



Resiliency and Medicine: How to Create a Positive Energy Balance

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A career in orthopedic surgery is a race, a marathon. Burnout, or emotional exhaustion, is very common in medicine and affects about one-third of physicians during their careers. Physicians in leadership or academic roles may be especially vulnerable. Resiliency, the ability to bounce back from difficulty, can be attained, even in the face of the most trying of times. Resiliency is really not so much about hours worked or hardships encountered. It is about how one manages *energy*. The flow of energy in one's life is very dependent on what one chooses to value. Some values lead to a life of fear, insecurity, and continual energy depletion. Other values will direct us to a life of fulfillment, peace, and energy renewal. We are free to choose our values which will influence our decisions. The decisions we make on a daily basis will ultimately either drain or sustain us.

The real path to resiliency lies in minimizing energy drains and maximizing what replenishes us. Furthermore, to manage energy, it is imperative that we learn how to manage our minds, since distorted, negative thinking will sap us of our life-force. The virtue of resiliency can be learned since the brain is a plastic organ. Maladaptive thinking and behaviors can be replaced with healthy, sustaining ones, such that the brain will be hard-wired to more readily perform positive, energizing behaviors and to avoid bad thinking and self-destructive actions.

Believe it or not, no matter what your background, genetics, or station in life, no matter what you think others may be doing to undermine your happiness, you have the power to choose the life you want. We all have the power to choose *high octane values* and manage our minds. In short, if you decide to live your life the right way, you will be much more resistant to burnout and have access to a continual stream of energy.

I hope to share some thoughts on the values which will sustain you—the high octane values. Furthermore, we will discuss how to attain a powerful mind by valuing mindfulness, the virtue of living in the moment. I would like to emphasize as take home points the following values that are essentials for the resilient life. In essence, resilient people value the following:

1. *Proactivity*. Resilient, stress resistant folks recognize that they are the creator of their life story and have the power to choose their values. One's choice of values will predict one's happiness and "energy-index."
2. *A connection to their "source" and a life based on morally sound, loving actions*. Stress resistant individuals live an honest, integrated life based on service and a common good. They love others and themselves. They manage their ego and are other-centered. The extent that one devalues one's ego will determine an individual's peacefulness and energy balance.
3. *"Mind management" and dedication to living in "the moment."* The resilient physicians are not enslaved by an overactive mind; rather, they have a mind at their disposal.

They are not the victim of a mind that is cluttered with racing thoughts, worry, or guilt.

4. *The pursuit of excellence, but not perfection*. High energy performers do not let the scourge of perfectionism sap their energy dry.
5. *Relationships (especially with one's spouse)*. Resilient individuals recognize that the quality of their relationships will determine the quality of their lives
6. *Passion and inspiration*. Stress-survivors allow these positive motivators to guide them, rather than fear and guilt.
7. *Outside interests and hobbies*. The resilient ones know that they cannot give what they do not have. They seek continual renewal through the arts, hobbies, and fine literature.

The Value of Proactivity: We Can Create Our Life Story

Steven Covey, in his masterpiece, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, describes proactivity as the ability to base behaviors on decisions, not conditions. The proactive person can subordinate feelings to a value. For instance, the proactive Surgeon who values responsible delivery of health care will decide to do the right thing for his or her patients, despite the oppressive conditions that insurers or other third parties create. He or she will subordinate a feeling (frustration) to the value of responsible health delivery. When we become proactive, we gain control. Feelings of loss of control are one of the strongest predictors of physician burnout. We do control our actions which yield predictable consequences. In essence, when we decide to live our lives in accordance with higher values, we will predictably receive more energy, and be at peace with ourselves and with others. This is so because, as Covey states, "principles govern." In other words, principles of human existence predict that if one lives his or her life the right way, principles, or natural law, will predict positive consequences.

A principle is a natural law that is timeless and self-evident. A commonly experienced principle is that consuming excessive calories leads to weight gain. This is changeless and timeless. This principle is immutable, and there is no way around it. Similarly, the principle of intimacy dictates that relationships must be nurtured and kept in constant repair to flourish. Surely, it is not possible to achieve intimacy with someone you never spend time with! Every sustaining Faith is based on enduring, moral principles. Two very important principles pertaining to energy balance are:

1. adherence to morally sound, loving values yields high energy.
2. adoption of self-centered values ultimately depletes energy.

