

At Your Best All the Time – Regular Practices for Delivering Sustainable High Performance

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CCH Learning:

Hello, everybody, and welcome to today's webinar, At Your Best All the Time - Regular Practises for Delivering Sustainable High Performances. I'm Susannah Gynther from Wolters Kluwer CCH Learning, and I will be your moderator for today.

A few quick pointers before we get started. If you are having sound problems and can't hear me, please toggle between Audio and Phone. Hopefully, you can see this instruction on the screen regardless. If you are looking for your PowerPoint for today's session, it's saved in the Handout section on your GoToWebinar panel. And just a reminder that shortly after the session, you will receive an email letting you know that e-learning recording is available and ready to be viewed.

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Your presenter today is Deborah Assheton, who is the owner and director of The Amplify Group, a business that uses best practise frameworks to deliver very practical, high impact leadership change, interpersonal skill-building workshops, coaching, and leadership programmes. Deb's passion is to help professionals deepen their self-awareness and embed behaviour that creates new levels of performance, engagement, and results for them. Deb offers executive coaching, leadership development programmes, short and public workshops. Deb has over 20 years experience in executive leadership positions where she has managed very large teams of more than 3,000 people for some of Australia's best known and highly regarded companies, including Vodafone, Bupa, and OBSM. Deb holds a BA in Psychology and a Masters of Organisational Coaching from Sydney University. Deb's clients span the retail and wholesale property management, banking, legal, technology, transport and motoring, and telecommunications industries.

I will now pass you over to Deb to commence today's presentation.

Deborah Assheton:

Thank you, Susannah. Hi, everyone. It's wonderful to be working with you today. Susannah, I'm just going to confirm that you've got my slides up and live.

CCH Learning:

Yes, they are.

Deborah Assheton:

Excellent. Thank you. Okay, so our session today is At Your Best All the Time. So what we're going to be talking about are sustainable practises for making sure that you are in the what's called the high performance zone. So this is about bringing your A game all the time and how we do that. And what we're going to explore is we're going to start by exploring how most of us live most of the time which is in what's called the fatigue zone, and I'll talk more about that obviously. Then we're going to look at mindsets and behaviour, mindsets and behaviour, mindsets and behaviour that support us to be at our best all the time.

What we are not going to talk about today is the external world changing. The world is not going to change for us. There's not going to be less demands at work or less demands from family or less demands from our epic projects like renovations or massive holidays or big events that we're putting on. We're not going to talk about those things. We're going to talk about what are the mindsets and the behaviours that we can adopt that help us to be at our best all the time.

So we'll start by looking at this fatigue zone in life, and then we'll talk about how do we take responsibility for being at our best? What does that actually look like? What are some of the big rocks that we need to put in place, the skills that we need and things that we need to be thinking about? And then what are some of the smaller rocks that also need to be in place to support us bringing our A game every day? So it's a really exciting topic. We're going to start with the not so exciting part, which is where many adults are now.

So over 30% of adults report feeling consistently or permanently fatigued. So that's over 30% of people say that they're in this what's called the fatigue zone all the time now and have been for several years. And then there of course, there's other adults who report falling into the fatigue zone at certain points, either seasonally or because of issues at home or work. And so they're moving in and out of it.

Burnout is one of the fastest growing syndromes in the Western world. So it is the number of people who report being exhausted and burnt out is on the increase and has been steadily increasing for a decade. So burnout is not an event that happens as a one-off thing. It's actually a process that for the most part takes place over quite a lengthy period of time. Not weeks, but more like months and potentially years. And the fatigue zone is the first zone in the phase of burnout.

Where we want to be is on the other side there in what's called optimum stress, and I'm going to talk more about that. That is where we are at our best where we've not got no stress in our lives, but I've got the optimum amount of stress for us that is challenging, invigorating, exciting, and it mobilises us. Where we have too much stress and not enough coping mechanisms, that's when we start to move into the fatigue zone.

So what does the fatigue zone look like in a given week? Well, I'm going to put up a standard week here. So during the week, you're in what's called the high performance zone. So you are potentially working long hours. Your work is possibly quite complex and difficult, so it's intellectually challenging and often emotionally challenging as well. You're on Zoom, you're on Teams, you're moving in and out of the office, so there's a lot going on that your brain is adapting to. You're doing emails. And on top of all of that work performance that we're asking our brain to do, we've also got projects at home. We might be planning an epic holiday. We might be renovating. We might be getting married or having a big birthday or doing all three. And then we're also juggling family as well. So there's a lot of busyness. There's a lot of demands on our body and our brain. And in order to work that way, the brain has to put itself into the high performance zone.

So then let's assume for the purposes of the webinar that you finish work on a Friday and you come home on Friday afternoon or Friday night. What do you do? Well, what most people do is they move into having a few drinks. They binge on Netflix. A lot of people, a lot of adults game quietly in the background or they just fall apart, sit on the couch, turn into a bit of a vegetable and zone out completely. These activities are what's called the depletion zone. So this is where you fast track your body relaxing. So you walk in the door and you pour a drink, and that drink fast tracks the relaxation process, which of course is a very, very, it's a shortcut. You're not really relaxing. You've got alcohol flowing through your system. So it's not... Obviously other people use many different ways to do this fast tracking, to disconnect, to come out of the high performance zone because it's tiring for our body.

