

Workshop: Energy

We are at the first level of the Hierarchy of Motivation[®]; the foundation for creating lasting motivation, where we are working on raising our awareness. This is the first of four workshops which are the core of the Motivation Factor[®] Method.

Just like a car needs fuel to run, a human being is unable to operate without energy. Our energy level provides the basis for our ability to function as a manager, colleague, spouse, and parent as well as all the other roles we perform in life.

The car comes with a helpful device: a dashboard light indicates when the car is about to run out of gas. Unfortunately, human beings have not been endowed with an indicator that warns us that we are tapping into our last reserves.

This is why it is vital in relation to all our activities, such as:

- Work
- Visiting or entertaining friends
- Daily pursuits
- Marital interaction
- Interaction with our children

To feel whether the activities:

- Add energy
- Drain energy
- Or are neutral



The most common symptoms associated with energy drainers are:

- Difficulty getting up in the morning
- Dissatisfaction
- Stress
- Routine tasks become overwhelming
- Loss of control
- Negative thoughts
- "Guilty conscience"
- Irritability
- Feelings of powerlessness

Below you will find a few examples of energy drainers:

- Lack of progress
- People being late for meetings
- "Status Quo" thinking
- Unclear goals or lack of goals
- Apathy
- Broken agreements
- Lack of structure/order
- Lack of engagement from others

You'll notice approximately 80% of the things that drain people's energy has to do with other people. In other words 80% of what drains us is things that we can't do much about, because we can't force other people to change their behavior.

The fact that we will never be able to change other people is probably the hardest thing for us to accept. But it is a matter of fact that we cannot change other people **unless** they feel motivated to change. Therefore this exercise is to quickly find out what we ourselves CAN do.

In this workshop we:

- Become aware of the things that drain our energy
- Generate options for what we can do and make choices for next steps
- Commit to action on the choices that we make

EXAMPLE: Say that a dripping faucet in the bathroom drains your energy. Your spouse has told you he will fix it – but nothing happens. He has any number of excuses for not taking care of it. A situation like that might leave you feeling angry, frustrated and powerless. You can't force another person to do something so what are your options?

You can:

- Call a plumber
- See if any of your friends can help you
- Work out how to change a gasket, and then do it yourself
- Decide not to get annoyed about it; that it is not that important after all, and that it will be fixed whenever your spouse feels like it
- Work out what might motivate your spouse to fix it
- Move somewhere where dripping faucets just don't exist
- Get a divorce

Once you have listed your options you will feel action-oriented. No matter which option you choose, it will be your choice – a conscious choice. Staying focused only on the things **you can do something about** and letting go of whatever is beyond your influence, restores power and possibility to you.

This is easier said than done, of course. But once you have finished working on this stage, you have achieved some clarification about the areas you need to be extra vigilant about. And you have picked up some tools to help you continue the process of getting rid of your energy drainers.

Studies have shown that the brain can only process half a dozen or so things at one time, and if that is already filled up with emotional turmoil and issues, it's very difficult to take in new learning. In addition, learning speaks to the analytical part of your brain, but if you are dwelling in your emotions it's nearly impossible to invoke the cognitive ability that is crucial if you want to eliminate energy drainers in your life. Our emotional reactions are not only speedier than conscious ones, they also can take priority over the conscious processing needed to store information and absorb new knowledge. Neuroscientists have found that the emotional part of our brain holds the upper hand in influencing our behavior: it must be calmed before our cognitive brain can do its best.

Think of it as a computer where "energy drainers" are synonymous with software programs. Every time you upload a new program it takes up space in the working memory and like the computer there is a limit to how many programs you can upload simultaneously before the computer "freezes". When that happens it doesn't really matter how long you wait for it to resume functioning or how many times you push the alt-control-delete buttons. If you do not close programs in time the only option left will be to press the "off" button. The same happens with humans, if you do not get rid of energy drainers in time the brain will press the "off" button.

Learning to identify and defuse the issues that drain our energy and hold us back is the necessary first step in transforming ourselves and our organizations. Energy drainers show their face at all levels in an organization: the competitive landscape, high interest rates, low cash flow, team dysfunction or a lack of resources just to mention a few examples. Those same energy drainers can also be true for teams and individuals. This section guides you in working with energy drainers at both the team and individual levels.

As mentioned earlier in this section, our research has shown that 80% of what drains people's energy has to do with other people or circumstances that they can't directly influence. A classic consequence of this is that when people have reached their limit of energy drainers they burn out, go down with stress or start looking for a new job because they feel powerless.

