

New Managers, Well-Being, and Engagement

BY LESLEY COOPER

© AMA - MCE This article was extracted
from the MCE Quarterly - First Edition 2026





The step up to a leadership role can be overwhelming. After an extended period of feeling at the top of their game, new leaders suddenly find the territory is unfamiliar, filled with new responsibilities and expectations. Rather than navigate using proven lived experience, they are now required to learn as they go.

Under these circumstances, to ensure there is no doubt about their dedication and enthusiasm for the role, leaders often respond by doubling down on the hours and the effort, accepting damage to well-being as unavoidable collateral damage. To do so, however, is to fundamentally misunderstand the role that good well-being plays in sustaining high performance in all aspects of leadership, but particularly in

securing engagement through connection and collaboration with direct reports and colleagues.

It is unfortunate that the term *well-being* has become so overused that the actual concept of being physically, emotionally, mentally, and purposefully “on the front foot” has been downgraded to a nice-to-have. The truth could not be more different. If paying attention to these aspects of your personal capacity was important before your leadership role, they become critical if you are to be the supportive and effective leader you aspire to be, and if you are to nurture the culture of psychological safety around you that is so important to building the trust, openness, and respect necessary for high levels of engagement.



As a leader, your efficacy and ability to connect and drive engagement from your team is directly linked to your own resilience, which, happily, can be directly influenced by actively choosing the specific behaviors that keep you in the right physical and emotional shape to inspire, guide, and support in the way the modern workplace needs. A new leader needs to resist the urge to leave it all out on the pitch and remember that prioritizing your well-being is not indulgent. The only resources that last are ones that can be renewed, so a focus on balancing contribution with recovery is appropriate. In nature, you will never see an oak tree with a tap root.

The natural world sees to it that the bigger the tree's canopy grows, the wider the root system that develops below ground to anchor the tree in a storm. There is a lesson here for new leaders, as the role will bring its own storms. You must resist the temptation to truncate your own anchoring roots by giving up the social, fitness, or family renewal activities that make you *you*. This will ensure that you remain appropriately anchored and upright when the pressure is on and you need to perform at the edge of your performance or capability envelope.

Maintaining your personal well-being is, therefore, a core leadership responsibility. It is important to ensure your own oxygen mask is properly fitted if you want to bring out the best out in others.

PERSONAL PERFORMANCE SUSTAINABILITY

When you take on a leadership role, expectations can increase exponentially. Working hours may get longer, the decision making will be more complex, and providing support to others will create an additional emotional and mental load. As above, the natural response might be to push on and through, but if you repeatedly do this at the expense of time spent on personal renewal, the outcome is likely to be fatigue and burnout. Both will quickly undermine your performance and credibility.

One of the key features of burnout is declining confidence in your ability and personal efficacy—not what you want at the start of your first leadership role. It is also quite common for newly promoted leaders to experience impostor syndrome, a persistent feeling that you are not as competent as others think you are and that you will be found out as a fraud. Even well-established, highly accomplished people feel this way sometimes. Overworking is a common response, which, paradoxically, because of the impact this has on well-being, is far more likely to cause underperformance than any competency shortcomings would.

Intentional recovery is not the same thing as rest. It is an active, deliberate, necessary, and regular investment in personal sustainability that ensures you can maintain healthy high performance. It is important to view it as a necessary investment right from the start—you wouldn't, after all, expect the ATM to keep dispensing money from your account if you were no longer having your salary deposited—but it is common to treat our personal physical and mental energy resources as being somehow inexhaustible. Build appropriate rituals early on in your leadership career to identify and protect the boundaries that make sustainability possible.

BEING THE ROLE MODEL

Leaders set the tone for workplace culture, and it does no good to say (as, sadly, many leaders do) that you know how important well-being is and you genuinely want employees to prioritize theirs if you follow a path that means you consistently neglect your own. This not only undermines your authenticity as a leader, but the mixed message also means that the team may feel pressure to do the same. By actively demonstrating the value you place on your own well-being through the specific choices you make around healthy boundaries and recovery, self-care, and resilience, you give others permission to do the same. In so doing, you nurture an engaged, healthy, high-performance environment.