And then so we might do that over the weekend in between more projects. So there might be family commitments, there might be sport commitments, there could be many, many commitments. And then we go back to work on, for argument's sake, Monday, and put ourselves back in the high performance zone again. And that cycle, high performance, depletion, high performance, depletion, that is the world of the fatigue zone.

What we're actually looking for, I'm going to talk a lot more about this throughout the webinar, what your body is seeking and my body is seeking is what's called the recovery zone. So you're in the high performance zone during the week, and the recovery zone is where you take yourself out of the high performance zone to some degree, and you rest, sleep, exercise. You calm your mind and your body. You tune off from a lot of that high performance stuff and give your brain a break.

What we're coming back to is a sense of equilibrium, or if you cast your mind back to biology in school, homeostasis, which is where the organism returns to its natural form of balance, which is you and me, and that includes your brain as well. Your brain needs to rest and relax to come down out of its high performance state so that it can restore and go there again on, for argument's sake, Monday.

So my question for you is what do your weekends tend to look like? Are they mostly in the high performance or the recovery or the depletion zones? So Susannah, if you could open the poll, that would be great. And if everyone can just respond, yeah, thanks.

CCH Learning:

Certainly. I'll just launch that poll now. So it's there on your screen. My weekends tend to be, A, mostly in the high performance zone, B, mostly in the recovery zone, C, mostly in the depletion zone, D, a combination of recovery and depletion, or E, every weekend is different for me. So please click a button in the radio button next to the answer that best describes your situation. That would be great.

Deborah Assheton:

Thanks, Susannah. And while you guys are doing that, let me just talk about a few things. So there's no right or wrong answer here. The most important thing is that you're honest with yourself. Many, many people are in the fatigue zone because of this. We've got ourselves into this structure over a long period of time. So no one's saying you're a bad person if you look like you're in this cycle of high performance and depletion. That's just it's actually how we're taught to cope.

So the most important thing is to be honest. And what we're going to talk about in this webinar is how do we find a way and navigate a way in order to be in the high performance zone to do everything that we've just talked about that you do, busy job, complex problem-solving skills or technical skills, and then you've got this fabulous life on the weekend as well. You've got great family and you want to be at your best for all of them. How do we do that?

So what I'm not going to do is say the world's going to change because it's not, and what I'm not going to do is say you have to do less because that's not necessarily going to work for you either. So we're going to try and work with exactly all the things you have on now, but look at how do we organise them in a way that keeps you at your best rather than just ticks the boxes. So Susannah, how do we go on the poll?

CCH Learning:

Okay, so yep. So let's have a little look. Okay, so a 50% said D, a combination of recovery and depletion, 20% C, then A, B, and then E. Back to you, Deb.

Deborah Assheton:

Okay, thank you. So 70% of people said it's either a combination of recovery and depletion, which is there's good that there's some recovery in there. Oh, sorry. 50% for D, and then mostly in the depletion zone, 20%. So we've got 70% of people who are moving in and out of the depletion zone, and that would be really, really normal.

So let's have a look at what we need to do. So the first thing that we need to do is to take responsibility for being at our best all the time. The world can't do that for you. No one can make you be at your best all the time other than you. So we have to see ourselves as the pilot here, the person who is steering, the person who is driving, in this case, the plane, and who is looking out and also looking back and looking within. So the plane is your world. It's you, your body, everything in it, and you're flying yourself or you're piloting yourself through the many things that you do in life. So this is actually the foundation. Without us stepping into taking responsibility, we tend to fall into that default cycle that many, many adults live in that's frankly completely acceptable and normal, but actually not great for us and does not support you to be at your best.

So for those of you that have worked with me before, you probably will have seen this model, but it's one of the best models that I've seen for taking responsibility and it's called above or below the line. It's not my model, I just want to use it today very quickly to talk about what it looks like within the context of being at your best. So this model asks us to imagine that we have a line, it's an imaginary line, of thinking and behaviour. And when we're behaving below the line, we're in some form of defensiveness. We are not taking responsibility. We are blaming the world. We are justifying. We are defending. So when we are below the line, we are not taking responsibility.

So this shows up in hundreds of different ways obviously, but the big ticket ways are there. So denial, blame, justify, manipulate, defend. So when we're denial, we refuse to discuss things. When we're blaming, we blame others. We say, "Well, it's not my fault that I'm working 80 hours a week. It's their fault. It's work. It's them. That's what they expect or that's what I have to do." Or manipulating where we try to make trade-offs. "Well, it's okay. I'll put myself into the fatigue zone because I've got a holiday coming up seven months from now." So it's a trade-off. We justify so we tell ourselves flavoured stories. "It doesn't matter that I'm exhausted and burnt out and my immune system's compromised because I'm doing really well at work." So we flavour and justify, and we often do that with the really important people in our lives, including ourselves. Or where we defend. We just place barriers around ourselves and everybody. We're Teflon and everybody gets that this can't be discussed. So these are how we behave when we're not taking responsibility.

When we're taking responsibility, this is where we are reflecting. We are making changes. So we say, "Actually, it worked last week but I don't want to do it long term so this is what I'm going to change." So we see ourselves in the story. It's so important. So we're not just the victim of, we're not just reacting to, we actually see ourselves in the story and we take ownership for our story. This is the piloting. So we see ourselves accurately. We know that we have a propensity to work really hard and then come home and open a drink, or that we give up exercise way too easily. So we have self-awareness and we act on that awareness.

