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ENERGY EMOTIONS TIME



A guide to self-management

Energy. Emotions. Time.

Energy

“You may not feel outstandingly robust, but if you are an average-sized adult you will contain within your modest frame no less than 7×10^{18} joules of potential energy—enough to explode with the force of thirty very large hydrogen bombs, assuming you knew how to liberate it and really wished to make a point.”

-Bill Bryson

Most fundamentally, you are energy. I don't mean that in the New Age, whimsical sense. I mean it literally. All of your cells constitute energy, and as you can read from the Bill Bryson quote, you contain multitudes. Our expression and recuperation of energy is the foundation of everything else we do with our lives. We can do nothing worthwhile or well without the requisite energy. So, that's where we'll begin.

When we think about energy in our day-to-day, practical sense, we think about whether or not we have the energy to do something. That something could be anything from thinking to expressing a positive emotion toward someone you love to completing a task that isn't all that pleasant (cleaning up dog shit comes to mind). Our lives require us to express immense amounts of energy every day—and with good reason. Life is amazing and we're all lucky for the opportunity. But if we don't manage our energy, what should be appreciated for the gift that it is feels like a burden. I'm not sure if you're keeping track at home, but burdens aren't fun. If you want to become the person that you envision yourself becoming (and enjoy yourself as you become him or her), and if you want to manage your emotions and your time well, then you have to begin by managing your energy.

Automating. Protecting. Expressing. Recuperating.

I'm presenting four pillars of energy management—automation, protection, expression, and recuperation.

Automation

Your brain has two main goals: to keep you alive, and to conserve energy (so that it's easier to keep you alive).

That's one reason that our continued actions form habits. Thinking burns energy, but habits are automatic, requiring little, if any, thought at all. The problem with habits is that it's easy to develop them quickly and subconsciously and they dictate how we interact with our environment without us realizing that they are. Then it can take an immense amount of energy to change them. That's also the good thing about habits. The crux of it all is attention. We have

to draw awareness to our daily, automated actions so that we can create habits that help us move in a positive direction while also bolstering our energy.

Step number one is noticing what you're currently doing. This step never really goes away, we need perpetual self-examination, but it's also the launching point for any meaningful, automated transformation. There are many ways to approach gaining an awareness of how you're currently spending your time and energy, but there are two simple approaches that work in conjunction or separately.

First is the recap. At the end of each day, recount hour by hour what you did. It'd be fine to journal about the course of your day or just sit aside time to review in your mind what happened.

Second is taking an hour-by-hour approach. Rather than waiting until the end of the day, you set aside time toward the end of each hour to recount what you just did. As with the end of the day recap, you could either keep track in your head or write it down. Writing things down, however, will likely work better in each case. But it's up to you how you'd like to track. Following one of these processes for a week or so will offer insight into what some of your automatic behaviors are—which are positive and which are negative.

It's important to note that these processes aren't about judging the shit out of yourself or bullying yourself because you aren't spending time how you'd like. You can try each of those things, and though I'm not a scientist, I'm going to guess that neither will get you all that far toward creating a meaningful set of habits. These processes are to help you notice, gain awareness, and approach your daily expenditure of energy with curiosity so that you can use what you learn to automate the parts of your day that make sense to automate. That's it and that's all, folks.

Now that you have awareness, there are a few questions that you have to answer for yourself.

What do I do consistently without thinking, what are my current routines?

Do I like them? Are they actually serving me or am I just acting? (These are the biggest questions.)

What would I change about them to make them better suited to managing my energy and my time?

It's easier to alter something that you're already doing than to create a totally new process—that old saving energy chestnut. Evolution itself is a process of updating prototypes based on how they react to environment. Your habits and routines are not beyond the process that governs the development of all life on this planet.

You've done a bit of behavior awareness and analysis. It's time to consider the flow of your day and when automation would be crucial to help you get moving, conserve energy, and set

yourself up for the day that you want to have. It seems as though there are two crucial times for automation—morning and pre-bed.

(Before we go any further, I want to give you permission to deviate. Your automation doesn't have to exist in exactly the same form every day of your life. I know, that doesn't sound quite automated...and I guess in strict definition, it isn't. While the principle pieces of your automation must exist every day, there is room for variation. It's simply giving yourself room to be human before you start beating the hell out of yourself for not doing things perfectly all the time. There, permission granted.)

Morning Automation

Morning automation's designed to get the body moving and set the tone for the day. It's about creating habits that wake you up and get your head on straight. You are the only person that can determine what would do those two things for you, but I'll make some suggestions to help your consideration.

First, go back to your answers to the question, *what do I do consistently without thinking, what are my current routines?* There's likely to be one to three things that you do every day without fail. These consistent actions are the foundation of the rest of your automation.

Now, let's consider the goals of our morning routine: to wake you up and get your head on straight. There are different elements that can help you do that. You have to explore what might work for you based on a handful of options. I'll offer some elements for you to consider:

- Movement, flexibility, mobility routine
- Reading
- Quiet contemplation
- Journaling
- Writing
- Breathing exercises

There are folks out there that include all of these elements in their morning automation. But those folks aren't the majority. The biggest goal of automation is to save energy. So, if you're trying to do too much, and you truly don't have the time for it when you consider the other constraints on your morning, it's going to stress you out if you can't fit all of the elements in. Stress, sponsored by "shoulding", will wear you down before your day even begins.

As you consider what elements to include in your morning automation, consider also what your current needs are, and, simply, what makes you feel good and gets your head on straight. Your routine doesn't have to be anything other than that. For example's sake, I'll share my morning automation.

Step 1: Swish my mouth with coconut oil while I read for twenty minutes

Step 2: Prep coffee while doing mobility training and continuing to read

Step 3: Drink coffee and work on whatever writing project I have going

Step 4: Review my planner so I can wrap my head around where I'll spend most of my time and effort today

That's it. One could technically argue that Steps 3 and 4 are really just the beginning of my work day and that Steps 1 and 2 are truly the wake up and head on straight aspect of the automation. That's fine. It's probably true. That only solidifies the point that it doesn't have to be much, it just should likely exist. (I say likely because I'm sure there are plenty of people living good lives without doing this stuff. I just know having these kinds of processes works for most people.)

The key here is you can play with the time and the elements. Maybe you want to read but you only have five minutes. Great! Read for five minutes. Over the course of a week that's thirty-five minutes worth of reading. Considering that it takes about five hours to read the average book, you could read a book in eight weeks by only reading for five minutes in the morning. Considering that you could likely find a few other minutes throughout your day to read, you'd probably half that time. That means you could read about twelve books per year just by starting to read for five minutes in the morning.

I use that illustration to demonstrate the value of doing something worthwhile for even small amounts of time. Don't discount five minutes to nothing.

Whatever elements you deem important, and whatever time is manageable, look at the actions that you're already consistently doing and anchor one action to it. Do this with the intent of getting your head on straight, waking yourself up, and giving yourself an energetic start to your day.

Pre-Bed Automation

Let's start this part of the conversation a bit more boldly—you know what you need to do to set yourself up for a good night's sleep.

You know you need to get away from the screens.

You know you need to stay away from the booze.

You know that reading helps.

You know you need to do something that gets you to stop ruminating on thoughts.

You know you need to get under the sheets for at least 7-9 hours of rest.

The question is, why are you attached to not doing all of these things? While I'm about to provide you some tactics for pre-bed automation, I think it's more valuable for you to consider that question before jumping in and taking action. What is it that's driving you to stay on your phone or watch TV up until bed time? Why? What could you do about it?

Night is different than morning. (Duh.) People, even if begrudgingly, know that they have to wake up, get moving, and meet the demands of the day. That implies a certain level of discomfort—so folks are often more willing to do some things that are initially uncomfortable. But nighttime, man, that's about unwinding from the day. It's about shaking off the stress and feeling good. And for many folks, it's really the only "me" time that they get—or time that they get with their spouse or significant other. All of that compounds to make it tougher to break patterns and build new ones. It's totally understandable.

And for all those understandable reasons you have to ask yourself another question. What would make my experience better, more meaningful, more enjoyable to me—and why? Whether it's time with your wife or husband or giving yourself some time to enjoy, what would make it more engaging so that you'd be able to do it, enjoy it, and then leave it be and go to bed?

