



Issue 262 - May 2026

PROTECTING *Capacity* with REST, RESILIENCE & RECOVERY





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THE HIDDEN TAX OF CONSTANT AVAILABILITY

With the convenience of modern technology, professionals seem to find it effortless to respond to colleagues, managers, clients, family, learning groups, and various social circles at any moment. However, we must be cautious of being "Always On". This includes behavioural patterns such as subconsciously checking communication apps to ensure you "look" online, constantly running a to-do list at the back of your mind which prevents deep relaxation and/or feeling uneasy or believing you "should" be doing something productive. This can lead to **cognitive overload**. When the brain assumes it must constantly respond to potential messages, it cannot enter "recovery mode," leading to mental health issues and **burnout**.

Sophie Leroy (University of Minnesota)¹ discovered that human attention does not function like an on/off switch. When you are writing a report (**Task A**) and suddenly receive a message on Teams or WhatsApp (**Task B**), even if you just "glance" at it before switching back, your cognitive resources do not fully transition. Your brain splits in two: one part responds to the message, while the other remains entangled in the logic of the report.

This is related to the Zeigarnik Effect in Psychology. If Task A is interrupted (e.g., an unread email or an unsolved problem), the brain marks it as "incomplete" and continues to run it as a

background process. According to Leroy's theory, every brief notification is a costly instance of **Attention Residue**. Even if we spend only 30 seconds replying to a message, the brain requires significantly more time to clear the residual information from the previous task. This continuous "**cognitive leakage**" is the fundamental reason modern professionals feel mentally exhausted².



COMPARISON OF MENTAL STATES

BRAIN OPERATING MODE

Single-threaded; resources fully concentrated.

Multiple task residues; excessive background processes.

STATE


DEEP WORK


ALWAYS ON

MENTAL ENERGY CONSUMPTION

Low
(Efficient and stable)

Extremely High
(Rapid overheating)

HOW TO MAINTAIN THE BRAIN AND RESTORE MENTAL ENERGY



(I) Psychological Detachment (by Sabine Sonnentag³)

The core concept of Psychological Detachment can be achieved through the following four methods:

- 1 Rituals:** Establish clear "end-of-work" rituals (e.g., changing clothes, listening to music) to tell your brain that work is over. For those working from home (WFH), it is recommended to wear professional attire during work hours and switch to comfortable loungewear afterward.
- 2 Mastery Experiences:** Use mindfulness to live in and experience the moment. Engage in hobbies that require focus but are unrelated to work (e.g., cooking, exercising, or learning a musical instrument).
- 3 Relaxation Experiences:** Practice mindfulness, go for a walk, or read. Simply put, psychological detachment provides the brain with a true "power-off" button rather than just staying on standby.
- 4 The Pomodoro Technique:** Take a 5-minute "True Break" every 25 minutes. This 5-minute break forces the brain to perform a brief "reboot." This time should not be used for checking messages; instead, leave your seat, stay away from screens, breathe deeply, or stretch to ensure both "visual" and "cognitive" offline states.

(II) If Your Job Requires Being on Constant Standby

If your role necessitates immediate responses to various situations, you can adopt these strategies:

- 
Ready-to-Resume Notes: Before moving to another task or entering a new meeting, take 1–3 minutes to jot down what you're currently working on. This serves as a "temporary processing" step to reduce the impact of attention residue.
- 
Implement "Batch Processing": Do not check emails or communication apps constantly during active work. Set 2–3 fixed time slots per day dedicated to processing messages, ensuring you can engage in **Deep Work** during other times.

In the era of information explosion, the **"ability to filter"** is far more important than the **"ability to acquire."** If you would like to discuss these methods further, please feel free to contact us.

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FROM SUPPORT TO SPONSORSHIP

High-pressure moments are familiar territory for any team. Deadlines approach, targets loom, and expectations rise. In these moments, leaders face a critical choice: Do we add more pressure to "push" results, or do we become a filter that protects the team's energy so they can perform their best?

Many leaders believe that "pushing" is the only way to meet a goal. However, true leadership, and what I call **true sponsorship** - is about removing friction, not adding force.



Case Study

The 48-Hour Sales Sprint

Many years ago, I served as a Front Office Manager at an English center in Ho Chi Minh City, leading a sales team of nine young women. They were hardworking and committed, but like most sales teams, they also faced demanding monthly targets.

