Top 10 Ways to Boost Your Energy at Work

Career Development

Romolo Tavani / *Shutterstock.com*

For an in-house counsel, work can bring continual challenges in high-pressure situations. You may be exploring risks, enhancing efficiencies, and handling other key issues covering all divisions of your company, while liaising with the board, regulators, and other demanding role-players. The pandemic may have added new pressures and the company might have cut costs, so you need to do more with fewer people.

To be the calm voice of judgement in such circumstances, applying your analytical powers and creative ideas to each new issue takes plenty of energy — and can gradually deplete even the most focused legal professional.

> To be the calm voice of judgement … applying your analytical powers and creative ideas to each new issue takes plenty of energy — and can gradually deplete even the most focused legal professional.

The challenge of sustaining your energy might even be increased by your pride as a lawyer in always going the extra mile or working long and busy hours, whether you're acquiring expertise in a crucial new topic, sweating over a contract, or mentoring a junior.

Personal energy is a precious resource. Maintaining your energy to tackle tasks vigorously requires careful and well-informed self-regulation. Tony Schwartz and his team at The Energy Project report in a Harvard Business Review article that by fostering certain habits and practices, as top athletes do, corporate professionals can manage their energy, enhancing performance and building resilience.

In this article we describe 10 ways in which you can maintain and build your stamina. Most of the tips are drawn from Egon Zehnder's frameworks and experience with executives and professionals across the world. Some of the advice — Items 2 to 5 — comes from Schwartz's research.

Sources of energy vary among professionals. You can learn what combination of practices works best for you personally, and what brings energy to the other members of your team.

> Anticipate and prepare for your upcoming energy needs.

1. **Observe energy shifts**. As a senior legal leader, you are often required to jump from reading and analyzing to taking action. Increasingly, in-house counsel must also be ready to switch into crisis management mode. Observe how your energy shifts from one task to another and be mindful of the type of energy required for each of these modes. Anticipate and prepare for your upcoming energy needs.

2. **Take care of your body.** Schwartz and his team describe the body as a wellspring of energy. We're all wired differently — but in general, you should keep glucose levels stable with small, regular meals, while keeping hydrated, exercise regularly for strength and cardio-vascular fitness, sleep seven to eight hours, get enough sunlight, and take regular short breaks from work.

> You can focus best for around 90-120 minutes at a time, so try to schedule such periods to get into a state of flow, minimizing interruptions.

3. **Manage your mind**. It's hard to concentrate for very short or lengthy periods. You can focus best for around 90-120 minutes at a time, so try to schedule such periods to get into a state of flow, minimizing interruptions. According to Schwartz, it's also refreshing to make conscious changes between detailed/tactical and big picture thinking, so that you don't get stuck in a focused or large-scale vision. And it's good to relax consciously, now and then, with an activity like reading, doing a puzzle, or meditating.

4. **Nurture positive emotions**. How people feel profoundly affects how they perform — and for Schwartz, you can learn to cultivate the emotions associated with high performance. Some ways to stimulate positive emotions that bring you energy are by strengthening your relationships with others — and more specifically, socializing, sharing your feelings, or expressing your appreciation or gratitude in a few words, a hug or a handshake. Attending events you value — like musical, sporting, or community occasions — also helps to boost you emotionally. And at emotionally tough moments, you can buy time by deep breathing to trigger a rest-and-digest response, rather than fight-or-flight, so that you retain the ability to reflect openly and creatively.

5. **Access your spirituality**. You might be thinking, "What does spirituality have to do with my life as a legal professional?" But you can derive energy from connecting to sources larger than yourself. This could involve religious practice, philosophical study and reflection, volunteering in your

community, being out in nature, or simply listening to music. If any of these activities can bolster your energy in your professional and private life, they're worth a try.

> By setting up habits and rituals of renewing your mood and energy, you can maximize your time in high performance.

