



The Punk Edition

Dynamic Designs for Education and Change

Energy. Excellence. Tenacity

"For an effervescent life, keep your thoughts fearless, your emotions constructive and your actions venturesome..."

Wellbeing on Purpose: How to Proactively Manage Your Energy for Health and Happiness.

Wellbeing on Purpose

Issue 8, April 2017

Resilience and wellbeing are terms that are being used with increasing frequency in both personal and professional contexts. Phrases such as 'work life balance' and 'me time' are now firmly embedded colloquialisms.

Interestingly, this coincides with research indicating that we are now earn significantly more than generations prior to ours, we own more 'stuff', we have access to a world of information thanks to the internet and we have the luxury of far greater choices spanning from what we can buy to what we can do with our lives. Our roles are far less socially prescriptive and there are fewer limitations or expectations regarding we 'should' do with our lives. Indeed, even the concept of a career is far less defined as people capitalise on innovative start-ups, globalisation and create careers through means that did not even exist 20 years ago (blogging, instagram).

Yet, in spite of these changes (or perhaps as some would argue, because of them), we are far less satisfied with our lives. Mental health

issues such as depression and attentional disorders such as ADHD are at record highs and this trend looks only to increase. We are bombarded with messaging in the media and through our online social networks about health, wellbeing and resilience. We are given conflicting study after conflicting study and a barrage of well-intended yet inconsistent advice. And whose advice can we trust?

One could be forgiven for being overwhelmed and frustrated trying to juggle and implement the erroneous list of wellbeing musts and shoulds thrown at us with great intensity. Some of these things are needlessly complex and overcomplicate the core meaning and intention of wellbeing. And this feeds into the vicious cycle of keeping most of us at a distance from wellbeing- striving to attain it as we precariously aim for the alleged ideal of no less than 7 hours of sleep but no more than 8, while we drink our tepid lemon water, bathe in apple-cider-vinegar and fast for two days per week. Gimme a break!

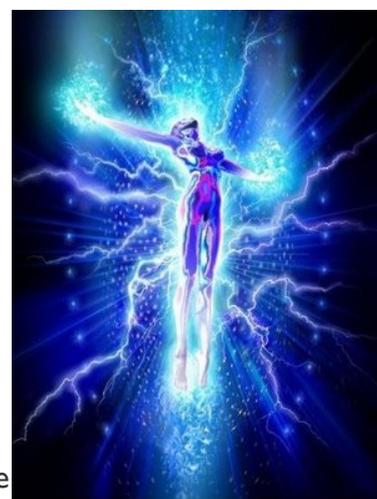


Image: <http://thepunnethehealthstore.com>

Power Package: Back by Popular Demand!

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Wellbeing, EQ and Resilience

Achieving a state of wellbeing is far from following a series of refutable 'facts' and hoping for an incontrovertible spike in vibrancy. It is simply not that complex, but it does require consideration and a proactive approach.

So what is wellbeing? When we are in a state of wellbeing, we are in a state of contentment.

We feel well, happy and have the energy to move comfortably through our day.

In this article, I propose that wellbeing is inextricably connected to Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and resilience. Fostering wellbeing is about creating our own recipe for wellness which is individual and developed experimentally. I also posit that wellbeing is balancing energy renewal and expenditure. Essentially, wellness results from purposeful and proactive planning and implementation of our wellness recipe.

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Wellbeing is inextricably linked to EQ and resilience:

EQ and Resilience are hot topics currently. EQ is the capacity to effectively manage ourselves and engage purposely and meaningfully in our social world. Resilience is the capacity to deal with hardship, setbacks and loss.

*When we are in a state of wellbeing,
We have the energy and mental
resources to devote to enhancing our
EQ and building our resilience.*

Being emotionally intelligent involves the capacity to respond to the people and events in our lives, rather than react to them.

The difference

between reacting and responding lies in the capacity to consider the consequences of our actions and decide on our behaviour or reaction accordingly. A similar process is needed in order to foster resilience. We need to be able to process events as they happen, but cultivate a bigger-picture-view of the impact on our whole life. For example, if we were unsuccessful in a recruitment process, resilience is the capacity to tell ourselves 'I may not have gotten this job and it's ok to be disappointed. Now I am going to take some steps to make sure I more prepared for the next recruitment process', rather than crumple in a defeated heap.