I'm asking you ask yourself this question because I believe it's a question of engagement. As we're trying to disengage with our day, we need engagement. By that I mean if you want to watch a TV show, really engage with it, experience it, and then let it be. We get sucked in because we approach it half-consciously and it soothes our stressed nerves. But if we approach it with engagement, knowing that we'll be able to move on and do something else good for us, I believe we can approach it differently, with a different energy, and then enter the restorative process of sleep. This goes for any of understandable reasons you wouldn't be constructing a helpful pre-bed automation. Once you have that answered for yourself, we can talk tactics.

Tactics in isolation, however, aren't optimal. It's better if we approach pre-bed automation ritualistically. A ritual gradually leads you to sleep by teaching your brain that's where it's headed. So, as we look at tactics, consider how you could string them into a ritual that would work for you.

Ok, tactics include, but are not limited to:

- Setting the temperature of your bedroom between 68-72 degrees Fahrenheit
- Taking a warm shower or bath
- Having a warm, uncaffeinated drink
- Reading
- Doing a brain dump of everything that's on your mind
- Planning your initial, and most important, action items for the next day

If you don't currently have pre-bed automation established, start with two tactics. It helps to have more than one thing to create a ritual. If you already have a pre-bed automation, consider how some of these tactics that you aren't doing might fit and be helpful to you.

No matter whether you currently have a pre-bed automation or not, consider the tactics that would be most impactful for you right now. If you have trouble with ruminating over ideas or get anxiety about what needs done, it might be good for you to try the brain dump and next

day planning. If releasing tension is your issue, maybe it'd be good to start with the warm shower or bath and warm drink. Consider yourself, don't just jump in and try tactics.

When you feel ready, or as another need arises, consider adding another tactic to your ritual. Just give yourself at least thirty to sixty minutes to shut yourself down before sleep.

Protection

Protecting your energy is mostly a matter of periodizing your demands and outputs while making sure that they align. It's also about putting some barriers up so that you don't let other people or activities drain you. We're going to talk tactics.

Waving Your Demands

You can't expend a high amount of energy at all times and not expect the quality of your work, and the quality of your life, to slip. Yet, we all expect this of ourselves, don't we? We should, day after day, be able to fully exhaust ourselves in all of our roles and responsibilities—and do that ad infinitum. This is a profound case of expectations, usually externally introjected but self-imposed, not aligning with reality.

Personal productivity, and growth, however are best approached through undulation. Think about how you apply stress to the bodies of your clients. Do you hammer them with high volume and intensity all of the time? Of course, not—they'd never adapt to the training. No matter the programming format, you introduce training stress in waves—because that's what the body needs to adapt. Well, there is no segregation of training from the rest of life. Undulation works in training because that's how life works. As much as we like to think we are separate, your work and productivity does not exist outside the laws that govern biology.

With that in mind, let's look at two units of time that we can apply undulation to—the week and the day. We'll start long and work to short.

The Week

Here's the main concept that I'd like for you to grasp: there are going to be days during which you work hard and/or long, there are going to be days during which you don't do much—yes even on working days, and there are going to be days that fall in the middle of those poles. How you undulate is essentially up to you, but I'll lay down some simple guidelines.

First—no planned hard days back to back. Each planned hard day is followed by either an easy or a medium day.

Second—there has to be at least one easy day per working week.

The hard day hinges on two variables—volume and intensity. You're either pushing yourself to get a high volume of work done, going specifically and intensely deep with your work, or both. The key with this day is framing. You know that it's going to be a hard, long day and you decide

to be ok with that because you know that respite is coming. This is the day to push on your big project right now, get as many clients in as possible, or push yourself to tie up as many loose ends as possible. No matter what the task, or task list is, this is the day that you plan on hammering. It's best to place this day toward the front end of the week when energy is freshest. You could also have one more on the back end of the week if necessary. A Monday and Thursday split works. It allows you to build momentum and capitalize on Monday's freshness, slip an easy and a medium day in, and then be ready to get after it again on Thursday.

Most days of the week should be medium days—you're engaged and working, but you're setting realistic limits and boundaries about the amount of time you're going to work and what you truly expect to accomplish. Projects are getting moved forward, and important tasks are getting done, but you're not stressing yourself out. A medium day is a normal work day. Consider what a typical day looks like for you when you're engaged and accomplishing, but relaxed.

During the course of your career in the fitness industry, has anyone asked you to come help them with a rote task in your free time? Maybe someone needs help working on a farm, or maybe there's a repetitive task like putting a series of the same thing together, or just shoveling a sidewalk. Did you notice how good it feels to just shut off your brain and "go" sometimes? That's what the easy day is about—shutting off your brain, just checking the minimal amount of boxes, and calling it a day. It gives you the satisfaction of knowing that you got something done, but is restorative at the same time.

Let's lay out a couple hypothetical schedules of Hard, Easy, Medium.

Option 1: When there's a big project going that's getting close to deadline

Monday- Hard

Tuesday- Easy

Wednesday- Medium

Thursday- Hard

Friday- Medium

Option 2: Normal Routine

Monday- Hard

Tuesday- Easy

Wednesday- Medium

Thursday- Medium

Friday- Easy to Medium

Along with how we are considering our work energy expenditure throughout the week, and how we are protecting it, we have to consider all of the other priorities we have outside of our work—training, relationships, hobbies, etc. A simple way to manage it all is to think in terms of inverse relationships. Let's use training as an illustration.

On your hard work days, you'll train easy or not at all. On your medium days you have the most wiggle room. You could train hard, easy, or medium on those days because they are regular days. Just be considerate of what the next day might hold and your total recovery. Easy days can be treated as total recovery days during which training stress is also low or non-existent, or it would be a day to get your hardest training in because you're not applying a ton of work stress to yourself. Using these ideas and variables, experiment and come up with the solution that works best for you.

The Day

Waving demands throughout the day begins with the consideration of a question:

When is it that you do certain types of work best?

This self-knowledge will do more to protect your daily energy than almost any other thing. If you're trying to complete work at a period of the day when you're not best suited to do that work, you're going to fight against yourself. That fight, sports fans, is going to waste a ton of energy—and you're likely going to judge the bejesus out of yourself for not being able to work the way that you "should."

To add a personal example, I went on for a long period of my career believing that I should just be able to write during any period of the day. But the reality is, the best time for me to write is in the morning. As the day wears on, I can't gather my thoughts in a way that's conducive to me constructing worthwhile prose—and that's totally fine. There have been, however, many instances in which I didn't get the writing done I thought I would during the morning and told myself that I'd finish it in the evening after all of the other toiling was complete. Inevitably, I'd sit down to write and end up frustrated by my lack of productivity. I'd judge myself as unprofessional, close my lap top frustrated, and not enjoy the rest of my day as I should have.

Understanding when you do what types of work best is incredibly important not only for productivity, but for your quality of life and sanity. I can't tell you when the optimal time is for you to devote to different aspects of your work, but I can offer you a series of questions to help you gain clarity.

At what point during the day am I most creative?

At what point during the day do I feel locked in and flowing with tasks that need checked off of my to do list?

When am I the best conversationalist?

Based on what I know about how I get distracted, when is the best time for me to answer emails and check social media?

When is the best time during the day for me to break and restore my energy and focus?

Just what in the hell do I want me day to look like?

This, of course, isn't an exhaustive list of questions, but it's enough to get the party started and hopefully help you to form some of your own. The answers will help you decide on what your daily workflow should look like. I say that with one caution: you have to give yourself room to try, experiment, learn, and change. What works for you for a six-months, might change during the next six months—and that could be dependent on you, on the time of year, on whatever demands might have changed. But starting with a structure will allow to observe patterns, capture them, and understand yourself better as you work. In the future, you'll be able to capture and apply those patterns as you observe yourself during monthly and yearly cycles.

The Month and The Year

I won't spend as much time on these because, quite honestly, I haven't spent as much time considering and capturing processes for these as I have for the week and the day. That being said, there is an ebb and flow for the longer periods of time the same as there is for the shorter periods of time. There are times of the year and the month that you are especially busy with a given aspect of your work and your time, priorities, and energy must shift to meet the demands. That's something that you have to sort out and understand for yourself. Take the principles above and apply them to meet those certain circumstances.