Our decision as to what we will value - altruistic versus egocentric/selfish motives—will predict how our energy balance will be long term.

We can maintain happiness and joy, in the long run, if we live our lives the right way. When we live in accordance with high octane values, in other words, values that keep our tank full, we will predictably be much more resistant to burnout.

The “High Octane” Values

Honesty and integrity are essential to energy balance. Both virtues are very energy efficient. Honesty is “saying what I do” and integrity is “doing what I say.” With honesty and integrity, there are no cover ups, no having to “remember what I said,” no protection of a pseudo-self or someone you pretend to be. One must be true to oneself and not pose as someone else. The honest, integrated surgeon practices humility and stays within his or her honest abilities. If you are not a traumatologist, do not tackle a complex acetabular fracture! Poor choices in order to protect a huge ego will only deplete you of your inner strength as you expend energy in order to preserve your egocentric pseudo-self.

When we value integrity, we keep promises to ourselves and others. We “walk our talk” and demonstrate to others (and to ourselves) that our word is our bond. In fact, Covey emphasizes that keeping promises is the very essence of proactivity. When we keep a promise, we are indeed affirming that our lives are a product of our decisions, not our conditions. We really are in control if we keep our word. We are deciding our life’s direction, despite the current conditions. For example, if we make the proactive choice to value marriage, we will decide to spend time with our spouse. Even if we don’t feel like going out on date night, we keep our promise to have dinner on Saturday night. We are true to our word, our spouses, and ourselves. Our decision is more important than our conditions or our mood (fatigue, things to do, pressing agendas, etc.). When we exercise our proactive muscles regularly, we will begin to experience more and more control over our lives. When we feel more in charge, we naturally have more hope, optimism, and energy. When we operate our lives from a posture of integrity and morally correct principles, we will predictably have a sense of peace and self respect that is unattainable otherwise. We will be respected, not necessarily liked, by others and simply feel good about ourselves.

There are several reasons why operating from a principled core values system generates good feelings. First, humans are hard wired for altruism. We predictably become more peaceful when we extend ourselves to others. We literally get out of ourselves when we become other-centered. Our problems receive less attention, and we soon find ourselves more relaxed, more at ease. Furthermore, we do reap what we sow. When we extend kind gestures to others, we will receive goodness in return. As one of my patients taught me, “if you want a smile, you give a smile.” Finally, something bigger than

us may be at work. You may call it God, your higher power, or the Universe. I like to use the term “source” which describes the ultimate energy repository. When we align with our source, or the loving power of the Universe, nothing but good will result. Further, when we are aligned with our source, we are plugging into our direct energy supply.

If acting from a moral or principle-based center sustains us, why do we act otherwise? One word – EGO, which some have stated stands for “Edging God Out.” Our EGO is simply the constellation of our selfish motives. It is something our mind creates to ease pain. It causes us to separate rather than join our source and others. Our EGO is our fearful, unsatiated self which wants more power, more fame, and more glory. It is possessed with agendas and the worry of “what’s in it for me.” It is never satisfied. In fact, the more it asserts itself, the more unhappy or unfulfilled it becomes. Indeed, individuals with large EGOS tend to accomplish much. However, the quality of their work is usually deficient. They are operating from a posture of fear, rather than abundance. They are far from their source and removed from the intrinsic energy supplies of inspiration and passion. Furthermore, the more the EGO drives one to accomplish, the more unfulfilled and unhappy one becomes.

Those that choose to stay in the light – love, seeking greater good, connection with others—will experience peace and positive energy flow. They also may accomplish great things, but the quality of their work reflects creativity and genuineness. They are creating from a source of abundance and are in the game to make a difference and improve the lives of others. Their energy is renewable, for they are buoyed by the good feelings a life of contribution generates. Those that drift away to their egocentric self will ultimately experience depletion.

We defend our EGO when we find ourselves criticizing, complaining, comparing, judging, justifying our actions, and seeking perfection. We stay close to our source when we practice love, self nurturance, forgiveness, acceptance, offering compliments, “letting it flow,” and gratitude. Forgiveness is an absolute essential to resiliency. When we do not extend forgiveness and hold onto hurt, we are merely defending our egocentric need to be right. When one considers energy balance, huge energy reserves can result when we realize it is more important to be at peace with our neighbor, our colleague, or our spouse rather than to be right. The daily practice of forgiveness allows us to start each day anew, fresh, and without baggage.

