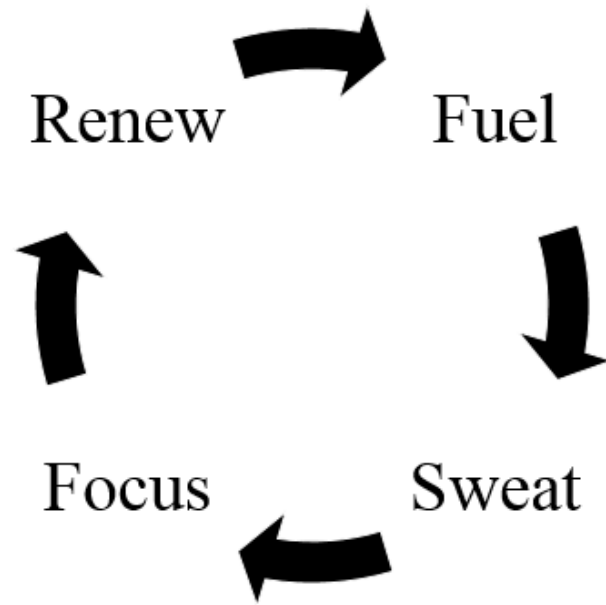
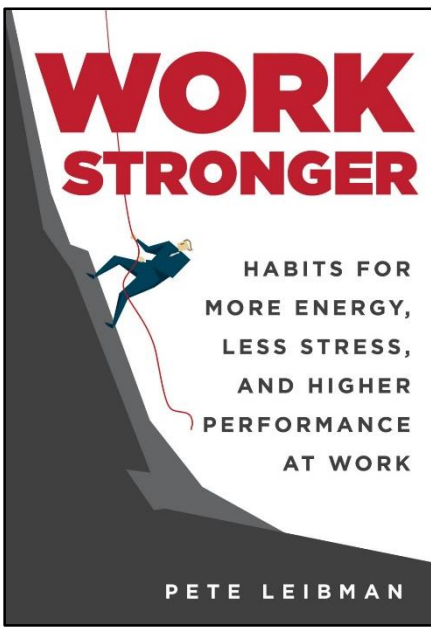


THE STRONGER CYCLE

Four Keys for Achieving and Sustaining
Higher Performance



By Pete Leibman, bestselling author of *Work Stronger*

Introduction

In today's highly competitive environment, there is tremendous pressure to deliver results and to always be "on."

Today's world also encourages excessive multi-tasking, sedentary behavior, insufficient sleep, and poor eating habits—all of which have been scientifically proven to increase stress and decrease productivity.

This report provides a brief introduction to *The Stronger Cycle*, a framework on how to achieve and sustain higher performance. When you leverage the power of *The Stronger Cycle*, you will be more engaged, more resilient, and more productive. You will also serve as a healthier, stronger role model at work and outside of work.

The Stronger Cycle

A growing body of research has demonstrated that four key areas (nutrition, exercise, mental focus, and sleep) have a significant impact on how you feel and perform each day. When you are not physically active, well-rested, and well-fueled, you will have less natural energy, and you will find it more difficult to focus. 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 and they can lead to significant health problems when consumed in excess.

In comparison, when you are active, well-rested, and well-fueled, you will have more

natural energy, and you will find it much easier to focus. As a result, you will produce much higher quality output in much less time, which leaves more time for life outside of work and for taking care of yourself in the future.

Unfortunately, many people fail to recognize the impact that these four areas have on their energy, resilience, and performance. "A lot of people have their priorities backwards in my mind," says Frank Karbe, Chief Financial Officer at Myovant Sciences, a global biopharmaceutical company. "Health and well-being is often seen as an afterthought. In reality, you have to focus on this first because this is the source of all the energy that keeps you going with whatever you want to achieve in your career and your life."

Fuel

For most of human history, natural foods were your only option. Today's world could not be more different. Unlike our ancestors, we have easy, ubiquitous access to sugary beverages, doughy treats, and heavily processed "foods" that provide empty, fattening calories and fleeting, uneven energy.