Responding rather than reacting takes energy. It is not the natural way our brain processes its environment. The brain is naturally reactive. It is an effort

to stay in a responsive zone and the more energy we have, the easier it is to stay in this zone.

Conversely, the less energy we have, the more likely we are to revert to a reactionary, or less desirable behavioural state.



Image: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDeATqGDy_8

Creating Our Own Wellness Recipe

Consider for yourselves the last time you were fostering a new habit. Chances are, the more tired, stressed or emotional you felt, the stronger the pull back into old behaviours. However on a 'good day' when you felt energetic and 'in the zone' it was far easier to stick to the new habit. Similarly, imagine the last time you encountered a frustrating or sad event. If you were in a state of good health and good energy, you likely dealt with it differently (more resilience) than if you were tired, run down or burnt out.

When we proactively take care of ourselves, we are fostering a better balance between energy expenditure and energy renewal. This helps to maintain a positive state of energy (in the black) rather than a deficit state (in the red), and therefore we have the energy that is required to be emotionally intelligent and are also naturally more resilient.

Our Recipe for Wellness is individual and experimental:

Wellness is not prescriptive. As highlighted above, we are bombarded with a multitude of conflicting messages. The key to achieving longer term wellbeing is to find out exactly what we need by way of experimenting with various options. We then create our own unique wellness recipe and check-in and refine it as needed, for example as we age or when our needs change.

I know people who absolutely thrive on six hours of sleep. Any more and they feel lethargic. I also know people who feel they 'cannot function' with any less than nine hours. The same goes for dietary requirements. I know I don't react well to bread and carb-heavy meals. They make me sleepy. So I steer clear of these things, especially during the day. My husband on the other hand, eats bread with every meal and feels unsatisfied and lacks energy without it. People need different amounts of different foods for optimum health because we all metabolise and react to foods differently. The same goes for activity levels and body mass. Some people need to be very active to feel their best mentally and physically. Others use activity as a pro-active strategy to manage their mental health. Recent research has also indicated that body mass does not link to overall health. Those who may be considered overweight (even obese) but exercised regularly yielded better health results than those in a normal weight range that did less activity.

There is simply no 'one size fits all' approach to achieving our own state of peak wellness. This depends on many environmental and physiological factors and through experimenting with different approaches, we can tune in into our bodies, our energy levels and our emotions to see what is working for us and what is not.

In some cases, people can form strong bonds with a coping mechanism that feels effective at the time, but does not yield long term wellness results. Examples are many and varied but a common example is drinking after work. Imbibing 'just a couple of glasses to take the edge off' may feel like an effective strategy at the time, but it has longer term wellness deficits to take into account including the effect of alcohol on sleep patterns, weight gain and fatigue. We have to consider the longer term impacts of the components of our wellness recipe as well as the short term gain. To illustrate this, we may not feel like going for a walk after work, but know that when we do, we will feel fresher, clearer and more energised.

When we are tuned in to our body, we can check-in and see how different elements help or hinder our wellbeing and plan accordingly.

There is no 'One-Size-Fits-All' approach to wellbeing. We find our own 'recipe' through an iterative process, trying and testing new things to evaluate their impact on our health, happiness and energy.

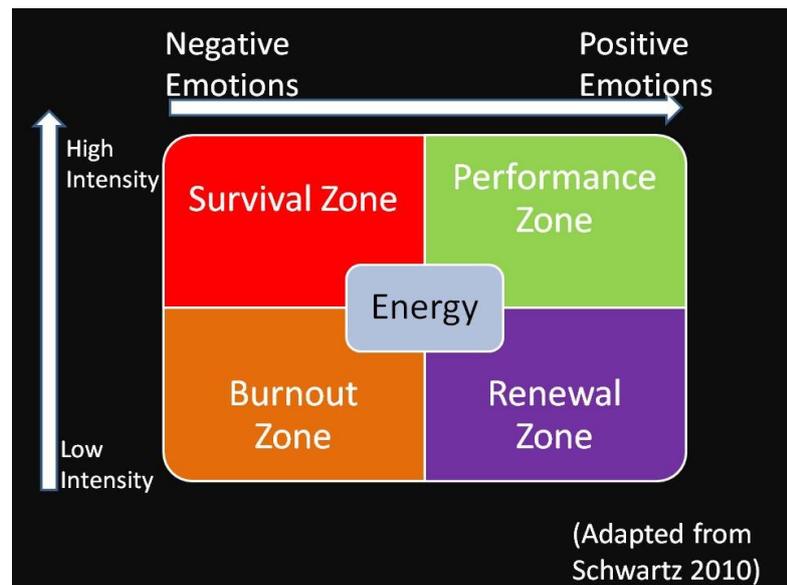
What are the Costs of Living the Way We Are?

