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**THE POWER OF FULL ENGAGEMENT: MANAGING ENERGY,  
NOT TIME, IS THE KEY TO HIGH PERFORMANCE AND  
PERSONAL RENEWAL**

BY: JIM LOEHR AND TONY SCHWARTZ

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How well are you showing up for your life? What are the quantity and quality of your energies (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual) with which you engage your relationships and projects? If you are interested in assessing your answers to these questions, or corporate life where you work, you will find a highly useful perspective in this book. If you are also interested in doing something as a result of your assessment, you'll find powerful strategies for change.

Performance psychologist Jim Loehr and his business partner Tony Schwartz have written an excellent book that compellingly re-directs the mountain of literature on time management. They make the case that energy is a more fundamental resource in our lives than time. Putting in time or showing up tells us little about our ability to engage. To engage our lives well, we need energy. Loehr has adapted his work with elite athletes to create The Corporate Athlete Training System© to meet the (in his estimate, more demanding) energy needs of business leaders and professionals.

Now, realizing that some readers of this review may react with negative energy to the athletic metaphor, I ask for your patience. This is a serious book, free of gimmicks, written in dialogue with fields such as emotional intelligence and with authors such as Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey (*How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001). The authors also use religious language such as "spirit" and "Sabbath" in ways that will catch your attention. The practice of "full engagement" involves the following four principles:

- "Principle 1: Full engagement requires drawing on four separate but related sources of energy: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.
- Principle 2: Because energy diminishes both with overuse and with underuse, we must balance energy expenditure with intermittent energy renewal.
- Principle 3: To build capacity we must push beyond our normal limits, training in the same systematic way that elite athletes do.
- Principle 4: Positive energy rituals-highly specific routines for managing energy-are the key to full engagement and sustained high performance" (18).

The authors' basic diagnosis is that their clients tend to live without respecting the oscillating rhythm of energy expenditure and recovery, to under-train themselves spiritually and physically while depleting their emotional and mental energies. Usually, they are more knowledgeable of what to do, than how they actually follow through. Since the audience addressed is comprised of persons who should steward the energies of their organizations, it follows that the authors' client organizations also reflect poor energy habits.

The treatment plan, *The Corporate Athlete Training System*,<sup>©</sup> involves three steps: define purpose (because spiritual energy is the chief motivation in life); face the truth (accurate assessment, including from one's co-workers); take specific action (in both one-time events and creating rituals). The latter two steps are particularly well-presented. The assessment tools for facing the truth reflect insights from work on emotional intelligence. The strategy of creating rituals to inhabit new behaviors seems wise. One of the insights that informs the need to create rituals (by which the authors mean habits) is that choosing is an energy intensive activity. Embedding choices in habitual action frees one's energy and attention to meet unusual demands.

For the intended audiences (the authors' clients include managers, executives, business owners, administrators, educators, and clergy-professionals with discretion regarding

how they structure their day), the book has many strengths. It is a fresh, different approach from time management, although it is complementary to Stephen Covey's principle-centered approach (e.g., *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989). Their approach values public virtues (such as integrity, compassion, connecting with a purpose larger than one's own interest), and relationships. The principles are simple to grasp and profound in their implications for daily living. The authors' attempt to advance a holistic approach creates a very interesting bibliography for a business book. Their theoretical framework is both thoughtful and practical. For example, in pp. 44-45, they write about "defense spending:" individuals and organizations running so close to empty that they use their remaining energy to defend themselves from any further demands. This seems to be a familiar condition in theological education.

If this book were to be used in a Christian seminary classroom, there are a number of interesting issues and questions that could be engaged. The book is aimed at a secular audience, but is one that is open to a secular spirituality (Laura Nash and Scotty McLennan in *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001, describe the popularity of this approach). In fact, Loehr and Schwartz claim priority for their generic definition in a way that undercuts religious particularity (110). A class may want to debate this claim, as well as to understand its appeal. The authors describe what strength and flexibility mean for each of the energy "muscle" groups. Spiritual flexibility means tolerance of others' views as long as those views "don't bring harm to others" (11). What do we, as Christians, mean by "spiritual strength"? What is the correlation between the Corporate Athlete method, and ascetic spiritual exercises? How would a specifically Christian response to the question the authors raise about "the chief end of human beings" (not their language) change, if at all, their concern to help people perform engagingly?

How well are you able to engage your life? With the strengths and limitations of a book written for a secular audience, Loehr and Schwartz do an excellent job of addressing this question. I can imagine leaders in a

congregation or a school asking and answering this question better as a result of engaging this book. I can also imagine the benefits of extending this question further down a path they suggest, adapting an energy assessment to the institutions in which we live, along with building energy recovery rituals into our corporate lives.

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