MENTAL ENERGY AND DECISION MAKING

Our personal resources exist in different energy dimensions, which are in a dynamic relationship with each other. Physical energy is the foundation, with emotional, mental, and purposeful energy being the other three. Because it is foundational, if our physical energy is compromised by lack of movement, hydration, sleep, appropriate nutrition, and regular renewal, then our ability to stay in control of emotions and choose the right response in difficult situations is also negatively affected.

When a person is emotionally triggered, it is extremely hard to focus and achieve the right mental clarity regarding the data needed to make good decisions. Such internal states narrow your ability to see options, think strategically, and respond calmly under pressure.

Similarly, losing sight of the bigger picture and what is personally important can leave a leader rudderless and less able to decide where the other dimensions are best deployed. Leaders who prioritize their well-being by intentionally managing energy are often better equipped to make sound, balanced decisions.

Maintain your well-being by being intentional about how you generate personal energy as well as how and where you deploy it. It isn't limitless, and how well (and often) you adopt the right energy management behaviors makes a difference in how effective you are during the working day. It also affects how much energy you have available at the end of the day to be the person you want to be inside relationships or activities that are important to you.

THE BASICS OF ENERGY MANAGEMENT

To preserve your physical energy, you need to move and change your position every 90 to 120 minutes. Stretch, take the stairs, or walk to see someone if you are in an office. Hydrate regularly. Avoid sugary snacks and choose low glycemic index foods to prevent sugar spikes that will make emotional regulation more difficult. Do not accept poor quality sleep. Review your sleep habits and, if necessary, avoid using devices one hour before bedtime.

To assist your emotional energy, check in with yourself regularly throughout the day between activities. Are your emotions currently positive or negative? If the latter, make a strategic recovery decision to change your internal state. Invest five minutes in a personal renewal activity. For example, do a task you like and find easy, listen to a favorite track, move and stretch, contemplate something or someone who brings you joy (pets are allowed!), or breathe. Negative emotions deplete energy and undermine mental energy.

Protect your mental energy by understanding that your

cognitive resources are valuable, so you need to apply them fully. Avoid being distracted and only partially present around team members and colleagues. Avoid multitasking. Focus and be fully engaged with what is in front of you, now. "Chunk" the time needed for long (and important but possibly unpopular) tasks by taking a 5-minute break every 90 to 120 minutes.

To make sure that you have purposeful energy, take time to regularly look up and beyond the tasks at hand to remind yourself of the bigger picture—what is most important to you, how you would like to be perceived, and what your true priorities are as a human being and a leader. This will enable you to keep the right perspective and avoid wasteful negativity by helping you focus finite mental energy on what matters.

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

In our modern VUCA world of work, leadership is no longer just about strategy. Increasingly, it has as much to do with the ability to connect with others and tease out their unique insights, knowledge, and experience. Multigenerational workforces, with all the experience and expectation variability that comes with them, mean that modern leadership is less about telling people what you want them to do because you have already worked it out and more about asking others what they think.

To engage in so-called "humble inquiry," leaders must have emotional stability and the self-awareness to know what they don't know and be confident enough about what they do know to be vulnerable on occasion. This effectively lets people in, gives them the confidence to share their ideas, and speeds up the learning and engagement process for everyone.

Coaching, supporting, and inspiring people to share their insights requires emotional capacity, but a leader who does not manage energy and practice intentional recovery can end up drained, reactive, and irritable—that is, behaving in a way that undermines trust and discourages openness.

By contrast, a deliberate investment in self-care, intentional energy management, and recovery ensures you will remain approachable, empathic, and motivating. This will give others the confidence to share the information and ideas you need to drive your own development and make the team boat go faster. Personal well-being management is not something you attend to when you've caught up on everything else—it is a leadership essential. [AQ](#)

Lesley Cooper is a management consultant with a background in health and well-being consulting in the private healthcare sector. She is the founder and CEO of WorkingWell, an award-winning specialist consultancy that helps organizations to manage pressure and stress in a way that facilitates a culture of sustainable high performance.

MCE / KEY FACTS

MCE is your reliable partner for continuous success with agile people development solutions.



10,000,000

participants on AMA & MCE programmes in the last 10 years



92%

of Fortune 1,000 companies are our business partners



96%

of participants report they are using what they have learnt at AMA & MCE



1,000+

expert facilitators globally



100+

Open Training Programmes running throughout EMEA



98

year's experience working with our clients around the globe

For more information please contact:

 +32 2 543 21 20

 info@mce.eu

Visit mce.eu