So often in energy draining situations, we find ourselves dealing with a person whom we feel is beyond reach or a circumstance that is beyond our control. What we do and say is not received, leaving us feeling that we can't influence the situation, that we are powerless. As we learn more about how to recognize energy drainers and unpack what it is about them that triggers us, we will find that many of them are about other people and their unyielding realities. Our challenge will be to engage our own powers to come up with new options for taking back the energy these situations demand from us.

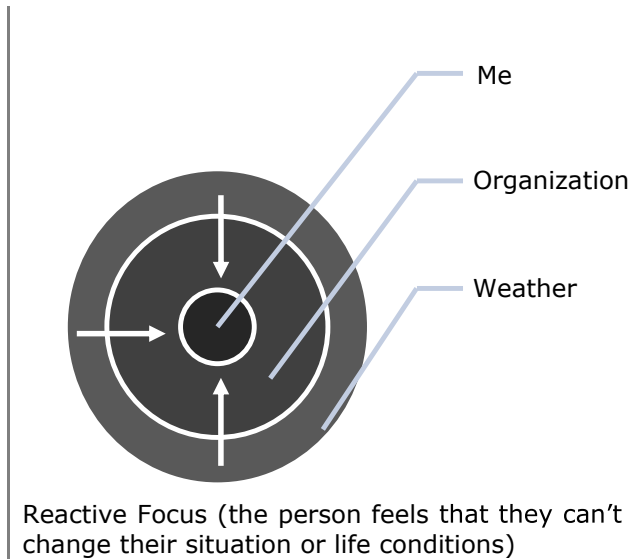
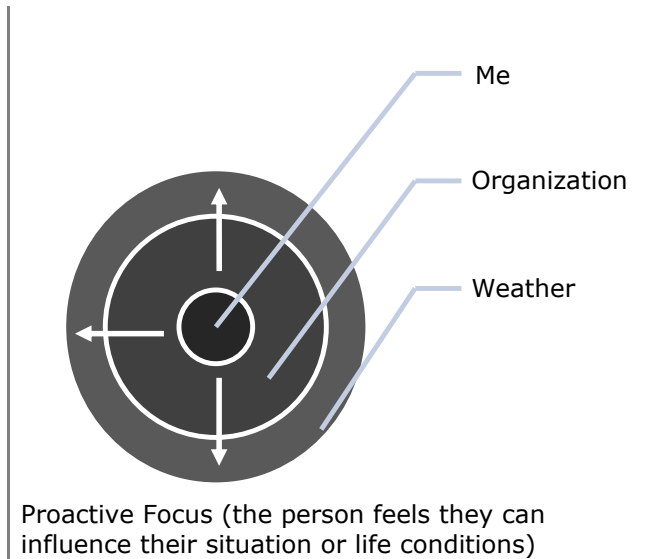
Over the long term, energy drainers signal their presence in our lives as irritability, sleep problems, the feeling that demands on us are overwhelming, a guilty conscience, dissatisfaction, and more.

At a corporate level energy drainers are easy to spot. Their symptoms can be demotivated employees and low morale, and their offspring: less creativity, a lack of innovation, and an inability to spot opportunities. These drainers affect contributors' abilities to solve problems thoughtfully. For example, a salesman might spend time complaining that he is powerless because pricing has increased on all the company's products and he cannot make a sale, but he does not have the mental surplus to think creatively about possible solutions. He is just too worried about whether the next email he gets will be a paycheck or a redundancy notice.

While many of the individuals in an organization challenged by morale or motivation problems may have similar workplace complaints, what is taking each individual to their own personal edge are unique energy drainers. This is where many conventional theories about motivation fall short, because in many ways they advocate treating employees as a single body. You can't have a one-size-fit all solution to problems that have different causes for each person.

The illustration below is an inspiration from Stephen Covey's book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. The circles of influence should be interpreted as follows:

- Me: relates to what's in the persons direct power to influence
- Organization: relates to what is in the person's indirect power to influence
- Weather: relates to what the person can't influence at all



Our job in this workshop is to help people shift from being reactive and “victims” of circumstances to becoming proactive and energetic.

We work with Energy Drainers to accomplish this and they can be roughly classified into four types:

- Things that are contrary to our expectations
- Things we feel we have to tolerate
- Things that cross our boundaries
- Things we could/should/would have done

Expectations

The first category of energy drainers we work with is expectations. An expectation arises when we assume that something will happen in a certain way. Our expectations are about what we expect from others and what we expect of ourselves. We always have, consciously or unconsciously, expectations of our surroundings and ourselves.

