

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Why energy?

Energy is our most precious and fundamental resource. The time available to us is fixed, but our energy can be expanded systematically. Our aim is to help individuals and organizations cultivate a source of energy that is self-renewing and multidimensional.

We call this Leader Fuel.

2. How can The Energy Project help?

Organizations increasingly face a “silent productivity problem.” Demand is outstripping capacity. Productivity numbers are up, but employees are being asked to do more with less. This relentless pressure exacts a pernicious but often invisible toll. A raft of data suggests that employees feel increasingly overburdened, overwhelmed, disengaged, disaffected and at risk of burnout and breakdown.

Most leadership work focuses on building competencies. The Energy Project addresses capacity, the fundamental ingredient critical to bringing any skill, talent or strategy fully to life. In the face of ever rising demand, sustainable performance requires teaching individuals how to accomplish more, in less time, at a higher level of quality, with a better quality of life.

Our interventions are designed both to be stand-alone and complementary with other forms of leadership development. For companies that do not currently offer development, The Energy Project core curriculum is a powerful means by which to drive sustained high performance, more effective leadership, improved morale and decreased turnover. For companies that already have programs in place, our core curriculum helps individuals to build the underlying capacity that makes other competency and skill-based programs more likely to succeed.

3. What makes your work distinctive?

We do not try to be everything to everyone. Rather, we focus on our unique strength – helping leaders and their organizations to build and sustain human capacity. For details about our specific offerings, please visit Products and Services.

4. Why is energy more important than time when it comes to sustainable performance and effective leadership?

Time is finite. Most people can't realistically increase the number of hours they work. Energy, however, can be expanded. Unfortunately, most of us take our energy for granted. We fail to value, cultivate, and regularly renew this precious resource in the systematic ways that best serve long-term productivity, health and happiness.

5. How do you measure outcomes and demonstrate value?

We are committed to ongoing measurement using our Energy Pulse survey, administered by our strategic partners, eepulse Inc. Founded by Dr. Theresa Welbourne, a professor at the University of Michigan Business School, eepulse has gathered vast benchmark data demonstrating statistically significant predictive relationships between employee energy levels and productivity, turnover rates, customer satisfaction and morale, as well as long-term earnings and stock price growth. The Energy Pulse is a highly flexible process that allows us to measure individual and organizational energy levels before, during and after our interventions. We also include custom-designed questions that address each client's specific concerns and desired outcomes. Finally, we measure specific changes in performance and productivity against whatever metrics are most relevant to our clients.

6. What are the Energy Project's key energy management principles?

Four principles lie at the heart of the Energy Project's work with individuals, teams and organizations:

1. To perform at our best we must draw on multidimensional sources of energy – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.
2. We experience four different energy states but only one of them – high positive – is optimal for performance.
3. Intermittent recovery and renewal are critical to sustainable performance.
4. To expand our capacity, we must build positive energy rituals – highly specific behaviors that become automatic over time.

7. What is the basis for The Energy Project's conceptual framework and programs?

The legacy of the Energy Project's work is 25 years studying, working with and writing about elite performers in a variety of fields: world class athletes, FBI Hostage Rescue team members, emergency physicians and nurses, special-forces soldiers, and senior corporate executives. Across each of these fields and at all levels of organizations, the same fundamental energy principles drive high performance, effective leadership and sustainability.

8. How does managing energy relate to leadership?

Great leaders are first and foremost stewards of organizational energy. Because energy is infectious, leaders have a disproportionate impact on those they lead – for better and for worse. Leaders inspire or demoralize others by how they manage their own energy and by how effectively they mobilize, focus and renew the energy of those they lead. When leaders are energized, optimistic, focused and passionately committed to a purpose larger than themselves, they infuse others with those feelings. The same is true in reverse. When leaders communicate fatigue, negativity, distraction and lack of passion to their troops, the result is equally contagious.

9. What does optimal energy being on fire look like in each of the four dimensions?

In physics, energy is defined as the capacity to do work. At the personal level, energy managed skillfully ignites a fire that fuels sustained performance and strong relationships as well as improved health and greater happiness.

To operate at our best, we must cultivate four separate but related sources of energy:

1. Optimal physical energy shows up as strength, endurance, flexibility, resilience and positive presence. Without a sufficient quantity of energy, we are compromised at every level. Physical energy also underpins the capacity to regulate emotion, focus attention, and maintain passion and commitment in the face of high demand.

