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EXECUTIVE STAMINA

How to Optimize
Time, Energy, and Productivity to
Achieve Peak Performance

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OVERVIEW

What does stamina have to do with executive success? Consider the following: stamina gives you the ability to remain consistently focused on and energized about the task at hand. Being overworked, overstressed, and exhausted increases your chances of making career-damaging mistakes. With e-mail, cell phones, and Blackberry devices increasingly blurring the line between work and personal life, stamina is no longer simply an asset for executives; it's an absolute necessity.

In *Executive Stamina*, you'll learn all of the skills, techniques, and positive practices needed to create a sustainable path to achieve your full career potential. Renowned executive coach Marty Seldman and endurance coach Joshua Seldman will introduce you to the revolutionary training system they've

used with great success on top executives and endurance athletes. You'll find hundreds of tips and tools that will help you maximize your career potential, while maintaining your health, staying in touch with your values, and avoiding costly tradeoffs in your personal life.

It starts by learning how to align your career ambitions with your core values, commitments, current priorities, and long-term goals. You'll learn to determine what is most important to you, whether your schedule is actually aligned with your priorities, and how to find your career sweet spot.

Whether you're trying to make it through a grueling project in one piece or planning for a lifetime of repeated success, *Executive Stamina* is your key to developing and maintaining success.

What Is Most Important To You?

A key success factor for executives is the ability to correctly prioritize and, when indicated, be able to reprioritize, quickly if necessary. In order to do this, you must be able to focus on the biggest challenges to, or biggest payoffs from, your career and/or organization. Although all of this sounds straight forward and logical, several skills are required to prioritize well. Among the most neglected of these skills is reflection. While there are many methods to prepare you for thoughtful reflection, *Executive Stamina* presents you with the most effective ways to evaluate your core values, commitments, current priorities, and long-term goals by answering three crucial questions:

1. What is already on your plate?
2. What is precious to you?
3. Are you living your stated priorities?

Is Your Schedule Aligned With Your Priorities?

To get a realistic picture of yourself, look at the choices you make. How do you spend your time? Your money? Whom do you associate with? The choices we make are usually obvious to the people around us, but not always to ourselves. Based on your actual schedule, you will find the gaps between your stated priorities, values and goals and the time you are devoting to them.

Although each individual situation is unique, to come into alignment it is important to examine the most common areas where wide gaps begin to surface for most people.

1. Health and Wellness
2. Financial Planning
3. Business Priorities
4. Religious/Spiritual Practices
5. Relationships
6. Core Values

By examining a realistic picture of yourself you may realize that you are overcommitted and be motivated to reconsider or reprioritize your commitments. You may become more determined to close the gap(s) and apply the proven and effective techniques found in *Executive Stamina*.

The Minimums and Shift/Drifts Systems

The Minimums System is the idea that to get the change process started, and to improve the chances that change will be sustained, start small. The proposed change needs to be small enough that it is well within our abilities and resources to accomplish yet meaningful enough to represent visible progress.

A minimum in this context is an activity that you commit to doing in any of the key areas (core value, commitment, current priority, long-term goal) where you perceive a gap or risk. It is a small step in the right direction that demonstrates to you and those around you that your priorities and actions are coming into alignment.

The Shifts/Drifts Tracking System is designed to make you aware of change, and the implications of change, in your career and personal life, and then to help you use this awareness as a springboard to take timely action—to reprioritize your time and shift your focus to maximize opportunities and deal effectively with threats.

Shifts are changes which are immediate and easy to recognize. Drifts are gradual changes that often go unnoticed. By systematically focusing on shifts and drifts and their impact, you put yourself in a position to make better decisions and improve the chances that should you begin to drift—you won't do so for more than a short period of time.

Finding Your Career Sweet Spot

In baseball, the sweet spot experience results from having the right combination of equipment, swing, timing and the ball itself; similarly, in your career, finding the sweet spot requires a coming together of the right elements:

1. Competence: What are you good at?
2. Enjoyment: What do you like to do?
3. Interest: What are you deeply and sincerely curious about?
4. Meaning: What fits with your values and serves a higher purpose?

“Often, when we finally become aware of or alarmed about a gap in our lives, our tendency is to commit to drastic change.”

The Impact of Stress

It is neither possible nor necessarily desirable to eliminate all stress. In fact, there is a positive kind of stress; it even has a name: eustress. Eustress is different for each individual but it is usually characterized by balance—that is, the demands and pressures that tax us are matched by the resources, competence, and confidence that we marshal to meet them.

So maybe it's more accurate to label the type of stress that can hurt our health and productivity as distress, for that is what most of us mean when we refer to stress. The fallout of this distress has the potential to have an adverse affect in several areas of our lives: our health and energy, sleep, the development of addictions, our relationships and our careers.