EXAMPLE: An employee (John) can have an expectation that the manager is responsible for motivating him. So every time he and the manager interact, John is just waiting for something to happen that can keep his motivation alive (reactive focus). The manager on the other hand is convinced that because John gets a high salary that should be motivation enough. The end result is that it becomes an energy drainer for both of them. A proactive approach to this could be that John openly explains his expectations to his manager and, if that doesn't work, either changes his expectations or finds another job.



When others don't live up to our expectations it is quite natural that we judge them. We label them incompetent, selfish, mean, etc.

It is important to understand the dynamics of those labels we give others and what those labels do to us. Consider the impact of those judgments on how we perceive that person! And how those judgments might impact us? For instance, how motivating is it to work for a manager that we consider incompetent. Or how committed are we to a team where we consider the other team members to be unengaged.

No one goes to work every day thinking "Yes, today I am going to be incompetent" or "what a great day to be unengaged". To let go of judgments we need to come from a place where we believe that everyone does the best they can with the abilities they have.

Tacit Expectations

The unspoken expectations, the ones we kind of expect others to "just know", make up a substantial portion of our "mass of expectations". Generally speaking we are not very good at communicating our expectations because we tend to expect our surroundings to recognize and respond to what we need.

Who does not on occasion expect:

- The boss to acknowledge that we are overworked
- The spouse to notice when we require extra care and attention
- The children to empty the dishwasher
- The colleague to understand that we need a helping hand

Explicit Expectations

Very often, all it takes to get our expectations met is to let the other person know what they are. Indeed, it's the first step we advise! But what happens when that doesn't work? It is possible to communicate our expectations to others without their feeling obligated to fulfil them. For example, you can tell your children: "I expect you to empty the dishwasher". But will they do it? Unfortunately not always.

Expectations versus promises

An expectation becomes a promise once the opposite party agrees to do what you have asked of them. From that moment on you are fully entitled to expect that it will be done. Of course, we sometimes find that even promises are broken:

- Something you were promised when you were hired was not delivered as promised
- Your colleagues don't keep the deadlines they have committed to
- You don't receive the information you have been promised
- The dishwasher is not emptied after all

In situations like these, your options remain your most important tool. If you stay focused on the possibilities in your power rather than letting your emotions take over, you will stay in control and preserve your self-esteem.

The first step on the road to getting our expectations met is to make sure that they are clearly communicated. We have a tendency to believe that other people are mind readers. We kind of expect others to "just know" what we expect at any given time, and that their focus is the same as ours. But even if expectations are clearly communicated we are faced with the fact some of them might not be fulfilled.

Below are 3 short case studies that describe how we work with Energy Drainers.

CASE 1: *Julia expects her husband to surprise her with a fun shared activity every once in a while. She is married to a sales director for a large company. One of his responsibilities is to come up with new sales and customer activities. He is very creative and always full of ideas for new events, so Julia expects this to be reflected in his personal life. But it isn't. He never takes initiative for fun shared activities at home. She interprets his behavior as indifference and lack of respect, and she does not feel appreciated.*

Julia listed the following options. She could:

- *Get a divorce*
- *Let go of her expectations*
- *Accept her husband as he is*
- *Take the initiative herself to come up with fun activities*
- *Work on her own self-esteem*

Julia chose to accept her husband as he is, without requiring him to surprise her. She also chose to take care of planning herself if there was something she wanted to do. These choices improved her self-esteem considerably (remember that our judgments of others can influence how we view ourselves).

CASE 2: *John works as a sales director in a large, listed company. The end of each quarter is an especially busy time because of the pressure to generate revenue. John expects his manager not to burden him unduly with additional tasks that are not directly linked to generating revenue. But his manager keeps handing him new tasks with unrealistic deadlines. John often works very late, and becomes more and more resentful. John believes his manager to be incompetent and lacking sense of context and empathy for the work it takes to meet the goals.*

John listed the following options. He could:

- *Refuse to take on more assignments*
- *Set a limit to how much time he would spend at work*
- *Change his priorities*
- *Seek a new position*
- *Reassume his role as a sales manager.*

John chose to set a limit to how much time he would spend at work. He decided to stop work at 6 p.m. Only tasks directly related to revenue would alter that time frame. He communicated this decision directly to the CEO and was fully aware that the decision might have consequences for his future employment with the company.

