



Episode 40: The Surprising Secret to Being More Productive

Welcome to In the Right Direction podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host, Deb Elbaum, and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness, one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi everyone, it's Deb. Tell me – how is your productivity these days? Are you getting all the things done that you want to do? If you are, that's wonderful. And if you're not, you're in good company. Most of my clients complain that they have more tasks than hours in the day. They want to feel more productive.

I'm guessing that you'd like the same. After all, you have teams to run, products to launch, and new jobs to find. There are only 24 hours in a day, and you want to use your time wisely. You want to be efficient using your valuable time to solve problems, plan meetings, and put out those metaphorical fires.

All of these things require your brain's energy and focus. Your brain is juggling so much – it holds all of your past experiences, it generates new ideas, and it keeps track of daily activities and long-term goals for both you and those you take care of.

If you want to maximize your brain's focus and productivity, there are things you can do to help it. You can help your brain help you.

The way to do this might surprise you. If you want your brain to be productive and tackle all the things on your plate with more efficiency and focus, here's the secret:

Take care of your body. Make sure your body is rested, nourished, exercised, relaxed, and happy.

Our body and brain are connected, and when we take care of our body, what we're really doing is taking care of our brain. And when we take care of our brain, we can think, lead, and communicate more effectively. If you want to be more productive, start with self-care and being aware of and intentional around your body budget.

You can think of your body budget as the energies and processes of your body that your brain is constantly managing all the time in order to keep you alive. When you keep your body budget topped off, your brain is happy.

Did you know that your brain's primary function is to keep you alive and breathing? Every moment of every day, your brain is managing your body's processes to pump blood through your arteries, expand your lungs to absorb oxygen, and digest food and eliminate waste. All of these processes require our brain's attention.

When our body budget is full, like when the gas tank of your car is full, you run smoothly and can go for hours. But what happens when the gas tank in your car is empty? You sputter and come to a grinding halt. The same thing happens when your body budget dips too low.

When our body budget is drained due to exhaustion, hunger, fatigue, and discomfort, it's hard to think clearly. It's hard to problem solve and make decisions. Our productivity suffers.

Here's an example from one of my clients.

A healthcare leader reached out because she felt burned out. Her job had many demands on her time, and she felt like she wasn't getting anything done. Journals that she needed to read were piling up. Decisions that she needed to make kept being put off. Things that used to feel purposeful felt draining.

We talked about her life, and she shared that in recent months, her self-care had plummeted. In particular, she had gotten into a habit of staying up too late, which then contributed to feeling exhausted the next day, and then when she wasn't productive, she'd stay up late again hoping to get work done, and the cycle continued.

Our coaching plan started with the basics of her self-care. We created a plan to help her go to sleep early, and she agreed to try this for 2 weeks. Two weeks later, we met again. She seemed completely different. She was happy, rested, and her outlook on her work and life had transformed. She was excited again about work, and she felt like her tasks were much more manageable.

Taking care of our body is taking care of our brain, which helps us our thinking, decision-making, and communicating. This was true for my client, and it's true for all of us.

Now, most of you – if not all of you – know this intuitively. You know that when you exercise regularly and eat well, you have more energy and focus. And yet what happens? When we get really busy, the first thing to go is our self-care. We stay up too late. We work through lunch. We push our bodies too hard. And our thinking and wellbeing pay the price. We lose focus and productivity.

Here's another example from a leader of a small company. He felt like he had way too much to do and not enough time. He told me that he didn't know where to start and or how to prioritize.

He also told me that the times in his life that felt most productive were when he started his morning with a meditation. When he took 15 minutes every morning to sit quietly and meditate, he felt calmer and more focused. His days went more smoothly and he was able to get much more accomplished.

Self-care equals brain care. Taking care of our body is not a nice to have, it's a need to have.

Forcing our brains to stay on task all the time paradoxically undermines our productivity. Our brain needs a break and downtime. It needs to be rested and nourished with oxygen and nutrients. Taking time for self-care with eating, hydrating, walking, moving, laughing, and relaxing will ultimately help you be a better leader and colleague.

It's the best advice we all know and forget to follow. Make your body a priority, and your brain will thank you.

Let's bring this to you. In the next few weeks, here are 2 suggestions for you to enhance your brain care. One involves you, and one involves others.

For yourself, choose one aspect of self-care that needs attention in your life right now, and then commit to focusing on that for the next week. For example, you could choose to go to bed early, take more walks during the day, or keep a glass of water on your desk to sip throughout the workday. See what you notice about how you think and feel during the day when you prioritize your self-care.

My second invitation is to bring this concept to those you live and work with. Because we all have bodies and we all have times when our body budget gets depleted.

I invite you to role model self-care for others. We often think we're the only ones who need to take care of our bodies, and that's just not true. Everyone has a body budget that can be negatively affected by stress, worries, illness, or layoffs. When the body budgets on your team or organization run low, results suffer.

If you want focus and engagement, talk about the importance of self-care. Ask your colleagues and team how they take care of their bodies and brain. Share with them the idea that self-care is really brain care.

I invite you to incorporate more brain care practices into the work day. Encourage walking meetings. Invite everyone to start team meetings with a stretch and drink of water. Pause every so often for a vision break so people can look away from their computer to give their eyes a rest.

Talking about the idea of a body budget might feel uncomfortable at first, and the more you normalize talking about self-care as brain care, the more everyone will benefit. When the body budgets of the people in your household or on your team are full, people will be happier, more focused, and more productive.

Thank you so much for listening and being part of my community. If you found today's episode interesting and want to create practices to boost your body budget and productivity, please reach out. Email me at deb@debelbaum or schedule a complimentary consult through my website: debelbaum.com. I look forward to it. I'm here to help you create your best self at home and at work, so that you're confident you're moving in the right direction for you.

Until next time!