Now, when we're above the line, we are a person with power. When we're in the story, when we take responsibility, we give ourselves personal power. We become more powerful, not power over. This work has got nothing to do with anyone else. When we're below the line, we've given up that power. It's the trade-off for saying, "I'm not to blame," means, "I've got no power. It's them or they." And so we advocate.

Now, a really important part of choosing to be at your best is that you have to bring a certain amount of power to that because no one can do it for you. And actually many of the forces that are operating in life are going to push your boundaries. And if you don't have some power in place to protect yourself and to hold firm, then you're going to be collapsed. And the first time that you're asked to work more hours, you'll just put your hand up and say yes, and the second and third and fourth. And you now, it is six months later, you've been doing three jobs for six months and you're in the depletion zone. You're on the verge of a exhaustion. So this aspect of personal power is really important, particularly in hybrid environments or any environment where you can work around the clock, between your phone and your emails and everything. The connectedness is enormous. So boundary is going to be really important and I'm going to talk about them now, but power, personal power, is the foundation for any form of personal boundaries, goal setting, and holding the line.

So part of the reason why we are below the line though is we don't want to actually experience the difficult emotions that are associated with taking responsibility. And the difficult emotions that are associated with taking responsibility can be things like, "Actually, I feel quite angry about this," or, "I'm really sad about that," or, "I'm frightened. I'm frightened to say, 'No, I can't do those hours,'" or, "I'm frightened to say, 'Actually, I can't do that work by Friday.'" And so we don't say it and we work around the clock. So we avoid those difficult emotions, and that is part of the thing that can keep us below the line. And it's not easy to step into difficult emotions.

Now, when it comes to difficult emotions, we could be talking about anger, grief, sadness, fear, regret, anything that's difficult to process in the body. And that's why we call them difficult emotions. There's nothing wrong with them. They're just hard to work with, hard to feel, hard to understand sometimes, although sometimes not. They're just really hard to process. Now, when it comes to processing difficult emotions, we've got four big buckets and the first two are the ones that are not very helpful. So this is where we repress, so we shove our difficult emotions, our unexpressed stuff in the closet. Literally, we push it down. We don't want to feel it. We don't go there. We just keep pushing it down. And this is what happens often in workplaces where we are asked to do unreasonable things over the long term and we don't stand up for ourselves. It just gets pushed down.

Or the other alternative, which is not good either, is that we explode. So things build up, build up, build up, and we explode. So we behave really well at work, but we go home and we take it out on our family. We yell at the dog or we yell at somebody random in the car park. It comes, it explodes out of us. And we often, if we're in a bad place, that explosion can be awful. And of course the people who receive it never deserve it, right? It's unacceptable behaviour. But we can go here when we avoid dealing with difficult situations and difficult work.

Now, there is no A game here in either of these places. It's just not possible for you to be at your best when either of these processes are going on. What supports you in your A game when we're above the line and we're taking responsibility are these two options. They're the only other two, expressing what's going on and experiencing it. Now, experiencing does not mean that you will develop the skills to levitate. I just really happen to like that levitation person. Experiencing is about feeling it in your body.

Now, I'm going to come back to these two options in a moment later in the webinar, but I want to just jump into a poll. So Susannah, if you could open the poll, I'm happy just to introduce it. So the question in the poll is, what is your top go-to behaviour? So repress, experience, express, or explode, or E, I'm not sure. Now, again, this is anonymous. No wrong answer. The most important thing is to be aware, just to be aware. So if you asked me that historically, I would answer D. I had a short fuse and I was really, really terrible at managing frustration. Now, my answer, my go-to would be B. I've had to learn those skills and it's a much better life for having learned them. So

it's really important that we are aware of our top go-to or our top two. Now, I'm just going to ask you about number one in this poll. So Susannah, how do we go?

CCH Learning:

Okay, I'm just going to close the poll and we'll have a little look. So we've got 37% said A, repress, 26% say D, explode, 16% each for B and C, and 5% for E, I'm not sure.

Deborah Assheton:

Okay, thanks very much, Susannah. Great. Okay, so 37% repress, 26 explode, 16 and 16 for express and experience. So a couple of things to say about that. Number one, repress and explode are pretty much what we are conditioned to do. We are never taught anywhere really unless we are very, very lucky in our family of origin. But for many of you, like me, would never have been taught how to express our experience or even that they are options.

So many of us grew up in environments and we are conditioned to repress and explode, and we use lots and lots of tools to help keep that in place. So we do things that support the repress particularly like getting addicted to stuff, food, whatever, alcohol, even just regular drinking helps to repress. And the explode has been what's been taught as well in that it's been normalised to be angry about stuff and exploding it. Now, it's becoming less normalised now, but certainly historically it was okay to yell at work, which of course is not okay. It's never okay. So for those of you that are in this space, I really invite you to consider what you can do to start the shift into express and experience.

For those of you that are in that space, great, well done. Express and experience are the world of you being at your best. They're actually a natural state. So expressing an experience is the body and the mind's natural response to handling difficult emotions. Repress and explode are not natural responses. So we're going to talk a bit more about that on the other side of the webinar. So these, B and C, is the world of bringing your A game.