2. Optimal emotional energy is expressed as confidence, exuberance, realistic optimism and honest self-awareness. The quality of our energy determines whether we face the world defensively and fearfully in a survival mode, or positively and optimistically, in a growth mode.
3. Optimal mental energy requires flexible movement between narrow focus – absorbed attention and sustained concentration – and open focus – the capacity to see the big picture and think creatively. The focus of our energy determines how effectively we make conscious choices and direct our behavior.
4. Optimal spiritual energy – the force of the human spirit – is grounded in passion, commitment and alignment between our values and our behavior and, above all, a purpose and a mission beyond our self-interest.

10. What does an organization that is optimally energized look like?

A company that is on fire radiates a purpose that transcends and includes its bottom line. Organizations are living energy systems. Their aim is harness to the energy of disparate individuals in the service of shared goals. On the one hand, individuals must learn how to take responsibility for sustaining, expanding and regularly renewing their own energy resources. On the other hand, nothing is more critical to the long-term vitality of an organization than the way it manages the energy of its employees. Companies and their leaders must actively support and reward the efforts of employees to manage their energy more skillfully and, in turn, to align their behaviors with the company's values and mission.

11. One of your key principles is that we must balance the expenditure of energy with the intermittent renewal of energy. How does that relate to performance?

Great performers instinctively understand the importance of work-rest ratios – the systematic balancing of energy expenditure and energy recovery. Unfortunately, in most organizations people are valued most for how long and continuously they expend energy. Taking time to renew and recover is typically viewed as a sign of slacking-off.

Without systematic renewal, we eventually become energy bankrupt – not just physically, but also emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Conversely, the ability to disengage and regenerate periodically, even for brief periods, leads to far greater employee engagement and more sustained high performance.

12. You talk a lot about the importance of recovery, but you also say that stress – the expenditure of energy – is critical to expanding capacity. Can you explain that?

It's just the flip side of the same equation. Too much energy expenditure without recovery leads to burnout and breakdown. Too much recovery without sufficient energy expenditure leads to atrophy and weakness. Think about an arm placed in a cast for an extended period of time in order to protect it from the "stress" to which it is ordinarily subjected. In a very short time, the muscles of the arm begin to atrophy from disuse.

It is only by regularly pushing past our comfort zones that we have the potential to expand capacity. The key to strengthening a muscle is to subject it to high demand, followed by a period of purposeful recovery. Growth actually takes place during recovery. This is true not just physically but also emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

Pushing too hard for too long or not pushing hard enough are equally insidious to long-term capacity. The key to sustained high performance is learning to balance energy expenditure with strategic energy renewal.

13. How does all the new technology at our disposal affect our capacity to create the optimal balance between energy expenditure and energy renewal?

The same technologies that allow us to be more connected with each other make it increasingly difficult to disconnect. Between cell phones and pagers, e-mail and Blackberries, we never fully disengage. As a result, we lose the opportunity to truly change channels and recover more deeply. Managing energy effectively requires consciously building boundaries back into lives – living life more as sprinters than as marathoners. In practical terms, that means breaking our lives into increments. We need periods of time during which we fully engage, balanced by shorter periods during which we deeply recover.

14. On what basis should companies invest time and energy in trying to assure that their employees are working out regularly, eating right, getting recovery during the day and sleeping enough hours at night?

If energy is the fundamental currency of performance, then it makes sense to look at anything in our lives that effects people's ability to produce and resiliently recover energy. We focus on physical capacity first – fitness, nutrition, sleep and rest – because without it, nothing else is possible. Fatigue profoundly influences performance. An insufficient quantity of energy undermines our ability to control emotions, sustain focus and fuel passion and perseverance in the face of setbacks.

15. It's easy to understand what managing energy physically means, but how does it apply to other dimensions – emotional energy for example?

When we ask people to describe how they feel when they're performing at their best, they invariably use words such as happy, optimistic, confident, positive, passionate and even joyful. They use the same adjectives to describe the leaders they have found most inspiring in their own lives. Under stress, many people default to negative survival-based emotions such as frustration, anger, anxiety, fear and impatience. As demand rises in the workplace, these emotions are increasingly dominant. Negative emotions are both extremely energy draining at an individual level and also antagonizing and dispiriting to others. This part of our curriculum focuses on helping people to exercise more control over their emotional states by learning how to systematically access high positive energy even under stress.

