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Relationship With Yourself

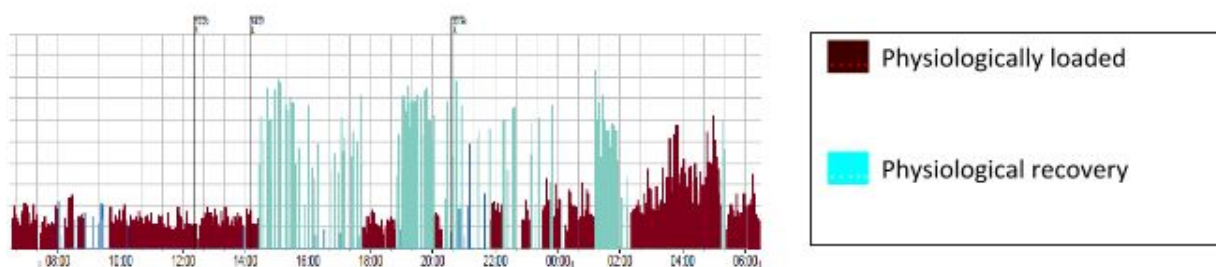
'Your vision will become clear when you look into your heart'

Carl Jung

Many years ago, I used the physiological monitor with a nurse who specialised in cancer care. She was feeling tired and low on energy and wanted to understand how she was dealing with the demands of work, life away from it and evaluate how effectively she was recovering.

On one of the days, she had to deliver a clinic where patients would be updated on their treatment, their progress, and their prognosis. This is a tough day at the office; one that we both thought would be high on stress.

The graph below shows the physiological status of the autonomic nervous system on the day of the clinic:



The data shows that the clinic, which took place in the afternoon, was not draining the nurse at all – in fact, it could be said that the opposite was true and that it was energizing her. However, it also shows poor quality sleep, and the ensuing conversation opened my eyes up to the importance of looking at things with ‘eyes wide open’.

Both the nurse and I were surprised to see the physiological response whilst delivering tough messages to patients. However, the more I measure people if they are doing something that is closely aligned to their values and competencies, in an environment where they are happy and comfortable, and with colleagues that they trust, a restorative physiological effect is often seen.

The second gem I took away from this reading came from a discussion we had about sleep – it went something like this:

Nurse: My sleep is not very good is it

Me: Well I have certainly seen better.

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Nurse: Why do you think that is?

Me: It could be that the challenges from the clinic are having an impact? Maybe there is a latent affect and you are struggling to detach from work?

Nurse (after some thought): I am not sure that is the case. I have done that clinic for many years and feel that I am good at separating myself away from it.

Me: What did you do in the evening when you got home?

Nurse: I would have been doing some reading and a bit of writing.

Me: Tell me more about that

Nurse: I've got to get my Ph.D submitted in a few weeks time, so I am frantically working on that. Oh, and yes, I remember the date now, I was travelling to China the next day, so I was sorting things out for this trip too.

This conversation taught me a couple of invaluable lessons. Firstly, don't jump to the obvious, both of us had thought the clinic would have been the toughest part of the day, but from a physiological point of view it was not.

Having seen thousands of days of data it is so often the submaximal stressors, the one's that nag away underneath the surface, that can create significant challenge. The big stuff you are likely to see, process, and move on from; it is often the smaller challenges, that can slip through your conscience, that end up being the catalyst for fatigue.

So, evaluating life with depth and breadth is required if you want to seek out the annoyances as well as the catastrophes. How often do you ask yourself the following three questions?

- How am I looking after myself physically and mentally?
- How am I looking after what is important to me?
- What are the challenges that are getting under my skin at the moment?

The second lesson learnt, related to the physiological response seen when someone was doing something that was aligned with personal values and mission. Many companies have a mission statement to describe their intent and modus operandi, but how many individuals can, in the same way, truly articulate what is important to them? Coming up with your version is a worthwhile exercise and is a great way of reminding yourself what really makes you tick.