CASE 3: *Helen is so disappointed and angry with one of her close colleagues that she can barely stand going to work. The reason is that Helen asked her colleague for help in a desperate situation where she couldn't finish her work on time. The colleague turned her down because she had a prior commitment with a friend to start training at a health club. Helen feels cheated; she has always been willing to help out her colleague. And Helen feels that the colleague could have started training any other time of the week – work is more important! Helen has a clear expectation that her colleague should do the same for her as she would do for her colleague. Helen feels that her colleague is selfish and self-absorbed.*

Helen listed the following options. She could:

- *Avoid doing the colleague any favors in the future*
- *Refuse to take on any more assignments*
- *Refuse to take on extra work late in the day*
- *Work on learning to accept other people's right to say no*
- *Find a different workplace*
- *Ask to be transferred to a different department*

Helen chose to focus on becoming better at setting boundaries so that she would not accept too many "urgent tasks". She also chose to become better at accepting other people's right to say no.

Most people will recognize elements of the three stories: that the spouse doesn't do the things we expect; that the manager can't see that his staff has reached the end of their tether; that some colleagues don't give the same back as they have received, etc.

Boundaries

Setting boundaries is the next category of energy drainers that we will focus on. If we take a stroll in the suburbs, we will see that physical boundaries are clearly marked by hedges, fences or walls. Boundaries are evident and it is clear when we trespass on other people's territory.

Unfortunately, personal boundaries are not like that. We are forced to communicate our personal boundaries. What is within our area of responsibility, and what falls beyond? What works for us and what does not? Recognizing and articulating our personal boundaries is extremely important. When we do so, we exhibit self-respect and a responsibility towards protecting ourselves and our interests.

To set a boundary is to make clear what we find acceptable or unacceptable. This could be related to personal space, commitment of time, sharing of personal information or other interests. Being able to say "No" is an important skill to develop as is developing a healthy respect for others' boundaries.

Of course having and communicating boundaries does not mean that others will change their behavior. Though our boundary setting might motivate the individual to change his or her behavior, we must remember that it is impossible to force other people to change. As we mentioned earlier, many people struggle with this fact every day.

Challenges in respect to setting boundaries

It can be difficult to set boundaries because doing so is associated with fear that we might:

- Hurt someone else's feelings
- Be abandoned or isolated
- Make someone angry
- Be considered a bad or selfish person
- Develop a guilty conscience
- Not be loved
- Feel that we are to blame
- Owe a debt

Our sense of duty is often to blame for our inability to set boundaries: the idea that if we receive something, we must owe a debt of return. What do we owe our colleagues? Or what do we owe others who have behaved kindly towards us? What is reasonable, and what is not?

Many people solve this dilemma by avoiding setting boundaries with people to whom they feel obligated. This way they avoid the guilt that follows from rejecting someone who has been kind to them – or to whom they would like to be kind.

Indeed, before we set a boundary it is extremely important to decide whether we are willing to face the consequences. Boundaries without consequences are not boundaries.

EXAMPLE: *At a large company, the changing nature of the business led the CEO to put pressure on several groups to arrange to be available around the clock, where they had previously worked regular hours five days a week.*

For one manager, this request pushed right up against his boundaries: he had already taken his group through salary cuts and several rounds of layoffs which meant that the remaining staff was emotionally frayed and carrying much heavier workloads than ever before. He knew that they were close to the breaking point and so he resisted the pressure.

Taking such a stand on boundary issues can sometimes come at a personal cost, which is why they tend to be particularly stressful as energy drainers go. Sometimes they send the message

that an organization isn't the right place for you – as it was for a CFO who refused to book a sale made on January 10th in the quarter that closed December 31st.

Setting boundaries can have serious consequences. But the saying “yes” when you don't want to can lead to burnout and pent-up anger that is worse than the professional or social rejection you are afraid of when you do set a firm boundary.

The core principle is this: Recognize and communicate your own boundaries. Recognize other people's feelings but make it clear that your feelings warrant the same consideration. Each individual is responsible for owning and articulating their own reactions. Luckily once the initial anger or defensiveness has subsided, the end result is often positive.

Tolerations

Our third category of energy drainers is what we call Tolerations. Tolerations are all those things we put up with but do not find “irritating” enough to actually deal with.

