

The background of the entire page is a microscopic view of cells, likely from a plant or algae, showing cell walls and internal structures. The cells are illuminated with a bright green light, creating a glowing effect. The text is overlaid on this background.

# The Biology of the Bottom Line

“What makes my Thinker think is that he thinks not only with his brain, with his knitted brow, his distended nostrils and compressed lips, but with every muscle of his arms, back and legs, with his clenched fist and gripping toes.” — AUGUSTE RODIN

Can we succeed without the body?

On the face of it, this seems like a ridiculous question, but when we step back and take a closer look at modern organizational culture, we might be inclined to wonder. After all, most discussions of management and strategy take place in the disembodied, abstract world of the mind. The body is considered a minor player at best and health becomes a concern only in its absence, when skyrocketing medical costs, absenteeism, and presenteeism reach unacceptable levels.

In practice, today's organization is almost completely blind to the body and its contribution to performance. We are, in the language of therapy, "vertically disintegrated" or to put it more bluntly, "dead from the neck down." As Sir Ken Robinson put it in his legendary TED talk, most of us now consider the body to be little more than "a locomotor device for the head," a transport mechanism whose only purpose is to move the brain from one computer terminal or meeting to the next.

And so it comes as no surprise to discover that we are suffering catastrophic consequences. Sedentary living, poor diet and cognitive overload have led to epidemic levels of obesity, diabetes and heart disease, as well as widespread depression, anxiety, attention disorders, and neurological problems. These are not isolated or trivial health concerns; disease is rapidly becoming the new normal.

At the same time, the modern organization asks more and more from the bodies that it employs. Intense competition and blindingly fast change demand extremely high levels of adaptability, concentration and endurance. This combination adds up to unprecedented levels of stress. Sadly, the body is beginning to deteriorate at the very time we most need it to perform at its best. Business leaders often complain about the difficulty of finding skilled workers, but we are now beginning to face a far more onerous challenge: finding healthy workers of any kind.

# Your Body Is Your Brain

Fortunately, a new era of biological sophistication is beginning to unfold with a flood of discoveries demonstrating powerful interconnections between physical health and work-life performance. The long-standing Cartesian assumption that mind and body are separate entities has been thoroughly discredited. In short, mind-body dualism is dead. As neuroscientist Antonio Damasio put it in *Descartes' Error*, “the human brain and the rest of the body constitute an indissociable organism.” Anything that affects our flesh also affects our cognition and decision-making, for better or for worse.

The consequences are both far-reaching and disruptive. Intelligence, we now realize, is not concentrated in the mind, the brain or the nervous system, but is distributed across the entire mind-body system. In other words, our intelligence is embodied. Information flows top-down from the brain, but it also flows bottom-up from the guts, the organs and the muscles. In other words, we “think” with the whole body.

A converging body of research tells a powerful story of continuity between healthy bodies and workplace performance. In short: what's good for the body is good for the brain; what's good for the brain is good for learning, memory, creativity, team cohesion and pro-social behavior.

Physical health is good for attentional stability, engagement, productivity, and in turn, prosperity. In other words, good bodies are good business.

Of course, the flip-side is also true. We now know without question that a health-hostile environment promotes the production of stress hormones which in turn increases vigilance and fear, which drives depression, social isolation, impulsive behavior, cognitive distortions, fragmented attention, and conflict. Obviously, these conditions are corrosive to productivity and prosperity. Unhealthy bodies are extremely expensive, not just because of increased health care costs, but because they behave, act, and choose differently.

## The Care and Feeding of Neurological Assets

The power of good health goes much further than most of us realize. Our state of body has a profound impact on the state of our brains and, in turn, the neurological assets of an organization. This term refers to the patterns of neurological activity that contain the learning and experience of managers, employees, and staff. In a knowledge-based economy, these neuro-intellectual assets are vital and may well be more important than conventional, tangible assets. After all, you can always buy a new aircraft or computer, but precious human experience, gained over the course of years or decades, may well be irreplaceable.