It was the end of the month, the peak of our stress cycle. With just two days left, we were still 15 sales short of our target. My own manager called with a directive that every middle manager recognizes: *"Push the team. You only have two days left."*

After hanging up, I stepped out of my office and looked at my team. They weren't relaxing; they were already intensely focused—calling clients, updating lists, and working through lunch. I felt the "middle manager squeeze", the pressure from above to deliver, and the empathy for my team below. I asked myself: *Do they really need me to add my stress to theirs?*

Instead of echoing my manager's demands, I decided to provide **Sponsorship**. I shifted my role from "overseer" to "path-clearer" through three specific actions:

- 01 Emotional Safety**
I walked over and asked, *"How can I support you right now?"* and *"Would you like to talk?"* This signaled that I was an ally, not a judge.
- 02 Removing Friction**
I handled the small things, preparing tea breaks and assisting with administrative blockers - so they could stay in their "flow" without distraction.
- 03 Value Realization**
I helped them calculate their potential incentives. By showing them how much they would earn by closing two more sales, I reframed the goal from, "company quota" to "personal win."

That night, around 10 p.m., we finally reached our target. My Senior Program Advisor later asked why I trusted the team so much. My answer was simple: *"I know who you are and what you are capable of. My job is to help you see your own strengths. Once you see them, you will push yourself further than anyone else can."*





Key Insights for Middle Managers

As middle managers, we are often the "filters" of an organization. If we simply pass pressure down, we create burnout. If we filter that pressure and turn it into sponsorship, we create resilience.

- ◆ **Trust is a Gift, not a Reward:** Don't wait for your team to prove they can handle the pressure before you trust them. Give the trust first; it is the foundation that allows them to perform.
- ◆ **The Pressure Paradox:** When people are stressed, their "peripheral vision" for problem-solving narrows. Adding more pressure makes them less creative. Calm support restores their ability to think clearly.

In the book **The Five Dysfunctions of a Team**, Patrick Lencioni identifies that trust is the foundation of a high-performing team. He writes: *"If you could get all the people in an organization rowing in the same direction, you could dominate any industry, in any market, against any competition, at any time."*

In stressful moments, teams need a **Sponsor** – someone who trusts their capability and provides the right support at the right time.

Key Insights for Staff

- ◆ **The Power of Transparency:** When you are in a crunch, tell your leader what specifically is blocking you. A "Sponsor" can't remove an obstacle they can't see.
- ◆ **Own Your Motivation:** Aligning your personal goals with the team's targets makes the high-pressure cycle feel like a rewarding challenge rather than an exhausting chore.

Reflection for today

What is one obstacle you can remove for your team (or your colleague) right now?



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WHY

STRONG TEAMS

NORMALIZE SLOWER DAYS



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Many workplaces unintentionally send the message that productivity must be constant. In this environment, packed calendars, instant replies, and visible busyness often become unofficial signs of good performance. But real productivity does not work that way. People don't operate at the same speed every day. Energy, focus, hormonal cycles and creativity naturally rise and fall during the week and across longer work cycles. Strong teams understand this and make room for slower days instead of trying to eliminate them.

When teams treat slower days as a problem, employees often feel pressure to hide them. They may stay online longer than necessary, schedule unnecessary meetings, or keep themselves looking busy even when their energy is low. This "appearance of productivity" might look good on the surface, but it increases stress and gradually weakens trust within the team.

Teams that openly acknowledge slower periods create a healthier environment. When people know that occasional dips in output are normal, they feel more comfortable being honest about their capacity. Instead of pretending to be busy, they can use less energy time productively updating documentation, organizing priorities, mundane tasks, or working on tasks that require reflection rather than speed.

Accepting slower days does not mean lowering expectations. In fact, it supports stronger long-term performance. When employees feel trusted during quieter periods, they experience less pressure, stay more engaged, and are better able to deliver high-quality results when their energy is at its peak.

For leaders, the goal is not to control productivity every single day. The goal is

to build a team environment where changing energy levels are expected and managed in practical, constructive ways.

Strong teams focus on sustainable performance, not constant motion.