Boundaries

There's a commonly held belief that collectively as a culture we say no too much and yes not enough. That might be true for society at large, but when it comes to business owners we often find ourselves in the destructively inverse situation of saying yes too often and overwhelming ourselves. So, I'm going to give you a big ol' heap of permission right now—it's ok to say no.

No, in fact, is the beginning of healthy boundaries. And healthy boundaries are the crux of energy protection. At the foundation of boundaries is a well-thought awareness of current priorities. When you know what your priorities are—personally and professionally—it's easier to say no to the opportunities that just don't fit right now. So, if you aren't in touch with your priorities, it's nearly impossible to effectively say no.

Above all else, to protect your energy, sort out your priorities. When they are sorted, you can give your energy to the tasks, people, and projects that need it.

Priorities are a product of setting a vision and direction for yourself and for your business and working backward. They are the product of questioning. What would be the most effective things to do right now that would take me closer to the next level in my life and business? Answer that question honestly and you have your priorities.

Priorities, by definition, aren't large in number. So, if you have a list of twenty priorities, you really don't have any priorities. They should number less than a handful. And when you get the

important things and actions down to a handful, you can act effectively within a healthy set of boundaries that protect your energy.

Boundaries, when it comes to energy protection, are purely actions in accordance with your priorities and disregard for the things that aren't priorities. (I've used the word priorities more times in the last few paragraphs than I likely have in my entire life.)

Phone Boundaries

Beyond priorities (there it is again), we have to give ourselves environmental boundaries that protect our energy. Being conscious with how we use our phones and social media is exceptionally important. It's so easy to lose hours per day to email, Facebook, Instagram, etc. And while scrolling is soothing, the net result of the time spent mindlessly perusing is negative. We have to have a strategy for managing it.

The simplest tactic is to keep your phone out of sight—especially during work periods that require focus and creativity. Hide it behind your computer or put it another room. Making access more difficult works because you'll have to expend more energy to use your phone. And if we have to expend more energy to make something happen, it's more likely that we won't do it. Make it harder to use your phone.

Besides limiting ease of access, it helps to set time limits on the apps and features that tend to suck up most of your time. I can only speak to iPhone users, because that's all I've owned. But droid users, I'm sure there are similar apps that accomplish what I'm about to suggest.

Using the ScreenTime app in the settings on your iPhone, set time limits on your apps. Start with where you're comfortable and gradually decrease the amount of time you allow yourself to use them each day. You'll ween yourself off of the need to scroll—conserving your energy and boosting your productivity.

One final thing to consider is what you're doing at a given time. We're going to discuss engagement more deeply in the section on expenditure, but having something to do will keep you from just filling space with time on your phone. Consider keeping a book handy that you're reading or reviewing your daily tasks consistently throughout the day to help you refocus and stay off of your phone.

P.S. I know these tactics help because I've had to do them for myself. My name is Todd Bumgardner, and I'm a phone addict.

People Boundaries

You don't have to give everyone your time. There, you have more permission to say no. As much as we all need and love other people, they can suck the energy right out of us sometimes. And the truth is, setting boundaries with people is tough—especially when you're in a people business like ours.

The trick is to set boundaries with folks without being curt. There are two, simple tactics that I use to set time boundaries with people. Setting time boundaries sets an expectation that the conversation can't drone on forever. This, in turn, will allow you to be present with the person while also knowing that you don't have an indefinite gum flapping on your hands. You each can focus in and then move on. (Often times, if the person doesn't actually have something important to speak with you about, they'll actually disengage at the mention of a time boundary.)

Here are the two ways that I set time boundaries.

First, there's the *letting them know how much time you have to talk* method. Here it is in action:

"Hey, so and so, I'm happy to chat with you, but I have to give you a heads up that I only have about 15 minutes to talk. What can I help you with?"

Second, is the *this is going to take longer than we have right now* method. It goes something like this:

"Hey, so and so, what's up?" They say what's up. *"Wow, I hear you. Listen, that's a big issue to discuss and I want to give it the appropriate amount of time, and I just don't have that right now. Let's schedule a time to sit down and talk through this."*

Taking the time to set simple people-time boundaries will protect a ton of your energy. There are, of course, a ton of other people boundaries to set. But, many times in our setting, simple time boundaries prevent a lot of energy draining.

Expression

There are two words that I want you to remember to frame your energy expression: intent and engagement. These words foundationally guide our energy expression by asking, what are you trying to accomplish? And how deeply are you focused?

We have to be conscious of what we are doing and how much of ourselves we are giving to a given aspect of our working day. This is true for all parts of our lives, but it's especially true for work because if we don't handle it with the proper intention and engagement it spills over into the rest of our lives—often negatively affecting it. Let's handle each word in sequence.

Intent

To some, doing things like setting intent comes across as foo foo new agey horseshit. These same people either likely set intentions without actually noticing or are painfully unaware of themselves. In either case, they're not to be listened to in this instance.

We need to give ourselves direction or we wander aimlessly—and that aimless wondering plays hell on our energy levels. Plus, if we really want to get the most out of ourselves as we give our energy to our work, we need to be focused on what we are doing.

Let's work broad to specific with intentions.

The Daily Intention

At the beginning of each day, my phone prompts me with a question (more on those prompts in a little bit). It asks me:

How are you going to live today?

It causes me to pause, deliberate what I actually want out of my day while considering what my day might need out of me. This gives me a chance to scan the microcosm of my life which is the day ahead—considering the tasks and interactions that are on the docket for the day. But it also pushes me to think bigger.

I pause and think, “What about my ideal self? What would the person I want to become do about this day? How would he face the work and the interactions that lie ahead in the next twenty-four hours?”

Essentially, I'm asking myself, what would I do today to make future Todd proud of present Todd? What courses of action today would make me prouder of myself? Then as I approach each aspect of my day I can repeat the question—which course of action would make me prouder of me?

A simple example is whether or not to train. Sometimes, when energy is totally drained and you know it, the right call is to bag exercise for the day. But there are also plenty of times when we know we have the energy, but we just don't feel like doing it. Rather than beating myself up and calling myself names, I simply ask—would you be prouder if you trained or if you bagged it and went home? And if you answer that question with absolute honesty, there will be days when you know the best thing to do is train and stop feeling sorry for yourself. And there are other days when you can be honest and bag it because it's the right thing to do.

Framing your day by asking yourself how you're going to live sets you up to be able to ask yourself essentially that question on a smaller scale. It works for keeping intentions set.

Intentions for Conversations

It's too often that we go into conversations without thinking about what we truly want out of them. Now, sure, there should be a level of spontaneity to our daily interactions with other

people, but the conversations that can leave us drained usually aren't spontaneous—it's shit we know we need to talk about. But it's also true that serious conversations spring up and we need to stop ourselves and redirect how we are approaching our half of the deal. We can do that with one, simple, predictable question:

What do I really want out of this conversation?

Easy, right?

If your immediate answer is, “for both of us to walk away with a better understanding and the ability to move forward with whatever is necessary”, then you're on the right track.

If your answer is less utilitarian, and potentially selfish, well, then you need to work on yourself in that instant to get your head into the right place. I'm not going to go deep on that here, or get all preachy, but it usually helps to take the other person's perspective.

That last paragraph is, of course, for difficult conversations. It still helps, however, to set an intent for a conversation that doesn't hinge on confrontation. Having an intention helps you be more mindful and precise with your speech. In the end—you save energy or are potentially invigorated.

Intentions for Tasks

This one boils down to a simple question—what's the goal?

If you can give yourself a simple, attainable goal for your daily tasks, it helps focus and engagement.

Let's say you have a big old shit pile of emails to get through—and it's going to be labor intensive because they can't all be one sentence responses. Setting a simple goal before you approach them is going to help you manage your engagement, and subsequently, your energy.

Here's a possible goal for dealing with that shit pile of emails:

I'm going to read and respond to 10 emails with devout focus and effort over the next thirty minutes.

That simple goal allows you to leave everything else be, even the emails you know that it's not feasible for you to get to right now, and get some shit done that you'll feel good about. Attaining that goal will help build self-trust—and it will often catapult you into being more productive than you thought you would be.