Assessing where you are at and what is working so far:

In order to create our own wellness recipe, we have to get really honest about where we are currently. How is the way we are choosing to live our lives really working out for us? What are the impacts on our health? Our family? Our relationships? Our mental health? Are we living a life congruent with our values or have we drifted away from our ideals? Some people have a moment of recognition that being in a continual energy deficit has led them to make a series of small yet incremental decisions that, over time, has taken them far from where they wanted to be.

This is the moment of truth. What are the costs of living and working the way you are? I invite you to seriously ponder this question. Dig deep! Are you, for the most part, in a state of contentment? Have you been avoiding some actions that will give you a longer-term gain for shorter term comfort, such as staying in an unrewarding job to avoid the effort of finding a new one? The bottom line is: do you feel well, happy and have the energy to move comfortably through your day?

If the answer is yes that's wonderful! What are the things you are doing that enable you to feel this way? These are the ingredients for your wellness recipe. If the answer is no, consider the many facets of your life and ask yourself what is contributing positively (working for you) and what is not, and read on...



Which energy quadrants do you spend most of your time in? In a state of proactive wellbeing, we can move purposefully between the performance zone and the renewal zone.

Wellness is balancing renewal and expenditure:

What are your habits, practices and rituals that form your routines? Do they effectively allow you to renew sufficient energy? Achieving wellbeing involves proactively balancing your energy expenditure with your energy renewal. When these are out-of-whack one of two things happen: we have energy but do not use it constructively, becoming listless and directionless; or and most commonly, we are expending far more energy than we are replenishing, leading to feelings of resentment, burnout, frustration and guilt.

Years ago I heard these wise words from author Iyanla Vanzant and although they resonated with me, it was not until this year that I truly and deeply understood what she was talking about. Holding her hands in front of her in the shape of a glass, Iyanla explained:

"What comes out of the cup is for ya'll, what is in the cup is mine. But I gotta keep my cup full."

This is such a powerful metaphor because it illustrates how crucial it is to manage ourselves, our energy and our wellbeing. We must take care of ourselves first in order to be of service to others. When our own cup is full, when we feel well and content, we have the energy to give of ourselves freely and without resentment or burnout. Iyanla then goes on to say: "when we give to others to the degree that we sacrifice ourselves, we make the other person a thief because they are stealing from you what you need and they don't even know it!"

The Essentials of Emotional Intelligence: The Self

This is applicable in all areas of our lives. We cannot be our best at work if we are not in a state of wellbeing. We cannot effectively manage or lead others if we are not in a state of wellbeing. We cannot effectively nurture or respond to the needs of others (particularly in our close relationships) when we are not in a state of wellbeing. We need to feel well in order to give what is needed in all areas of our lives.

Many of us are in the trap of give-give-give at work, and then we come home a tiny nub of a human being.

We need to consider how much energy we need at the end of a workday to engage meaningfully with those we love the most.

Our 'nice jug' has been emptied all through the day and the people we claim to love the most get the least exceptional version of us. We may snap in ways we wouldn't at work, or be too tired to engage in meaningful ways. This is a symptom of ineffective wellbeing strategies and of an unequal balance of expenditure and renewal.

In short, we need to consider our day and our week and forecast all of the things that will take from our energy resources. We then need to counter balance these withdrawals with energy renewal.

This is wellbeing, to feel well, happy and have the energy move comfortably through our day. We can liken our wellbeing to a bank account. For every activity or engagement that withdraws energy, we need to replenish. Otherwise we end up in the red. And when our account is in the red, if someone tries to take a withdrawal, it gets rejected or we have to cop extra fees and charges. When there is money in the account, the transaction occurs smoothly.

