



# BECOMING WORLD CLASS

**W**e're always looking to improve our performance. In the transportation business, you have to be "on" all the time, available to service your shippers and talk to your drivers 24/7. We all know how hard it is to sustain such an energy level. During an EO (Entrepreneurs' Organization) event, I was very impressed by Warren Rustand's presentation of the High Performance Pyramid developed by Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz of LGE. The whole idea behind the High Performance Pyramid is that world-class CEOs, like world-class athletes, thrive under pressure and can mobilize their energy on demand, because they discovered how to train, manage, and control their inner states. I thought principles of the High Performance Pyramid could help you become a world-class freight professional.

“...WORLD CLASS CEOs, LIKE WORLD CLASS ATHLETES, THRIVE UNDER PRESSURE AND CAN MOBILIZE THEIR ENERGY ON DEMAND...”

# THE BASE OF THE HIGH PERFORMANCE PYRAMID IS BUILDING PHYSICAL CAPACITY

## PHYSICAL CAPACITY

Energy is the capacity to do work, and the best competitors manage their energy by using recovery rituals. The core of energy management is interval training, which advocates oscillation between energy expenditure and energy renewal. Many of us often try to plug away at work non-stop, forcing ourselves to work constantly for hours, viewing breaks as wastes of time that keep us from achieving our goals. Energy oscillation advocates a powerful burst of energy, followed by a recovery and renewal time to enable the next powerful burst of energy. Without time for recovery, your energy level wanes over time and you achieve less overall. Recovery rituals lower your heart rate, create more focus, and generate more positive feelings.

So how often should you use recovery rituals? After every 90 to 120

minutes of concentrated effort, take a break to recover and renew. This could involve a short walk, a non-related discussion with a friend or co-worker, lunch away from your desk, or an enjoyable non-related task to give your mind a break. Feeling too stressed to take a short break? Rustand believes stress is self-induced and causes choking. You cannot change external conditions, but you can change your reaction to them by incorporating disciplined recovery into your routine. Recovery rituals can ultimately help alleviate stress by giving yourself more energy overall. Alternating between desirable (energy boosting) tasks and less desirable (energy draining) tasks has also helped me maintain energy and focus. It takes 30 days to form a habit. Try it for 30 days, and see how you feel, and how your performance improves.

# THE SECOND BLOCK IS BUILDING EMOTIONAL CAPACITY

“YOU CAN CULTIVATE POSITIVE EMOTIONS BY INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU, PRACTICE GRATITUDE BY RECOGNIZING THE SMALL THINGS THAT ARE GOING RIGHT IN YOUR LIFE.”

## EMOTIONAL CAPACITY

## PHYSICAL CAPACITY

The idea here is that positive emotions create optimal performance, while negative emotions create suboptimal performance. During their research, Loehr and Schwartz asked hundreds of athletes to describe how they felt when performing at their best. Using words like “calm,” “challenged,” “engaged,” and “optimistic” revealed they were not stressed, but happy during peak performance states. Conversely negative emotions like frustration, anger, fear, and resentment drain energy and can negatively affect performance. Athletes choke in competition when feeling negative emotions.

These same emotions affect freight agent performance at work. So it is extremely important to cultivate positive emotions. According to Barbara Frederickson, author of “Positivity” and creator of the “broaden-and-build” theory, “positive emotions open our hearts and our minds, making us more receptive and more creative.” Conversely, negative emotions close our minds to available possibilities, narrowing our focus and reducing our probability of success.

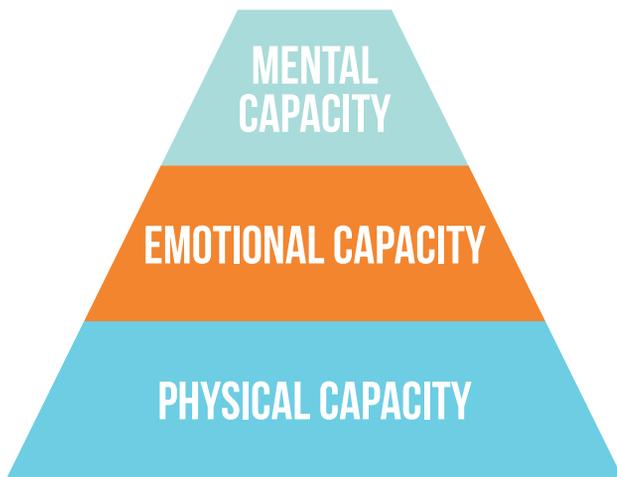
So what does this mean for freight agents in your day-to-day lives? You can cultivate positive emotions by interacting with people who are important to you, practicing gratitude by recognizing the small things that are going right in your life, listening to music, performing a random act of kindness. As you look at all the tasks a freight agent has to do in any

given day, find some pleasure in those that you like and really master them. Create a sense of satisfaction when you calmly solve a customer’s problem on a difficult load. Smile when you are talking on the phone, your positive energy will shine through.

