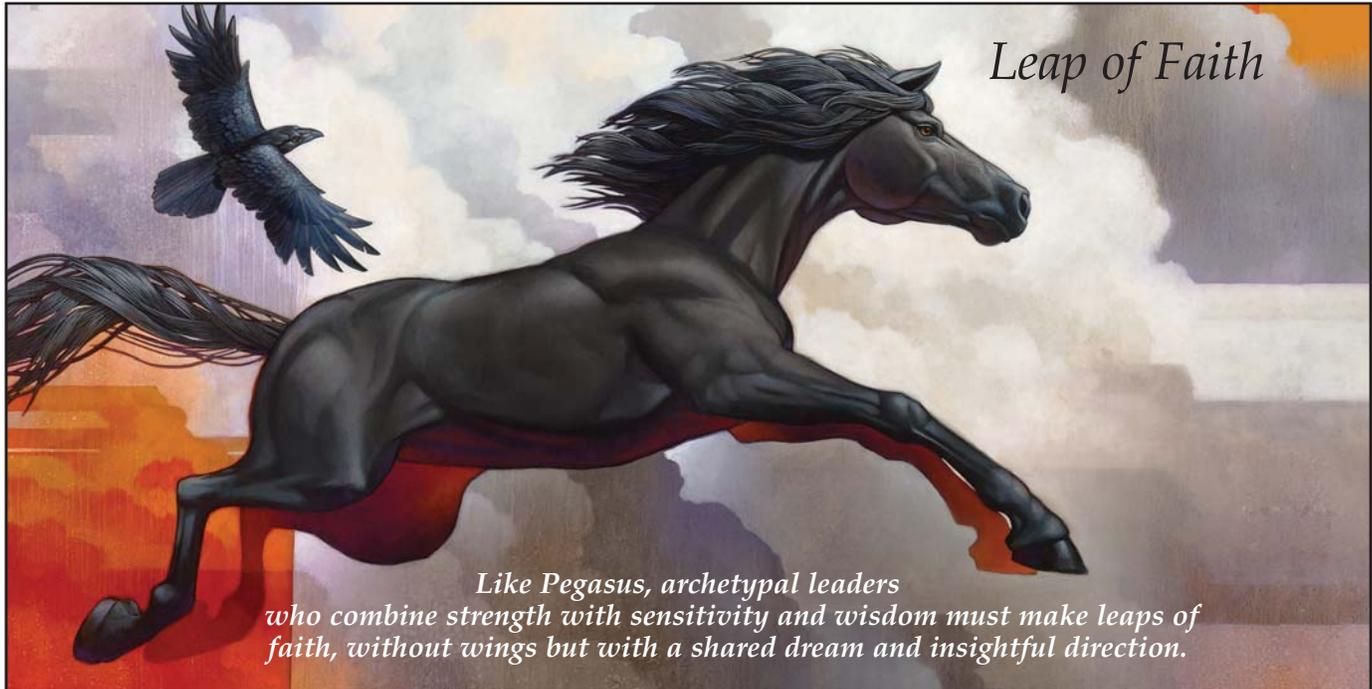


LEADERSHIP *Warren Bennis* Excellence



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Like Pegasus, archetypal leaders who combine strength with sensitivity and wisdom must make leaps of faith, without wings but with a shared dream and insightful direction.

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Train Using Sports Science

Learn from the biology of business performance.



by Jack Groppe

MANY MANAGERS believe that *model employees* are dedicated solely to their work: working overtime, foregoing vacations to move a project ahead, tackling the next big assignment immediately after putting the last one to bed, and rarely socializing with co-workers during business hours. This antiquated notion is counterproductive to high performance.

During the economic recession, many employees worked longer and harder, but *were they more productive?* A productive employee is an engaged employee who is attentive, focused, creative, and emotionally resilient. Is this the face of the American workforce? Statistics suggest otherwise.

- Price Waterhouse Coopers reports that one in four employees intend to leave their employer in the next year.
- Gallup reports that only 28 percent of workers are engaged in their work; 54 percent are not engaged (*sleepwalking* through their work); and 18 percent are *actively disengaged* and acting out their unhappiness on the job.

