

4 STEPS TO MAXIMIZE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT, RESILIENCE, AND PERFORMANCE

By Pete Leibman, Author of *Work Stronger*

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INTRODUCTION

“Take care of your employees, and they’ll take care of your business. It’s as simple as that.”

— Sir Richard Branson, founder of Virgin Group

In today’s 24/7, high-stress world, employees are under more pressure than ever. As a result, stress levels are rising and engagement levels are declining. Consider these bleak statistics from studies conducted by Harvard Medical School and Gallup, respectively:

- Over 95% of leaders feel at least somewhat burnt-out ¹
- Over 85% of employees worldwide are not engaged at work ²

The good news? These statistics present an incredible opportunity for your organization to stand out. When you help your people feel and perform their best, you will find it much easier to attract and retain great people, and you will outperform your competitors. This report highlights proven concepts, data-driven strategies, and key questions to help you take employee engagement, resilience, and performance to the next level at your company.



Pete Leibman, author of *Work Stronger*

STEP #1: START AT THE TOP.

Once I attended a training seminar delivered by an independent consultant named Ted. My employer at the time hired him to run the program for our department. On the first day, Ted was introduced quickly by the leader of our group, a man named Nick. After introducing Ted, Nick stuck around for a few minutes. Then, Nick disappeared for the rest of the day.

Nick's absence was a hot topic at lunch amongst the staff. The group speculated about all the possible reasons why he chose not to attend the program. A few people believed that he felt threatened by Ted, and that he was worried that he might be put on the spot during the training. A few others were convinced that he wanted some time for uninterrupted work. Another theory was that he simply did not see the value in the training and that *his* boss had required our department to go through it.

Regardless of Nick's real reason for not being there, his decision had a very powerful impact. Some employees zoned out from the start, convinced that it must be a waste of their time. Nick's absence also impacted those of us who saw the value in the training. Since Nick had no idea what was covered, there was no way for him to reinforce what we learned. As a result, very little was retained.

Later in my career, I attended another corporate training session. This program was not any better than the one that Nick skipped. However, the results of this program were far greater. This time, our leader (a man named Sam), took part in the entire session.

Like Nick's absence, Sam's presence also became a popular discussion topic. Several of us discussed how much we appreciated his attendance, along with his active participation. We all agreed that his actions during that day—more than any of his words before or after—made it quite clear that the program was important. In the months that followed, he also reinforced what we all had learned.

Leadership's absence (or presence) speaks louder than its words. Regardless of how you try to make your organization stronger, you need to start at the top by getting your leadership to buy-in first and lead by example. As Dr. Larry Senn and Jim Hart write in *Winning Teams Winning Cultures*, "All too often leaders in an organization approve of training programs dealing with issues such as leadership development or culture shaping, but don't attend them as participants or visibly work on the concepts themselves...We have found that the fastest way to create a positive self-fulfilling prophecy about cultural change is to have the top leaders individually and collectively shift their own behaviors. They don't have to be perfect, they just have to deal themselves into the same game they are asking others to play."³

STEP #2: PROVIDE ENERGY AND RESILIENCE TRAINING FOR ALL EMPLOYEES.

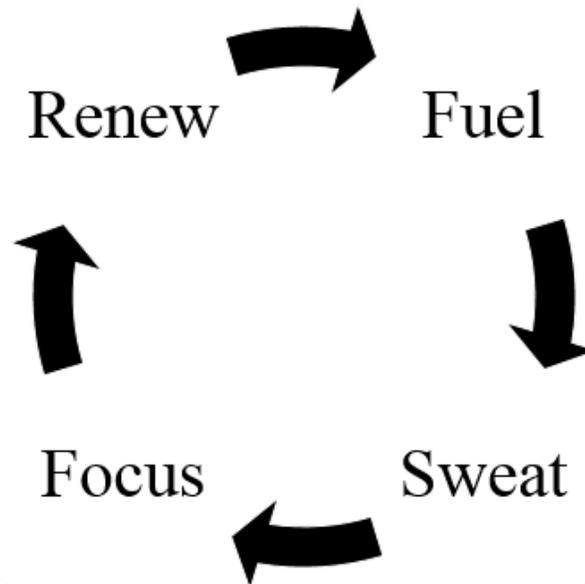
I once spoke with a member of the executive team for a leading telecommunications company. We discussed how this woman takes care of herself, and we also talked about what her company does to take care of its people. When discussing her organization, she told me about a program that helped a small group of employees discover they were at high-risk for chronic diseases or conditions. I then asked what her company was doing to help the rest of her organization, which included more than 90% of their workforce. "You are on to something," she replied. "We haven't really taken that approach though. I guess we have just focused on those who are the unhealthiest."