When you feel the stress mounting and the negative emotions coming to the surface, you are really experiencing a physical “fight or flight” reaction. When early humans were confronted with a threat, stress hormones were released by the body so it could mobilize to fight or run away from the threat. These same hormones are released in our bodies when we are under stress, and we need a physical release to counteract the effects of these stress hormones. A good workout can help burn off negative emotions, so a regular exercise schedule is highly recommended.

For freight agents dealing with difficult customers or drivers, another more practical way of dealing with mounting stress can be practiced right in your office. Loehr and Schwartz came up with a ritual to help push negative stress emotions back: Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths from the belly not the chest, consciously relax your facial muscles, soften your voice and speak more slowly, try to understand the other person’s point of view, and frame your response in positive language. Cultivating positive emotions and counteracting negative emotions can definitely improve performance.

## THE THIRD BLOCK IS BUILDING MENTAL CAPACITY



LGE's training centers on cognitive (thinking) areas of focus, time management and positive thinking skills. Focus refers to concentrating your energy on a specific goal. One goal most freight agents can identify with is cold-calling or prospecting for new customers by networking. Anything that prevents your ability to focus drains your energy. Although this may sound odd, researchers have determined that meditation increases focus. If you can't see yourself as someone who meditates for 15 minutes twice a day, just try this. Nothing fancy, but just prior to a sales call, center yourself by taking 10 deep belly breaths to calm your mind, counting backwards from 10 to 1 before a call.

As for time management, creating rituals for cold-calling that incorporate small breaks can help freight agents

keep their energy and motivation up. Chris Curran, author of "The Leap," once encouraged me to have a "Power Hour." I would psych myself up to continuously call people for a one hour block of time. Then I would then take a break to rest and recover.

Visualization of positive outcomes also comes into play for sales calls. Once you have quieted your mind, visualize the person on the other end of the phone or with whom you have your meeting being positive and receptive to your message. Visualize yourself easily and successfully understanding their needs and communicating how you can fulfill those needs. Visualization is used by athletes all the time to enhance performance. By visualizing success, you create positive energy that helps you achieve actual results.

## THE FOURTH BLOCK IS BUILDING SPIRITUAL CAPACITY

“WHEN YOU LEVERAGE YOUR STRENGTHS, YOU CAN TAP INTO YOUR SENSE OF PURPOSE...”

This has nothing to do with religion, but instead, your deepest values that give you a sense of purpose. Building spiritual capacity helps increase resiliency in the face of challenges as well as enabling you to sustain focus, motivation, and determination as you pursue your goals. Take some time right now to connect to your deeper values. What is really important to you in life? Your family? Helping others? Why are you a freight agent? Is it to make money to provide a certain lifestyle? Do you find rewards beyond the financial in your work, like providing great service and building strong relationships?

There is a school of thought that embraces the idea that success and happiness come from building on and using your strengths instead of focusing on correcting your weaknesses. When you leverage your strengths, you can tap into your sense of purpose and enter a state called "Flow" where you actually lose track of time while performing certain tasks. According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, experiencing this state of flow on a regular basis enhances happiness and life satisfaction.

As a freight agent on the practical side, you do need to make money to support yourself and your family, but there can still be more to being an agent than just the money. You may think of being an agent as a job, which is a means to this end. You may think of it as a career, where you are interested in developing yourself to grow professionally, creating an agency

with employees. Or you may think of it as a calling, where you are fulfilling your purpose to service your shippers, develop your employees, and build a loyal carrier base. Wherever you are on this continuum, you can still identify your strengths and use them in your day-to-day business activities to achieve moments of flow. Problem-solving on tough loads, communicating with shippers, multitasking many live loads, empathizing with drivers, any of these can be strengths you can use, develop, and feel proud of to give you a larger sense of purpose on a day-to-day basis. This will energize you in your daily life and enable you to become more resilient during the tough times when a driver disappears or you lose a good shipper.

Loehr and Schwartz tied up their Harvard Business Review article on this subject by writing, "When people feel strong and resilient—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—they perform better, with more passion, for longer. They win, their families win, and the corporations that employ them win."

I believe that freight agents can win by building the pyramids in their own lives to achieve an ideal performance state and become more energetic, resilient, and fulfilled. ■



Cheryl Biron is President and CEO of One Horn Transportation in Wayne, N.J.

She earned her Bachelor of Science degree from Cornell University and her MBA at The Wharton School.