The Value of Love Must Apply to Ourselves First and Foremost

In order to survive today’s demands, one must cultivate the value of self nurturance and again remember that principles

The Effect of Values.

Positive Values → Positive Behaviors → Positive Consequences → Positive energy

Negative Values → Negative Behaviors → Negative Consequences → Negative Energy

govern our well being. In other words, as much as we would like to think otherwise, we cannot cut corners with Mother Nature! Ask yourself the following questions to determine your “self nurturance value quotient”:

1. Do I get adequate sleep?
2. Do I have time to exercise?
3. Do I eat healthy meals?
4. Do I engage in a hobby?
5. Do I feed my soul with fine music, literature, and art?
6. Do I feel close to my loved ones, especially my spouse?
7. Do I regularly connect to a Higher Power?

If the answer to any one of these questions is “no,” you are neglecting some of your basic needs and not fueling your soul. Principles apply to sleep. Lack of sleep will predictably bite you! Millions of years of evolution have determined that human beings need sleep, period. We cannot train ourselves to sleep less. Lack of sleep, over time, will lead to an increased risk of hypertension, diabetes, dementia, as well as whacking our immune systems. Similarly, exercise and its effects are principle-based. Exercise predictably leads to positive mood, weight loss, disease reduction, and increased productivity. In fact, we simply do not have time not to work out. A 30-minute lunchtime workout can boost afternoon production capacity immeasurably. Regarding meals – we really are what we eat. Processed, sugar laden foods do not lead to sustained energy. Rather, we are left with mood swings, fatigue, and periods of sleepiness. Finally, when we feed our souls with hobbies, music, and literature, we adhere to the principles “you cannot give what you don’t have” and “well-rested and happy docs will be more productive.” Only when our tank is full can we extend the love and care that both our families, friends, and patients need. The principle of energy conservation applies. We simply cannot give what we do not have. Resiliency is inextricably linked to the value of self love.

Managing Our Mind—The Value of Mindfulness

Depression and anxiety will rob us of our life blood. They will sap us dry of energy and motivation. A return to mindfulness, or living in the moment, will restore us to healthy thinking and keep the demons of anxiety and depression at bay. Anxiety is merely worrying about the future. Depression is largely based on guilt of the past. When we can return to the present moment, the miraculous occurs. Worry and guilt dissipate, and we will be energized by the wonderful world around us. When we can learn to live in the moment, we will not be at the mercy of our minds. Our mind will be at our disposal. When we are present, we open ourselves to a force that is bigger than us. Again, call it God, the Universal Mind, or the Source. When we are truly present, past hurts dissipate, perfectionism wanes, we become *aware* of what is happening *now*, and we enjoy much more fulfilling relationships. In his book, *The Power of Now*, Eckhart Tolle beautifully illustrates that a return to the present moment will give you an everlasting source of guidance and wisdom. When we can return to the *now*, we will be inspired by our inner voice. There is no longer a need for stress and worry over decisions. When we are in the *now* we attain clarity, and our minds are at our disposal.

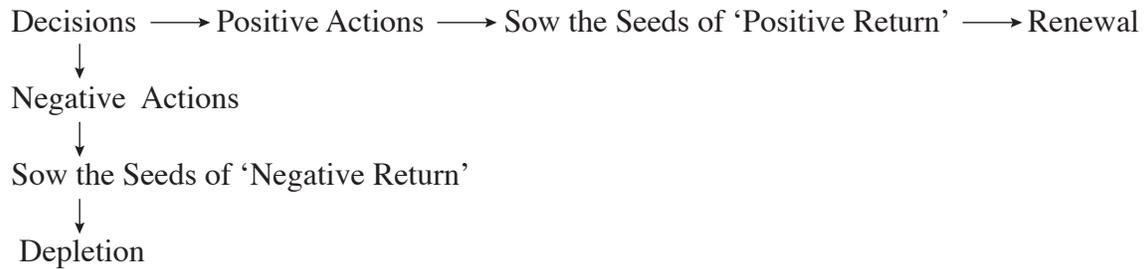
For example, when we encounter a new patient, if we are truly present to them, we will, with a clear mind, know exactly what the right thing to do. The gentle movements of the Spirit and a focused mind that occur when we are present will not disappoint us. When we lose ourselves in the past or future, stress returns and with it, a return of disorganized thinking. When we are present, we are removed from our ego and will operate from a place of love, peace, and clarity. We won’t tackle an extraordinarily difficult case to prove our worth. We will indeed become aware of what is exactly the right course of action for the patient. Furthermore, when we are truly present to those we encounter, we are giving them what they need (us, our attention), and we are receiving from them what we need (their perspective, their wisdom).

