

Take Back Your Lunch and Transform Your Day

by Tony Schwartz

Several weeks ago, I sat down for a coaching session with a very senior executive at a Fortune 50 company. Let's call him Richard. He'd invited my company in to help his team better manage the overwhelming demand he believed was taking a toll on their productivity and their satisfaction.

I began by asking Richard to describe his own workday. He told me that he arrived at the office about 7:30 a.m. and worked virtually straight through until 9 p.m. He consumed his lunch in less than 5 minutes at his desk. If he went out to dinner, it was for a business meeting.

"That's pretty typical of people at my level, isn't it?" he asked me. Sadly, it just may be.

What set this executive apart from most I meet is that he recognized this way of working wasn't serving him well. In recent years, he'd stopped exercising and put on considerable weight. He loved his work, and felt energized by it, but he worried that pushing himself so hard was taking a long term toll.

I suggested he begin with a couple of very simple changes. The first was to schedule a time at least three times a week to work out. He did that almost immediately, and successfully — at 6 pm, as a break before returning to work.

The second change I suggested was to get outside for lunch at midday, for at least 30 minutes. He agreed, and we actually scheduled the time in his calendar, with his assistant, but I could tell he wasn't confident he'd make it happen.

I wasn't entirely surprised. [The Energy Project](#), the organization I run, recently conducted a poll on the Huffington Post about people's experience in the workplace. Sixty per cent of 1200 respondents told us they took less than 20 minutes a day for lunch. Twenty per cent took less than 10 minutes. One quarter said they never left their desks at all.

That's consistent with a [study](#) by the American Dietetic Association, which found that 75 per cent of office workers eat lunch at their desk at least two to three days a week.

Those poll findings were the inspiration for a movement The Energy Project is about to launch. The concept couldn't be more straightforward. We're calling it [Take Back Your Lunch](#). It begins this Wednesday, between noon and 2 p.m., in locations around the country, and continues every Wednesday this summer. [Find out where people will be gathering](#) — or [organize a Take Back Your Lunch](#) Meetup in your city or town.

Far too many of us — managers and employees alike — have bought into the belief that the best way to keep up with demand is to be working all the time.

What if you set an example for the people you manage by taking back your own lunch - and by encouraging them to do the same?

At the most practical level, leaving the office for lunch is an opportunity to relax, let go of whatever stresses you've accumulated during the morning, and return to work feeling more energized, more focused and more engaged in the afternoon.

Taking back your lunch is the first step in taking back your life.

It's been three weeks since Richard made his own commitment to take back his lunch. Last week he got out twice. Can you commit to at least once? Invite your whole office starting Wednesday.

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