easy to grab when you need them. I have also learned to always carry things like almonds or carrots with me when I travel to avoid making lousy last-minute decisions. The key is to build better defaults into your environment.

## **Health Rule #4: Do anything to avoid sitting all day.**

I cannot think of anything more damaging to human physiology and daily energy than sitting. As I wrote in *Eat Move Sleep*, I think sitting is the most underrated health threat of this generation. Even 30 to 60 minutes of exercise a day is nowhere near as important for health as reducing purely sedentary time, in my opinion. One recent study estimates that every two hours of sitting cancels out the benefits of 20 minutes of exercise.

Based on my research, sitting will be a bigger public health challenge than smoking over the next century. The problem is that most people don't do the math about how little time they spend moving around in a typical hour. As a result, most people are working at nowhere near their capacity in terms of energy levels and productivity, because their bodies are essentially going to sleep in chairs throughout the day.

Fortunately, it also turns out that building even brief bursts of standing, walking, stretching, or other activity into each hour has many benefits. In addition to reversing the physiological changes caused by prolonged sitting and boosting physical energy, getting up every 20 to 30 minutes is also good for your thinking, creativity, memory, and cognitive abilities. Anytime I am speaking with a group now, I always force myself and others to stand up every 20 minutes, mostly because I am almost positive no one will be able to pay attention or recall anything if I don't employ this tactic.

Early research on this topic suggests that building five-minute walking breaks into each hour can produce big gains. When workers were reminded to take five-minute walks every hour, they reported greater happiness, less fatigue, fewer cravings for food, and greater levels of overall energy and vigor. As one of the study's authors, Dr. Jack Groppel, put it, their results suggest that "even a little bit of activity, spread throughout the day, is a practical, easy way to improve well-being."

As this study suggests, most people need to focus on reducing seated time first and then worry about vigorous exercise. Once you have minimized sitting, getting 20 or 30 minutes of more strenuous exercise where you get your heart rate up can also boost energy levels and your mood for almost an entire day. It's pretty clear from all this research that the more active you are, the better you think.

The basic act of putting one foot in front of another boosts your mood—even when you don't expect it to. A fascinating study from Iowa State University researchers went so far as to control for the issues normally associated with exercise research, such as social contact, fresh air, and expectations of exercise being beneficial. What they found, through a series of carefully designed experiments, suggests that movement does not just create but may embody the state of positive emotions. As the researchers who conducted this work summarized, "People may underestimate the extent to which just getting off their couch and going for a walk will benefit their mood as they focus on momentarily perceived barriers rather than eventual mood benefits."

## **Health Rule #5: Make good sleep a status symbol.**

The best performers and the people who produce the highest-quality products are the ones who sleep the most. Yet we have had this almost perfectly backwards in terms of the way we perceive people's value in organizations for decades. I grew up in a hard-working midwestern culture where the last thing I would've ever done was admit I needed a full eight hours in order to be effective.

Yet a great deal of research that has emerged over the last decade has made it clear: cutting an hour of sleep is not equal to an extra hour of achievement or enjoyment. It is about the last thing you should do when you have a difficult assignment. Yet sleep is often the first thing people sacrifice.

As a result, we have countless people showing up to work in a state that is clinically identical to being intoxicated at work. Showing up for work sleepless decreases about every outcome metric an organization cares about. As Amazon founder Jeff Bezos puts it, "I'm more alert and I think more clearly. I just feel so much better all day long if I've had eight hours (of sleep)." Lack of sleep is also horrible for your personal health, as it hampers your immune system and makes you five times as likely to develop an illness.

There are a lot of little things you can do to boost sleep quality. Maintaining a regular, fixed schedule is a great start. Sleeping in a room that is quite a bit darker and cooler than you are used to often helps. Eliminating noises and distractions that wake you up, especially smartphones and electronics in the hours before bed, makes a difference.

But there are also more structural changes that need to occur in the way we talk and think about sleep in groups and organizations. If organizational leaders are continually sleepless and sending messages at late hours and over weekends, consider the implicit message this sends. As parents, my wife and I stopped sending our kids "to bed" as any form of punishment and instead have a set routine for sleep every night. We also talk about how to make sure everyone gets a sound night of sleep regularly. The key is to make sleep more of a family, organizational, and cultural value—to the degree that we'll all feel free to boast about getting a full eight hours last night.

## CONTRIBUTION AMPLIFIERS: HEALTH

1. Does the work you do help you eat right, move more, and get better sleep?
2. On most days, do you have as much, or more, physical energy at the end of the day as you did at the beginning?
3. Are you healthier because of the work you do each day?

## Relationships

The work you do should positively influence the people you care about most in life. Your friends and family should be able to say definitively that they have better relationships with you because of your work. This is not simply about how much time you spend at work or away from home. It is about whether you come home from work or a meeting and infuse energy into your home environment upon arrival.

Work should be a deeply social experience in and of itself. Almost all of us need a few good friendships at work in order to have great days. Much of this is just a function of how much time we spend working over a lifetime. Any organization you are part of should help you create new relationships while growing and maintaining existing ones.

### **Relationship Rule #1: Track the quality of your interactions.**

Relationships are created through a series of interactions with another person. If you meet a new colleague today and have a poor interaction with her, you are less likely to seek her out in the future. If, in contrast, you have an inspiring discussion with another colleague, that not only improves both parties' wellbeing, it makes you more likely to invest in that relationship in the future. This all sounds obvious, yet what we often fail to understand is that every one of our existing relationships requires these frequent and positive interactions in order to thrive.