In order to cultivate and nurture mindfulness, a focus on bodily sensations can be extremely helpful. Tolle recommends feeling and becoming aware of our bodies as they relate to the present. For example, feeling the floor on your feet, sensing the shirt on your back or your fingertips in the computer keypad. A focus on breathing is especially helpful to return to the now. Frequent deep breaths throughout the day will help get one back to now. When we are back to the present, we are no longer at the disposal of our ego. Our higher self directs us and will sustain us. For those tense moments in the OR, take a time-out, breathe, and then return to feeling the knife in your hands or the scope in your fingertips. When you can get back to the present, you can return to that flow state where creativity and lucidity blossom. We cannot tap into the “Universal Mind” when we are tense, stressed, and trying too hard to defend an ego. Adrenaline is a great impediment to attaining mindfulness. Frequent workouts can help dissipate excessive adrenaline and allow us to return to the now.

When we practice mindfulness, we will ultimately learn to master the discipline of detachment. When we experience the present regularly, we will be very sensitive to the times we are not in the now. We will learn to recognize the thoughts and feelings that are of the past or future and label them as the ego. When we recognize and label dysfunctional thinking, we then can detach from it.

If one finds oneself in a bit of a funk or a blue day, or if excessive worry has you in its throes, take a step back, look those thoughts from a distance recognizing that thoughts of anxiety and depression are distortions – they contain a lie. They are merely your ego, or pseudo-self taking over your thinking. The discipline of cognitive behavioral therapy is predicated on the truth that dysfunctional thinking is not real. When we feel that we are “a no good, worthless excuse for a surgeon,” take a moment to observe these thoughts, rather than be them. Look at these thoughts from a distance and get back to the present. When back to the present, we whittle away at our ego and become able to act on our values and what inspires us. Psychologists teach us that when we resist dysfunctional thinking, it grows, and we give it more power. As the noted therapist Carl Jung stated: “what we resist persists.” *Accept* negative thinking but do not believe it or act upon it. Watch it from a distance, return to the present, and act on your chosen value system.

The Power of Decision: We can choose the 'high energy' or 'low energy' path.



If one sinks into the abyss of a deep depression, help may be needed. Self nurturance is a sign of strength. Problems need to be addressed and will not merely go away. Orthopedic Surgeons tend to align with the egoic notion that they are strong, macho bonecutters. Admitting depression would indicate a sign of weakness.

Again, the admission of a problem and the decision to get help is indeed a sign of real strength, of real character. Several years ago, I found myself embroiled in a particularly painful lawsuit while my dad was suffering from a chronic, debilitating illness. I became very depressed and couldn't sleep or concentrate. I sought the help of a talented therapist who taught me the principles of how to manage my mind. I also took medications which allowed me to get the rest I so badly needed. Without this help, I could have languished endlessly, hurting myself, my family, and my patients needlessly.

Value Excellence – Not Perfectionism

and the pursuit of an illusory goal. How about your standards? Medicine attracts perfectionists who are accustomed to harshly criticizing themselves and creating expectations that are unrealistic. If you always feel that you are missing the mark, you will be continually disappointed and drained. Perfectionism usually has its roots in childhood wounds – the withholding of love from a parent or caregiver. There is also evidence that some inherited genetic predisposition for obsessive traits may be responsible as well. Perfectionists are an unhappy lot who live in negative energy balance. They are always missing the mark and feel frustrated. Their dissatisfaction drives them to do more and more to prove their worth only to feel more and more dissatisfied. Perfectionists tend to procrastinate, waiting for the perfect time to complete a task. Perfectionists are essentially defending the needs of their ego. The ego's need to be perfect will never be satiated. Perfection is an illusion. No one nor any one thing is absolutely perfect. The antidote to this dysfunctional thinking is to recognize that perfection is an illusion and only leads to frustration and wounding of self esteem. To overcome perfectionism and thereby return to positive energy balance, one must learn to accept and label the "voice of perfectionism" and practice detachment from it. The gentle movements of the spirit are in sharp contrast to the impulses that perfectionists experience. When the impulse to trim the meniscus to absolute perfection arises, take a deep breath, look at this impulse from a distance, and return to the present moment and let inspiration,