All right, so let's move on now. I want to start to talk about how do we actually bring our A game, and then I'm going to come back to expressing and experiencing. Well, a few things to say here. Bringing your A game, so being at your best, for doing that, there is no formula per se, right? No formula. What works for me is going to be different to what works for you on a given day and certainly over the medium and long term. However, there are some principles that are common, research would show is common to all of us, and that's what I want to talk about here, the principles.

So the first principle of bringing your A game is mental and physical health. And my challenge to you is that you prioritise it, your own physical and mental health, above everything else. It's a big challenge. Sleep, nutrition, exercise, and relaxation are what I'm talking about there. They're the four things that we really, really need. We need high quality sleep, we need good quality nutrition, we need good exercise that suits our body, and we need to find ways to relax. So that's my challenge to you. Now, I can almost hear your voices, your wonderful, beautiful voices saying to me, "Yes, but I've got family. Yes, but I've got this workload. Yes, but I've got these challenges." And of course you do.

And my response to that, which I've had to learn as well, is you will do everything else in your life better. You'll be a better parent. You'll be a better daughter, a better son, a better sister, a better brother. You'll be a better family member. You'll be a better leader. You'll be certainly a better worker if you have prioritised your physical and mental health. You'll be happier. You will most likely live longer, and you'll operate at a much, much higher level. I'll talk about the research in a moment. That's principle number one.

Principle number two, you prioritise strong relationships in every area of your life. The research on loneliness is mind-blowing. And the more research that's done, the more mind-blowing it is. Loneliness is a bigger killer than many illnesses. It shortens your lifespan. Lack of connection is not good for you. It's not good for your brain, it's not good for your heart, it's not good for your body, it's not good for your longevity, and it's not good for your performance. We are social beings. We are wired to connect. And when we don't connect and feel connected, when that reciprocity is not there, there are physical and mental implications for us.

So my challenge to you is to think about the quality of the relationships you have, hopefully with people you like. People who you don't like and shouldn't be spending time with, they're not the ones you want your strong relationships with. Now, family, I know they could walk a fine line there, I get it. Family's important though, right? So there's ways to do that which is smart. But prioritising strong relationships is really good for you and is critical in you bringing your A game.

Number three, you work intentionally. So this is where we step into your piloting. You are the cause of, not a reaction to what's happening in your life. You live intentionally. "How am I going to manage this week? What does it look like for me? What am I driving in my life? What are my goals? How am I responding? What is my intention here?" Rather than, "I've got this pressure pushing down on me. That person's doing this to me. I can't say no to that. She told me this. He said that." That attitude of being in reaction is what keeps us in fatigue and exhaustion and ultimately below the line. So we've got to get into a space where we intentionally set out how we're going to live. Are we doing that today? We do that over a given week, over a month, over a year. That's how we live. This is how you bring your A game.

And number four, you enjoy the path. This is an interesting one. So what we're talking about here is that you're at peace with your journey. So you're not in a space of struggle. "Oh, I'm not where I want to be yet. I thought I'd be better. I thought I'd be further with than where I was. This should be more advanced and it's not." When people are enjoying the path, they are not resisting life. They're not fighting with the reality that is happening around them. Now, some paths are not easy to enjoy. I get that. But the principle of really just being at peace with your journey, of not fighting with life, is really valuable, so valuable. And it's a really big rock.

These are the four really big rocks. So we have prioritise our physical and mental health so that we are here for a long time and we have a long health span, we have great, right relationships in every era of our lives, and we work intentionally and we're at peace with where we're at. And those four things are what allows your body and your mind to operate at your A game. These are actually your natural states. You weren't born as an infant or a child or a baby who fought with life. That's a learned behaviour. So these are the four really big rocks that help us to set up ourselves for the A game, today, for the week, for the month, for the year, et cetera.

So as I said, this looks very different for each of us. So whilst the big rocks, the principles are shared, research would show these, all four of these are shared, actually how that looks for you is going to be different than it looks for me. And how it looks for you is probably different this week than it might be in October. So this is a living expertise that you have. This is a living approach. It's not something that we just do and it's done. So let's have a look at how do we actually make this work for us.

Well, the first thing, the first big rock is clarity that what are you aiming at is a very important question. So what does your A game and being at your best all the time look like for you? Do you know? It's a really great question to ponder. And again, my challenge to you would be to take this content, print it out if you print out or whatever, but to spend some time contemplating, what does the A game look like for me and how do I get myself, for those of you that are in the fatigue zone, get myself out of it? How do I start to make this transition? Transition, not, "Oh, I'm going to do it and it's going to be better from Monday." Actually transition. This is always a transition. I've been doing this work for a long time and I'm always, always transitioning. There were days last week that

were great for me. I was not on my A game. And then I've got a plan for being on my A game this week. So it's a transition.

So what I want to start with is actually blatantly obvious, but often very challenging. So there's quite a bit of research that shows now that when becoming intentional starts with or a practical way to become intentional can start with your ideal week, mapping your ideal week. Now, a lot of people roll their eyes and go, "Oh, should I really be doing that? It feels like a waste of time. I start work here. I finish work here," et cetera. Well, your ideal week is not actually about work. Your ideal week is about you having the kind of week that you enjoy that's good for you, that meets all four of those principles that you deliver. You deliver great work. You're great parent. You're great for your family. You enjoy being in your body, heart, and mind, right? It's much more than just, "Oh, I've got my calendar for work."