Timing Your Expenditure

There are certain tasks that we have no choice but to work at for a given amount of time—coaching comes to mind. Other people are involved, and there is a designated time and place, so there we are for that period. But much of our other work is formless when it comes to time and energy. We can do it whenever and wherever, so it becomes more difficult to get done—and sucks the energy out of us in the process. Lack of constraints spreads us out and pulls from us without restoring. Self-imposed constraints can save us. Rather than just approaching work with an open-ended timeframe, we need to give ourselves stop and start times with built in breaks.

Using the timer on your phone, or one of the egg timers from the internet, set a timer to work on a task—it could be writing an email, working on your numbers, etc. For that time, that’s all you’re doing and there’s nothing else in the world to worry about. I’ve found anywhere from twenty-minute to fifty-minute timers to be effective. At the end of the timer, you take a five-minute to fifteen-minute break—depending on the work interval you just completed—and then get back to work on the task or transition to a new task.

Work blocks such as these allow us to focus because we know that there is an end point. And it’s great if you’re a clock racing type of person—you can strive to get as much done during your work period as possible. Either way, it keeps work that’s usually shapeless and time-ambiguous from spreading out over too long of a period, sapping our energy, and frustrating us because we don’t feel productive. That frustration is the biggest energy thief of all.

Engagement

Level of engagement is a direct result of intention, so this section won’t be wordy. If you set boundaries, and set intentions—while also following the guidelines for protection, your engagement should be on point. If it isn’t, you know that one of the tactics from above isn’t running as planned. Take a second to diagnose, give yourself some time to shake it out, and then get back after it.

If your engagement is really, really shit, then it might be time to just give yourself a break. Since you’re reading this, I’m going to guess that you have a certain level of healthy ambition, and aren’t inherently lazy. So, if you don’t have the moxie to get something done, there’s probably something else at play—and it’s likely because you’re drained. It’s time to recuperate.

Recuperation

This section could be co-titled “Reinvigoration” because many of the tactics will do just that. Let’s get rolling with a big question.

What is truly restorative for you?

We’re going to handle tactics in just a second, but let’s start a bit more abstractly first. It’s tough to apply tactics without self-awareness, so let’s use this question to gain some before we start doing some willy nilly shit.

As much as I think we need to experiment to learn about ourselves, there are things we know that fuel us and restore us. I make this obvious point because I think it's very easy to get caught up in the game of thinking we should do something because others say it "should" restore us. Meditation comes to mind. For all intents and purposes, meditation should help calm us down. But if you know the act of meditating actually gives you anxiety because you're not good at it, well, then it's not actually restorative. That's not to say that you shouldn't practice it in some way so that one day it can be restorative for you, but it is to say that it shouldn't be part of your current recuperation plan. It's going to take more effort to get it done than it is going to give back to you. That's okay—it just has a different place.

Before we start talking tactics, let's take a few minutes just to think about the things that put you completely at ease. When you do these things, you're totally contented. There is no time or place to worry about and you don't need anything else. What are those things for you?

At this point, I don't even want you to list them. I just want you to think about them and feel them. I want you to visualize them—see yourself in those circumstances. And, goddamn it, I just want you to feel at ease and contented right now. It's really nice, isn't it?

After you take a minute to just feel pretty good, I want you to capture those things that rejuvenate and recuperate you—those things that give you a feeling of oneness and contentment. Now, I want you to write them down for two reasons.

The first is so that you can make sure you include them in your life as often as you possibly can. There is no point in working hard just to not enjoy your life. It's totally fucking pointless to do all this and feel like shit. So, at the most practical level, we need to incorporate the things we love and make us feel whole. Otherwise, fuck all this shit.

The second is so that you can look at this list and visualize one or two of the things that rejuvenate you. Maybe you can't do the thing right now, but taking a few moments to see it in your mind's eye can recreate it for you. And a lot of times that's enough to restore us.

Pre-emptive Recuperation

Remember how prehab became popular back in the day? We were all doing rehab-type exercises before we ever got hurt in an effort to prevent injuries. While injury prevention isn't necessarily a real thing, a little bit of prehab helped us to feel good and prepped us to lift. Pre-emptive recuperation follows a similar line of logic.

Early in the morning before I start my work, I set a timer for ten to twenty minutes and I write. You might be thinking, tap the breaks there Bumgardner—writing is work. In some respects; that's true. But the writing that I do first thing in the morning is on passion projects—and it sparks me before I ever get into my work.

I can't give you scientific reasoning because I haven't done the research yet, but the act of doing something that I find fun and rejuvenating before I ever get into work fills me with enthusiasm and creativity. It's creativity that I carry over to my first work tasks of the day, which are usually creative, and it not only puts my brain in a creative mode, it also boosts my productivity. I can get a lot more shit done in a short amount of time. (And, if you're keeping track at home, working less time and getting more done in the time that you do work, is cool.) Now, I choose writing because it's important to me and I think it's fun. It might sound like total drudgery to you. That's cool. But there's something that you enjoy that exists just adjacently to your work that you'd normally pause work to do in an effort to rejuvenate and recuperate. What I want you to do, is try doing that thing before you do the work things. And just see how it goes for you. You should feel restored before you ever even begin to deplete.

Transitional Resets

In the section on energy expenditure, we talked about timing your expenditure. At the end of each work block, there was a break. Using that break well is a must for recuperation.

In his book *High Performance Habits*, Brendon Burchard mentions that transitioning from one work task to another is often what zaps our energy. We haven't truly closed the book on one thing before we moved on to the next. That leaves the last thing lingering and incomplete in our minds and disrupts the focus and energy we can give to the next work block. He offers a simple technique for transitioning smoothly—and I'll add a little of my own flair to it.

During the break between work blocks, especially if you are transitioning from one kind of work to another, Brendon recommends taking a brief few moments, closing your eyes and repeating "release" in a medium cadence as you control your breath. Set a timer for whatever amount of time you deem appropriate—anywhere from two-minutes to half an hour—but be sure to set the timer. Having the timer set allows you to release and relax because you know there's a boundary. If you were to do it without setting a timer, it would be tough to settle in because you'd likely worry about how much time had elapsed.

To these release resets I add quick bits of movement. Whether it's just walking around, doing some light calisthenics, or CARs, I move a bit. I've found that the movement helps with reinvigoration. The process is to do the release meditation before the movement. The meditation shuts out the past work block and the movement preps for the next work block.

Days Off

There should be at least one day per week during which you don't work at all. At times, it will be necessary to break this rule—but that should be a very infrequent exception.

Eating, Sleeping, and Other Physiological Shit

I could have put this section at the front, because it's likely the most important and most fundamental to our recuperation. But I think it works as a nice capstone as well.

Look, this is the shit that we all coach our clients to do. We know what to do here—it's just easy not to do it. So, make it easy on yourself.

Create a nighttime automation that sets you up to rest.

Create an eating schedule that works for you. Chris often doesn't eat until early afternoon. I have to eat by midmorning. We each approach it differently, but we do it in a way that sets us up for success. Eat in such a way that you feel energized and mentally clear—and make this somewhat routinized. And please, for the love of all things good, don't should all over yourself. You're going to skip beats from time to time.

When it comes to other physiological shit, I'm generally speaking about exercise. Now, we talked about waving your demands and your training throughout the week, but I want you to ask yourself another question in regard to your training as it fits with your priorities.

Do I need more or less tension right now?

It's often that we default to lifting because it's what we like and what we're good at. But when we have a lot of tension in other aspects of our work and life, it's often more energy depleting than energy giving. Sometimes we have to bag the weights and do something else.

If you are honest with yourself and know that more tension isn't the answer at a given instance, please let it be and do a restorative form of exercise. Cardiac output, light mobility training and movement, and light, flowing yoga are all good options. Taking yourself on a walk is also a great idea.

Training is, for all of us, the impetus that got this party started—so, it's often that we feel as though we must be iron men and women when we approach it. "Training is what we do, we should be able to do it in the way we want all the time, no matter what," goes the logic of the "shoulding" that we do to ourselves. Our identity plays tricks on us. But the reality is it that it isn't the highest priority—at least most of the time it isn't. It's become a tool that helps us give energy and usefulness to our lives. It must exist and always have its place, but we truly have to consider the application and how it fits with the rest of the demands on our energy.