rather than compulsion, guide you. I am not advocating complacency; the pursuit of excellence is noble. When we strive for excellence, we are hoping to become our best selves and to develop our talents to the best of our abilities. When we attain excellence in a given discipline, we generate feelings of accomplishment and the satisfaction that we are implementing our gifts to the highest degree. We must aim high for goals that stretch us, but also recognize the ego's voice which whispers: "you are not good enough – only if you achieve this, will you be considered worthy." Get back to the present and allow the gentle voices of fulfillment and satisfaction for a job well done spur you on to do more.

Perfectionists are driven by fear. The fear of doing a job less than perfectly drives them until they are momentarily satisfied with a job well done, only to find that feelings of inadequacy and fear return quickly. They procrastinate until the perfect time to complete a task. This leaves them continually on edge. Deadlines mount and mount, consuming psychic energy predictably.

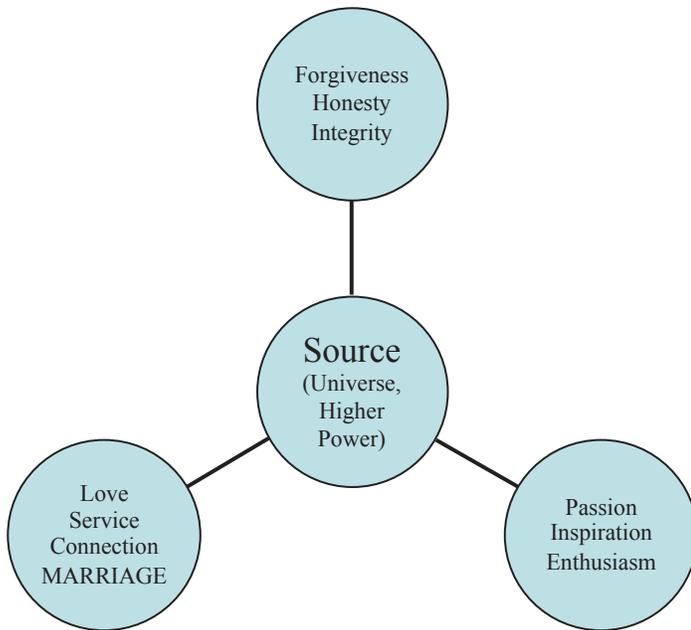
Learn to recognize the voice of the ego and its attendant prompts to do everything perfectly. Endeavor to stay in the relaxed zone of the now and watch your life blossom. Endeavor to tackle problems head on, problems that a perfectionist voice tells one to avoid until you are ready. Recognize that unfinished tasks will ultimately consume you.

Relationships

The degree to which we value relationships is proportional to our life satisfaction. What we accomplish in our careers pales in comparison to what we accomplish in our families and friends when it comes to life fulfillment. No one on their death bed wished they had done more cases! Countless tales abound of aged workaholics lamenting the loss of intimacy with loved ones during their productive years. When we make the proactive choice to value relationships, we are deciding to live a life of connection, support and endless energy replenishment. Relationships are the true tailwinds in life, and they must be kept in constant repair. The most important relationship we establish, and the one with the most potential for energy replenishment, is our marriage.

There is no more important union than the one with our spouse. Our marriage vows are the greatest promise we make, and the quality of our lives will be in direct proportion to the quality of our marriage. Marital discord is the greatest cause of adult depression in the United States, and the divorce

Alignment with our Energy 'Source'



rate approaches 50%. The greatest affirmation we can receive is from our partner. No single thing will bring you more happiness than investment in your marriage. Many physicians have devalued their marriages and have subsequently undermined their happiness. In an effort to meet the egoic needs of extraordinary achievement and recognition, many physicians have damaged their families by their absence. In an effort to build the practice, the spouse becomes an obstacle rather than the support and source of love it is intended to be. Truly, when you are not growing closer, you are growing apart.