While your organization should look for ways to reduce healthcare costs, it is a huge mistake to think about employee well-being programs strictly from a defensive, cost-cutting perspective. Unfortunately, many companies do just that and create well-being programs that focus exclusively on people who are the unhealthiest. Such programs are irrelevant to the majority of your workforce. They can also feel hollow to all employees, since they can give the impression that your organization only wants to save money. A broader approach will engage everyone, make it clear that your objectives are not strictly financial, and help you boost engagement, resilience, and performance throughout your entire organization.

There are significant benefits to thinking more strategically about how you can leverage your employee well-being programs. As Chip Bergh, President and CEO at Levi Strauss & Co., told me in an interview for *Work Stronger*, "I believe there is real, quantifiable business benefit to creating a culture focused on health and well-being. People who are healthier are going to be more productive, and they will be more engaged at work." Jennifer Fisher, National Managing Director of Well-being at Deloitte, shared some similar thoughts in another one of my interviews. "We believe our people are our greatest asset and that it's good business to take care of them," she said. "This leads to higher productivity, creativity, and engagement, and also creates stronger loyalty to the organization."

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN WELL-BEING AND PERFORMANCE

The science is clear. When your employees form stronger habits in four key areas (nutrition, exercise, focus, and sleep and renewal), they will be more engaged, they will handle stress more effectively, their brains will function better, and they will perform at a much higher level. These four interconnected areas form a high performance framework that I refer to as *The Stronger Cycle*.



The Stronger Cycle

When an employee is active, well-rested, and well-fueled, his energy, mood, and confidence will improve dramatically. He will also find it much easier to focus. As a result, he will produce much higher quality work in much less time (and with much less stress). This leaves more time for sleep, personal renewal, and taking care of himself in the future.

In comparison, when an employee is not physically active, well-rested, and well-fueled, he will have less natural energy, and he will find it more difficult to focus—regardless of how talented or motivated he is. Many people try to compensate by fueling themselves artificially with sugary products, energy drinks, and lots of caffeine. These band-aids don't fix the problem though. They just make you more irritable and more anxious. They also make it harder to get quality sleep, which makes it harder to focus the next day, when the process repeats itself.

MOST WELL-BEING PROGRAMS ARE INSUFFICIENT

While most companies offer some sort of employee well-being program these days, most of these programs fail to improve how employees feel and perform. In fact, Gallup's research has found that less than 15% of employees strongly believe that their well-being is significantly higher because of their employer. ⁴ Hosting an annual health fair or providing a monthly wellness allowance is a step in the right direction, but it's far from sufficient.

In a survey by Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), over 85% of leaders said they would benefit from more health and fitness components in leadership training, and over 60% of leaders said their organizations fail to provide them with the support they need to manage their stress. ⁵ This brings us back to the importance of starting at the top (step #1). If some or many of your leaders feel burnt-out and ill-equipped to manage their stress and energy, what kind of message does that send to the rest of your employees?

In another survey (this one by McKinsey), 70% of business leaders said that sleep management should be taught in companies, just like time management and other professional development topics. As Nick van Dam, McKinsey's global chief learning officer writes, "Companies should embed sleep training in a broader approach to well-being that takes in other topics, notably exercise, nutrition, mindfulness, and energy management." ⁶

LinkedIn (acquired by Microsoft in 2016 for \$26.2 billion) serves as an excellent example of a company who approaches wellness differently and much more strategically than the typical employer. In addition to providing an annual wellness allowance (known as PerkUp!) and offering fitness classes on-site, LinkedIn also provides employees with educational training, which is delivered through an online portal and in-person presentations. "By including both learning and action, we believe that we create a robust and complete path that allows employees to incorporate the behaviors in their life that will drive the desired outcome," writes Michael Susi, LinkedIn's wellness leader. ⁷

STEP #3: MOTIVATE EMPLOYEES NATURALLY.

In *Telling Ain't Training* by Harold Stolovitch and Erica Keeps, the authors share the following analogy to illustrate how people learn: "Imagine the following scene. In one hand I have a pitcher filled with water. In the other I have a glass with a lid. What happens when I try to pour water into the glass? Obviously, it spills over the glass and my hand because the inside is closed off."⁸ The authors then explain that this physical example is analogous to trying to pour your ideas into the closed mind of a learner. In other words, learners (such as your employees) show up for any educational experience or change initiative with a "lid." Their lid includes their objections, self-limiting beliefs, doubts, and fears.

