A Primer on Maintaining Employee Energy During COVID-19

By THERESA M. WELBOURNE  APRIL 22, 2020
Staying energized is a critical goal for anyone who is trying to optimize their productivity and get the most of every day. We are all more challenged today as we live through a pandemic; therefore, I wanted to go back to this article and review some energy basics so that as we build on this work with new research, readers will be a little more in tune with the energy story.

**Employee energy defined**

We all know that energy is an important part of reaching goals. It’s especially important for business success, but what exactly is employee energy, and how can you use it to maximize results at your organization?

Let’s start by defining the term “energy.” According to Merriam Webster’s Dictionary, energy is the “ability to be active: the physical or mental strength that allows you to do things.”

In the world of physics, it also is defined as the ability to do work. There are two types of energy: (1) stored or potential energy and (2) kinetic or moving energy. As a manager or an individual owner of your own energy, you can play a role in converting potential energy to moving energy.
and directing that energy towards goals that help you meet overall objectives for yourself and for your organization.

From our extensive research on employee energy, we created these definitions to help managers and individuals direct their human-energy more effectively:

**Energy defined:** Energy is the internal force available for you to exert at work (ability to work) = our version of potential energy.

**Energy measured:** Energy is measured by assessing the level of energy it takes for an employee to be at his or her best at work (how energy is used) = our version of kinetic energy.

With energy, being at your optimal energy level is the difference between success and failure. For example, if you want to lose weight, you may start a new exercise program. But if you don’t exert enough energy, you won’t burn enough calories to reach your weight-loss goals.

And if you exert too much energy, you may physically harm your body. That’s why it’s important to monitor your heart rate and try to stay in a particular target zone when starting a new exercise regime.

The same is true for exerting and monitoring employee energy. Humans can only multi-task, endure stressful situations, work long hours and continue to go “above and beyond” so long before they are at risk of being overwhelmed and even getting physically sick from the process.

Because of this, it’s essential to direct and optimize energy levels at work for optimal success.

**Tips to direct and optimize employee energy**

To help optimize employee energy-levels for the best results, managers and individuals can do two things:

1. Create ideal conditions to convert potential energy to kinetic energy.
2. Direct employee energy to focus on important and useful tasks.
Think about the role of the coach of a football team. You help your team succeed by hiring players with various skills, creating conditions under which they can perfect their talents, and then directing these individuals to come together and make specific plays to score points. Over time, these efforts add up for big wins.

**What is the optimal employee energy level?**

This is a popular question, and unfortunately, the answer is unique to each organization. After all, the level at which an employee reaches his or her optimal energy level is specific to that individual. This means you cannot use the same methods of energy optimization for all employees. Our research also shows the critical importance of energy being an optimization vs. a maximization metric. We use a 0 to 10 scale, and each person chooses the level at which they are at their own personal best (optimal energy) and the level where they are today (working energy).

Our research shows two things predict performance across multiple organizations around the world, studying different jobs and many different categories of people. Those two things are:

- The gap between working energy (where you are today) and optimal energy (where you are at your best). The bigger the gap, the bigger the productivity loss.
- Variance in energy over time – high variance is bad for performance.
It is essential for managers to develop specific goals for particular employees, or for individuals to do for themselves, and then direct energy towards these goals, monitoring the results along the way. This way, employees can work at a pace where they are in the right “zone” to be most productive.

And there is also a very important aspect of employee energy that managers often forget; energy is catchy! Your energy affects your employees’ energy, so it’s essential to monitor, direct and optimize your own energy levels as well.

**Measure, reflect and then change energy habits**

After doing work with hundreds of companies around the world and collecting data from millions of individuals, we have learned that the key to success in optimizing human energy is the measurement, reflection and change.

Measure energy, track it over time and then reflect on what’s making your energy go up or down, stabilized or not. We do this via frequent energy pulsing and putting the employee in the driver’s seat when it comes to learning and looking for a change. Managers play a role, and they can help employees in many ways. Leaders also can be very effective in removing barriers to energy optimization or high productivity. But all in all, the owners of employee energy is the individual employee. That is why, since we started doing the employee energy work in the early 2000s, we always built tools for individual employees. We invented the pulse survey before many organizations were putting surveys online, and we did this specifically to commercialize the work on employee energy. Because measuring variance is a key to unlocking energy, we knew we had to track energy frequently. Also, we learned that by giving employees the knowledge, the metrics and the power to learn from their own data and journaling, change could happen quickly.

**Do something now**

Take advantage of the opportunity to track your energy and learn – engage in what is called reflective learning. I can offer two opportunities to use the energy work we have established. First, you can take a test drive of the measures and process at:

[www.whatsmyenergy.com](http://www.whatsmyenergy.com)
Second, you can [sign up for a 30-day daily energy pulse process](https://www.tlnt.com/a-primer-on-employee-energy/). This initiative is to help people who find themselves working at home, out of work or simply experiencing more stress than in the past. Journal, measure, reflect and learn. The 30-day initiative is no cost, and it is offered via the Leadership Pulse®, which is an ongoing project offered by eePulse and The Center for Effective Organizations at The University of Southern California. Learn with us, and let’s all energize each other.

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Dr. Theresa M. Welbourne is the founder, president, and CEO of eePulse, Inc., a human capital technology and consulting firm. Dr. Welbourne's expertise is in the areas of leadership and human capital management in high growth and high-change organizations. She has a large body of work on initial public offerings; in addition, she works in the areas of employee energy and engagement as well as managing a large project on employee resource groups (ERGs). Theresa also holds an appointment as an affiliated senior research