

Recharge Your Team: 3 Secrets to Boosting Energy

by Suzanne W. Zoglio, Ph.D.

Remember when your work team oozed with ambition, focus, and creative ideas? Probably *before* the recession, Enron, 9-11, and the war in Iraq. Now, with the universal mandate to do more with less, and a job market that makes job-hopping impractical, many teams are running on empty. Stressed, tired, and uninspired employees cost American industry an estimated \$300 billion annually, according to NIOSH...in absenteeism, accidents, low productivity, and health claims. Seven out of ten U.S. workers report daily stress, but most wait weeks, even months before stopping to refuel. By then it's too late. So, what can you do? Plenty! You can enhance your team's focus, confidence, and energy by supporting the habit of refueling at work...often in less time than it takes for a coffee break. Here are three secrets to recharging your team.

1. BECOME MORE ENERGY AWARE

Review and remind your team of the stress-success connection demonstrated by Yerkes and Dodson of Harvard: some stress (pressure, challenge, change) is necessary for high productivity, but unmanaged stress diminishes productivity...not to mention health and personal well being. The secret is in applying what I call the "rubber band theory" of energy management. Stretch and relax, stretch and relax. If you do so several times a day, you maintain your resilience. If you stretch, stretch, and stretch – without stopping to interrupt the fight-flight response – you eventually burn out.

To manage our energy efficiently, we have to recognize the signs that it's time to interrupt the fight-flight response and stop briefly to refuel. Individual signs might include physical symptoms like muscle tension or fatigue, behavioral symptoms like tuning out when others speak or reading the same message three times and still not getting it, or even emotional signs like feeling depressed, edgy, or angry. Once a team understands *why* it's important to refuel and can recognize *when* it's time to refuel, it can then learn *how* to refuel...fast...like race drivers pulling in for a pit stop.

2. KEEP QUICK-LIFTS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

If team members know only one way to restore their energy: by getting away...on vacation, with sick days, or by quitting their jobs...they'll go too long without a break and the chronic stress will take its toll on mental clarity, motivation, and health. The wait-for-vacation method simply doesn't work. In fact, research indicates that for optimal performance, we should disengage every few hours...even if for only for a few minutes. So to recharge your team, make sure everyone has a variety of quick-lift ideas available when they need one. In my book, *Recharge in Minutes* (Tower Hill Press, 2003) I offer 101 such ideas, several for each of ten common energy drains. You might start with those and then add your own team's ideas, or develop a few as a team and then add to that list regularly. Include anything that team members can do at work, at lunch, at home, or en route.... in 10 minutes or less...to calm down, rev up, or fine-tune their focus. Energy breaks might include deep breathing, yoga, or mentally reciting a prayer. Or shifting to a creative mindset by listening to a favorite piece of music, perusing a favorite book of art, or even building a paperclip sculpture. They might try focusing activities such as prioritizing, delegating, or planning tomorrow today. Mind vacations, quick connections with others, sharing a laugh, or singing out loud (and then laughing at yourself?) are also ways to temporarily disengage from the challenge at hand, restore energy and refresh a point of view.

3. MAKE ON-THE-JOB RECHARGING A HABIT

It really doesn't matter what quick-lifts your team members choose to use, as long as they do so regularly. The best-case scenario is that recharging becomes as much of a habit for your team as checking email or taking a coffee break. You can help make recharging a habit in several ways. Be a role model by taking regular energy breaks you. Instead of a coffee break, take a yoga break and invite others to join you for a few stretches or postures. Or make jumping jacks (all welcome) at 11 AM on Mondays a regular event. Consider emailing everyone and asking that each person send one "thank you" to someone on the team (we gain energy when we give and are reminded of that others are there for us). Help your team develop

the recharging habit by pairing with a particular time or a daily habit. For instance, you could suggest that everyone install a “favorite place” digital photo as his or her screensaver. That way, whenever they check email, they’ll take a little mind-vacation. Or you could start each staff meeting with an energizer – one thing that went well this week...instead of starting right in with the challenges to be handled. At noon each day you could blow a whistle and call all present together for a round of quick “kudos” for any successes in the last 24 hours. Every time the phone rings, stand up and stretch your back; whenever you sit at a keyboard, lower your shoulders (since 75% of us raise our shoulders automatically when we sit down to type). Before you shut the lights off at the end of the day, stop for a full minute and “engage” with a photo of someone you love. Pairing little lifts with daily behaviors will help you incorporate recharging into your routine...and your team’s!