

tapping my personal energy

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Picture an airplane perched at such an angle that you could simply pour people in from a measuring cup. While this method of loading people could be efficient, the plane may never get off the ground.

I, like that plane, need to be careful that I don't overload myself to the point that I'm grounded. Learning to balance my life is a continual challenge, and I'd like to share some of my observations and experiences.

Valuing My Ideas and Judgments

When I doubt my ideas, I'm vulnerable to the judgment of others, and try to meet their expectations. Because I'm looking to others, my success or failure depends on their feedback. Too often, I've concluded that I'm not okay or that I'm doing poorly because of negative feedback. As I look to others for rewards, I lose energy.

In the past, I've lost too many ideas because I was looking to others to acknowledge them. I threw valuable ideas away because the timing was wrong, co-workers weren't ready, I didn't have the resources to carry them out, I hadn't cultivated the proper audience, or the idea needed refinement. When others were negative, I withdrew, losing energy and creativity.

I now regard my ideas as a precious and fragile resource. By saving my ideas, I'm valuing my opinion. Because my ideas blossom when I trust my environment, I find individuals who support me and my ideas. While I can test ideas with others, in the end, I need to believe in them. I also need to be aware of the times I'm brainstorming so I can catch the ideas. If I'm problem solving over the phone or meeting with a client in the office, I think, "Hey Kappler! Better write those ideas down." The ultimate test is to date your ideas and see how long they take to implement.

Another way I drain my energy is to blame others for not recognizing my innovations. My success depends on their

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"blessing." I'm angry when I don't get their approval. While bureaucratic roadblocks may exist, I need to be aware that I'm draining my energy needlessly.

Fighting unrealistic expectations is another energy waster. I try to fulfill the numerous roles that seem to be expected—perfectly and in a prescribed way and time frame. Part of me demands perfection and another part rebels. With such internal conflict, I just about have enough energy to complete the task.

In working with the 4-H program, I criticized myself one year when the round-up seemed to be going poorly (my evaluation). I knew I could do a better job. Being the county home economist responsible for family living, EFNEP, some 4-H, and community development, I was just going to have to accept that everything couldn't be done perfectly.

When I value my own priorities, I generate energy. I accept responsibility for my decisions knowing others may not agree. Because I believe in my judgment, I can protect myself when others criticize and not feel guilty (another energy waster). I accept that all things can't be done perfectly and some things may just not get done.

. . . I don't feel that I'm always successful at being creative, at saving my ideas, or taking care of myself. I'm much more sensitive to experiences that reduce my energy and creativity. As I increase my energy, I enhance my ability to cope and grow.

Feeling okay is an ongoing struggle for me. When I consider another's viewpoint, I need to be careful not to put myself down for my original decision. In spite of the way things may seem, I'm doing my very best, given my knowledge, experience, and working conditions. If I don't feel I'm doing an acceptable job, I can't expect others to feel I am.

Accepting myself also means accepting the job that I'm doing. When someone compliments me, I say thank you instead of explaining how I could have done better. By not accepting a compliment, I discount the other person's opinion and drain everyone's energy. When someone compliments me, I say thank you, smile, and enjoy the compliment. Appreciating compliments is energizing.

Creating Choices

Limiting choices limits energy. These limits may be imagined perceptions from others or ones I impose from within. If I feel I "have to" carry out an activity in a certain

way, my rebellious self finds reasons and ways not to cooperate. "I'm tired." "I'm bored." "I have no energy."

For a period of time, I had no energy to plan or cook supper. I came home tired and felt I "had to" cook supper. I gave myself no choices or options. In evaluating our options, my husband and I have turned our meal plan upside down so that we eat our big meal in the morning (6:30) and eat a lighter meal in the evening. My husband is now in charge of the evening meal, which gives me even more time. The main meal of the day and the dishes are done early in the morning and I have the whole day ahead. (I also have the whole day to use up the calories!)

Within this plan, I need to be careful not to limit my choices. Because many people know of our plan, we are often asked what we had for breakfast. If we had a common breakfast of pancakes and eggs, I don't apologize. The plan is to work for me, not others. I give myself permission to have choices.

Taking Care of Myself

When I try to meet the expectations of others, I don't take time for myself. Over the past three years, I've been learning to take better care of myself. When I overloaded myself physically and mentally, I put myself in a precarious position. I'm not centered. My energy and creativity are jeopardized.

In the past, I've wasted too many weekends sleeping, recuperating from the week. Then, I got angry because I didn't have the time for things I wanted to do. My body forced me to take care. I needed to make up the time I hadn't taken during the week. I'm learning to be more sensitive to my bodily needs as the day progresses. When I cheat, my body lets me know with exhaustion, backaches, stiff necks, headaches, colds, or illness.

Caring means eating properly, relaxing, exercising, and breathing properly. With my early morning schedule, I need some relaxation exercises before I leave for work. I also take time during the day. Being with others demands courtesy and energy. While I may go out to lunch with a friend, I still need a few minutes to myself.

By taking time for myself, my body rewards me by creating more energy. I need to be constantly aware of my bodily needs and respect them. Being sensitive to bodily needs may mean going to the bathroom. (WHAT? You say!) Haven't you sat through a meeting longer than you were comfortable doing? Such behavior can cause headaches, constipation, whatever.

**Concluding
Thoughts**

As we begin to recognize some of our absurd demands, we can laugh at ourselves—another source of energy. Have you noticed how much energy is in a room filled with laughter? I don't feel that *I'm always successful at being creative, at saving my ideas, or taking care of myself.* I'm much more sensitive to experiences that reduce my energy and creativity. As I increase my energy, I enhance my ability to cope and grow.