6. **Stay aware of your energy zone**. We can think of our state of energy as falling in one of four zones: high performance, renewal, survival, or burnout. We all love life in the high-performance zone — but it's not sustainable from a biological perspective. What you *can* do is to move consciously and smoothly between the high performance and renewal zones. By setting up habits and rituals of renewing your mood and energy, you can maximize your time in high performance. What you *can't* do is to pick yourself up from a state of burnout, or — barely better — of mere survival, in which you feel mentally or physically depleted, and go straight to high performance. Rather, from such negative zones, you need a protracted period of recovery before stepping up to perform at your best.

7. **Keep good habits in tough times**. When you're negotiating a merger or acquisition, you might think of practices to maintain energy as a needless luxury. In fact, such practices are even more crucial than usual, allowing you to perform strongly when the stakes are high.

8. **Think small**. Maybe it's tempting to set high goals for major shifts in your lifestyle. But as in-house counsel, you'll seldom have time to fully reboot your schedule and workload for intense periods of energy renewal. It is much easier — and more realistic — to incorporate energy renewal into your daily routine without disrupting it. Consider what sort of micro sources are available to you, as well as appealing to you. For instance, are you able to start your day with a five-minute meditation? Or is there a park near the office where you can take a short walk during a call?

> Intentionally build your micro sources into your routine.

9. **Make it routine**. Intentionally build your micro sources into your routine. Set your alarm five minutes earlier so you can do that meditation. Pack earphones so you can walk in the park while you take your call. It's easier once a system is in place.

10. **Check how it's going**. You don't always know what energizes you before you've tried it. Take a pragmatic approach: If a new habit isn't lifting your energy after a few weeks, change it.

If you take a conscious, informed, and systematic approach to sustaining your energy, you needn't become run down, even in stressful times. On the contrary, professionals who work on their vitality, ensuring regular and effective recovery and refocusing, can strengthen their capacity for energy management.

Learn more: Join ACC.

Disclaimer: The information in any resource in this website should not be construed as legal advice or as a legal opinion on specific facts, and should not be considered representing the views of its authors, its authors' employers, its sponsors, and/or ACC. These resources are not intended as a definitive statement on the subject addressed. Rather, they are intended to serve as a tool providing practical guidance and references for the busy in-house practitioner and other readers.

Simone Stebler

Consultant

Based in Zurich, Simone Stebler provides leadership advisory services (including executive search, board consulting, talent assessment and development) in the financial service industry, both at a global as well as a local level. She is further active in Egon Zehnder's Legal, Regulatory & Compliance Professionals practice. Stebler has a strong passion and expertise in advising a broad range of clients on how to foster diversity and inclusion.

Prior to joining Egon Zehnder, she was a senior associate with the law firm, Bär & Karrer AG. Earlier, she was with the law firm Nater Dallafior Rechtsanwälte AG.

Stebler holds a masters in law, summa cum laude, from the University of Fribourg, and a masters in law in international business regulation, litigation, and arbitration from New York University. She is qualified to practice law in Switzerland.

In her spare time, she loves being outdoors and enjoys surfing in tropical locales, hiking, climbing, and spending time with friends and family.

Hugo Nanninga

Consultant, Global Legal, Regulatory & Compliance Professionals

Egon Zehnder

Hugo Nanninga, based in London, leads Egon Zehnder’s Global Legal, Regulatory & Compliance Professionals Practice. He has extensive experience advising companies across all sectors on legal professional succession and general development of their legal talent. Nanninga is also a key member of the firm’s Consumer and Financial Officers practices, working closely with clients while providing services from executive and board search to executive assessment and development across Europe and the United Kingdom.?

Before coming to work for Egon Zehnder, Nanninga was an associate in the corporate practice of the Clifford Chance LLP law firm in Amsterdam, where he counseled clients on cross-border public and private merger and acquisition transactions, joint ventures, restructuring, and corporate governance.?

He earned a master of laws from Erasmus University, in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, and a master in business administration from London Business School.

In his private life, he is passionate about his family, sports, travel, and music of every kind.?