External causes of stress are easy to identify— heavy workload, a noisy environment, crowding, long lines, travel delays, disruptions, difficult people and so on; few of us think about a very important internal factor: how we perceive stressful events and how we choose to react to them. This is often a major determinant of how much stress we actually experience.

You have the potential to influence three major aspects of stress:

1. Frequency: How often you experience stress
2. Duration: How long you stay upset
3. Intensity: How upset you get

It is imperative that you recognize that your perceptions and the way you frame events drive your stress, making you a key contributor to your own pain.

Increasing Your Fitness

Increasing your fitness is no longer reserved for a few dedicated individuals, but is now a necessity to maintain career longevity and perform at the level you desire. It is your gift to use to achieve the results you want in career, life, and relationships.

Your body is designed for movement and effort. In the absence of action it slowly starts to deteriorate; bone density, muscle strength, and aerobic capability decline, and your basic metabolism begins to slow. Even if your weight stays the same, your body is replacing muscle with fat, lowering your calorie burn rate even more.

Our approach to fitness starts with you as a unique individual. We will describe a variety of fitness levels, activities, and workout plans to increase your options. Overall fitness includes: aerobics conditioning, maintaining flexibility, and building strength.

Although you are no doubt already familiar with many of the benefits of getting fit, below is a comprehensive list of benefits:

- Increased Energy
- Better health
- Stress management
- Mood Elation
- Improved Relationships
- Better-Quality Sleep
- Improved Decision-Making Capabilities
- Image and Impact
- Corporate benefits

To help you achieve maximum results you will be presented with a series of workout plans, specific to your current level and your fitness goals. The time you devote to fitness is not a luxury: it is a personal and business necessity you need to plan for.

"If you are too busy to exercise, you are too busy."

"The personal choices we make regarding our bodies shape our health and energy."

Nutrition

The connection between nutrition and stamina is straight forward: food is fuel. Along with oxygen, it is our primary source of energy. Just as we will become fatigued, and perform at a lower level, when deprived of enough oxygen, our energy will drop off when given inadequate nourishment. That is why you need to focus on how the choices you make regarding what you eat and drink can either support or undermine your objectives in key areas of stamina.

- Keeping our energy levels high, without drop-offs
- Strengthening our immune system and increasing longevity
- Maximizing the fitness gains from our workouts
- Helping our bodies recover from stress, and experience deep sleep
- Providing good nutritional options while traveling

Fortunately these days, it is easier than ever to make healthy food choices. Public concerns, consumer demands, and, in some cases, regulatory changes, are pushing food manufacturers, restaurants, and even the media to focus on a "better you" approach. Of course easier doesn't mean easy. That is why the goal of this chapter is to offer you key concepts to serve as a guide to your day-to-day decision-making process where food is concerned, and to provide you with many simple, convenient choices that can help you move in the direction of high-stamina eating.

Stress Management: Your Individual Plan

While many executives face similar challenges and have personal and professional dilemmas in common, your individual commitments, priorities, values, long-term objectives, extended family constellations and set of circumstances are unique to you. So to develop a stress management program that will be effective for you, you will have to use self-knowledge to design the plan that specifically addresses where you, and only you, are at in this stage of your life. To develop your most effective plan, here are three self-awareness areas that you should pay attention to:

1. Stress Triggers: What are the situations and who are the people that cause stress in you?
2. Stress Signs: What are the early indicators that you are starting to experience stress?

3. Stress Feedback: Tune into the direct and indirect feedback you get from those around you.

Once you have identified your specific self-awareness areas, you can begin to develop an individual plan using techniques and practices designed as building blocks to assist you. These building blocks include:

- Simplicity
- Enjoyment
- Control
- Self-Awareness
- Self-Talk
- Prayer/Meditation
- Relaxation

Think about which of these you might want to initiate in your life.

"Often the most extreme levels of stress are experienced by people who feel they have little control over their circumstances."

Yoga at the Office

The primary goal of this chapter is to give you simple, easy to follow exercises you can practice throughout the workday. By doing these exercises regularly, you will, over time, create new, healthy, habitual patterns that will reduce stress and tension, and lead to a better work performance and a deeper sense of peace overall.

Even if you currently practice yoga, you can use this program as a guide for incorporating yoga at work, in addition to your current program. If yoga is entirely new to you, this is an invitation to begin a regular, easy routine that will help you stay calm, focused, and more effective while working.

Identifying High-Payoff Activities

Most executives already spend a significant amount of energy thinking of ways to optimize their time. So why spend time pointing out to you that you should spend your time on activities that yield the highest payoff for your specific objective? Three reasons:

1. *Reflection:* World-renowned psychologist Edward de Bono poignantly summarized the importance of spending time wisely: “No amount of hard work in the wrong direction ever takes you in the right direction.” Because many executives work at a hyper pace, allowing little time for reflection, it is often the case that they are spending too much time on non-crucial activities and neglecting others that are essential.
2. *Habits:* In conjunction with an absence of reflection, most of us have formed habits and established patterns that have us spending valuable time on low-payoff activities. And as we all know, habits are easy to make but difficult to break.
3. *Increased Urgency:* Activities that don’t vigorously advance our goals or, worse, waste our efforts, carry two risks. First, extending the length of the work day actually increases the chances of our reaching the point of diminishing returns before we achieve our objectives. Second, every time we say yes to something, we may also be saying no to a more important business or personal activity.