When researchers study the importance of brief interactions, they generally find that a single bad exchange can counteract several positive ones. For this reason, I often recommend that people aim to have at least 80% of their interactions fall in the more positive versus more negative camp. If you are able to have at least four or five positive conversations for every negative one in a given day, it should carry forward and energize the networks around you. As a part of the research I conducted for the book *Are You Fully Charged?* we found that people who have great interactions throughout the day are five times as likely to have very high wellbeing.

### **Relationship Rule #2: Your response is up to you.**

You may not get to control the initiation of your next interaction with another person, but you always get to choose your response. Even when you're having a horrible day and someone says something rude to you without reason, you get to decide if you will dig in on the negative tone or try to turn things around. With that choice, you will likely set off a cascading process that will make your day progressively better—or progressively worse.

I get to test this out on a daily basis, as the product of not having vision in my left eye. Almost every time I'm in a crowded market or grocery store I run into someone, either directly or with my cart, if they approach from my left. While I wish I could avoid these scenarios, it does give me a fascinating lens into what's going on in the minds of these fairly random samplings of strangers.

Some people likely assume I am oblivious, not paying attention, or worse. Others are quick to blame themselves and apologize in order to defuse any tension. However, some people are quick to become enraged, express disgust, or say something rude, like "Watch where you're going." If only that were possible.

The problem for people in that latter group is that they are making a choice that works against their own wellbeing for the remainder of the day. By choosing not to assume positive intent, they increase their own hostility levels in a way that is likely to carry forward for at least hours, if not days. In contrast, those who choose to assume I did not have any bad intent get to move on through their day as usual, or perhaps even feeling good about letting me off the hook. The central learning for me from these experiences is that we always have the choice of how to respond, and it always works out better when you assume positive intent.

### **Relationship Rule #3: If you can't say anything nice, go ahead and say *something*.**

I've spent much of my career studying the value of focusing on strengths over weaknesses and looking at ratios of positive versus negative interactions. But it turns out there's something more damaging and insidious than focusing on the negative all the time: ignoring someone. In almost every study I have conducted or reviewed on these topics, there are voices in the data from people who simply are not being heard. This state of mind is almost always correlated with the lowest wellbeing and poorest outcomes, from schools to businesses.

A Canadian study suggests that being ignored at work could be even more detrimental for both mental and physical wellbeing than harassment or bullying. People seem to underestimate the value created by genuinely paying attention to another human being. On the other end of the continuum, there may be no condition as dangerous as being ignored or having a complete lack of communication.

When people are ignored, they often assume the worst. Our brain essentially goes to work filling in potential voids with worst-case scenarios. Perhaps this is human nature—a way to protect ourselves—but it often leads to an unbelievable amount of unwarranted stress and worry. So try to keep an eye out for people who may think they're being ignored, and keep investing in the interactions that nurture your closest connections.

## Relationship Rule #4: Be known for not using your phone

I am convinced that even 15 minutes of time spent genuinely listening to another person is one of the most valuable things one can give. In this era of hyper distraction, asking great questions and listening will increasingly be two of the qualities we look for most in friends, partners, and colleagues. Yet most people are sending the exact opposite message to friends and loved ones today.

Personally, I know that my smartphone can be a great asset to combat boredom or idle time in a long line when I'm alone. As a lifelong technology guy and gadget guru, I used to see huge value in being able to stay more connected, access almost unlimited amounts of information, and so on. But then, a couple years ago, I read about a study that completely changed my mindset, habits, and behaviors.

This study, based on an experiment with 200 participants, examined the effect that the mere presence of the smartphone has in the context of conversations between people. What the researchers essentially found is that any time a smartphone is visible, even if it is not ringing, buzzing, vibrating, or powered on, it degrades the quality of the conversation for everyone. In the cases where the phone was visible, participants had lower levels of empathetic concern and found the conversations less fulfilling. The people who took their phones out were essentially saying, "This device comes before you and this conversation."

Ever since I studied this evidence for the first time, I have been careful in every conversation, from work events to sitting at the dinner table with my wife and kids, to keep my phone completely stowed away and out of sight. On the rare occasions when I do need to have my smartphone out, my friends and family members now notice, because it is the exception and clearly not the norm. It's been refreshing for me to see how quickly this pattern has caught on, both within and beyond my own social circles.

Essentially, giving another person your undivided attention is a measure of how much you care. Intently listening, even to people you have just met, is a remarkable way to create new relationships and deepen existing ones. At a minimum, when you plan and choose to spend time with a friend, make it count.



## **Relationship Rule #5: Invest at least an hour a day back into your best relationships.**

Most of the variance in your wellbeing over days and weeks is the product of your relationships with your immediate family, best friends, and closest colleagues. To me, the product of these relationships is life itself.

Without my parents, wife, kids, best friends at work, and closest friends in my community, there would not be much left. All of the work I have done, the research and books I have been a part of, and what I have learned over a lifetime is a product of these relationships. So to spend more time investing in “self-development” instead of investing in these relationships and people I love would be a catastrophic mistake.

I don't think I've seen anything as un-nurtured or underinvested in as close human relationships today. Most men in particular are bad at it; in fact, most male-dominated leadership teams (which is a bigger problem in itself) do almost nothing to build and maintain and grow relationships among one another, hence the dysfunction at the top of many large businesses. (Women seem to fare better on average.) Whether you lead a family, a team, or an organization, you can have a great deal of control over the frequency and intensity of positive emotions moving through your networks. When you invest in one very fun or productive conversation with another person, take a moment later on in the day to note whether this appears to have had a residual effect as that person interacts with others. If you can see this during the workday, it is also a very good proxy for whether that person will take more energy home with them for friends or family members at the end of the day.

## CONTRIBUTION AMPLIFIERS: RELATIONSHIPS

1. Does your work help you create new friendships and maintain existing ones?
2. Does your work have a positive influence on your relationships with your immediate family?
3. Are you able to work in a place with close physical proximity to friends and family?