So you've got 168 hours. That's the magic number that we get, all of us every week. Everybody on the planet gets it. So when you map out your ideal week, this is an example, you can pull this off the internet, you should start with your sleep first, exercise sessions. Who are you going to spend time with? Who are you going to call? Who are you going to call or who are you going to email? How many hours do you want to work? And this is where it starts to get tricky. Well, you might say, "Well, my calendar is back to back around the clock from 6:00 AM in the morning till 10:00 PM at night." Okay, that's your choice. So number one, that's a choice. And number two, you have a choice to change that if that doesn't work for you. If it works for you, great.

But the other way you can look at this is to say, "Well," rather than, "Oh, I've got this massive workload and I just have to work, work, work, work, work to get it done." The other way you can look at it with more intention is to say or to ask, "How many hours do I want to work this week?" Now, when I ask that question, most adults will say somewhere between, well depending on their situation, but often people will say is, "40 to 50 or 40 to 45, no more than that because I want to do all these other things." And so the question then becomes, how do I achieve everything that needs to be done in 40 hours?

Now, if you only had 40 hours or 35 or 45, whatever your number is, if that's all you had, not an hour more, how would you structure yourself differently? And this is the work. What would you strip out? Who would you delegate to? What would you say that can't be done? But this is the work is actually you intentionally determining how many hours you're going to work rather than being at the mercy of. Now, you might say, "Well, this week I'm working 70 hours or 60 or whatever it might be because I've got next week off." Fine, that's intentional.

But your driving is the key here. How are you going to transition and rest? So by transitioning, we mean how do you take yourself out of work mode into home mode so that you don't come home and yell at the dog, right? Or how do you transition between meetings? I'm going to talk more about this. And how do you rest and recover? What does recovery look like for you? Do you go for a walk? Do you spend some time in your garden? So resting as a activity, reading a book, whatever it might be.

When does life admin get done? So where do bills get paid? Where does banking get managed? Where do those things get done? Because they're important for you to have a clear mind. If you leave them too long, they build up, problems. And where's the adventure and newness? So now you might not have this every week, but where's the skill that you started in COVID that you've dropped, you learning the guitar or the piano, or where's the planning of the holiday that you're really looking forward to, or where's date night or whatever it might be. Where's the adventure and newness?

So your ideal week is this all-encompassing week, and some of the research shows, you can just see there on that particular example of theme under the days of the week. There's some research emerging that theme days seem to work well for everyone. So Tuesday might be one-on-one meetings days, or Tuesday, Wednesday might be meeting days, or Thursday might be a strategic day, or particular projects get done in one day. And that is actually very good for your brain because your brain's able to tune into something wholeheartedly for the day and get itself in the high performance zone and then not think about it for a couple of days. That's very good for your brain. That's the mono tasking. Rather than trying to move from project to one-on-one to crisis to drama to client to go... If you can theme your days, it does seem to be better for your brain, if possible.

Okay, so your ideal week is about choosing how you want to show up for the week as much as possible, and your calendar is a great place to start. It also requires that you are clear on what you're aiming at, which is what we were talking about earlier. Now, there's two types of goals in the world. An intentional behaviour uses approach, what's called approach goals or approach motivation. So we can either be motivated away, so we can motivate it by what we want to move away from, or we can be motivated by what we want to move towards. That's it. That's the way we're wired. So you're either moving away from or you're moving towards. Now, think about when you are thinking about a topic or a person, think about how you feel. Do you want to spend more time with them, move towards them, or do you want to move away from them? That's that motivation.

Now, if you have avoidance goals, which over 50% of adults have some form of avoidance goals, they can look like this. Classic one is stop smoking or quit smoking. Lose weight is a great example of an avoidance goal. It's what you want to move away from. Work less hours is a great example of an avoidance goal. If you look at what's at the heart of those three examples, the thing you want to diminish, to do less of is in the goal. So I want to lose weight. Well, guess what's in that goal? Weight. My brain keeps going back to weight. Quit smoking, my brain keeps going back to smoking or drinking. Working less hours, I work less hours. I'm constantly going back to the work, right? They are much more likely to fail that type of goal.

Approach goals on the other hand are what do you want to move towards? So, "I will run a marathon. I will run five kilometres. I will work 45 hours this week. I will weigh X, Y, Z in weight or I will fit X, Y, Z clothes." They're about the outcome. It's much better for your brain because what your brain is tuning into is newness, challenge, opportunity, excitement, and they're very, very different for us in terms of what we then go and achieve. So often people who are unintentional end up in an avoidance with avoidance goals. People who are intentional have approach goals. Now, this is really important for managing boundaries and for setting up your ideal week. You've got to know what you're aiming at and you want your aim to be in the approach area.

Now, you might start in the avoidance goals. So you might say, "Actually, I'm really, really unhappy with my weight." Great, good to know. But don't make losing weight the goal. Make the goal something that is about how it's going to be different when the weight is lost. So fitting a certain size, whatever, or running or being fit or whatever it is for you. So you can start with the frustration of the avoidance goal. "I'm really unhappy with my weight," or, "I'm really unhappy with the amount of hours I'm working." Okay. Now, I'm going to take responsibility and set a goal that's going to work for me and therefore for everyone around me. So you get yourself in the approach space. So that is big rock number two or big rock... No. Yes, big rock number two.