16. How about mental energy?

Optimal mental energy is characterized by flexible focus. The highest levels of task-based performance depend on the capacity for narrow focus – engaging fully in one challenge at a time and sustaining concentration. Multitasking is the biggest enemy of narrow, concentrated focus. It means being partially engaged in several activities at once and never fully engaged in any of them. More open, imaginative thinking depends on just the opposite: the capacity to disengage fully from logical, sequential, tightly focused thinking. Practically, this means learning how to spend immersed time in more passive activities such as reflection, deep breathing, walking in nature, exercising and anything else that prompts changing mental channels.

It is by learning to “think aside” that creative breakthroughs occur most reliably. This capacity is typically both undervalued and under trained in corporate America.

17. And how is spiritual capacity relevant in the workplace?

Preoccupation with our needs for security, safety, acceptance and recognition can be hugely energy draining. Conversely, we tend to feel energized by serving others, or a larger cause. Spiritual energy is derived from a commitment to something beyond our self-interest. Defining and staying connected to universal values such as integrity, compassion, generosity and courage offsets our tendency to expediency – behaviors that may provide short-term relief but are energy-inefficient and destructive in the long term. By contrast, spiritually based choices – aligning everyday behavior with our deepest values – generate a uniquely sustaining and powerful source of energy.

18. How do telling the truth and taking responsibility affect our energy states?

The absence of truth telling is one of the most pervasive energy drains in any organization. Public denial of reality and failure to communicate honestly lead to private expressions of despair and cynicism. The eventual result is a toxic culture characterized by frustration, fear, anger and mistrust. At the individual level, blaming, complaining and playing the role of victim likewise squander energy. Helping people to take responsibility for the quality of their experience – regardless of external circumstances – frees them to invest their energy more efficiently and productively.

19. What is it that prompts people to translate these ideas and principles into enduring, positive change both individually and as leaders?

Change is difficult. Research in the emerging field of psychology known as “automaticity” confirms that human beings are deeply habitual in their behaviors and that conscious will and discipline are very limited resources. What we did yesterday, we are likely to do again today. Good intentions don't necessarily translate into sustained change, as we all know from failed efforts to maintain diets, sustain exercise regimens and follow through on New Year's resolutions.

The key to making change that lasts is building positive rituals – highly specific behaviors that become automatic over time. From studying and working with the best performers, we have learned that rituals are critical in every dimension of energy management. This is true of what and when we eat; how we exercise and recover; the way we manage our emotions under stress; what sort of mental preparation routines we build, and ultimately how we insure that we are guided by our deepest values even in the face of high demand.

20. What you say makes sense, but we have tried many programs in the past and after the early enthusiasm passes, we typically see diminishing returns. What makes the Energy Project's approach different?

Beyond the central and powerful role played by positive rituals, we have designed our programs around three other critical factors that underlie enduring change: Duration; Precision and Specificity; and Support and Accountability.

Duration means that our programs take into account the evolving evidence for how enduring change actually occurs. Our core curriculum is designed as a series of modules delivered over several months, separated by periods of two to four weeks.

Our goal is maximize the learning and absorption around each principle; to build in opportunities for practice in between sessions; and to have each section of the work build on the last.

The best research suggests that a typical person undertaking a significant change “fails” anywhere from four to six times before the change becomes permanent. Failure, in short, is a predictable part of the change process. By starting with this premise, we can work to help clients to manage disappointment along the way, and to understand the recommitment process.

Finally, because we recognize the powerful role that resistance plays in any change effort, we devote a great deal of attention to understanding and addressing the unconscious obstacles that stand in the way of turning positive intention into sustained new behavior.

Defining new behaviors with precision and specificity is the second key to sustaining change. The habitual patterns of our lives and the relentless onslaught of new demands leave us very little energy to introduce new behaviors into our lives. By defining positive rituals in the form of very precise behaviors, and by scheduling the time or circumstance in which they will be executed, the odds of success rise exponentially. The more we have to think consciously about implementing a new behavior, the less likely it is to recur. The more it becomes a regular part of our daily routine, the more likely it is to endure.

Accountability and support are also critical to sustainability. Even the most motivated clients find it difficult to sustain change in the absence of encouragement, coaching, support and even, at times, admonishment. We create peer coaching relationships which are grounded in a commitment by both parties to a specific frequency of check-in and communication. We also offer an individually customized on-line Executive Dashboard, which gives clients a way to track their progress and to receive electronic coaching. Finally, our Energy Pulse surveys provide a measurable means by which to quantify success against defined objectives.