Renewal can include all kinds of practices- they do not have to be big or time consuming. It might even be a matter of changing only our perception to an outside event or situation in order for it to be less stressful. Here is an example: I travel a lot with my career. A few years ago I had ineffective coping strategies for this and found myself very worn out. I had to reflect on what I was doing and ask myself, very seriously: can I maintain this lifestyle? I love my career and there was no way I was going to give it up and as a result, travel is a natural part of it. There was no way to change that. So I looked closer at how I approached travel and I found that I was needlessly expending energy on making myself stressed! I would worry about getting to the airport on time, become frustrated when I was (as I usually am) stopped for the bomb-swipe test, get annoyed with the bad airplane food, noisy and brightly lit hotel rooms, and the list continues. I was actually focussing on all of the things that would reinforce that travel was stressful and haemorrhage energy as a result. To address this, the answer was not in changing the travel, but in changing my mind about it. So this is what I did: I started to think of the flight as a great time where there was no phone, no email and I could simply focus on whatever I wanted without distraction. I actually began to look forward to this! Instead of being annoyed and frustrated with the bomb-swipe experience, I would use it as an opportunity to test out my latest 'dad-jokes' and see if I got a reaction. Usually this would result in a good laugh between the security officer and myself and this in itself was a mini mood-boost. I began packing my own food for long flights, or make sure I ate before them instead of arriving starving after a long day. And on days when I was feeling particularly tired, I would use the cab-drive in to recall episodes of the Young Ones (my favourite show) line by line and scene by scene.



Image: <http://patch.com/>

Wellness is the Result of Planning Proactively

This show is hilariously funny to me (a sign of a misspent youth) and I would inevitably arrive at the airport in a far calmer and better mood. Not only did this totally change how I viewed travelling and stop the needless energy expenditure, but I was able to transform this into an energy renewal activity!

I share this with you to demonstrate that renewal does not always involve additional activities that may need extra time. It can be as simple as changing how we approach things in our daily lives.

Additional benefits come from switching up some of the practices and rituals in our daily lives. Rather than having an extra coffee, down two big cups of water. Rather than trying to eat at our desks, go for a brisk walk around the block. Have a walking-meeting with a colleague instead of sitting in a dimly lit, windowless room. Take a mental-health day when we need it instead of trying to power through.

We can transform our perception of an experience to lessen or alter a stress or anxiety response. This saves energy that we can use for bigger and better things!

This energy renewal/expenditure algorithm is particularly helpful for proactive planning. If we are 'running on empty' it might not be the best time to have lunch with the in-laws or with those people who we have make an effort with. We can plan something that will give us energy instead and save those other engagements for when we are in the 'black' with our energy reserves. If you have a big week at work, pair back on your other commitments to give you plenty of time to renew and refresh. Know whether you are an introvert and require 'alone activities' to replenish, or an extravert and require social contact to reenergise.

Wellness results from purposeful and proactive planning and implementation of our wellness recipe:

The key to achieving wellbeing is proactive energy management. Wellbeing brings many benefits from enhancing our EQ as we respond rather than react to people and events in our lives. We are able to move through our day with contentment and comfort and have the energy to give to those we love the most and engage in the activities that bring us more joy! Waking up each day and just dealing with what is in front of us will not yield long term results. It will leave us chasing our tails.

In Conclusion:

When we approach our lives with an understanding that we have to balance our energy expenditure with our energy renewal, we can plan proactively for this. This way, we actively and purposefully enhance our wellbeing. From this state of being we are able to wake up in the morning and- I borrow this eloquent phrase from Eddie's character in Absolutely Fabulous- "Get up. Kick ass!"



Abby Elizabeth Rees is PunkPDs director, a self-confessed 'education junkie', University Lecturer, Education and Empowerment Writer, Behaviour and Change Specialist, Executive Meta-Coach and artistic thinker.

Energy, Excellence and Tenacity capture Abby's drive and personality.

Thriving on new challenges to design for education and change, Abby leads with a level of energy that earned her the nickname '240' (240 Volt) from her former colleagues. With the tenacity of a Rottweiler, Abby lives and breathes her design projects, providing her clients with a commitment to excellence that is unparalleled. Abby has a lively personal presence, strong interpersonal skills and uses a wide range of innovative and inventive techniques. With rich experience in facilitating diverse groups, Abby has delivered a range of corporate training and developed education, change and communication tools to meet individual needs.

In addition to being recognised with numerous National and International awards for her work, Abby embodies the cliché of 'life-long-learning' and has achieved:

Masters of Educational Leadership

Sustainable Leadership Fellowship Scholarship

New York Un-School of Disruptive Design

Bachelor of Education: Inclusive Education

Graduate Certificate in Public Relations

Executive Meta-Coach Accreditation (ACMC-P)

Neuro-Linguistic Programming Practitioner

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