As you examine these reasons, only you can decide the best use of your time, and the answer will be different for everyone. Nevertheless, there are some guidelines that you can follow to help you identify those activities that should be a priority in your current role.

- What is my unique position on the team?
- What are the factors necessary for me to succeed in this role?
- What are the current risks and priorities of my role?

Executives often remark that time is their most precious commodity. Building on insights and techniques to identify high-payoff activities can guide you to be able to add the maximum value in your role. As you analyze your schedule, your priorities and all the objectives you are trying to achieve, it is beneficial and rewarding to be creative and look for useful ways to integrate them with your personal value system as well.

“A starting point in helping you decide which activities are essential is to examine your specific role on your team and your organization.”

"If you don't have a plan for your time, someone else will."

Taking Control of Your Calendar

The most fundamental of priorities and commitments already account for a large part of your schedule, and most executives will acknowledge that they don't have the luxury of participating in unproductive activities. Yet established habits, a lack of certain skills, and a prevalence of outdated systems allow this misuse of time, talent and resources to persist. Despite these organizational shortcomings, individuals must scrutinize their habits and patterns to determine when time is either not being optimally spent or, in some cases, being wasted.

The key principle underlying all the messages in this chapter is simply this; if your plate is full, realize that every time you say yes to something, you are saying no to something else. Consider the implications in your life for:

- Not having a plan for your time
- Engaging with toxic people
- Unproductive meetings
- Procrastination
- Unnecessary travel

Whether you do it yourself, or allow others to help you, taking control of your calendar produces positive results.

Career Management

How your career advances will be based on more than just your desire and your track record; it will be heavily dependent on the input of others, which may not always be to your advantage. That is why developing organizational savvy is vital to your success. What does organizational savvy mean? It means:

- Knowing who has power and how it is used in the organization
- Building a network of supporters and like-minded colleagues
- Learning the culture of your organization
- Finding ways to make your accomplishments known in subtle yet effective ways
- Creating and maintaining an accurate perception of your talent and potential
- Using self-management skills

While all of these skills are embedded in organizational savvy, it is equally important to avoid career management mistakes. We are all more prone these days to making mistakes that, in a single minute, can undermine years of hard work and diligence. Learning how to avoid these mistakes is essential to a long and successful career.

Maintaining Positive Relationships

Forming and maintaining positive personal and professional relationships is at the core of everything you do. The bonding that occurs in relationships is a foundation of happiness and may be our most effective weapon against stress. But these bonds are not unbreakable, and should never be taken for granted. They must be nurtured and supported by some basic practices; for once broken they are hard to repair. There are several basic core skills that will help you maintain relationship bonds.

- Don't take relationships for granted
- Remember the law of gradual change
- Be predictable
- Make time for listening
- Communicate clearly
- Resolve conflict effectively
- Pay attention to "tells"

About the Authors



Dr. Marty Seldman is one of the world's most experienced and successful executive coaches. He is the author of five books and has designed impactful seminars like *Organizational Savvy*, *Optimizing Differences*, and *Executive Stamina*. Currently he is the President of Optimum Associates.



Joshua Seldman is a highly respected cycling and fitness coach. During his professional athletic career, he was a twelve-hour and twenty-four hour solo mountain bike champion. He was also a lead coach for Carmichael Training Systems and Lance Armstrong's Tour of Hope cross-country ride.

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SyNet is what it appears to be. We are a truly global learning and development consultancy providing business professionals worldwide with the personal and professional skills needed to be highly effective in their organizational roles and personal lives. Our affiliated consultants, instructional designers, trainers and coaches throughout the world are experts in their field. Our team works to help clients effectively address strategic and tactical challenges in critical-to-success areas. SyNet's proven track record of success comprises an extensive list of industry leaders who rely on a globally present, fast and flexible partner to meet their specific learning and development needs in line with their business objectives.

SyNet operates from a 100% client-centric perspective – we listen and we meet the unique needs of each individual client. We do not just manage client relationships, but make them inspiring and real– which leads to a lasting shared success. It's a winning experience.

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- New and best-in-class interventions and solutions to address performance-limiting problems/issues
- Senior consultants with in-depth knowledge and experience
- Complete turnkey capabilities to address your needs from start to finish
- Interactive training methodology vs. conceptual learning and lecture
- Transformative learning experiences

We value learning above all. When dealing with new initiatives, we always consider the degree to which we think we can make a lasting business and social difference while learning alongside our clients.

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