

A Great Day at the Office

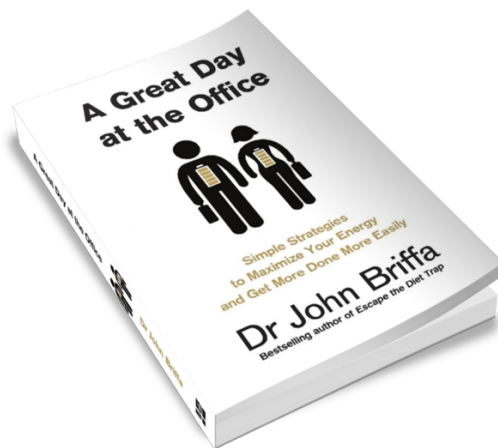
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by

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Introduction:

Can you sometimes find yourself 'putting in the hours' at work, only to find you have little to show for it at the end of the day? Do you feel that while you know what you need to do and how to do it, you 'fail to execute' much more often than you would like? Do you sometimes get the sense that the bulk of your energies and efforts are going into your career, and that there's little left over for your loved ones and interests outside work?



If any of these scenarios resonate with you, then you are not alone: they are just the sort of cries I've heard time and again from the individuals

I have worked with in the corporate arena over more than 20 years. But, it needn't be this way: workplace issues such as reduced vitality, faltering focus and subpar productivity are usually rooted in issues that are not only *identifiable*, but easily *solved* with the relevant knowledge, understanding and practical know-how.

Drawing on cutting-edge but little-known research, as well as the real-world experience of thousands of business professionals, *A Great Day at the Office* equips you with the knowledge required to run your body and brain at maximum capacity. This book explores the fundamental factors that determine our energy, mental functioning and mood, and how to put them together in a way that will take your vitality, performance and sustainability to new heights.

This book offers key insights in wide-ranging factors including diet, physical activity, light exposure, breathing, psychology, and sleep. Put even a fraction of the strategies offered here into practice, and you will be rewarded with optimised energy and vitality, and an ability to get more done more easily.

Solving the Energy Crisis

While most of us acknowledge that our professional lives can be rewarding on many levels, we'll may also recognise that they usually come with considerable challenges, too. Long working hours and the stresses and strains of a demanding and competitive environment can drain our physical and mental resources. This, in turn, can take a toll on our wellbeing and performance. My experience with organisations around the world tells me that eroded energy, faltering performance and problems with sustainability are common and pervasive issues throughout all business sectors.

The vast majority of the individuals that I have worked with in seminars and workshops clearly have the skillset and knowledge necessary to do their job very well. Some are demons at satisfying the most demanding of clients and have supreme technical knowledge.

They may be masters in the principles of effective leadership or know ninja tactics for handling the daily onslaught of email. However, whatever someone's knowledge, skills and experience, they know that none of this counts for much when they find themselves short of energy and struggling for inspiration.

The fact is, without abundant and sustained energy, theory tends not to translate at all well into practice, and our talents can easily end up being squandered. Plus, when energy runs low, *more* effort is used to get *less* done (and things usually get done *less well*, too).

Conversely, in an energised and vital state we are able to get more done more easily, and our work will generally be of superior quality. Combined with professional and business skills, having abundant mental and physical energy is the key to success.

The processes in the body that drive energy production are highly dynamic and dependent on several factors. In a way, the human body is no different to a car: for us to get from A to B a few basics need to be in place, such as fuel in the tank (and the *right type* of fuel at that), water in the cooling system, oil in the engine, and for the tyres to be properly pumped up. If these fundamentals are not satisfied, then performance is impaired. This book is essentially a manual for your body, explaining its inner workings and what is required for you to perform at your peak.

A Great Day at the Office offers a wide range of information and advice grouped into seven key areas:

- diet and nutrition
- sleep
- light exposure
- activity and exercise
- music and sound
- breathing
- psychology

Each area will be explored from a scientific perspective, enabling you to gain valuable insights into the impact specific behaviours have on how you feel and function, as well as your long-term health and sustainability. In each section, practical guidance is given on the simple and sustainable changes that make a real difference.

But, many of us are only too aware that we can sometimes fail to do things we know are good for us, and perhaps persist with habits that hold us back. To this end, the final chapter provides practical tips on how to get healthy habits to stick, as well as unhealthy ones out of our system - with ease.

Not every factor this book covers will require action on your part, as my experience tells me that almost everyone is getting *some* (possibly many) things right. However, hardly anyone has no room for improvement, so there's a good chance that within the pages of this book you will find quite a few nuggets that will make a tangible difference to your ability to achieve your goals, from tasks on your 'to-do' list, to major life ambitions.