Emotions

*“One ought to hold on to one’s heart; for if one lets it go, one soon loses control of the head too.”
-Friedrich Nietzsche*

The problem with emotions is that we need them. If we didn’t, it would be easy to disregard them as fleeting, silly things that have no place in a rational human’s life. But they are our living barometers, helping us to determine when things are right or wrong. And they make our lives rich. Could you imagine walking this earth as some kind of subhuman, emotionless droid without the complexities of human feeling? The world would be gray and meaningless.

In needing emotions, we get confused by them. Often, we take them as truth and fully submit ourselves to their whims. This is especially true in relation to our in-built, human bias toward negativity. On the roller coaster that is self-employment and entrepreneurship, the troughs can lead us into the darker places of our psyches. And while feeling the good and the bad is all part of being human, there are deep, dark places we ought not consistently go.

While the emotional roller coaster is part of business ownership, it doesn’t have to dominate us. We don’t always have to listen, and we can consciously, and environmentally, manage them. When we do, we are at our human best. We are living and feeling, but we do so in a way that moves us forward with a clear, productive mind.

This section on emotions follows the section on energy because, in most instances, when we manage our energy well it’s easier to manage our emotions. When our energy is depleted, we are at the mercy of our whims—and that’s no place to be. So, the first step in managing emotions is managing energy.

Let’s move on to the rest of the tactics for managing emotions.

Expectations

Beyond mismanaged energy, the largest saboteurs of our emotions are mismanaged expectations. A mismanaged expectation by default thrusts us into the unknown. We act thinking one thing is, or will become, reality, when, in truth, we were off of the mark. In missing the mark, we end up in a place where we essentially don’t know where we are. The not knowing can be exciting and fun, but it also is anxiety provoking. That anxiety brings about negative emotions.

Solid expectation management is akin to optimistic realism. It begins with the question, “What do I truly want?” The follow up question is, “Ok, well where am I currently at?” Both of these questions require sincere self-honesty and awareness. It can sometimes take years to answer these questions in a satisfactory manner. But it’s the trying that makes us able to answer them.

As we try to answer them, we observe our world, our actions, and the results. Our observations must be noticed and registered—whether that register is written down or exists only in our minds, we have to notice. Once we notice, we truly take stock, we can have self-derived, realistic expectations. The faster we started paying attention, the faster we can attune our expectations to an optimistic reality—accepting things as they are while having confidence in our ability to continue to improve our standing.

Optimistic, but accurate, expectations are accompanied by self-trust. To earn our own trust, we have to show up and do the things we say we are going to do—however minute those things might be. When we do those things, we start to believe ourselves more and more. We get to know ourselves deeper and deeper. And then, we trust the lens through which we view the world. Our optimism blends with realism and we see the world on the shiny side of accurate. We can accept things as they are and realize our place in them. We can move forward with belief that we create the best version of our lives and work that we can realistically expect within a given time frame.

But we also have to outsource some of our expectations. Trusted mentors, colleagues, and friends help us shape our view of reality. It's important, however, to be wary of whom you listen to in setting your expectations.

Help and Support

No matter how hard you try, you can't smell your own nose. That's a gem borrowed from the wisdom of Alan Watts, and it's illustrative of an important, but often unrecognized, point—we outsource our sanity. We know whether or not we are on course through the reactions, and interactions, with others. Our psyche is managed through relationships.

It begins where we left off in the last section—expectations and a certain level of healthy wariness as to whom we allow to help us manage our psyche. We have to be selective about who we listen to in a given context. Since our current context is our work, let's stick with that.

Don't listen to people that haven't done shit. They have no bearing on what realistic expectations about your business might be, and they communicate mostly via their fear and inadequacies—or their uninformed optimism. Everyone opines via their biases, but these folks' biases are often off the mark, and are skewed either toward the overly negative or toward the unrealistically positive. We need to be conscious about who makes up our circles and the conversations that we have with them. I'm going to give you mine as an example so that you can be more conscious of how you structure yours.

Chris, you may know him as “Money Balls Merritt” is a constant source of optimistic accountability for me. I see his relentless work and passion it pushes me to be better. He also personifies realistic optimism. He knows where he is at, and where our businesses are at, but he believes within a realistic stretch of reality that we can make incredible things happen. And he's right.

But he is also someone that knows me intimately—as a business partner and a friend. His example helps me to consider my own current actions, but he also knows my quirks, my bullshit, and my strengths. He always asks me the questions that keep me from bullshitting myself, and when I slip up, he calls me out. He is very much my brother.

Bill Hartman is my guide. He helps me navigate life in a way that keeps me on the path toward my true north star—what I truly want and who I truly want to become. In doing this, he helps me consider what my true priorities are and stay in line with them. This came through years of conversations and getting to know each other. Like Chris, but in a different context, he always asks me the questions that need to be asked that keep me heading in the direction that I want to go. Having an elder mentor that knows you and is experienced with the world, and understands the business that you work in, is absolutely invaluable. If you don't have one, it's absolutely time to seek one out.

Mike “Big Poppa” Connelly is an unwavering supporter—and someone that can truly empathize with me. We are similar forms of crazy. Mike always helps me consider myself when I'm at my low points and lifts my chin. In that way, he's much like a big brother. But he's also a constant source of good ideas that I can take and run with. He's been on both ends of business—good and bad—so he has a unique viewpoint as it relates to what we do.

My friend Josh, whom I've known since I was twelve years-old, is a release valve for me. Although we've been through some troubles, and I've helped him through some dark times, we are silly sons of bitches together. We talk about the most ridiculous shit imaginable—most of the time we just joke. Other times we talk fishing and hiking—and then we fish and hike together. He's very bright and he also satisfies my intellectual curiosity. We talk several times per week and I always visit him when I'm home in Pennsylvania. Like Chris and Mike, he's also my brother.

Brett Shaffer and I have the most complex, and in some ways, most rewarding relationship of all the people close to me. I'm an adopted member of Brett's family—attending Thanksgiving and Christmas with them. He and I are also hunting buddies—the outdoors being one of my greatest passions. But, he's a much better outdoorsman than I am, so he serves as a mentor as well. The roles get reversed in business. Brett has a fledgling outdoors business and I return the mentorship favor in helping him consider how he structures, and makes decisions about, his business. All of these relationships are encapsulated by a deep friendship—giving cause to the spectrum of conversations that brothers have.

The coaching team at BSP NOVA allow me to give. My collective professional knowledge is expressed through them. They act on my ideas and I get to observe and notice from a far more objective position than if I were to act on them myself. And I also have the privilege of receiving their feedback about the ideas. I also get to serve as their mentor and teacher, which drives me to be better every day. I have to, day in and day out, ask myself the question, “Am I worthy of leading these men?” Being able to answer yes drives me to constantly consider myself and improve.

Through all of these relationships, and those that aren't necessarily so close, I am able to consider where I currently stand in the world. I don't have a formula for you, and that's probably because one doesn't exist. But you need people.

You can't smell your own nose.

Self-Curiosity

It's much more productive to pose questions to ourselves than it is to tell ourselves what to do. Those questions come from wondering—that wondering curiosity often saves us from the ruminating thought beat downs that we issue ourselves. It starts with some human understanding.

Human beings do weird shit and we are all imperfect. Alan Watts, whom I've quoted earlier in this document, is widely respected as an incredibly wise man with a clear vision of what the world, and existence as a human, really is. He was an alcoholic and likely died because of it at the age of fifty-eight. Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves and held the country together when it seemed as though it would surely tear apart. He battled severe depression his entire life. Lyndon Banes Johnson is considered one of the greatest civil rights leaders and politicians in the history of the United States. He was so demanding of his staff members that he often berated and verbally abused them.

I offer these illustrations to show you that there is no greatness without flaw. And that's good news. You just get to be human like everyone else.

One of my heroes, Carl Rogers, said, "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." Self-acceptance is the foundation of self-curiosity. When you let yourself be, you can actually start asking yourself questions about why you do the things you do—and you can be fair about it.

When you feel that twinge of self-judgment, use it as a trigger to ask yourself, "I wonder why..." Most often we judge ourselves for shit that really doesn't deserve our judgement. Sure, there are times that we behave in a reprehensive way. But how common is that? Not very. So, rather than flagellating yourself for being human, ask yourself a question about why maybe you didn't perform as well as you wanted to and the conglomeration of things that might have contributed.