In an effort to recapture happiness, many divorce and seek an upgrade with another partner, only to find the same issues, the same egoic needs present. In his enlightening book, *Getting the Love You Want*, Harville Hendrix conveys the concept that when we make the proactive choice to love our spouses unconditionally, whether we feel like it or not, we are healing ourselves and our subconscious selves of old hurts. Hendrix's statement "the trauma of childhood becomes the drama of adulthood" awakens us to the truth that we all have unfinished business as adults. When we decide to honor our vows and stay the course with our spouses, we will do the real work of recovery from old wounds. Absolute commitment, for better or for worse holds great potential for growth. When we sell-out for marriage, we begin to see our spouse differently. We simply make the most of the situation and focus on the positive. As Ohio State football coach Jim Tressel states, "commitment is the key to any relationship."

Our spouse can become our best teacher about ourselves. If we are willing to manage our ego and accept the opportunity for real feedback and healing. We project our egoic needs to those closest to us and what we seem to dislike about our spouses holds clues to what we are not comfortable with our own selves. Furthermore, when our spouse pushes our buttons, be mindful that there is likely an old childhood hurt within us

to blame. Only in the security of commitment, can we truly embrace our egoic needs and begin the real work to heal them.

When we *decide* to value our marriages more than anything else, we will have a partner for life and someone to stand by you for the duration. You will be blessed with lifelong support and sustenance. You will see yourself ushering forth higher quality work because you are giving from a place of abundance, not of fear or excessive ambition. Work on "Living in Love" and hang in there! Seventy-two percent of miserably married couples, when questioned 5 years later, are happy!

What we spread around will help us or hurt us. We truly do reap what we sow. Humans are hard-wired to respond predictably to love and affirmation. Positive actions reap positive responses. When we decide for relationships, we must realize that what we give we will receive. When we choose to look for the good in others, we find ourselves in positive energy, our mood is boosted. Consequently, when we affirm goodness in others, they will be inclined to respond in kind.

Mirror Neurons

Our brains are hard wired to emit impulses they receive. Mirror neurons, located in our cerebral cortices, emit positive signals if they receive positive energy. Likewise, reception of negative impulses cause the mirror cells to emit negative impulses. Think about how you may feel in the presence of a chronic whiner or complainer. Soon, you find yourself complaining as well!

When we value relationships, it behooves us to make the proactive choice to be a light, rather than a critic. Sow the seeds of a beautiful culture at home and at work and see how your happiness will grow. Take the lead in your marriage and in your family and witness the fruits of the seeds you plant!

When we go to work in the morning, do we greet our staff or do we mumble or complain about the latest practice issue. Do we bless others or criticize them? When we look for the good and bless others (no matter how we feel), we will fashion a culture that exudes positive energy that will help sustain us. As Drs. Wayne and Mary Sotile have elegantly stated in their writings on physician stress, resiliency is not about absence of hassles. It is about presence of uplifts. Wayne Sotile has coined the expression "emotions are contagious." We can decide what seeds to sow at work and at home. And remember, there are times when we won't feel like offering a compliment. However, when we return to our values and choose to honor them, whether we feel like it or not, we are flexing our proactive muscles and slowly gaining more and more mastery of our lives.

Remember, happiness is indeed a big deal for doctors. When we are happy, we simply have more to give. Our productivity will increase. Happy doctors do give better care, have more compliant patients and are less likely to be named in malpractice suits! Furthermore, happy doctors are perceived as giving better care as well! When our patients like us, they believe us and perceive us as being competent.

Likewise, investment in families has huge dividends in one's quest for peaceful living. A high value on family will generate

peacefulness and resistance to stress. When we choose to value our families, they will value us in return. Do not forget, **no one will cover your back like your family!** They will be there for you in thick or thin when you affirm them. Mitch Albom, in his jewel *Tuesdays with Morrie*, quotes Morrie Schwartz regarding family: “what I call your ‘spiritual security’ – knowing that your family will be there watching out for you. Nothing else will give you that. Not money. Not fame.”

Remember, we enter this world and leave this earth with our families. No amount of material success will ever surpass the joy of a rich family life. We must prioritize our family life and carve out time daily to affirm and sow intimacy with our loved ones! Want to leave your mark on the world? Start with your family! So many of us work so hard to provide for our families when what they want more than anything is you. Truly provide for your family by prioritizing individual time with each member. The feeling that you matter in the lives of each of your children will buoy you through the toughest case, most disgruntled patient, or onerous malpractice suit.