Your employees might not fully understand why change will be good for them. Even if your employees want to change, however, they might not be optimistic that they can. Their pessimism could be due to past failures. It could also be due to thinking they are "too busy" to change, thinking it's "too late" for them to change, or thinking that change will be "too difficult," take "too long," or be "too expensive."

As a change agent, you must identify and remove "the lid." You need to help employees understand why change is in their best interest, and you also need to help employees believe that change is possible. If you skip this essential step, change will not last, even if it somehow occurs in the short-term. So, the obvious next question is: "How do you remove the lid?"

DON'T BRIBE, THREATEN, OR PUNISH

Before we discuss what to do, let's discuss what *not* to do. Some employers pay workers (or provide other extrinsic rewards) for walking a certain number of steps each day or for achieving other benchmarks deemed to be positive. There is no doubt that the people and companies implementing these programs mean well. Unfortunately, there are significant problems with this approach. When you incentivize employees for doing something that they could want to do naturally, you ignore the beliefs and other obstacles that are preventing them from behaving in a certain way in the first place. In other words, you try to pour water into a covered glass.

When you rely on artificial forms of motivation, you also perpetuate a myth that forming stronger habits is a chore and something that you should only want to do if you get a prize. As Alfie Kohn writes in *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise and Other Bribes*, "Anything presented as a prerequisite for something else—that is as a means toward some other end—comes to be seen as less desirable.

'Do this and you'll get that' automatically devalues the this.' The recipient of the reward figures, 'If they have to bribe me to do this, it must be something I wouldn't want to do.'" ⁹ To be clear, some studies have proven that financial incentives can lead to short-term compliance and results. However, studies have also shown that incentives can encourage dishonest behavior, and do more harm in the long-term. In an extensive meta-analysis conducted by Dr. Edward L. Deci and two of his colleagues, the researchers concluded the following: "Careful consideration of reward effects reported in 128 experiments lead to the conclusion that tangible rewards tend to have a substantially negative effect on intrinsic motivation." ¹⁰

Want some additional evidence that contingent prizes are not effective? Consider that there are vendors who are profiting by running incentive programs for employers. In one such program that was highlighted on Fox Business Network, participants pay \$300 to enter a weight loss challenge. If they achieve their goal, they receive \$1,000. If they fail, they lose their money.¹¹ Where does their money go? It goes to the vendor running the challenge! Think about that. The vendor's profits actually increase as participant success decreases. The CEO of this vendor was asked by Fox Business Network about success rates in the program. He admitted that only 15-25% of people achieve their goal. His company has to pay those people, but his organization gets to keep the full entry fee from the 75-85% of people who fail. ¹²

UTILIZE CHAMPIONS AND COACHES

Emily Kolakowski, COO at Wellness Corporate Solutions (a company providing biometric screening services and comprehensive wellness programming), has an excellent recommendation on how to motivate employees naturally to form stronger habits. Her company helps clients identify people in the organization who can serve as internal champions. Then, they equip these people with tools and resources to inspire and motivate their coworkers.

Many companies also hire coaches and other experts to lead group workshops for employees and/or to help them address challenges privately. You could hire one or more experts on a contract or part-time basis, or you could take it one step further, like The Motley Fool, a financial services company headquartered in Northern Virginia. In 2011, they hired their first full-time staff member to help employees improve their well-being. "I wish we'd done so fifteen years sooner," writes Tom Gardner, CEO and co-founder of the company. ¹³ Today, Samantha Whiteside [the company's chief wellness officer] leads a variety of group exercise classes for employees across their office. She also coaches colleagues around the world via Skype. "The net result is a convenient solution for our employees that yields higher productivity, lower health insurance costs, and greater levels of satisfaction," writes CEO Tom Gardner. ¹⁴

STEP #4: CREATE A STRONGER WORK ENVIRONMENT.

