

Rituals for a More Productive Life with Tony Schwartz

By Samantha Schilke; February 2, 2015

On Thursday, January 15, 2015, I attended a Live Webinar with Tony Schwartz, founder and CEO of the Energy Project. His company helps people and organizations grow by fueling energy, engagement, focus and productivity all backed by the science of high performance. In this webinar, he spoke of creating rituals for a better life, both professionally and personally.

Tony defines a **ritual** as a change that lasts, not a hastily planned New Year's resolution that fails after the first couple months. As humans, we are all confined by the limited resource of time. It is finite, and it never feels like we have enough.

Tony's main philosophy revolves around efficiency. Since you can't get more time, you have to get more done in the same amount that everyone has to work with. He goes on to discuss that past a certain number of hours (that varies for each individual) you get much less return on the energy you put in. Instead, you'll start gathering collateral damage as your body reaches exhaustion. Therefore, **more ≠ better**.

Energy is defined as the capacity to do work. The more energy you have, the more capacity you have for work. And, unlike time, energy can be **expanded, renewed**, and used more **efficiently**. Like building muscle, you can build up your energy storage to house and store more and more energy. To sustain energy, you must renew. Renewal should not be thrown aside or slandered with terms such as "slacker." And to get more done in less time, you must become efficient.

Tony then went into more detail about **human energy**, and the four main sources of it. These sources work together and expand off each other; increase any one area and you will unintentionally influence other areas. They are:

1. **Physical** = quantity of your energy
 - a. Foundation of all the sources of energy
 - b. Based on – sleep, fitness, nutrition, and renewal
2. **Emotional** = quality of your energy
 - a. Influences how you perform
 - b. Goal is to feel how you feel when you're performing at your best
3. **Mental** = focus of your energy
 - a. In this age, we are severely distracted by technologies
 - b. Time doesn't matter without focus; need to be "fully here"
 - c. Focus on one thing at a time in an absorbed way
4. **Spiritual** = energy derived from a sense of purposefulness
 - a. If it matters to you, you will bring more energy to it

He then goes in to some familiar themes we have stressed at TeamStrength, such as the importance of habits. Will Durant said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then is not an act, but a habit." As humans, we are creatures of habit. Tony expands on this to say that habits are not always chosen, and we often "fall" into them making it very difficult to change.

The solution is to build **energy rituals**: highly specific behaviors done repeatedly, at precise times, until they become automatic and no longer require much will and discipline also known as **habits**. The goal is to move the action from the conscious part (pre-frontal cortex) of the brain to the lower sections (basal ganglia). Tony Schwartz's main point is that will and discipline are wildly overrated – meaning we don't have very much of them and they run down very quickly.

The more we have to think about doing something the less likely we are to do it; because, for our brains, it's much easier to say "No" when we're exhausted than it is to say "Yes." Designing your own ritual will take a leap of faith, most people fail at least six times before they actually succeed.

One of the most important aspects of making a change in your life is to give yourself an endpoint to re-evaluate the ritual and impact. Tony advises you to put that date 4 months in the future. He then went on to outline core rituals you can create. Here are a few:

- Implement a workout routine
 - Moving is critical, get out of your chair
 - Need either a cardiovascular behavior that elevates your heart rate for 20-30 minutes at least 3 times a week and/or a strength behavior for 20-30 minutes twice a week
- Create a pre-sleep routine to wind down and/or go to sleep at a designated time
 - Need at least 7 hours of sleep a night
 - Affects your focus, ability to think creatively, and many other dimensions
 - Prepare at least 30 minutes before
- Design a transition ritual between work and home
 - Want to create an "on" at work and "off" at home
 - Goal is to consciously disengage from work and engage with your home and family
 - Ideas: listen to music, call someone you care about, stop at a park on your way home

His final thoughts relate on how to begin a new habit/ritual (and reminded me of some main points from Susan Schilke's Take Aim! Presentation from the TeamStrength Leadership Workshop 2014). They are:

1. Define the specific behavior
2. Define the specific days and times
3. Define a backup day and time (if you miss your scheduled ritual)
4. Find someone who will hold you accountable, and update that person for the next four Fridays of your 4 week trial

Tony Schwartz concludes his webinar by saying this is **NOT** an **EASY** process. Instead, it's one that builds and expands over time.

So now it's your turn. Take what you've learned from the people who know it, whether it be Tony Schwartz from The Energy Project or Susan Schilke and her Take Aim! principles. You have the power to change who you for the better every day of your life. Once you find an avenue that works for you, expand to your family, your company. See how much good a small habit can do for your fellow employees, your boss, and even your kids. Visit The Energy Project online to find more ways to increase your efficiency and as always, stayed tuned for TeamStrength's monthly blog and resources.

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