

# SEVEN Bytes

## SELF-MANAGING IN A TIME OF CRISIS PART 3: SUSTAINING PERSONAL ENERGY

In a crisis, a lot of good intentions go out of the window. We can easily forget about work-life balance, fostering engagement and seeking fulfilment. When your back is to the wall, it seems to make sense that the more time and effort you throw at the problem, the more likely you are to succeed, or at least stave off disaster.

But it's not always true. Time is money, they say, but that supposedly most valuable resource is finite; when it's gone, it's gone, and it ain't coming back. Effort, by itself, is not enough and if misguided, can be counter-productive.

Biological systems, including human beings, operate optimally according to rhythmical processes of activation and restoration. Unlike time, energy is a renewable resource, and high levels can be obtained and sustained, but only if regulated, restored, and replenished<sup>1</sup>.

Under threat, the first response is to fight, flee or freeze. As challenge increases, our nervous system can get stuck 'on' and we can find it difficult to bring ourselves back into a sense of calm and relaxation. We can also get stuck 'off' and find it hard to move out of a state of feeling overwhelmed and into action.

### SO WHAT CAN WE DO?

We cannot ignore the challenging emotions that arise at this time. Just like everyone else, you may have moments of being overwhelmed or being gripped by fear. This is part of our evolutionary make-up. Now there is growing evidence of a complex regulatory interplay between bodily physiology and our social engagement and relationships. It seems that interpersonal interaction – sometimes just a soothing tone of voice or a kind gesture – or engaging activities that enable us to feel secure can 'kickstart' the nervous system out of disorganized or fearful states and into more productive action.

The proposition is this: re-orient yourself to draw on your social and interpersonal resources so that these challenging emotions can live within you, not you living within them. Feeling and riding the waves of regulation offers us a place to hold our nervous system activation and bring more resources to meet the challenges we encounter.

Here are some strategies for you to explore to create waves of regulation. Perhaps pick one of the following that resonates with you and focus on developing that. We are more likely to embed or re-embed rituals when we focus on one thing at a time.

### PHYSICAL ENERGY STRATEGIES

#### Sleep

Sleep is the foundation of our recovery. Aim to establish a good sleep routine - disengage from technology an hour before bed, perhaps have paper and a pencil beside the bed so you can write down any worries that might come into your mind when you are trying to sleep; this allows your mind to put them down for a while.

#### Take breaks

Get curious about establishing a routine of regular breaks (for example get up and walk about every 20 minutes if you are usually desk-bound).

#### Keep moving

Notice if you are letting go of your regular exercise routine (if you have one). Get curious about flexing or establishing an exercise routine - get out for "socially distanced" walks, put your inventive and innovative mind to work - find new ways of doing home gym/yoga dance etc. Find a new rhythm.

### EMOTIONAL AND NERVOUS SYSTEM STRATEGIES

Cultivate self-awareness about when you are activated and get curious about developing your skills of self-compassion and gratitude when this happens.

#### Bring the Vagus Nerve back online

The vagus nerve is the communication pathway between our social and physical selves<sup>2</sup>. Do something that engages the vagus nerve and invites the system back into regulation; for example, sing, orientate your eyes or focus on something which gives you joy. Do some meditation or yoga, particularly yoga that focuses on good breathing<sup>3</sup>. Connect with someone who calms you when you talk to them, let their system help your system to regulate (co-regulation).

#### Keep social contact with those people who resource you

Intersperse periods of solo working with keeping social contact (perhaps by zoom/webex/phone) with people who make you feel calm and positive. Share the challenge together with people who you enjoy working with; solve something together.



## Practice gratitude

Take a few moments to bring to mind some things you are grateful for right now; try to focus on this and perhaps write a few lines about it. Allow your mind to ponder your appreciation.

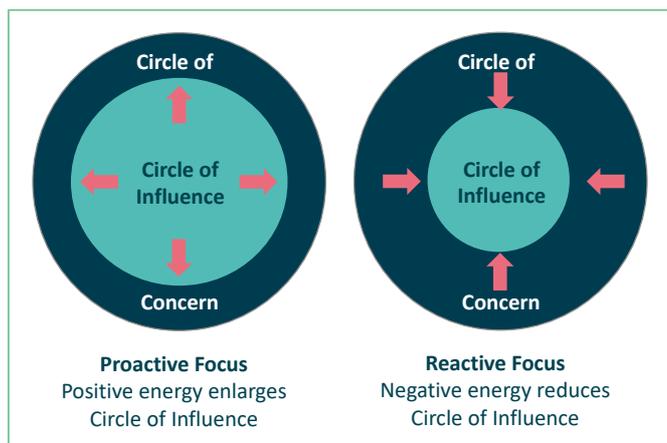
The regular practice of reminding ourselves what we have to be grateful for has many benefits, both emotional and intellectual <sup>4</sup>. We know that it encourages our neurons be more active in the medial prefrontal cortex, a brain area associated with learning and decision making <sup>5</sup>.

Even better, keep a Gratitude Journal <sup>6</sup> – once a week, write down four or five brief statements describing the people, events and things you are grateful for.

## MENTAL ENERGY STRATEGIES

### Where you put your focus

The Steven Covey exercise of Circle of Concern/Circle of Influence is very useful when you are feeling overwhelmed. Draw out two circles; a “double bubble”. In the first circle you put down everything you are concerned about. In the second circle you only put down things you can do something about and be specific about what you can actually do.



<sup>1</sup> [https://hbr.org/2007/10/manage-your-energy-not-your-time?cm\\_sp=Article-Links-Comment](https://hbr.org/2007/10/manage-your-energy-not-your-time?cm_sp=Article-Links-Comment)

<sup>2</sup> <https://ct.counseling.org/2016/06/polyvagal-theory-practice/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ekhartyoga.com/teachers/lisa-petersen>

<sup>4</sup>

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_gratitude\\_can\\_help\\_you\\_through\\_hard\\_times](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_gratitude_can_help_you_through_hard_times)

<sup>5</sup>

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_gratitude\\_changes\\_you\\_and\\_your\\_brain](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_gratitude_changes_you_and_your_brain)

<sup>6</sup>

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/tips\\_for\\_keeping\\_a\\_gratitude\\_journal](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/tips_for_keeping_a_gratitude_journal)

## News Consumption

Think about what a healthy level of news consumption would look like for you? How can you acquire the information you need while not tuning in too much, catastrophising and priming your nervous system for danger and getting your nervous system stuck ‘on’. What might be a good rhythm for you?

### Sprints of attention

Explore working in sprints of attention (20-40 minutes), focusing on one thing at a time followed by some recovery time where you do something different and ideally move.

### Be Here Now

Keep inviting your mind back to the here and now - how are you in this moment? What can you appreciate about this moment which will never come again?

### A Natural Break

Find a quiet spot in nature, being in nature can help to restore your energy, savour the joy of the world and reset your peripheral vision. It’s also great to move and get some air and experience a change of scene.

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT SEVEN'S VIRTUAL RESILIENCE WORKSHOPS, PLEASE CONTACT BRID@SEVEN.IE**