I want to ask you about what type of goals you typically have. So this is the third poll for today. Do you typically have, A, approach goals? And maybe Susannah, if you could just open it up, that'd be great.

CCH Learning:

Yeah, sure.

Deborah Assheton:

A, approach goals, B, avoidance goals, C, a mixture of both, or D, none of the above.

CCH Learning:

Yep. So that poll is now open so please indicate in clicking in the radio buttons what sort of goals you tend to have.

Deborah Assheton:

Thanks, Susannah. So as I've said, the avoidance goals, typically we find ourselves in those when we are not intentional. And so you might have those in some areas of your life, but in other areas of your life you don't have them because often we can be more intentional in certain areas than we are in others. And the approach goals are far more likely to be successful, they feel better as we achieve them, and therefore we are likely to achieve them at a higher level of confidence. So your A game is in the world of approach goals. How do we go, Susannah?

CCH Learning:

Okay, I'll just close that vote and let's have a little look. So 65% said a mixture, with 20% saying avoidance goals, 15% saying approach goals. Back to you, Deb.

Deborah Assheton:

Right, okay. Thank you. Okay, so most of you have got a mixture, which is pretty normal. So as I said, the avoidance space, it's fine starting place. There's nothing wrong with. It's not where you want to set goals from. And you might notice the avoidance goals are the ones that you've had for a very long time and never achieved. So often when I work with people, I might say to them, "How long have you had your goal for that you haven't achieved?" And they could say, "20 years, I've had this goal for 20 years. I haven't got there." And it's almost always an avoidance goal. So the work is to flip it out of the avoidance space into the approach goal. If you can't do that, just drop it. Drop it. Just drop it. It's not good for you to have avoidance goals that just floating around your mind. So if you can't find the approach version, drop it. Something else will happen and something else will come up.

Okay, so I want to move on now to the next big rock which I actually started with, which is sleep. Sleep is, it's a performance risk when we don't get... Sorry, a lack of sleep is a performance risk. There is no way that you can be bringing your A game, being at your best, if you don't have enough sleep. It's so foundational, it's ridiculous. And the research on lack of sleep is very, very compelling. So first of all, we definitely have a sleep crisis amongst adult populations and arguably children in some cases around the globe. There's over 50% of people, adults, report not sleeping well. And there's a range of symptoms of not sleeping well but the defining question is, did I wake up feeling good? Quite aside from everything else, did I wake up feeling good? And over 50% of people say they don't.

Now, I'm just going to put this up but the reason why sleep needs to be prioritised is because it damages your body when we don't have enough of sleep. And we have again this cultural history in the Western world of celebrating people who burn the midnight oil, who burn the candle at both ends, who stayed up all night and work late and took one for the team, or who are out all night partying but showed up at work anyway, this kind of idealising or heroizing people who don't get enough sleep. And it's not cool. It's not fun and it's not good for you and you can't be at your best.

So you can see the statistics here. They're actually really brutal. Lost sleep cannot be regained by your body, so you can't catch up. What is lost is lost. It's gone. The body cannot catch up from sleep that you lost two years ago. You just physically can't. So it's a one-time opportunity. And for you to be at your best, it's probably the most important thing. It seems that sleep is more important for our health than exercise and nutrition. So it is right at the baseline here.

And when your body is exhausted, in order to give you the energy it needs, what it does is that it turns off what it considers to be background functions. So it turns off things that are not needed today to give you the energy to stay in the high performance zone when you under slept. Now, those background functions include things like digestion. They include things that are DNA repair. They are not background functions at all. They are vital functions. So prioritising sleep is really important if we want to be on an A game. And you all know how to do this, right? I'm going to talk a little bit more about the practises in a moment, but actually taking responsibility for making it happen is the first thing that we need to do.

And so what I want to talk about now is a combination of taking responsibility, so being above the line and seeing ourselves as the pilot, and then applying that to things like our ideal week, how much sleep we get, how we spend our time. So I want to talk about boundaries because boundaries are how we work with the world to make sure that those four principles that we talked about can be in place in your life. Now, boundaries are a big topic and they are really important and they've never been more challenged than they are right now. COVID just shook the boundaries world. It was already hard enough and now it's really tough. So I just want to talk about this for a moment.

So boundaries are a space. Now, when I'm talking about boundaries, I'm talking about your personal boundaries, my personal boundaries. It is a space. And within that space, you can have not enough going on in your world or too much going on in your world. So it's like a spectrum here. Now, when we're in a... Actually, I'll put this up and then just talk through it. When we are in our high performance world, so this slide assumes that you've got a busy life, you've work, you've got family, you've got all that going on, complexity, difficulty, et cetera, as well as lots of joy and adventure. So there will be a range of things that are in that zone of okay with me. I could do this week in, week out. I love it. It's okay with me. It's well within my boundaries.