It is well-known that poor nutrition can make you overweight. It is also well-known that being overweight increases your chances of developing virtually every chronic disease or condition- including cancer, diabetes, stroke, heart disease, and depression. These are not the only consequences though.

Poor eating habits also reduce your intellectual horsepower and cause your

brain to age faster. A 2016 study published in *Neurobiology of Aging* showed that brainpower declines faster for overweight people than for people who are leaner. Overweight subjects in the study had brains that resembled leaner subjects who were ten years older.²

“Your brain actually shrinks as you gain extra body weight,” says Dr. Daniel Johnston, CEO of BrainSpan, a brain health analytics company. “There are incredible benefits for your brain’s health, resilience, and performance when you eat right.”

In addition to the obvious health benefits, studies have shown that stronger eating habits also lead to greater focus and greater productivity. For example, a study led by Dr. Jeremy Spencer of Reading University found that something as simple as eating a large helping of blueberries (a food rich in antioxidants) could lead to increased concentration and memory up to five hours later.³

The way that you fuel yourself also impacts your energy level throughout the day, along with your mood and your emotional stability. “I’m more effective when I eat well,” says Penny Pritzker, an entrepreneur, civic leader, and philanthropist who also served as U.S. Secretary of Commerce in the Obama administration. “To me, this is about performance as much as it is about health and well-being.”

Sweat

The busier you are, the more important it is to be active. Saying you are too busy for exercise is like saying you are too busy to stop for gas because of how far you want to

drive. You should make time for exercise *because you are busy.*

“Exercise is the single most powerful tool you have to optimize your brain function,” writes John J. Ratey, M.D. in *Spark; The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*.⁴ Studies have demonstrated that exercise provides a number of cognitive benefits, including greater creativity, a sharper memory, and a stronger ability to focus.⁵ A study conducted at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign even demonstrated that exercise can reverse cognitive decline associated with aging.⁶

High performers who were interviewed for *Work Stronger* shared a number of additional reasons why they make time in their busy schedules for exercise. Elliott Ferguson, President and CEO at Destination D.C. (the lead organization to successfully manage and market Washington, D.C. as a premier global convention, tourism, and special events destination), believes that exercise gives him more stamina. “A lot of people think that working out will make you tired, but it actually energizes you,” he says.

Barbara Tulipane, CEO at National Recreation and Park Association (the leading non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of public parks, recreation and conservation), uses exercise to reduce stress. Being physically fit is actually a secondary benefit to her. “It’s all about alleviating stress and taking care of my mental health,” she says.

Robin Thurston, CEO at Helix (a consumer genomics company), relies on exercise as a healthy, productive way to break away from work and technology. “The way I really disconnect is when I ride my bike,” he says. “I fundamentally need it. I don’t think I

could operate at the level I need to without it.”

Focus

Today’s “always on” world makes it much harder to focus. Laptops, smartphones, and other forms of technology clearly make our lives better in many ways. However, they also discourage us from concentrating on one task at a time.

Despite what many people think, multitasking makes you *less* productive. In fact, multitasking reduces your performance on virtually every kind of task, including your ability to multitask. Dr. Clifford Nass (a deceased Stanford university sociologist) studied this topic before he passed away. As he said during a 2013 interview, “People who multitask all the time can’t filter out irrelevancy. They can’t manage a working memory. They’re chronically distracted. They initiate much larger parts of their brain that are irrelevant to the task at hand...they’re even terrible at multitasking. When we ask them to multitask, they’re actually worse at it.”⁷

Focusing on one task at a time helps you achieve more in less time and with less stress. Studies have also found that greater focus can increase your creativity and your engagement at work. For example, The Energy Project, a boutique consulting firm, partnered with *Harvard Business Review* in 2013 and 2014. They surveyed over 19,000 people globally across twenty-five industries. They found that engagement at work increased by 29 percent among those with the greatest level of focus.⁸

Renew

One of the biggest myths about high performance is that you can increase your productivity by cutting back on your sleep. In reality, poor sleep reduces your brainpower, decreases your energy, makes you more irritable and anxious, weakens your immune system, hinders your muscle growth and recovery, and leads to weight gain. “Lack of sleep is linked to underperformance, not overachievement,” says Jeff Stibel, a brain scientist, entrepreneur, and co-founder (with Kobe Bryant) of Bryant Stibel, a venture capital fund. “None of us are immune to a lack of sleep, no matter how busy or important you are.”

