



Cultivating Energy

Written by Cam Yenokida ©2025



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Energy isn't something that happens to you - it's something you build. The leaders who know their list and protect it show up differently.

Cultivating Energy

"Energy and persistence conquer all things."
- Benjamin Franklin

Most conversations about energy begin by asking you to identify what gives it and what drains it. The framework is intuitive — sort the people, places, and situations in your life into columns and optimize accordingly.

The problem is that most of what ends up in those columns is outside your control. The draining client. The difficult board dynamic. The organizational complexity that doesn't simplify just because you've named it. Framing energy as something external that happens to you, rather than something internal that you build, keeps you in a permanent reactive posture.

Cultivating energy is a different practice. It asks a different question: not "what gives me energy?" but "what do I do that moves me closer to my most vital, creative, and present self?" That shift — from external to internal, from reactive to deliberate — changes how you approach your days.

The Biology Behind It

The reframe has biology behind it. When we engage in behaviors aligned with intrinsic vitality — physical movement, meaningful connection, stillness, creative engagement — the brain releases dopamine, the neurotransmitter central to motivation, focus, and cognitive performance. Research in neuroscience and performance psychology consistently links these states to sharper problem-solving, stronger decision-making, greater creativity, and more sustained presence under pressure.

"Managing energy, not time, is the fundamental currency of high performance."
- Jim Loehr & Tony Schwartz

For most of my career, I thought about exercise the way many leaders do — as a form of stress management. A release valve for when the pressure builds. I've since reframed that entirely. The goal isn't to manage stress. It's to move toward vitality — to engage in the behaviors that make you a better thinker, a more present leader, and a more energized human being in the room. Stress management is reactive. Vitality is proactive. One you reach for when things go wrong. The other you build before things go wrong, so you have something to draw from when they do.

There are fundamentals worth acknowledging: quality sleep, a healthy diet, physical movement, and reduced screen time. Without them, everything else is harder. But the fundamentals are just the

floor. The more interesting — and more personal — work is discovering what, specifically, moves you toward your best self.

Discovering What's Yours

For me, the list looks like this: quiet mornings before I touch my phone. Breathing exercises. Meditation. Visualization. Journaling. Physical activity. One-on-one conversations with people I genuinely enjoy. Time in nature.

Someone I mentor recently shared that one of the things that most cultivates her energy is playing meaningful music loud throughout the house as she moves through her day. There is no correct list. There is only yours — and the willingness to pay close attention to when you feel most alive, most present, and most like yourself at your best.

The leaders who take this seriously — who know their list and protect it with intention — show up differently. They have more to give in the room. They think with greater clarity. They make better decisions under pressure. They are more present to the people in front of them.

The cost of low energy isn't just fatigue. At the leadership level, it shows up as diminished creativity, slower problem-solving, reactive decision-making, and a reduced capacity to be fully present in the conversations that matter most. The executive who walks into a pivotal board meeting or a difficult performance conversation depleted is not the same leader as the one who walks in with genuine vitality behind them.

Cultivating energy is not self-indulgent. For leaders operating at this level, it is one of the highest-leverage decisions you can make.

"The energy of the mind is the essence of life."
– Aristotle

Final Reflection

What makes this practice different from a wellness checklist is what it requires of you. Not discipline alone — but the confidence to know what actually works for you, even when it doesn't look like what the leadership books prescribe. And the courage to protect it consistently, even when the calendar pushes back.

What is on your list? And are you living it?

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