Then on either side, you've got stuff that is okay with me sometimes. So sometimes I'm okay to do, for argument's sake, a 70-hour week. Maybe it's at the end of the financial season or it's when we are landing a particular client or when a big piece of work is due, right? I'm okay with it sometimes. At the other end, I'm also okay to do 10 hours of work a week sometimes. I don't want to just do 10 hours of work a week every week, but I'm okay with it sometimes. Or I'm okay to take a call on my holiday sometimes, or this holiday. Not okay with me is the space that is not okay with you. Actually, I'm not okay to take a call on my holiday. Actually, I'm not okay to work 80 hours a week and three jobs for the next six months. Actually, I'm not okay with the expectations that you have of me. Or actually, I'm not okay to go to 14 family functions this weekend, right? These are things that are not okay with you.

And the not okay can be too little. So you might say, "Well, it's actually not okay with me not to work because I know that when I don't work, I just sit around and eat and watch TV. And I don't want to do that. That's not who I am. Equally, I don't want to work 100 hours a week. That's not okay with me either." So your boundaries are going to be very individual. They're going to change over time. What's okay with you today will not be okay with you a decade from now hopefully. Your life changes, your boundaries need to move with it. So they're a space. They are living, breathing boundaries that are yours.

Now, you need to know what yours are. A lot of people don't even know what their boundaries are. You need to know what yours are. I suggest that you can use these columns and you can say, "Actually what is okay with me? What's okay with me sometimes?" You can write a list, "What's not okay with me? It's never okay with me to have 14 family functions in one weekend." And you can do this with your partner. You can do this with your family. You could do this with your team. You can do this with your peers at work. So you can start to get really good at understanding what's okay with me, what's okay sometimes, and what's not okay.

Healthy boundaries are those that work for you and fit you with your world. So you have to have some flex, right? We are responsible for setting our boundaries. It's not up to the world to change in order for your boundaries, for you to meet your boundaries. That's not how it works. Boundaries are your stake in the ground. It's actually this is what it takes for me to be healthy, long-term for me to live well, for me to enjoy this one life that I've been gifted, and for me to spend time with my family and meet the priorities of my life. They're the most healthy, natural space in the world, is to have great boundaries that you are happy to honour, explain because people are going to have different boundaries to you, and that you're happy for them to shift and move as required.

So healthy boundaries, we are aware of what our boundaries are and why they're important. We take responsibility for setting and maintaining and managing those boundaries. There's a certain presence around them. So we're open and accepting, and we also work with other people's boundaries, whether we like them or not. It's not about whether I like someone else's boundaries. It's actually about, "Okay, he knows these boundaries or she knows the boundaries. How do we work together with those?" And there needs to be a little bit of flexibility. Now, not this much flexibility, but this much flexibility of give and take from this strength. Actually though, many people have poor boundaries. So they're either collapsed or what are called rigid. So collapsed to where there's either no boundaries or we are not able to fight for the boundaries. We're not even able to articulate. We just constantly collapse. So in other words, effectively there's no boundary.

And so this is where people tend to get the pushed over in that this is where we see people that are working hours longer than they ever wanted to work or who are stuck working in situations that they really dislike, but they haven't got the boundaries to fix the situation or to change it. And so they often leave their job, which means that it's good that they got themselves out of that situation, but often then it gets repeated at other organisations. Rigid boundaries are where we are too rigid about the boundaries and it becomes this power over judgmental, arrogant, "Well, I don't do that." And we absolve ourselves of any responsibility to flex the boundaries. So this is where the boundaries become weaponized and they also become problematic. And people find you difficult or dogmatic or complicated to work with because these boundaries are too rigid.

Now, in both cases, rigid or collapsed, boundaries are motivated by fear. They're not great. So we want to move away from that completely. So when we talk about being at our best, what we're talking about is moving into a space where we can process difficulty, in other words, challenges that we find hard, and we can do that in a way that's really healthy. So experiencing is about exercising, writing, meditating, contemplation, retreats, holidays. It's about feeling what's going on and honouring it, understanding it and honouring it. And then expressing is about talking to people. So talking to people that you love, talking to a confidante. It can include therapy. It can also include a whinge factor where you've got someone at work and you say, "Deb, I'm just going to whinge to you about this for five minutes and then I'm going to take responsibility. Now, here's what I know I need to do." So it's about clearing your head and refining your thinking.

These two things are really, really super healthy. And what they actually do is process the difficulty. They don't push it down. They don't send it out into the world. They process it within you. And then guess what happens? You move on from that difficulty. It doesn't haunt you for nine years or nine days. And you're able to act on it in a way that brings you back to your best. Being into your best is actually your natural state. And so this is the process that helps you get there.

Now, what I've got coming up here is I've got some slides that are resources. So there's quite a lot on these. You've got copies of them. I'm not going to go through every single slide, but there's lots of things that we can do to balance out pressure or stress and a coping mechanism. So that, right back at that first slide where we talked about optimal stress, this is what optimal stress looks like. You've got a good amount of stress. It's energising and motivating, and you're living in a way that means that that level of stress is really great for you. Optimum stress, not too little, not too much.

Now, there's loads of techniques here, all of which are pretty much supported by research, that can help you to recover and restore. And of course number two might work for some of you, but number six might work for others. So again, what I suggest you do here as you go through these is to highlight the ones that you think will work for you right now. And then what it looks like six months from now might be very, very different. So some days I take the cognitive breaks here, number two, every 90 minutes, but other days that doesn't work for me. But when I can do it, I do. And I find it's amazing, the difference. My brain at 4:00 PM is so much better than it would be on a day where I'm not able to take them for whatever reason.