When you gain awareness via self-curiosity, you can think more objectively about your actions and how you'd potentially like to change them. Or, you can just accept them as part of who you are and leave them be—that's a totally fine option. In fact, until you take that step of acceptance, it's likely that you won't be able to change in the meaningful way that you want to.

So, rather than berating yourself, stop and ask, "I wonder why..."

“Forget the Shoulds”

Those things from the last section that we’re often too hard on ourselves for take shape as the “shoulds.” The shoulds are all those things that we believe we should be doing because other people say they are good—so, obviously, they are good for us, too.

The shoulds can really be anything, but let’s talk about them in the context of emotional regulation. They are things like journaling, meditation, talk therapy, etc. Now, before we go any further, I want to make sure that you know that I’m not poo pooing any of these things. They all have merit in their own right. But I am saying that doesn’t mean that you should do them.

We often get frustrated with ourselves when we do something that’s “supposed” to work for us but it doesn’t—or it just doesn’t feel right. Sometimes it’s a matter of staying the course before you realize the fruits of your labor. But it’s also often true that the tactic just doesn’t work for us. We get hemmed up by the belief that it should work for us because other people say it should. Then we get into that whole frustrated judgement cycle.

Fuck ‘em.

Just because something is generally good, doesn’t necessarily mean it specifically applies to you. And that’s more than just perfectly okay—that’s just the way of the world. If you like to meditate in the various forms recommended by experts, and you get benefit from it, then, please, by all means continue. But if it causes you more stress than good, and it frustrates the shit out of you, maybe it’s time to leave it be. (It also may be time to get curious about why meditation is frustrating you so much. But that’s another conversation.) There are also a million ways to meditate—just to stick with an example. It doesn’t have to be sitting and counting breath or focusing on your body. Playing an instrument, taking a walk, talking with a confident about a topic you really jive on can all be forms of meditation. The point is you’re totally immersed in your life in the here and now. And when we keep the goal in mind, and not the specific tactic, it’s easier to act in a way that’s accordance with who you are and what works for you.

So, rather than shoulding all over yourself, consider a few things. What is it that you can pay attention to that helps you regulate your emotional state? What are the things/activities that help you notice? What typically helps you restore your emotional equilibrium or keeps you from getting too far off of it? Be patient with yourself, but take the time to answer those questions.

Bright Spots

What works for you to notice the good things in your life and capture them? Whatever that process is, do it. Maybe it’s gratitude journaling in the morning. Maybe it’s talking with your significant other about the good things that happened in each of your respective days. Like we talked about in the last section, the tactics don’t matter as much as the goal. The goal is to have

gratitude for your existence—and there are a million ways to do that. The weird thing is, you can't force it. But you can lead yourself down the path to gratitude through practice of paying attention. And the question that you have to answer, what helps you pay attention?

A Strategy for the Not-So-Good

Here's something that you already know—life isn't always so bright and shiny. It's our resilience during those not-so-good times that ultimately reveals who we are and shapes the outcomes in our lives. As it goes with everything else regarding our emotions, we need attention and strategy to improve how we manage ourselves.

I want you to think back to a challenge you had during the past week—one that you didn't handle well. If we're honest with ourselves, we frequently have challenges, however small, that we could have handled better. Recall your actions, what happened, and what the outcome was. Once you've done that, I want you to replay it in your head—what could you have done differently to improve the outcome? Could you have been more prepared for the situation? What could you have done during the course of the situation to rise to the challenge? What will you do in the future to make sure the next time a similar situation arises that you'll also rise to meet it in a productive way?

One of the beautiful things about the human brain is how well it learns and how abstractly it thinks. Abstraction is one of the things that has not only helped us rise to the top of the evolutionary heap, but it also keeps us alive. We can use information from situations that we've encountered in the past and apply it in thought as we approach a similar situation—and it helps us avoid the danger. Using the power of abstraction to play out situations that we didn't handle so well trains us to improve how we approach similar situations in the future.

Often, our failure to rise to challenges has to do with poor emotional regulation or not having a strategy for acting. The tactic we just discussed tackles both. Thinking through a situation before it occurs again takes us out of the jungle we don't know and places us squarely in the forest that we do know. It kills the tigers in the bushes that raise our emotional alarms and replaces them with familiar beasts. It's the unknown that shakes us, and when we limit the unknown we act more coolly and with calculation.

Future You

Have you ever thought about yourself as living within your own hero myth? As if you're playing out the drama and comedy of your life as the main character? Sometimes it's useful to think that way—especially to step back and think objectively about a course of action. It can also be incredibly empowering.

There's a simple question that you can ask yourself to place yourself firmly within your own hero myth, "What would the hero of my story do?"

This can be especially helpful during trying times, or during times when your emotions are getting the best of you and, well, you just don't feel like doing anything about the situation. Asking yourself that question helps you to bring out your better parts—the aspects of your personality that you respect most. Not only does it help motivate you to rise to the challenge ahead of you, but it also prods you to think strategically—an emotional regulation double whammy!

There's another variation of this question that I often pose to myself when I'm feeling stuck, unsure, or overwhelmed. It goes like this, "What does future you need you to do?"

We all have an idealized self that, in truth, is already with us—we are already that person we just have to let ourselves realize it. But in our thoughts that person is in the future—and in order to move forward, we have to value that person more than our current self. I know that sounds kind of weird, but if we value our current self more than we value who we want to reveal ourselves to be, we end up making short-sighted decisions that often make things worse for our present and future selves.

Asking ourselves these questions helps us to behave in a way that deepens our self-respect because we act in attunement with our deepest values. The more we grow to respect ourselves, the more resilient we become. And the more resilient we become, the better we are at regulating our emotions.

Sincere, But not so Damn Serious

Have you ever noticed how children learn before they start school and we fuck the whole process up? They play. They explore with their innate curiosity and then play with the things they find. That's probably the best way for us all to continue on, and some of us can, but most of us don't.

When we play, we're sincere, interested, and engaged with what's happening—and we're enjoying ourselves. The world is contained within the activity and we're simply observing and going with the flow. But we're not so damn serious. It's the tension that comes with being overly serious that often gets us into bad thought cycles. (I'm not talking about sports play in which we are incredibly concerned about the outcome. I'm talking general play.)

Yes, there's a lot riding on the line for all of us. There is absolutely no denying that. But, I'm curious. Have you found that you perform better when you're engaged, interested, and enjoying yourself or when you're so serious and tense that you're overbearingly evaluating yourself? It's the former, isn't it? I thought that might be the case.

Negative Emotions are an Alarm, Learn to Approach the Alarm

There's a problem with the "always positive" philosophy that's so prevalent today—it doesn't give us the best opportunity to learn and grow. It's also just not human. Although it's not ideal to fall prey to every negative emotion and live in a perpetual swirl of negative thoughts, we do have negative emotions for a reason. They evolved to help us pay attention and to avoid danger. But I think there's a way that we can use them that's far superior than only learning to avoid. They're best used to learn to approach.

Negative emotions alarm us to the dragons of our psyche—our fears, doubts, biases, and hatred. When it comes to our lives as fitness business owners, all of the above can be involved, but we mostly deal with fear and doubt. Both of those emotions cause us to act in odd ways. Sometimes we react to feelings of fear and doubt by holding in contempt whatever is rousing in us those emotions. Other times we simply withdraw. But what if we got curious and moved toward the thing that scares us?

There's a process in counseling called systematic desensitization. It helps people with extreme fears and anxieties defeat their fears, or at least control them, so that they don't have such a profoundly negative impact on their lives. Say, for instance, someone becomes deathly afraid of getting in a car after an accident. Unless the person is a city dweller, not being able to get in a car will severely inhibit the possibilities in their life. So, someone trained in systematic desensitization would, step by step, with the ultimate goal of getting the person to be able to ride in a car, inch them closer and closer to sitting in a car and taking a ride—or potentially driving. It would start at whatever level of stress would make the person uncomfortable but wouldn't totally shut them down—and then progress toward the ride.

