Living Our Values, 'The Way We're Working Isn't Working' – Tony Schwartz, 2010

Summary

Tony Schwartz argues that we bring our best energy to work and life when four core needs are met: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. The spiritual need is about **significance** – knowing what we stand for and living by it. Our values act as an internal compass: they steady us when the pressure is on, help us make the right call when an easier route is tempting, and give us a source of identity and strength that no one can take away.

Research consistently shows that people whose motivation comes from within – who are clear on what matters to them and why – are more energised, more engaged, more persistent and, in the end, higher performing.

"He who has a 'Why' to live for can bear almost any 'How'." – Friedrich Nietzsche, quoted by Schwartz

The question at the heart of this resource

"Who are you, and what do you really want?"

What do you stand for most deeply, and how closely does the way you live match it?

How to use this resource

1. **Activity One – Your best self and your lower self** (20–30 minutes). Use a simple four-box grid to surface the values you live by when you're at your best, and their opposites.
2. **Activity Two – Where your energy really goes** (15 minutes). Score how much each area of life matters to you against how much energy you actually give it, and spot the gaps.
3. **Reflect** on what the gaps are telling you, and what you'd like to change.
4. **Background** – the final pages set out Schwartz's four energy needs as a 2 × 2 matrix, so you can see where this values work sits in the bigger picture.

You'll need: a pen, this worksheet, some quiet time – and, if you like, a person who knows you well and whose judgement you trust. It's often hard to see our own shortcomings, and just as hard to give ourselves credit.

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Activity One: Your best self and your lower self

Purpose and significance aren't handed to us – we have to tap into them. One way in is to think about your most admirable qualities: the ones that make you feel best about yourself and that nourish others.

Follow the numbers

1. Recall at least **two occasions** when you acted in a way that made you feel deeply good about yourself. Write down what you did in the **top-right** box.
2. Ask: *what values was I serving?* Write them in the **bottom-right** box.
3. Now recall times you behaved in ways that **didn't** make you feel good about yourself. Note them in the **top-left** box.
4. For each of those, ask: *how would I have behaved if I'd been at my best?* Add those behaviours to the **top-right** box.
5. What values do those better behaviours reflect? Add them to the **bottom-right** box.
6. Finally, write the **opposite** of each value in the **bottom-left** box – for example, generous → stingy, considerate → greedy, forgiving → judgemental.

	NOT AT MY BEST –	AT MY BEST +
BEHAVIOURS	**Behaviours that didn't make you feel good about yourself** 3	**Behaviours that made you feel deeply good about yourself** 1 · 4
VALUES	**The opposites of those values** 6	**The values you were serving** 2 · 5

Which is the real you?

Both. Once the grid is full you'll have two pictures of yourself: qualities you'd rather avoid, and the admirable qualities that reflect what you value most. Our highest and lowest selves live side by side, and we move along the spectrum between them depending on circumstances. Accepting that is the first step – when we can recognise our lower self, we can choose to say yes or no to it.

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Activity One: Worksheet

Use the numbered steps on the previous page. Write freely – short phrases are fine.

	NOT AT MY BEST –	AT MY BEST +
BEHAVIOURS	**Behaviours that didn't make you feel good about yourself**	**Behaviours that made you feel deeply good about yourself**
VALUES	**The opposites of those values**	**The values you were serving**

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Activity Two: Where your energy really goes

This is a quick audit of the gap between what you value and the life you're actually living. It isn't a forced ranking – give each area as high or as low a score as feels true.

1. **Column 1 – How important?** Working from top to bottom, rate how important each area is in your life, from 1 (low) to 10 (high).
2. **Column 2 – Energy invested.** Using the same scale, rate how much energy you actually give each area.
3. **Column 3 – The gap.** Subtract column 1 from column 2 and write down the answer. A minus number shows where an area matters more than the energy you're giving it.

Area of life	1 How important?	2 Energy invested	3 Gap (2 – 1)
Work / career			
Financial success			
Children			
Family			
Friends			
Creativity / self-expression			
Enjoyment / happiness			
Learning / growth			
Service to others			
Other: _____			

Reading your scores: look first at your largest minus numbers. Then notice any big plus numbers too – areas taking far more energy than their importance warrants are often where the missing energy has gone.