MANAGER'S PLAYBOOK

**01**

SET THE EXPECTATION EARLY

Let your team know that productivity naturally fluctuates. During team meetings, reinforce that not every day will be a peak performance day.

02

REPLACE "BUSY SIGNALS" WITH CLEAR PRIORITIES

Instead of measuring productivity by visible activity, define the 2-3 outcomes that matter most each week. This keeps the team focused even when energy varies.

03

GIVE SLOWER DAYS A PURPOSE

Encourage team members to use lower-energy periods for tasks such as documentation, learning, planning, or clearing small administrative work.

04

WATCH FOR ANXIETY SIGNALS

Let your team know that productivity naturally fluctuates. During team meetings, reinforce that not every day will be a peak performance day.

05

MODEL BALANCED PRODUCTIVITY

Leaders set the tone. When managers openly acknowledge needing time for thinking, planning, or recovery, it signals that sustainable productivity is valued.



Strong teams are not productive every hour of every day. They succeed because they understand the rhythm of work and create an environment where people can contribute without feeling pressured to perform constantly.



What Data Tells Us About Rest, Errors, and Attrition

Across APAC's always-on work culture, recovery is often overlooked. We tend to normalize long hours, cross-time-zone demands, and digital presenteeism. However, the data shows a clear trade-off: **reduced recovery leads directly to higher errors, safety risks, and attrition.**

Sleep is the body's primary recovery mechanism, and its absence has immediate cognitive consequences. Even moderate sleep deprivation reduces attention, slows reaction time, and impairs decision-making (Pilcher et al., 2020)¹. This translates into measurable business impact – research shows that after sleep loss, performance quality can drop significantly, with error rates rising sharply (Fucci et al., 2018)².

The implications extend beyond productivity into safety. Fatigue is a well-established contributor to workplace incidents: sleep-deprived employees are significantly more likely to be involved in accidents, and a meaningful share of workplace injuries is linked to sleep issues (Workplace Health Resource Center, 2018)³. In sectors critical to manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, IT, this elevates operational and regulatory risk.

Less visible, but equally important, is **leadership fatigue**. Sleep loss affects emotional regulation and judgment, increasing the likelihood of reactive decision-making and poor communication (Pilcher, et al., 2020)¹. This creates a multiplier effect: fatigued leaders unintentionally normalize overwork, embedding burnout into team norms.

Organizations often track absenteeism, but the larger cost lies in presenteeism – employees working while cognitively impaired. Fatigue-driven presenteeism reduces output quality, increases

rework, and contributes to disengagement (Workplace Health Resource Center, 2018). Over time, chronic lack of recovery leads to emotional exhaustion, making attrition a predictable outcome rather than a surprise.

The core issue is structural. Recovery is still treated as an individual responsibility, when in reality, it is shaped by how work is designed. For organizations competing globally, this is a critical blind spot.



The Cost of SKIPPING RECOVERY





Intervention Priorities for Organizations

To address fatigue systematically, leading organizations are shifting toward recovery-centric design:

01

Embed fatigue as a measurable risk

Track work hours, meeting load, and after-hours activity. Use these as leading indicators for errors and burnout.

Protect recovery windows

Introduce meeting-free blocks and enforce downtime across time zones to reduce continuous cognitive load. If the employee exceeds the number of working hours, issue a warning along with wellness interventions.

02

03

Redesign leadership norms

Encourage leaders to model sustainable behaviours - avoiding late night communication and signalling boundaries

Integrate sleep into wellbeing programs

Move beyond generic wellness to include sleep education, fatigue awareness, recovery tracking and using EAP services to cope with transitions, stress & other related issues that can be the cause of sleep deprivation.

04

05

Address workload, not just resilience

Focus on realistic deadlines, resource allocation, and workflow efficiency rather than expecting employees to "cope better."

3M's (Micro, Messo & Macro Breaks) - Employees should focus on micro (10 minute) & meso (1 to 2 hours) breaks through the day and week especially when workload increases & deadlines are around the corner. Macro-breaks (half or full day) can be taken after projects are completed, during downtime or even before taking on a promotion.

The evidence is consistent: fatigue increases errors, weakens decision-making, and accelerates attrition. Reframing recovery as a ****business-critical input - not a personal choice**** is essential for sustainable performance in all organizations.



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