So we want to adapt and respond and move through these. And some of them, like not catastrophizing, can take quite a long time to build that skill. But there's loads of these practises that are available to us to help us stay at our best all the time. It's the choice that's so important. And then what it looks like when it's done well is this. So you're still in your high performance zone but you've got clear boundaries. You're disconnecting from work every day. You take cognitive breaks. You're multitasking. You're mindful. You're connecting and you're pacing yourself with projects. And your depletion zone, you can still come home on a Friday and have a drink, but we limit alcohol when we're tired. So important. The damage that's done is much greater when we're tired than when we're not. And of course, alcohol impacts sleep. So you want to stop drinking well before you go to sleep. Stop checking your phone. Take binge breaks. Don't binge around the clock on Netflix. Limit people who are not good for you. Limit dramatic news. Limit junk food. Those things send you into depletion.

And the recovery zone is actually really active. So it's doing things that you enjoy, having power naps, love and nana nap, reflecting on progress, getting exercise, nature, nature, nature. A 30-minute walk in a park is immeasurably better for you than a 30-minute walk down a main road. Choose the park. Everything about it is set up to help you go back to homeostasis, and your body relaxes more in that 30 minutes than if you're walking down the road. Gratitude practises to just being grateful for small things helps to bring your nervous system down and stay above the line.

Okay, that's it from me today. I took a bit long there towards the end. So we've only got a couple of minutes for questions, but I really hope you found today valuable. And I want to say thank you very much for coming and well done on engaging in this content. It's very easy not to look at how we stay at our best all the time. So thank you very much for joining me. And we've got a couple of minutes for questions, Susannah.

CCH Learning:

Thank you very much for that, Deb. That was a great presentation. Maybe something that'll take a few goes to digest completely, but that's okay. So we will be spending the next few minutes taking questions. To give you some time to type those up, I will mention our upcoming webinars.

So coming up, we've got AML Phase 2: The Key AML/CFT Obligations for a Professional Services Firm. We're also going to be looking at the 2024 Mid-Year Budget and SMSF Annual Returns - Same Same, But Different. Also, How to Negotiate Payment Plans with the ATO - What You and Your Clients Need to Know. We'll be looking at Work-Related Expenses Hotspots with the ATO and Bankruptcy and Winding Up Cases. And also, Building a Resilient Brain with Mindfulness. If you're interested in these or any of our sessions, please head to the CCH Learning website and see what is right for you.

So let's have a little look, oh, little look at the questions. Okay, so I have a question from Sarah. Sarah was asking, "My workplace and workload are relentless. Everyone works really long hours. How can I break that mould?"

Deborah Assheton:

Look, it's a good question, Sarah. Well, it's hard. It's really hard. So what I would suggest is that you do it slowly and that you put in place practises where you still get your work done but you think about how you do it in less hours is the first thing. And you may want to raise it as an issue, but if you've been there long term, that can be hard to do. But they're the two options. So you take responsibility for starting to ratchet it down and think about how you can get your work done in less hours. Or number two, raise it. Number three, if it's really not good for you and you don't feel comfortable to raise it because it's the culture, then you may want to consider moving jobs. You only get one life, Sarah. So staying for years and years and years in an environment that's not great for you isn't a very good option. Thank you.

CCH Learning:

Thank you for that, Deb. I hope that helps you there, Sarah. I also have a question from Michael. Michael was asking, "I think my team are at risk of burnout. What can I do?"

Deborah Assheton:

Yeah, Michael, you certainly wouldn't be the only one. So if you think your team's at risk of burnout, I think it'd be good for you to spend some time looking at what do you think is driving that risk? Is it workload? Is it clients? Is it that you're under resourced? What are the key drivers? Might be all three. And that I would engage your leader if you can.

Now, if you are the leader, you might be able to make some decisions about that, but I would certainly engage your leader and just talk about, "Look, here's my concern. Here's what I think is driving it. Here's what I'm seeing from my team," and ask for his or her help. "Deb, you are my leader, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. These are the issues. This is what I'm saying. Can you help me? Because I'm worried that the team's at risk of burnout, here's what I would like to do." And so you develop a set of options.

You can talk to your team. But once you open the door with your team, you create an environment where people can say, "Well, I'm feeling burnt out now," so it might be better to go to your manager first and talk about your concerns and share them with her or him, and just see where that goes before you start talking to the team. Thanks, Michael.

Susannah, I can't hear you. I think you might be on mute.

CCH Learning:

Sorry, that was me. I had muted myself.

Deborah Assheton:

That's all right.

CCH Learning:

That does bring us to the end of our questions for today. But however, Deb's details are there on the screen. So please, if you have any further questions, please reach out and I'm sure Deb will be able to help you.

Deborah Assheton:

Thank you.

CCH Learning:

So in terms of next steps, I would like to remind you all to please take a moment to provide your feedback when exiting. We've asked you a couple of questions about today's webinar, so it's really important for us to hear your opinions. It's also a reminder that shortly after today's session, you will be emailed when you're enrolled into the e-learning recording, which can be watched multiple times, and have access to the PowerPoint transcript and CPD certificate.

I would very much like to thank Deb for the session today, and to you, the audience, for joining us. Hope to see you back online for another CCH Learning webinar very soon. Please enjoy the rest of your day. Thank you very much.