



Photo: Pam LeBlanc

BY DENNIS SPARKS

Leaders' Energy Essential to Organizational Motivation

Great leaders ... focus attention on developing their intellect, understanding and managing emotions, taking care of their bodies, and attending to the deep beliefs and dreams that feed their spirits.

— Richard Boyatzis & Annie McKee

A school faculty's motivation to continuously improve teaching, learning, and relationships depends on its leader's positive energy and enthusiasm. There is no substitute. Leaders who are stressed, physically and emotionally depleted, and spiritually bereft find it difficult if not impossible to address the intellectual and interpersonal challenges of their demanding work.

As Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz point out in *The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal*, "Every one of our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors has an energy consequence, for better or for worse." They add, "To be fully engaged, we must be physically engaged, emotionally connected, mentally focused and spiritually aligned with a purpose beyond our immediate self-interest."

Leaders' energy can be heightened and sustained through the development of healthy habits, through satisfying connections to others, and through awareness of their best selves. Among the healthy habits that Loehr and Schwartz recommend are eating energy-

rich foods, such as low-fat proteins; making sacrosanct in one's schedule time for activities that are enjoyable, fulfilling, and affirming; connecting work to one's deepest purposes to create a sense of making a difference; and participating in regular periods of retreat, contemplation, and meditation.

Sustaining vital connections to others is another source of energy for leaders. In an [interview](#) in the *Journal of Staff Development*, Jane Dutton, author of *Energize Your Workplace: How to Create and Sustain High-Quality Connections at Work*, told me that there are no formulas for such connections and that "it is the simple things, like being present or being more authentically who they are, that produces a long-lasting impact on their organizations. . . . What's important is that we give ourselves license to be present, to bring ourselves emotionally and physically to the interaction."

Dutton also told me she encourages leaders to conduct a "Reflected Best Self Assessment" in which they ask 20 friends, family members, or colleagues to tell them three stories about how they added value to these individuals' lives. Leaders then write a "Reflected Best Self-Portrait" that describes them at their best and set goals to make changes in their lives based on what they learned. According to Dutton, leaders who engage in this process "experience a deep affirmation of their unique greatness" and "see themselves as being much more efficacious."

When leaders cultivate their energy and encourage others to do the same, they lead through learning.

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