Other brain health experts agree. “Many people think of sleep as this period when they aren’t doing anything but nothing could be further from the truth,” says Dr. Daniel Johnston, CEO of BrainSpan, a brain health analytics company. “You should think about your seven to eight hours of sleep like ‘going to the gym for your brain’ for seven to eight hours.”

What about those who claim that sleeping less than six hours a night is a key to their success? Most of these people eventually realize that their sleeping habits actually held them back, rather than helped them reach their full potential. Just ask former U.S. President Bill Clinton, a man known for sleeping less than six hours a night during much of his career. Clinton later said, “Every important mistake I’ve made in my life, I’ve made because I was too tired.”⁹

Conclusion

A multitude of research has demonstrated that four key areas (nutrition, exercise, mental focus, and sleep) have a significant impact on how you feel and perform each day. In today's 24/7, rapidly-changing world, there is tremendous pressure, and it's easy to develop poor habits in any or all of these areas. When that happens, stress and irritability increase and energy and performance decrease.

When you understand how to fuel, sweat, focus, and renew, you will be more engaged, more resilient, and more productive over the long-term. You will also serve as a healthier, stronger role model at work and outside of work. "I believe that a big part of my job is to inspire other people to be great both in their personal and professional lives," says Hoby Darling, former CEO at Skullcandy, a creator of world-class audio and gaming products. "This is so important. It makes you a better leader. It makes you a better parent. It makes you a better friend. When you look at it that way, you think 'how could you not find time for this?'"

About

About the author: Pete Leibman is a consultant, speaker, and bestselling author who has been featured on Fox News, CBS Radio, and CNNMoney.com. His latest book, *Work Stronger; Habits for More Energy, Less Stress, and Higher Performance at Work*, debuted in August 2018 as an Amazon.com bestseller and #1 new release. Before writing *Work Stronger*, Pete worked as an executive recruiter at Heidrick & Struggles in the firm's Global Technology & Services and CEO & Board Practices. In this role, he interviewed and assessed hundreds of leaders and helped complete executive searches for top employers such as Ernst & Young, American Airlines, and MIT. In his free time, he teaches one of the largest group exercise classes in the D.C. area and competes in endurance races including the Obstacle Course Racing (OCR) World Championships.

About the book: *Work Stronger* features a science-based approach on how to increase your energy, decrease your stress, and maximize your performance- by working stronger, not longer. The book also features insights from private interviews that Leibman conducted with more than 25 prominent leaders, including Chip Bergh (President & CEO of Levi Strauss), Dick Costolo (former CEO of Twitter), and Janine Allis (an investor on *Shark Tank*).



Author Pete Leibman at work (left) and competing in a fitness challenge (right)

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8. "The human era @ work; Findings from The Energy Project and Harvard Business Review," The Energy Project, accessed on August 11, 2017.
9. Arianna Huffington, *Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder* (New York: Harmony Books, 2014), 74.

Interviews

The following interviews were also utilized for this report.

1. Pete Leibman interview (via phone) with Hoby Darling: January 26, 2017.
2. Pete Leibman interview (via phone) with Elliott Ferguson: May 4, 2017.
3. Pete Leibman interview (via email) with Jeff Stibel: May 17, 2017.
4. Pete Leibman interview (via phone) with Daniel Johnston: June 12, 2017.
5. Pete Leibman interview (via phone) with Barbara Tulipane: June 22, 2017.
6. Pete Leibman interview (via phone) with Frank Karbe: June 30, 2017.
7. Pete Leibman interview (via phone) with Robin Thurston: July 14, 2017.
8. Pete Leibman interview (via phone) with Penny Pritzker: August 2, 2017.