Many employers underestimate or fail to recognize the impact that their environment has on the behavior of their people. Your work environment provides powerful physical and social cues that influence what and how much your employees eat, how active or sedentary they are, and how much they focus and renew during the day. Let's look at four specific recommendations on how to create a stronger work environment, so that all of your employees can thrive:

RE-DESIGN YOUR OFFICE KITCHENS

In *Work Rules!: Insights from Inside Google That Will Transform How You Live and Lead*, Laszlo Bock, former SVP of People Operations at Google, shares data from experiments that Google conducted to analyze employee eating habits. In one experiment with the company's Boulder, Colorado office, calories consumed from candy dropped by 30% just by placing candy into opaque containers in self-service stations that contained snacks and drinks. This made the candy less visible than healthier alternatives like fruit and nuts. This same change was then implemented in Google's New York office. Over the next seven weeks, employees at that location consumed over three million less calories at work than usual.¹⁵

Like Google, you can improve your employee's eating habits by making unhealthy items *less* visible and *less* accessible. Use glass containers and prime real estate to make healthier options *more* visible and *more* accessible. You could also replace fattening foods with items that are more nutritious.

CREATE A WORKOUT AREA ON-SITE

A growing number of companies are also creating workout areas on-site. Dick Costolo, former CEO at Twitter, highlighted the benefits of this during our interview for *Work Stronger*. "The gym [at Twitter] was the place where everyone came together," he told me. "You would have salespeople with finance people, engineers, designers, data science people, and people in HR. It was great for everyone to be able to see each other in a non-work setting on the same level. It also helped people talk to me back in the office in a way that they might not have otherwise felt comfortable. Doing these grueling workouts together made us feel more connected in the work environment," he said.

You do not need to build a fancy fitness center in order to encourage physical activity though. You can promote fitness simply by having showers and locker rooms on-site, and by organizing a group exercise activity before work, during lunch, or after work. (Costolo told me that Twitter started with group runs after work, before eventually building their own gym and offering CrossFit and yoga classes on-site.)

Another option is to dedicate part of your office space for exercise—either by blocking out an area permanently, or during certain times. This is one way that GreatCall, a company headquartered in San Diego, encourages physical activity. “We created a big space in the middle of our office where we don’t have any desks,” said David Inns, the CEO at GreatCall and a regular participant in the classes. “This has become our fitness room. It’s literally in the middle of the office.” The company takes it further by hiring personal trainers and yoga instructors to lead group classes for employees at lunch every day. Even better, Inns serves as a healthy role model by participating in those classes (like Dick Costolo did at Twitter).

CREATE MORE ACTIVE, MORE FOCUSED MEETINGS

Scott O’Neil, CEO at Harris Blitzer Sports & Entertainment (which includes the Philadelphia 76ers, the New Jersey Devils, and leading venue Prudential Center), told me he implemented a “no phones” policy for meetings. “You put your phone to the side as soon as you enter the room, not just when the meeting begins,” he said. “Of course, it’s a much-maligned policy, but it certainly helps us be more connected. Asking the person next to you about their weekend is much more important than checking Twitter or responding to an email that can wait an hour.”

You could also turn sitting meetings into walking meetings. If your group is not that large, you could have your meeting on-the-go. If your group is larger, you could all go for a walk together, and then have your gathering at a fixed location. One of my former employers did the latter with our weekly staff meetings, which were held in a separate conference room across the street from our main office location. Our employees always enjoyed getting some fresh air during the day and having a change of scenery. A short walk during the day will also give your people more energy. In one study, researchers at the University of Georgia found that ten minutes of low-intensity activity (like walking) could make participants feel more energized than consuming 50 mg of caffeine, the amount found in a typical can of soda.¹⁶

CREATE A WELLNESS ROOM

Unilever has a “wellness zone” to provide employees with “a space for mindfulness, meditation, rest and recovery.” The “wellness zone” has four sections, including an area stocked with healthy snacks, a separate area where employees can connect with colleagues, a separate area for yoga and stretching, and a completely silent area for breaks and rest.¹⁷

Just like you do not need to build a fancy fitness center in order to encourage physical activity, you also don't need to create an elaborate wellness room to promote wellness. You could simply designate (and decorate) an empty office or conference room as a space for personal renewal.

