

EXECUTIVE VITALITY™: YOUR HAPPINESS QUOTIENT

How are you feeling a month into the new year—as you finish up setting goals, forming new habits, and thinking about new ideas? Are you happy? What is happy? Webster says: “A state of well-being and contentment: joy.”

It is time to calibrate and improve your “happiness quotient” as an executive.

In the past, we have written about the elements of Executive Vitality™: Work, Play, Finances, Relationships (e.g., time with family and friends), Spirituality, and Health (e.g., rest, eating, and exercise). It is not hard to see that if you have these six elements of Executive Vitality in good working order, then you will be feeling pretty content. We believe that happiness and Executive Vitality are inextricably linked.

Shawn Achor is a guru of happiness. If you have not seen his [TED talk](#), we recommend it. He summarizes five steps to greater happiness: They are: (1) Write down three new things you are grateful for each day (based on research by Emmons and McCullough, 2003); (2) Write for two minutes a day describing one positive experience you had over the past 24 hours (Slatcher and Pennebaker, 2006); (3) Exercise for 10 minutes a day (Babyak et al, 2000); (4) Meditate for two minutes a day, focusing on your breath going in and out (Dweck, 2007); (5) Write one, quick email first thing in the morning thanking or praising a member on your team (Lyubomirsky, 2005).

For years, we have been suggesting to our coachees that they include those activities in their action plans. All coachees who have been working on their Executive Vitality in this way have achieved great results. For example, one reports: “Striking the right balance between work and other things—I have gotten that nailed now. I can work hard and play hard. I have enough time for family and work, and I am more balanced; and that makes it easier for me to be with.” Another one says: “Some of the suggestions about looking after yourself better—sleep, exercise, and pursuing other interests [were some of the things about executive coaching that benefited me the most personally].”

In addition to the steps suggested above, to ensure you improve your “happiness quotient,” we also recommend that you:

1. **Map out personal time to care time for yourself.** Plan for the whole year—big things and little things. Plan mini-vacations, longer vacations, and daily time slots in order to refresh, renew, and de-stress. The goal is to take more time for yourself and less time for your work. The thinking on that startling concept goes back at least to the 1920s. As Henry Ford said of the decision to reduce work hours: “It is high time to rid ourselves of the notion that leisure for workmen is either 'lost time' or a class privilege.” This sentiment has been updated by such gurus as Peter Bregman and Tony Schwartz (see *HBR Guide to Getting the Right Work Done*). Also, research shows that *planning* the vacation per se leads to an increase in happiness (as reported in the *New York Times*, February 18, 2010, “How Vacations Affect Your Happiness”).
2. **Be sure you get adequate sleep.** One study at the University of Michigan by Norbert Schwartz shows that getting one extra hour of sleep a night per night contributes more to happiness than getting a \$60,000 raise.

3. **Write. Keep a journal.** There has been much research on the benefits to mental and physical well-being of journaling. James Pennebaker, University of Texas, was a pioneer in this research. (Also, see research by Philip Ullrich, University of Washington, Seattle.)
4. **Do something for somebody else.** Help others. Do community service. Volunteer. 2013 United Health research reveals that 94% of people who do community service say that volunteering improves their mood.
5. **Meditate.** We are emphasizing this from the list above as there is increasing evidence of meditation's effectiveness. For example, a recent study quoted by *Harvard Business Review* says: "Research participants who had spent just 15 minutes in 'mindfulness' meditation, focusing on their breathing, were 77% more likely than others to resist what's known as the 'sunk-cost bias,' the tendency to stick with a less-than-optimal strategy merely because a lot of money has been sunk into it," says a team led by Andrew C. Hafenbrack of Insead business school in France."

And if that is not potent enough evidence for meditating, consider the stunning victory of the Seattle Seahawks over the powerful offense of the Denver Broncos in the Super Bowl this year. Pete Carroll, the coach of the Seahawks, introduced daily meditating into his coaching program in 2011. Seems like it paid off.

If you follow the recommendations above, consistently, you will feel better and so will the people around you.

How much time are you putting into the six areas of Executive Vitality and how does that impact you and the people around you? What can you do to impact your mood which in turn impacts family, friends, colleagues, your health, well-being, and behavior?