For example, we might have a shoe pinch our toes, but we wear it anyway. Or we might have a pile of paper that needs archiving, a wall that needs a coat of paint, or a colleague who always badmouths others.

The way to deal with these tolerations is firstly to make sure they are visible to us. We might do this by grabbing a notebook and pen and “taking a stroll through our life”. Each time we stumble on something that is not the way we would prefer, we write it down. We need not find a solution to it right now; just writing it down is an effective process in itself.

Most important is to become aware of the issues and decide for each whether we want to take action or whether we want to make a **conscious decision** not to do anything.

Often, a large energy drainer might be identified that takes several minor drainers away with it.

EXAMPLE: *From Founder, Helle Bundgaard: “When I started this process, I found that many of my tolerations resided in my and my husband’s large 1903 patrician villa - a real “fixer upper”. Not only were there a number of outwardly visible things that needed to be done: the base of the house needed rebuilding, the bathroom was due for renovation, the fences needed repairing. On top of this there was the everyday maintenance. Practically all of our spare time was dedicated to refurbishment.*

We started the process by writing down all the things we felt should be changed, repaired, discarded, renovated, etc. We then started to throw things away. We threw practically everything away that hadn’t been used in a year. Getting rid of all that stuff released a lot of mental energy in both of us.

But clearing up was only one point on a long list. We realized that if we were set on doing it all it would be a time consuming and expensive process. We sat down and had a long conversation about our possibilities and ended up by producing a list. This is what our list looked like:

- *We could reduce the number of projects*
- *We could pay to get all the remaining things done*
- *We could work on the projects in the evening*
- *We could sell and buy a newer house, which did not require as much maintenance*

“After long and tough consideration, we decided to sell and move to a newer house. It is one of the best decisions we have ever made. It released a whole lot of energy and freed up the resources to do other things. It hugely improved the quality of our lives.

“Lack of time was another significant energy drainer for me. I felt that I didn’t spent enough time with my children and I didn’t have enough time to read or for introspection. Having decided to stop all house related projects (since we were selling), I did have some time on my hands now – but without making a conscious decision about how to use my new found time – I quickly found myself in front of the TV. I actually spent an average of three hours a day in front of the TV. Three hours of my precious spare time.

“Using the same process as we did for the house, I decided not to watch television Mondays through Fridays. That would give me more time to read and reflect. Fortunately my husband chose to do the same which meant that we had plenty of time to talk. And there was more time for the children, because we no longer had a 9 o’clock p.m. deadline called “the evening news”. The quality of our life was vastly improved for the whole family due to that decision.”

Would, should and could

The fourth category of energy drainers is “would, should, and could”. All sentences beginning with “I could” or “I should” are usually associated with a guilty conscience. A great big red bulb should light up whenever we come across those three words.

Here are some typical examples:

- I would exercise more
- I could make a to do list
- I should be a better manager

The issue with the would, should or could are that the words are not action-oriented. If we substitute those words for “will”, the sentences have an entirely different meaning.

- I will exercise more
- I will make a to do list
- I will be better manager

Quantifiable Goals

Now that the sentences have been changed to “will” and have become action-oriented, it is vital that we set concrete goals. Each time we attain a goal, our energy will be replenished, and our faith in possibility will be confirmed.

Unfortunately, many of our intentions are what we call unquantifiable; goals that cannot be measured. Let us look again at an example from above: “I will exercise more”. Exactly how often is that?

- Half an hour a week?
- Once a month?
- 4 times a year?

It is essential that our goals are quantifiable, for how else would we know when we have achieved them? For every goal, be specific about what is to be done, how often, by when, etc. Then we are able to achieve even more action-oriented sentences:

- I am exercising more by...
- I am making a to do list by...
- I am becoming a better manager by

Compromises

We all have to compromise sometimes. But beware of allowing compromises to turn into tolerations. Say we have decided to leave work at 5 p.m. Our superior asks us to stay till 7 p.m. We compromise and agree to stay till 6 p.m. If we feel that we have been forced to stay until 6 p.m., it belongs in the toleration or boundaries category since our feelings associated with the choice will probably be negative.

If, on the other hand, we have freely accepted to stay, there will be no emotional reaction and it will be accepted as a natural compromise. There is a significant psychological and emotional difference between the two scenarios.

One of the compromises that often come up at these workshops is people who have been demoted due to reductions or other kind of organizational changes. Even though they have accepted a new position it is only on the surface. The "yes" in this situation often comes from a place of fear and powerlessness.