SUMMARY AND KEY QUESTIONS

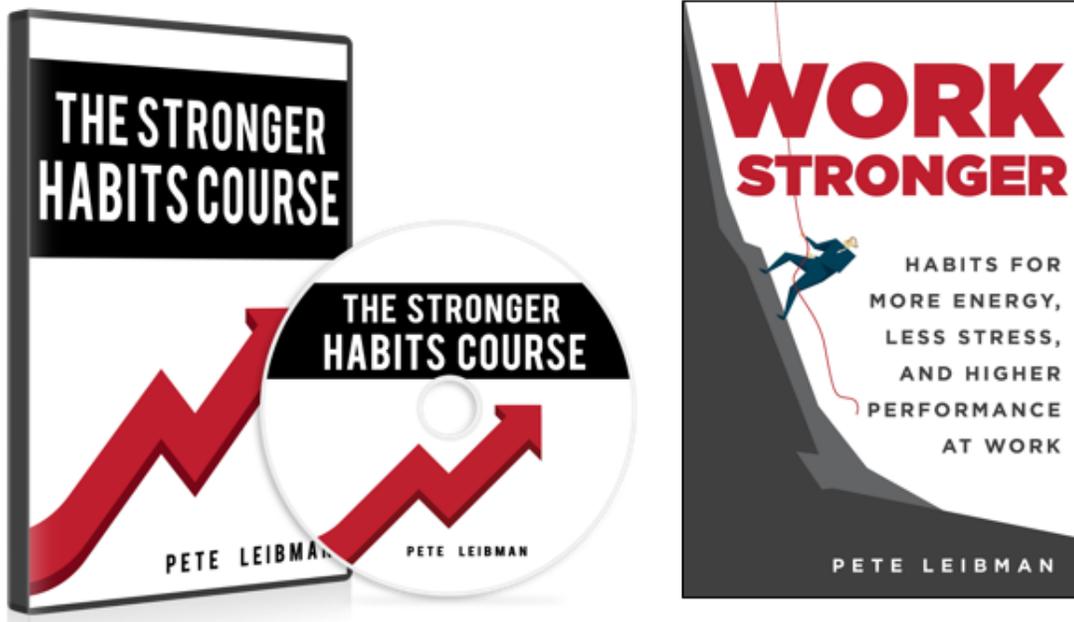
Recent statistics on burn-out and employee engagement are very bleak. However, they present an incredible opportunity for your company to stand out, to attract and retain great people, and to outperform your competitors. Follow these four steps, and you will maximize employee engagement, resilience, and performance at your company:

- Step #1: Start at the top.
- Step #2: Provide energy and resilience training for all employees.
- Step #3: Motivate employees naturally.
- Step #4: Create a stronger work environment.

Here are four questions to ask yourself as you reflect on this report:

- How much do your leaders support and participate in your professional development initiatives, and how could you encourage even greater participation in the future?
- What is your company currently doing to help employees increase their energy and resilience, and how could you provide more training and support in these areas?
- How often are you trying to drive behavior change through artificial forms of motivation, and how could you motivate your employees naturally to form stronger habits?
- How might your current work environment be holding your employees back, and what changes could you make to your environment to help your people perform at an even higher level?

STRONGER EMPLOYEES = STRONGER COMPANY



No matter how talented or motivated your people are, they will not feel and perform their best until they understand how to manage their energy and stress. In order for your company to thrive, your people need to *work stronger*, not longer.

The Work Stronger Signature Program is a science-based professional development program that helps you maximize employee engagement, resilience, and performance. There are three phases to the program:

- Phase 1: Assessment
- Phase 2: Training (in-person or online)
- Phase 3: Reinforcement

Participants learn *how* to form stronger habits, and they also learn *what* to change in four key areas (nutrition, exercise, focus, and sleep and renewal) that impact how they feel and perform each day.

The program is led by Pete Leibman, author of *Work Stronger; Habits for More Energy, Less Stress, and Higher Performance at Work*.

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to schedule a phone call to learn more.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pete Leibman is a leadership consultant, author, and speaker who has been featured on Fox News, CBS Radio, and CNNMoney.com. Before writing *Work Stronger*, Pete worked as an executive recruiter for Heidrick & Struggles, a leadership advisory firm who serves the majority of the Fortune 500. In this role, he interviewed and assessed hundreds of leaders, and he executed high-profile searches for top employers, such as MIT, Ernst & Young, and American Airlines. Pete lives in Arlington, VA. In his free time, he teaches one of the largest group exercise classes in the Washington, D.C. area, and he has competed in the Obstacle Course Racing (OCR) World Championships.



Pete Leibman at work (left) and competing in an obstacle race (right)

“Think you’re already successful? Follow Pete Leibman’s advice, and you can get even better.” – Marshall Goldsmith, the *Thinkers 50* World’s #1 Executive Coach and the New York Times #1 bestselling author of *Triggers* and *What Got You Here Won’t Get You There*

“Pete Leibman provides a powerful, step-by-step approach for maximizing your most valuable asset: your brain.” – Daniel Johnston, MD, MPH, Co-Founder of BrainSpan, a brain health analytics company

“A healthy, disciplined, and focused lifestyle correlates to success in your career. Pete Leibman vividly shows you how it works and the methods to achieve it.” – Mukesh Agni, President at the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF)

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