Tried and Tested

The information contained in these pages is based on published (but often *unpublicised*) research. But more than this, it's also informed by the collective experiences of literally thousands of people. My work as a doctor, speaker and facilitator has brought me into contact with individuals with diverse wellness and performance issues including fatigue,

disturbed sleep, low mood, lack of focus, impaired concentration and burnout. Working with these individuals over time has given me the opportunity to discover what actually works to resolve these challenges and have people brimming with vitality once more.

Much of the information and advice offered in this book is founded in science and published research. As a doctor, I am obviously interested in the underpinnings of the approaches I discuss here, and you may be too. But, as I often tell my clients in talks and workshops, the gaining of this knowledge is not merely an academic exercise: the focus is always on having individuals leave with practical, sustainable strategies that are *effective* for improving their condition. Rest assured, the concepts and methods presented here have been tried and tested with countless individuals and have been found to give consistent and predictable results in the real world.

Taking Charge

Anyone who owns a smartphone will know the importance of maintaining charge in its battery for it to be useful to them. Periodic plugging of these devices into the mains is just one of those things we have to do if we want to take advantage of all the functionality they have to offer. The human body is a bit like this, too: We can use it to get stuff done, but we have to put something back. If we drain our 'charge' more than replenish it, we can end up suffering from periods of 'low battery power' that can put a major brake on our productivity. If severe and protracted enough, this situation can ultimately lead people into a state known as 'burnout'.

It's fine to put time and effort into work, even in the long term, just as long as we are regularly doing things that, overall, 'recharge our batteries' and keep them from running flat. In many respects, this is what *A Great Day at the Office* is about.

'Battery charging' can happen in a number of ways, including making the right food choices and being physically active. However, it can also take place via 'activities' that require little or no effort at all. Examples explored within the pages of this book include getting better sleep, napping, increasing sun exposure, listening to particular types of music, and specific breathing techniques. Other examples of things that might help the 'recharging' process include an evening spent at the cinema or theatre, enjoying time with loved ones and friends, getting a massage, or even indulging in a nice, long soak in the bath.

Some people, though, can view these sorts of activities as distractions from work, and therefore in their minds classify them as 'unproductive' time. However, another way to look at them is as opportunities to 'plug ourselves into the mains', to ensure we are maximally effective in whatever time we apportion to work. In this way, taking time 'recharge' through relaxation and recuperation may not now seem 'unproductive', but *essential* to our long-term success.

I am not suggesting for one moment that we should never work in the evenings, at weekends or on holiday (I do all of these things on a semi-regular basis, by the way). The key is to be able to live and work in a way that ensures our energy and effectiveness rarely falter, if at all, and that our personal sustainability is assured too.

Maintaining charge in the battery can be particularly important for those whose work is transactional or seasonal in nature, such as auditors or those involved in business recovery or mergers and acquisitions. Going into a busy phase already somewhat depleted is 'risky business', to be honest. 'Doing the right thing' in quieter times can provide a store of power that can be drawn on when the pressure is on and the going gets tough.

Working Wonders

Here's a list of the typical benefits to be had by applying the strategies contained in *A Great Day at the Office*:

- enhanced energy and vitality
- increased mental focus, concentration and decision-making ability
- improved resourcefulness and creativity
- brighter mood and reduced tendency to anxiety, low mood or depression
- better sleep and heightened energy on waking
- the ability to function effectively throughout the day with no mid-afternoon slump
- improved resilience and the ability to maintain high performance, even when the going gets tough
- weight loss without hunger or the need for extensive exercise
- resolution of persistent, troublesome health problems including headaches and digestive issues

Many of these benefits have a direct impact on performance at work, and will significantly enhance your ability to generate high-quality output and 'get the job done' – *consistently*. However, improvements here will likely enrich your professional *relationships* too, from which myriad spin-off benefits can be yours...

It's a plain fact of life that when we are energised and mentally alert, we are able to respond to people with more enthusiasm, resourcefulness and vigour. This, in turn, leads people to respond better to *us*. If you act on the advice here, do not be too surprised if you end up being held in higher esteem by your colleagues, clients or customers. This can, of course, translate into expanding opportunities and speedier career progression.

And the benefits do not stop when you leave the workplace, either. Typically, individuals will reap the dividends of brighter mood and enhanced energy in their *personal* relationships, too. It's unlikely that anyone close to you will complain about your transformation into a better-balanced and altogether happier person.