Neurobiology has shown that chronic stress and sedentary living can have severe impacts on connectivity in the brain and, in turn, neurological assets. Fortunately, we know the antidotes:

- Frequent, moderate exercise promotes the production of “brain-derived neurotrophic factors,” substances that have been described as “Miracle grow for the brain.”
- A real-food diet, low in refined “carbage,” keeps blood sugar levels from spiking and limits neurological damage.
- Mindfulness meditation stabilizes our attention and contributes to overall brain health.
- Positive social experience promotes the flow of oxytocin, a powerful hormone that decreases stress as it promotes trust and bonding.

Putting these antidotes together with a rhythmic style of engagement and rest will go a long way towards the preservation and growth of neurological assets.

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# Time Sucks and Time Generators

Sadly, there's a lot of push-back against health-promotion in the modern workplace. "Wellness programs sound great in theory, but exercise, meditation and good diet takes time, time that we don't have." Or so the current thinking goes. Actually, this perspective is short-sighted. In the first place, wellness practices don't really take that much time; twenty minutes per day for movement and meditation can make a huge difference in health and performance.

But the real question is more fundamental. That is, "Do you have time for the real time sucks that come from unhealthy bodies in the workplace?" The chronic medical conditions, accidents, wasted training, presenteeism, attention deficits, and social friction that come with physical degeneration? Do you really have time for stress, fear-based cognition, and bad decisions?

In practical fact, health and wellness practices effectively create time over the long term. Healthier bodies make for smarter, more attentive brains that can focus directly on crucial tasks. This not only cuts down on wasted effort, it also decreases stress, which leads to even better health. In this respect, health promotion is one of the most lucrative of all possible workplace improvements. It's an obvious win-win.

# Return On Action

Of course, anytime someone suggests a change to the status quo, skeptics will ask about ROI. “All this talk about health sounds good in theory, but what’s our return on investment?” This, of course, is precisely the wrong question. The right question asks, “What’s our Return On Inaction?” “What’s our Return On Inactivity?” “How much will it cost us if we do nothing?”

By now, the answer should be obvious: an escalating epidemic of lifestyle disease, presenteeism, and neurological erosion will continue to sap our vitality and productivity. Doing nothing for the body is going to cost us dearly.

Fortunately, action for healthier bodies is not only possible, it’s actually pretty simple. We begin by creating a culture in which honors health and physical vitality. This means taking a whole-body, whole-life orientation in which health is actively integrated into the fabric of organizational culture; the body is a priority, not an after-thought.

Specifically, three steps are essential. First, provide the opportunity and leadership for frequent “movement snacks” that can be taken several times throughout the day. These sessions need not be ambitious, sweaty workouts. Rather, they are a chance to revitalize our bodies and get back in touch with our native physicality. Get people out of their chairs, their cubicles and their vehicles for a walk, a stretch or some easy movement.



Second, provide the opportunity and leadership for meditation. Short periods of focused attention on the breath will bring welcome relief from the incessant distraction, multitasking, and confusion of the day. They also contribute to greater engagement and flow.

Third, provide the opportunity and leadership for high quality, real food in the workplace. Specifically, this means eliminating highly-refined food products, soda, and other forms of garbage that are so popular but so physiologically destructive.

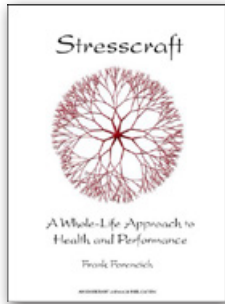
With these three measures, we not only improve health directly, we also send an implicit message to people across our organizations. The presence of workplace exercise, meditation programs, and real food tell people that their health, lives, and performance are important. We're in this for the long term. We care. We want you healthy. We want you to succeed in your work and your life. You are valued.

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These implicit messages take us far beyond the standard biomedical metrics of body weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels. They inspire behavior change, pride, loyalty, and engagement, with powerful multiplier effects that extend across the organization. Naturally, this becomes a virtuous circle of health improvement, increased vitality, focused attention, creativity, and pro-social behavior. There simply is no downside.

**In fact, taking care of the body is one of the best deals you can possibly make. 🧠**

# Info



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