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Reflect: Closing the gap

It's in the crucible of high demand that we're challenged to turn our best intentions into our best behaviours. Take your time with these questions – on your own, or with your coach.

1 **Where is the biggest disconnect between what you value and the life you're living?**

2 **Often the gap is simply neglect – doing nothing at all, or less than you believe you should. If that's true for you, what's the story you've been telling yourself that has made the gap acceptable until now?**

3 **What is the gap costing you – and the people in your life?**

4 **Are you OK with the trade-offs you're making, consciously or unconsciously?**

5 **Looking back at your core values from Activity One, what is one small, concrete change you could make this week to close the gap?**

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Background: The four energy needs

Schwartz's central idea is that we're most engaged and productive when four core needs are met. Each one can be pictured as its own 2 × 2: where you sit in each grid shapes how much energy you have, how it feels, where it's focused and what it's in service of. The right-hand column of each grid is where we want to spend more of our time.

Mental

Self-expression · the focus of our energy

	DISTRACTED	ABSORBED
NARROW	**Reactive Zone** Shallow, inefficient, impulsive, short-sighted, intermittent	**Tactical Zone** Logical, analytical, task-oriented, precise, methodical
WIDE	**Scattered Zone** Spacey, indiscriminate, diffuse, overwhelmed	**Big Picture Zone** Intuitive, open-ended, imaginative, playful, metaphorical

Physical

Sustainability · the quantity of our energy

	UNHEALTHY	HEALTHY
ACTIVE	**Stimulate** Quick lifts from caffeine, sugar and other stimulants	**Energise** Exercise, yoga, play, laughter, eating lean protein
PASSIVE	**Numb** Alcohol, sleeping pills, eating to soothe or switch off	**Renew** Regular breaks, meditation, rest, time away on holiday

Emotional

Security · the quality of our energy

	NEGATIVE	POSITIVE
HIGH ENERGY	**Survival Zone** Impatient, irritable, frustrated, angry, fearful, defensive, anxious, worried	**Performance Zone** Calm, optimistic, challenged, engaged, invigorated
LOW ENERGY	**Burnout Zone** Exhausted, empty, depressed, sad	**Renewal Zone** Carefree, peaceful, relieved, receptive

Spiritual

Significance · the purpose of our energy

	NOT AT MY BEST	AT MY BEST
BEHAVIOURS	**Lower self** Times you acted in ways that didn't make you feel good about yourself	**Best self** Times you acted in ways that made you feel deeply good about yourself
VALUES	**Opposite values** The reverse of the values you serve at your best	**Core values** The values you were serving when you were at your best

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Reading the matrix

A short guide to each need, with a question to take into your next coaching conversation.

Physical – Sustainability

How we fuel and refuel the body. Under pressure, it's easy to spike our energy with stimulants and then numb ourselves to come down. The healthier pattern is to **energise** intentionally and **renew** regularly – rhythm, not relentlessness.

Ask yourself: *Where do you reach for a quick lift? What helps you properly recover?*

Emotional – Security

How we feel shapes how we perform. High negative energy puts us in the **Survival Zone**, and staying there too long tips us into **Burnout**. The aim is to spend more time **performing** – and to build in proper **renewal** so we can keep going.

Ask yourself: *Which zone do you spend most of your week in? What tips you into survival?*

Mental – Self-expression

Where we put our attention. Distracted attention leaves us **reactive** or **scattered**. Absorbed attention lets us move between narrow, **tactical** focus and wide, **big picture** thinking – both are needed, at the right moments.

Ask yourself: *When do you do your best focused work? When do you make room for big-picture thinking?*

Spiritual – Significance

Why our energy matters. This is the quadrant you explored in **Activity One**: the behaviours and values of your best self, and their shadow. Living by our values gives us direction, conviction and the fuel to stay the course through setbacks.

Ask yourself: *Which of your core values most needs your attention right now?*

Source: Tony Schwartz, with Jean Gomes and Catherine McCarthy, *The Way We're Working Isn't Working* (Free Press, 2010). Adapted by Will James, With.

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