• AON Hewitt reports the largest decline in global engagement scores in 15 years, stating, “Organizations are exhausted and struggling to find ways to improve or stabilize the future.”

Since a disengaged workforce can't reach its potential in productivity, how can leaders turn this around? Some answers come from an unlikely source—*sport science*, a field that combines the disciplines of exercise physiology, nutrition, psychology, biomechanics, motor learning, and sports medicine and revolutionizes how athletes train today, while enhancing their performance and lengthening their careers.

I see many parallels between athletes' and employees' needs in order to perform at their best. Overstressed and under-rested athletes make more mistakes and have higher injury rates. Workers who don't get enough rest also make more mistakes. The key is to approach employee performance in the way trainers now approach athletes—by taking the *whole person* into account. Looking at an employee as a

thinking, feeling, living, breathing being with *physical* and *psychological* needs—helps leaders achieve *optimal performance*.

Bring Sport Science to Office

Human capital is often a company's highest expenditure, and in knowledge-based organizations, it's the key contributor to both bottom- and top-line revenues. Traditionally, firms manage human capital by trying to improve performance through training and talent management, to ramp up productivity by asking employees to work longer and harder, and to shrink costs through *right-sizing*, or lowering health-care benefits. In spite of—or because of—these measures, employees are failing to reach their *optimal productivity*.

Three discoveries in sport science can be applied to business to improve



performance: *multidimensionality*, *recovery*, and *periodization*.

• **Multidimensionality** means that to improve performance, people need to improve in *four dimensions*: physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

• **Recovery** suggests that in *each dimension*, people need *recovery mechanisms*. For example, if you are an athlete and exercise a muscle today, you shouldn't stress it again for at least 48 hours to give the muscle *recovery time* to grow. People also need time to recover emotionally, mentally, and spiritually (by connecting with family/friends, or by aligning to a *mission*) from assignments, projects, or other energy-draining work.

• **Periodization** deals with the long- and short-term work/rest ratio, allowing athletes to endure grueling training schedules and helping employees endure peak work-load periods and challenging assignments. For example, stress is the stimulus, and *recovery* is when *growth* occurs. If there is no *recovery*, there's no *growth*. Periodization

enables the person to restore energy and then prepare to enter the competitive arena more effectively. And, it can happen in large doses (e.g., vacation) or small doses (e.g., between meetings).

World-class athletes and corporate employees face similar challenges. Both live in a world of *brutal competition* and *accountability*. Since numbers drive everything, every moment requires sustained attention, focus, and engagement. Like athletes, knowledge workers must fuel their bodies and brains adequately, train for emotional resilience, and improve their mental acuity. Human beings are biological organisms that require sleep, nutrition, and activity to survive and thrive.

Note the *direct relationship* between psychology, physiology, and performance. Ironically, *companies often work against their own bottom lines by drowning employees in health and productivity disincentives*. For example, when companies expect their employees to sit at desks all day, work too many hours without adequate breaks or days off, or sit in long meetings with easy access to finger foods that are high in fat, sugar, and calories and low in nutrients, *they undermine the employees' ability to perform at their best*.

What You Can Do Today

You can take steps that support employee health, boost productivity, and *physiologically optimize team performance*:

- Serve low-glycemic snacks.
- Support those suffering from sleep problems through health coaching.
- Offer meditation or yoga classes.
- Let people take a few hours off before undertaking new assignments.
- Help employees gain *emotional resilience* by accessing *opportunistic emotions* such as *optimism*, *sense of challenge*, and *mastery*. When they get an *emotional hit in the face*, they can learn to go into a positive solution mode.
- Support *periodization* by encouraging employees to plan for and incorporate periods of rest and recovery, before the next meeting or project.
- Get up and move periodically. This energizes people, and improves focus.
- Ensure that your teams are aligned to the organization's mission, and their own mission, to be *Corporate Athletes*.

To increase revenues, lower costs and improve performance, leaders need to seamlessly link *individual biology* with *the biology of teams and organizations*. LE

Jack Groppe, Ph.D., is co-founder of the Human Performance Institute, and VP of Applied Science and Performance Training at Wellness & Prevention, Inc., a Johnson & Johnson company.

ACTION: Optimize your team performance.