We can do the same thing for ourselves through questioning with everyday situations. (I am in no way claiming that we should be trying to treat ourselves for extreme phobias.) It starts with simply wondering why something bothers you so much—or why you are experiencing so much fear or doubt. It starts with asking if it's really true. Is the thing that's stressing you so much really true or is it a story that you're telling yourself? Maybe your answer to that question nixes the whole issue.

But, maybe it is true. Now what? Well, what if you weren't feeling doubt or fear associated with that thing? How would you act then? The answer is usually the advice that you'd give to someone else that's in the same, or a similar, situation. In that line of thought, you'll find the action plan that will make you feel better.

Beyond questioning, there is one simple thing you can do to deal with negative emotions—something. We feel anxiety and reservations because we haven't acted. Anxiety, at its most essential, is an emotion that's there to get us to act. That action might be a thought of acceptance, or it might be literally moving in the world. Do one little thing that takes you closer to the thing that you're scared of. You'll be amazed at how much better you feel. I think, however, it's important to extend this curiosity and action in the spirit of the sincere but not too serious philosophy that we talked about above. It keeps us more open and relaxes us rather than forcing us into a rigidity that makes it difficult to act.

We have eyes on the front of our head because we've evolved to approach. We are not prey for our emotions, our emotions are alarms that signal to us what we are supposed to approach, overcome, and then wield as we grow stronger. You can run from fire because it's scary, or you can learn how to use the fire. Then the fire is yours.

Give

Most of this talk on emotions has been abstract. These last two sections are more practical and directly applicable—parting gifts for your immediate use without too much contemplation.

We're wired to take care of each other—there's a reason that it feels good to help another person. It's at least in part because we are aware, even if only subconsciously, of our vulnerability. Without others, the world is a much scarier and more difficult place to navigate. But with others, well, you've seen the positive aspects of what humans have been able to do.

The most human thing is to feel connected to other humans. That feeling of connection may well be the best emotional regulator of all. And a wonderful form of that connection is contributing meaningfully to someone else's life with absolutely no expectation of them returning the favor. To feel that connection, all you have to do is give.

Now, I don't mean financially, or even great amounts of your time—although each of those things can help. What I do mean is giving a kind word or gesture. It could be a compliment or simply a note letting someone know that you're thinking of them.

Take time each week to send notes, messages, emails, or letters to people just to say hello and ask about them. Selfishly, you'll feel good for doing it. Unselfishly, you'll have a meaningful impact on another person's life. And there's a chance that your kind words of inquiry pulled them from a darker place. If you can find a more productive and meaningful thing to do with your time here on this planet, I'm all ears.

Setting Alarms

This time when I say alarms, I don't mean using your emotions as means to pay attention. I literally mean alarms—on your phone.

In his book, *High Performance Habits*, Brendon Burchard mentions using different types of triggers in an effort to manage emotions and mindset. My favorite, and the one I've adopted fully into my life, is setting alarms on my phone as reminders of just how good I have it.

The daily ups and downs of business ownership can have us feeling as though we are the kings and queens of the world in one minute, and then feeling as though we're a total fuck up in the

next. As we start to drift into the troughs of our negative thoughts and emotions, we need automatic reminders that things aren't so bad.

Burchard recommended setting alarms several times per day with a reminder to "bring the joy" noted in the title of the alarm. As you're going about whatever task, your phone alarm sounds with whatever tones you wish, and the text "bring the joy" is in your face as you look at your phone. It's a subtle reminder to express gratitude, enjoyment, and engagement in whatever you are doing.

I followed Burchard's directions and gave myself the note to bring the joy at 9:00am, 1:00pm, and 6:00pm every day. These are the times of day that I typically start to fade and potentially devolve into the more curmudgeonly aspects of my personality. And I can tell you, anecdotally, that these alarms have helped me immensely. In times when I'm feeling sorry for myself, or not feeling in total control of my mood, and those alarms go off, I read the text and reply in my head, "You're right." Why not be joyous in the things that we are doing? It's life and we get to be alive—no matter the drudgery.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, in *The Gulag Archipelago*, his chilling recount and history of the Soviet prison camp system, mentions people that say that they love life, but in the prison find a disdain for their existence. Solzhenitsyn says in reply that even prison life is life, too. If you truly love life, you must love all of it. There's brutal truth in that logic. And on our very worst day, we are not suffering immeasurably in a forced labor camp. That's not to say things aren't relative and that we don't all have our struggles. But it is a poignant bit of perspective. That being said, automatic reminders help us from slipping into the story that our life isn't wonderful.

After noting the success of the bring the joy alarms, I decided that I'd experiment with the alarms to manage other aspects of my mental life—namely my mindset and energy as I approached the gym to be a leader.

You could deny that your staff and your clients are influenced by your energy and mindset—but you'd be wrong. One of the most important things that we can do as leaders is to have our heads in the right place before we enter an environment that requires us to be a positive example for everyone else. In the past, I'd been inconsistent with how well I've kept tabs on my mindset, emotions, and energy as I came to the gym. We have our, "leave your shit at the door" ethos at BSP NOVA, but I wasn't always as successful with it as I wanted to be. So, I combined Burchard's alarm system with something I learned from Ari Weinzweig of Zimmerman's. I set an alarm to check my "energy box."

The "energy box" is a tool that they use at Zimmerman's to ensure that they aren't bringing a bunch of negative baggage with them to their work. So, they check it, make sure they are putting in the good and leaving the bad—emotions, drama, etc. Liking the concept, and knowing that I could use an improvement on my system, I set an alarm to check my energy box. Now, that alarm goes off every weekday morning at 10:30am, which is usually the time that I arrive at the gym and start interacting with Chris and the coaches. Because of this simple, little

alarm, I've done a much better job of managing my emotions and energy—showing up as the leader the team needs me to be.

Time

"There is no safety in the cosmos."

-Alan Watts

In September of 2001, two days before September 11th, and as I began my sophomore year of high school, the *Band of Brothers* miniseries premiered on HBO. Throughout that fall, I think all Americans swelled with patriotic pride. We'd been attacked. We were hurt, scared, and angry. But we knew that good would prevail over evil. September 11th was a terrible event that brought us all closer together for a time. (I wish we still had that sense of unity.)

The timing of *Band of Brothers*, for me, was crucial. Swelling with patriotic pride, and burning with fervor ignited by learning more of the details of my grandfather's service during WWII (I never got to meet him, he died when my mother was nine years old), I attached deeply to all of the men of Easy Company, 101st Airborne, as they were characterized in the drama. One man, after learning of him, became one of my heroes—Major Richard Winters of Hershey, Pennsylvania. Though Winters stood atop the heap in my mind, I admired all of the men for their own reasons. The brashness, bravery, and confident decisiveness of Lieutenant Ronald Speirs has always resonated with me.

During one of the early episodes, a private is struggling with fear and shell shock when Speirs comes across the private in his fox hole alongside a hedgerow in France. The private tells Lieutenant Speirs about how he hid on D-Day after parachuting into Normandy. He explains the crippling fear he felt. Here's some of the dialogue:

Speirs: "What's your name, Trooper?"

Blythe: "Blythe, sir. Albert Blythe."

Speirs: "You know why you hid in that ditch, Blythe?"

Blythe: "I was scared."

Speirs: "We're all scared. You hid in that ditch because you think there's still hope. But, Blythe, the only hope you have is to accept the fact that you're already dead. And the sooner you accept that, the sooner you'll be able to function..."

Now, this might appear as exceptionally bleak. But ever since I heard it for the first time, I've found it liberating. I used to mutter it to myself before running down the field on kickoff coverage during my college football games. And it allowed me to do my job selflessly.

You're already dead. The universe existed for eons before you and it will exist indefinitely after you're gone. And in the short yawn of time from we're born to when we die, we can approach our lives with liberation by knowing that no matter what, you're going away. So, be damned the

consequences. From the perspective of eternity, we're already dead. And in the frame of human time, we'll all be dead soon. Let go and give yourself permission to use your time before the cosmos return you to nonexistence.

Why Are You Here?

It's a really big question—maybe the biggest one. Here it is, rephrased:

What are you on this earth to do?

Doesn't make it feel any smaller, does it? Good. Your existence shouldn't feel small. The sooner that you come to the knowledge that it isn't, the sooner you can give the appropriate amount of yourself to the world. That appropriate amount is all of you. Remember the Bill Bryson quote about all of the energy you contain? Defining why you are here gives you cause to take that energy and convert it into effort over time.

