Energy Management: A More Useful Lens Than Time Management for Leaders

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The limits of managing time alone

Time management assumes that the main constraint on performance is the number of available hours. For most senior leaders, this is not actually the binding constraint; their calendars are already full. The more meaningful constraint is energy: whether the hours available are spent in a state that allows for good judgement, or in a depleted state where even simple decisions become difficult.

The four dimensions of energy

Physical. Sleep, movement and nutrition form the base layer; without adequate physical energy, the other three dimensions are much harder to sustain, regardless of how well time is scheduled.

Emotional. The ability to access calm, curiosity and confidence rather than defaulting to irritability or anxiety under pressure. This is trainable, largely through the same practices that build self-awareness and emotional regulation more broadly.

Mental. Focus and the capacity for clear thinking, which degrades with constant task-switching and fragmented attention, even if total hours worked stay the same.

Purpose or meaning. Energy drawn from a genuine sense that the work matters. This dimension is often the most overlooked, and its depletion is frequently what underlies burnout that looks, on the surface, like simple overwork.

Practical applications for a leader's week

Match energy-intensive work to your natural peak periods, rather than scheduling by availability alone. Most people have a window, often mid-morning, where mental clarity is highest; protecting that window for the work that most needs it, rather than filling it reactively with whatever meeting requests arrive first, produces disproportionate returns.

Build in genuine recovery between high-demand activities, not only at the end of the day. Even a few minutes between back-to-back meetings, used deliberately rather than spent checking messages, meaningfully affects the quality of attention in the next conversation.

Audit your calendar for energy, not just time. Reviewing a typical week and marking which activities genuinely energise you and which deplete you, independent of how long they take, often reveals patterns worth adjusting that a purely time-based review would miss.

Why this reframe matters

Leaders who manage only their time often burn out despite disciplined scheduling, because a full but well-organised calendar can still be relentlessly depleting if it ignores energy. Managing energy

deliberately, alongside time, is what allows sustained high performance over years rather than short, unsustainable bursts.