

# Work Endurance in the modern world

## *Or why regulation is not just for Bankers*

The stats are not pretty. Our population has unprecedented victims of cancer, heart disease, autoimmune disorders, allergies, etc, etc. And GPs are seeing many professionals reporting unrelenting fatigue. "We have a short-hand for this" said my GP told me once. "TATT. Tired all the time." Having supported the development of leaders for 18 years I have been around long enough to observe many professionals traverse significant career and life transitions. Regardless of conventional measures of success, some have navigated their challenges with less wear and tear than others. Some burn out where others sail through. Today's world of flatter organisations, 24/7 global interactions, increasing role autonomy, job insecurity heightened by recession and increased pressure "to get the work done" all test our personal boundaries. Professionals who manage and "regulate" themselves seem to endure despite the demands upon them. Whereas those who yield find that their work excesses (however well meant) come home to roost.

Imagine yourself as a cup containing energy and vitality. How full your cup is depends upon whether it is being filled more than drained. The difference between those who endure and those who burn out is simple - those who endure have made sure that over time there is more filling their cup than draining it.

"Fills" can include things like compliments, achieving a goal, winning a prize, a good rest after exertion, good self-care, happy times with loved ones and so on.



"Drains" can be things like failure (real or perceived), misfortune, too little (or too much) exercise, emotional pain, poor self care, etc. They fall into three categories:

- 1: luck.
- 2: our chosen actions and habits – let us call it Discipline.
- 3: our involuntary reactions to events – let us call this Disposition

### **Box 1.**

#### **Discipline**

The small habits and the daily decisions we make about our lifestyle and self-care.

#### **Disposition**

A combination of the temperament we're born with and how life has impacted our character - the deep inner wiring that determines if we perceive something to be a threat or not.

We can't do much about luck. But there are things we can do about Discipline and Disposition.

## Discipline

To many this is an uncomfortable word, suggesting chores. Whether we realise it or not, many of us employ rituals and routines in our life that have, de facto, become our disciplines. The question is, are they filling or draining our cup? Think about the chocolate biscuit with your coffee. Or that nightcap when you're working late at night. Or the half bottle of wine to wind down when you get in of an evening. Or spending hours in front of a screen without breaks. Apologies if this scares you, but did you know that...

A drop in body pH caused by regular intake of refined sugar can result in the gut being too acidic for its bacteria to effectively do two critical jobs - extract nutrients from our food and remove toxins from our system. This has harmful consequences for our liver and kidneys, and beyond. Alcohol taken at night, even in moderate amounts, is now widely understood to harm the quality of our REM sleep and significantly compromise its restorative properties. Lack of sleep is the cause of many serious accidents. And ladies, a few glasses of wine in the evening puts way too much stress on your kidneys, plus it's a depressant.

The military know something about discipline. They need their men and women to be on top form at all times, ready for any eventuality and have a simple formula that is critical for endurance: SHED. How do you fare?

Figure 1.

		Rarely	Occasion-ally	Regularly	Most of the time	Always
<b>Sleep</b>	Do you get 7-9 hours good quality uninterrupted sleep each night?					
<b>Hydration</b>	Do you take in (through drink and water-rich foods) enough water daily such that your urine is not concentrated you don't have a dry throat or headaches?					
<b>Exercise</b>	Do you daily get 30 mins exercise where you lift your pulse rate from resting into the anaerobic zone for your age?					
<b>Diet</b>	Do you get 3 meals a day rich in: fresh veg, fruit, fibre; low in: sugar, short-chain fats, sugar, alcohol, and caffeine?					

Neglect SHED over a long period and your body will have to compensate in some way. The high price you'll pay will become clear in time. Usually when it's too late.

## Disposition

Depending on our disposition, certain events in day-to-day life can significantly affect our emotional equilibrium and drain our cup. Daniel Goleman in his book Emotional Intelligence refers to these as "Amygdala hijacks". The Amygdala is the part of the brain where emotions to ensure survival are aroused, causing the fight, flight or freeze response. It seems we are significantly more susceptible to

such hijacks when depleted. So the more we demand from our physical system and the more we mistreat ourselves, the less emotionally stable and resilient we may become over time. However, this presents an oft-missed opportunity - our underlying "issues" become more accessible for resolution. So, the next time your buttons get pressed, look carefully at the emotions you are feeling - they offer valuable personal insight and an opportunity for building greater resilience. Figure 2, below, shows how the critical ones work.

Figure 2.

	<b>The emotion we feel when something triggers the belief that...</b>
<b>Anger</b>	... your rights or boundaries have been violated in some way
<b>Guilt</b>	... you have violated someone else's' rights or done something wrong
<b>Shame</b>	... there is something wrong with you
<b>Fear</b>	... you are under threat
<b>Anxiety</b>	... there may be a future threat
<b>Sadness</b>	... you have lost something, tangible or intangible (such as self-worth)
<b>Embarrassment</b>	... you are being judged negatively by others

An intense emotional reaction can have its roots in a deeply unpleasant event long ago in your past when this response helped you survive, albeit at the cost of higher-level thinking. Understanding how and why these emotions get triggered can open the door to managing your present-day responses more appropriately – which will be far easier on you, not to mention on the people around you.

Professional input helps. Do you need it? Well, if your reaction in certain situations stops you fulfilling your potential, then perhaps. Today there are many resources available such as: a good coach; sensitively facilitated 360 degree feedback; a perceptive and kind mentor; inspiring role models; and a commitment to one's own personal development.

Some simple practical tips for handling a hijack are to:

- first, notice it is happening;
- then breathe deeply;
- next, as politely as possible, withdraw from the situation, deferring any critical interactions or decisions;
- compose yourself, working to gain perspective until you are calm;
- finally, resume.

(Note, regaining composure can take minutes or days, depending on the severity of your reaction, how fit and well your body is and how open you are to seeing different perspectives. As you can imagine, the longer it takes, the greater the toll on your body.)

## Conclusion

In essence, work endurance is down to your commitment to manage both your discipline and your disposition. A great starting place is to do a proper reality check that tells you specifically how you are adding to or diminishing your own endurance, This should generate all the motivation you need.

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Author, "Work Endurance - the self-check handbook for 21st century professionals"

## **Resources:**

"Work Endurance - the self-check handbook for 21st century professionals" Siobhan Soraghan:  
[www.active-insight.com/work-endurance-handbook](http://www.active-insight.com/work-endurance-handbook)

"Emotional Intelligence" Daniel Goleman

"Self-coaching - what to do when your life gets out of control" Joseph J. Luciani

"Authentic Happiness" Martin E.P. Seligman

Some online resources (subscription may be required):

- [www.healthmonitor.com](http://www.healthmonitor.com)
- [www.weightwatchers.co.uk](http://www.weightwatchers.co.uk)
- [www.weightlossresources.co.uk](http://www.weightlossresources.co.uk)

iPhone apps: BMI calculator; Meal Diary, Daily Burn, Sleep cycle alarm clock, Pedometer to name but a few.