

Sleep

Active rest and recovery for competitive advantage



In both the workplace and sporting arenas an important part of the recipe for achieving consistent and sustained high performance is to be very, very good at rest and recovery.

The better you are at recovering between bouts of hard work, the more energy and focus you can give to the work itself. You can achieve more in less time, by spending less time working tired and more time working with energy and focus.

Here are three top tips for gaining competitive advantage:

Sort out your attitude towards rest and recovery
If you view working tired and working long hours as a badge of honour, then change your thinking. Working tired means that:

- Work takes longer
- You are more likely to make mistakes
- You're less flexible in your thinking
- You're less resilient when things go wrong

So, if you're choosing to work tired, you're probably underperforming and you may also be putting your mental and physical health at risk.

Protect your sleep

Lack of sleep or having poor quality sleep will directly impact on your performance at work. Research by NASA for astronaut training found that if you consistently have two hours less sleep than you need, your brain performance is impaired to the same degree as drinking two to three pints of beer/lager. They also found that getting the optimal amount of sleep boosted performance by 30%.

Sleep is this important to your success. It's the time when your body physically repairs itself (in the early hours of sleep) and when (during the later hours of sleep) the brain moves information from short-term to long-term memory, freeing up working capacity that you need during your waking hours.

For optimal rest and recovery for both your body and your brain, most people ideally need seven to eight hours of sleep consistently each night. What can you do?

- Plan your sleep sensibly – make sure you spend eight hours in bed – so if your alarm goes off at 6.30, make sure you're in bed at 10.30
- Establish a consistent bed time routine – learn to relax and wind down before going to bed so that you're ready to go to sleep when you go to bed
- Avoid strenuous exercise two to three hours before you go to bed
- Get your bedroom environment right – dark, cool and comfortable
- Avoid eating a large meal in the two hours before bedtime

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Active rest and recovery for competitive advantage contd.

Be constantly aware of your energy levels

We usually only realise we need to top up our energy levels when we're starting to run low – the problem with this is our performance will be already negatively affected. That's why at the end of the week we can often find our capacity to work is diminished and at the same time we are more easily distracted. Our energy levels naturally ebb and flow; here are some ideas that will help you keep your energy levels closer to their optimal levels:

- **Understand yourself better** – what or who gives you energy and what or who drains it? Exploit the things that give you energy, to prepare for and recover from, those things that drain it
- **Energy begets energy** – being more active increases your capacity to produce energy
- **Food is fuel** – eat a healthy breakfast, every day; and then eat little but often to keep your brain and body properly fuelled
- **Stay hydrated** – drink at least 2 litres of fluids across a 24-hour period, more if you're in an air conditioned environment all day
- **Work in a series of intense bouts followed by breaks** – use the breaks to top up your energy – the optimum time that you can maintain optimal concentration is 50 minutes