Friendships outside of our family are also crucial to feeling the emotional connection needed to remain resilient. Friends outside of medicine in particular, help us to see the world differently and experience life in ways unknown to medical families.

Passion and Inspiration

A renewable source of energy is our interests and passions. We need to stay close to what really grabs us and moves us. When we gravitate to our interests and couple this with the value of service, then we will be doubly energized. Again, when we manage our ego and become mindful of giving, rather than taking, we get our juices flowing. Giving back and looking to change the world for the better will lead to quantum energy. Causes, or crusades to make the world better, truly motivate. That is not to say we can ignore our basic needs of living, loving and learning. Remember, the heart feeds the coronary arteries first before it nourishes the rest of the body. However, if you truly want to contribute to the well being of your brothers and sisters on the planet, you will be blessed with fuel for the journey! Steve Farber, in his book, *The Radical Leap*, expounds on this further by listing the following energy generators in addition to love:

Great ideas

Noble principles

Leaping goals (goals which “leap over” your self-imposed limits)

Interesting work

Exciting challenges

Remember the words inspiration and enthusiasm. “Inspiration” derived from the words “breathed upon” indicates energy from a higher place. If we follow to what inspires us, we will connect to our source and be sustained. If you are inspired to change your practice venue or organization, give the matter serious attention. Enthusiasm, from the Greek word, “en theos” or “having a God within” also is a means of connecting to your higher power. What gives you enthusiasm? Is it shoulder scopes? If joint replacements

no longer float your boat, follow your passion and do what infuses you with energy. You will be serving your patients and yourself better! To be most receptive to inspiration and enthusiasm, our minds must be clear of the clutter of worry and anxiety. A mind in the present is the best receptacle for inspiration and enthusiasm.

Lastly, let us look at another energy generator: hobbies or interests outside of medicine. We need to feed our souls with activities that are just fun, period. The medical mind, which feels the need to continually produce, will ultimately languish when there is no more juice. Resiliency blooms when we indulge in regular hobbies which rest our nervous system, which allow us to experience pleasures, not just work aversion. The bonus is that by regularly engaging in a fun hobby, your productivity will increase. Every successful surgeon I know, who has enjoyed long term productivity, has a hobby for which they feel passionate about. A continual preoccupation with only medical matters stunts personal growth, hampers relationships, and hinders us from seeing the world as it truly is. Sporting events, art exhibits, concerts, plays, and events outside of medicine all help us shift our attention away from the draining wound or the litigious patient. In addition, when we experience all that life has to offer, we gain perspective. We appreciate beauty in all its forms, and we open ourselves up to creativity. We ultimately experience various paradigm shifts and begin to see the world differently.

For lasting energy and resiliency, we need to choose the values that sustain rather than drain. These values are time tested. Every successful faith and civilization is predicated on these high octane values. They are in accordance with a moral center, with something bigger than us. Only by aligning ourselves with our source, or ultimate energy repository, will we remain in positive energy balance. Huge egos may appear to accomplish much in the short term. However, the more egocentric motives are satisfied, the more miserable and unfulfilled the egocentric person becomes. It has been said “it is amazing as to what one can accomplish in one’s lifetime if one is not willing to take the credit.” True long term fulfillment and happiness can only be attained when we live our lives the right way and reflect on the greater good, the higher calling. A loving, forgiving and service oriented spirit will enable you to do more good than you ever imagined. The perpetual decision to live in accordance with the high octane values will be your greatest shield against burnout.

Some suggestions:

1. Write down your own “high octane values” and read them daily. Decide every day to honor them. A choice to value honesty, integrity, love, forgiveness, service, and gratitude will keep you afloat in a sea of uncertainty.
2. Dedicate yourself to being the best spouse you can be for the next thirty days and watch your happiness quotient flourish.
3. Prioritize your family and friendships. They are true tailwinds in life.
4. Practice self-nurturance and get rest, exercise, and feed your body whole foods.
5. Die to your egoic needs daily, and let passion, inspiration, and enthusiasm guide you.

6. Read about mindfulness and practice it regularly through the disciplines of meditation, deep breathing, and yoga.

We have embraced one of the most fulfilling careers in the universe. Orthopedic surgeons can mitigate pain and suffering like no other. Its time we decide to return to the values which will serve as jet fuel for this most wonderful and privileged profession. In doing so, you will rewarded with a life of contribution, fulfillment, a beautiful family culture, and many happy patients.

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