There are plenty of folks that will offer to tell you the meaning, the reason of why you're here—flag waving authority figures, ideologues, religious figures. But the truly wise know that the only person that can tell you why you're here is you. And it's the most important thing that you can reveal during your time here. When you know why, you'll be able to tell yourself how to spend your time here.

In the intro to this discussion on time, I referenced the idea that we're already dead. Once, during one of our bi-weekly conversations, Bill Hartman mentioned to me that we actually have three deaths. The first is when our physical body dies. The second is when we put to our final resting place. And the third is the last time anyone ever speaks our name—when we cease to exist as an idea in anyone's mind. To some, it's a sobering thought. But is it, truly?

You have the opportunity to exist in the minds, in the patterns of memory of other people, after just a short time on this planet. And you get the opportunity to die—and know that you will. You get to play, to do your work, and then you get to let go. I can't think of anything more meaningful in the annals of anything that we call human.

Knowing that everything you ever do or say will eventually be gone, puts the full authority of your life into your own hands—if you're willing to take responsibility for it. You may live, as artfully as you so choose, and you get to give it all away, and let go. If you were perpetual, the things you say and do couldn't obtain the same level of meaning because the pattern of memories that is you could never be as valuable. Your life, your time, the idea of you has value because it won't exist forever. So, beyond the fact that it's fleeting, why are you so valuable? That's a question for you to answer. And answering it honestly tells you how to spend your time.

It's a matter of accepting what you know to be true about yourself, about the world, and about you interact. It's being honest about your natural abilities, your lack of abilities, what you inherently value, and what you can best give to the world. When you can see it, your true

priorities, not just the ones defined by your everyday business actions, become obvious. As an illustration, I'll share why I'm here with you, in the simplest way I've been able to define it.

I'm here to express thoughts that people connect with—and enjoy myself while I do it.

At the most fundamental level, that's my purpose. The medium and context will evolve and change depending on setting and relationship, but at the most foundational level, that's why I'm on this earth. How did I come to this understanding?

I've considered myself deeply. I paid attention to what I truly love doing. I acted in the world and observed the results. I accepted my strengths and weaknesses.

I'll be totally transparent; this realization has only recently come to me. It took a lot of time, effort, wins, and losses, struggles, and triumphs to understand this about myself. Hopefully, you already know your purpose, or hopefully it doesn't take you the struggle that it took me for you to connect with your own.

But when you know why you're here, it's much easier to sort out your priorities. Subsequently, it's much easier to determine how you'll spend your time.

Time is Priorities

To be practical and formulaic,

Time management = priorities + effort + attention

Until you know what's important, what level of effort those important things are going to require of you, and have an idea of how you'll pay attention to what you're doing, you won't be able to manage your time well.

At the highest level of resolution, consider what your priorities are so that you may live out your purpose. They provide the framework for what you do with your business and your life.

But at a closer resolution, your priorities are the things required of you to maintain the health of the current situation while also moving in the direction of your ideal situation.

To successfully define priorities, you need to know your purpose at every level of action and you need to define for yourself the current stasis and what is required to preserve it, as well as your ideal that you'd like to move toward. The ideal being any vision of your business, yourself, or any relationships that you are a member of. When those things are sorted out, deciding on what to do, and how to spend your time, is much easier. It takes some work to get to easy, however.

Who Needs You on Your A-Game?

I'm stealing from Brendon Burchard again—it's a question he poses in *High Performance Habits*.

We're often more motivated to do for others than to do for ourselves—especially when things get difficult. Priorities aren't always comfortable, and we often have to do a bunch of shit we don't necessarily like or want to do. And there are also times when we even struggle to do the things we enjoy doing. Being human is weird.

In those times when we start to feel a little sorry for ourselves, demotivated, what-have-you, it helps to consider who really needs you to show up and kick ass. When you see their face, or faces, in your mind's eye, and truly feel committed them, it's a hell of a kick in the pants.

There are a couple of productive ways to pose this question to yourself. You could, like the reminders to bring the joy, set an alarm to go off on your phone at your chosen intervals. Or, my chosen way, is have the question written on a notecard at the head of my desk where I can see it. That way when I'm losing steam, I can look at the card, visualize the people that need me to perform, and get back to work.

You can choose however you'd like to do it. It's an extremely useful tactic because people, and our relationships with them, are often our biggest priorities.

Structure So That You Can be Here and Now

What can you do so that you feel focused and contented to work on the thing that's right in front of you, right now? That is the question. The answer is in environment and clearing your mind. Let's work through some more questions that approach each specifically.

What environment, or characteristics of an environment, allows you to narrow your world to the task at hand? Is it music, or is it silence? Is it a closed off room, or is it a quietly energetic coffee shop? The answer is totally unique to you, but it has to be considered. I'll offer mine as an illustration.

I'm at my desk, with the door shut. Wifi is turned off on my laptop. My phone is in another room where the door is also shut. I have acoustic guitar instrumentals playing low in the background. The combination of these elements creates the ideal environment for me to be productively—creatively and with simple tasks.

Many times, the right environment takes care of the whole clear mind thing. But without having a strategy to ensure that you can let go of the other things to be done and focus on your current priority, you can end up letting static creep in and disrupt your focus.

The question is, what can I do to clear my mind of all the other things that need done and focus on the thing I'm doing right now? The answer is often the simple tactic of brain dump and prioritize. There are a few solid ways to work this process.

One is the weekly Sunday brain dump followed by a prioritization of actions and tasks. Set a timer for fifteen to thirty minutes, and get all the things you'd potentially have to do for the week. Once you have everything down on paper, examine the list and curate them in order of importance. Once they are ordered, pick out the few priorities for the week and set aside time to work on them.

Another is to do a brain dump each night and follow the same process, just simply shrinking the time frame from a week to a day.

The third idea is to do this when you're struggling to focus on the task at hand because other tasks, ideas, and actions keep creeping into your mind. Set a ten minute timer and get all of the things out on to paper. Then, have a look at the list and determine when you could act on the other tasks, actions, or ideas that need your attention. After that, leave the list be and get back to the task at hand.

All of these brain dump and prioritize variations allow you to let go and shrink your world and your focus by outsourcing your brain to a piece of paper so that you don't have to try to hold so much shit in there. Get the other stuff out so you can be here and now.

When am I Truly Best Suited to do Different Types of Work?

When's the last time you sat down to try to do something creative but just didn't have the focus or idea flow to get it done? It's a frustrating experience, isn't it? Controlling for environment and a cleared mind, you just might have been trying to do the wrong kind of work at the wrong point in the day.

Each day has an ebb and flow. There are times when you're going to feel most creative, and other times when you're going to feel more task oriented and productive. The key is to go with the flow of those times and do your best to structure your work day in a way that fits the way that you work.

What time is best suited for you to do creative tasks?

Is there a time of day that you seem to learn best?

When is it best for you to handle your administrative-type duties?

How about answering emails?

Taking phone calls?

Now, you can't control for all of this, real life is real life and things are going to get in the way. But you can optimize to the best of your abilities. It's mostly a matter of paying attention to yourself, noting when different types of work flow and when others don't, and then trying to shape your day so that you aren't fighting yourself to get things done.

To quote Alan Watts once more, "You get the full strength of the stream when you swim with it."

There's No Such Thing as Wasting Time

How liberating is that statement? If you let it sink in, it's incredibly liberating.

No matter what you're doing, you're doing it for a reason. If something that you're doing doesn't align with how you'd like to be spending your time, or how you feel you should be spending your time, the goal is to figure out the reason. For example, if you're spending a bunch of time on your phone, disengaged from your work or your relationships, there's a reason why. It's not that you're just wasting time or that you're lazy, you're choosing to do that for a reason—maybe it's because you don't feel especially competent at the task at hand. Maybe it's because you just haven't given yourself a good reason for doing the thing that you're supposed to be doing.

Either way, your actions are purposeful—even the ones that feel wasteful. Understanding the purpose behind the action, rather than just calling yourself lazy and thinking that your wasting time, is much more productive in the long run. And it makes it much easier for you to change if you want to.

You're not wasting time. You're doing something for a reason.

What's the reason?