Occupational Hazards

I have worked with a wide range of organisations around the world and interacted with individuals in varied settings and all levels of seniority - from graduate trainees to CEOs and successful entrepreneurs. Perhaps the most common fundamental issue that my clients express to me is that their performance is, at times, considerably lower than what they would like and feel they are capable of. Many people have a sense that they could do more and be more effective - they're just not sure *how*.

For some people, though, the issues are more acute. They may feel devitalised and swamped with work. A significant minority, no matter how hard they try, feel perpetually 'off the pace' in terms of the things they need to do. Work can somehow bleed (or haemorrhage) into personal time, including the evenings, weekends and holidays. All the while, this quite relentless nature of work can leave individuals feeling short on both time and energy.

Ultimately, the quality and quantity of their output tends to suffer, which usually adds to the stress and only compounds the problem. Now blighted by fatigue, some people can struggle to stay afloat and conclude the way they live and work is completely unsustainable. Ultimately, some decide it's all too much for them and time to go. For others, their organisation makes that decision for them. I've seen the careers of many very talented and experienced professionals end unnecessarily prematurely in this way.

The cost here is not purely personal, of course. When individuals underperform, this has impact on the *business* too. 'Going off sick' is a potential consequence here, but this is the mere tip of the iceberg. My experience tells me that people absenteeism is a relatively confined problem, especially at senior levels within an organisation. Much more of an issue, though, can be 'presenteeism' – essentially, people enduring long working days consumed with 'busyness', but at the same time simply not getting the results they, and maybe others, expect.

This sort of underperformance saps an organisation's productivity, which inevitably knocks on to revenues and profitability. This can eat into the bottom line, as will the increased costs relating to staff turnover: Many organisations have considerable people 'churn', and substantial sums can be spent recruiting and training replacements. Healthcare costs associated with wellness issues can be a significant financial drain, too.

All organisations need to justify the resources they put into learning and development. It's clear, though, that whatever is spent on making tangible improvements to the wellness, effectiveness and sustainability of its people pales into insignificance compared to the cost of *not* making this investment.

Opportunities Knocked

Another major unseen cost of impaired performance and 'unwellness' relates to *missed opportunities*. When vitality is depleted, fewer calls are made and emails sent, and less creative thinking and planning may go into, say, product development or service improvement. The acquisition and retention of clients and customers can be similarly neglected.

If you pitch for business, not being fully on top of your game or appearing 'spent' will do little to inspire confidence in your prospective customers. The inability to be mentally agile and spontaneous in your thinking won't help matters, either. The winning or losing of work can sometimes come down to very small margins, and if a client does not have complete confidence in those doing the selling, it can cost you (and your business) dearly.

Also, if you are in a position of some seniority, then it's inevitable that some will look to you as a role model. If you appear 'bent out of shape' to your junior colleagues, what sort of message might they take from that? I've worked with human resource professionals who tell me they have serious sustainability issues in their organisation because increasing numbers of staff look at the sort of lives senior colleagues lead and decide it's just not for them.

Of course, in the age of the internet, word is out about the organisations that are best avoided if one wants to enjoy a rewarding career *and* decent quality of life. If an organisation

gains a reputation of driving its people ever harder, without giving much back, this can make recruiting top talent that more challenging (and costly).

Taking Care of Business

Of course, the reverse is also true, and I have worked with organisations that use the fact that they provide wellness and performance programmes for its people as a major selling point in the recruiting process. Some organisations even ‘advertise’ these initiatives to their *clients*. After all, the fact that an organisation takes steps to support its people in meaningful ways only helps to convince clients that this is a company with whom they should do business.

Occasionally, some will go a step further and invite existing or prospective clients onto wellness programmes they sponsor. This endeavour provides value and meaning to people in a way that eclipses traditional corporate hospitality and the finest of dining.

One such delegate was the CEO of an international public company, who came as the guest of one of my corporate clients. The usual stresses and strains of running a sprawling, shareholder-owned company, coupled with an insane travel schedule, had led to some fatigue and wellbeing issues, as well as an ever-expanding waistline.

Inspired by what he learned on the programme, he changed some behaviours and found his lost energy was quickly restored. As an added bonus, he shed over 35 lbs in weight with without any additional exercise or cutting back at all on business lunches or dinners. In a few short months, his diminishing proportions had required him to twice rebuy his wardrobe. While costly, he did not begrudge a penny of this additional expense. So changed was he by the experience that he sponsored a wellness programme for his own executive board.

This particular CEO’s experience is not my any means extraordinary, either – it’s *typical*. Again, all that is usually required to make a tangible difference to how someone’s wellbeing and how they feel and function is some small but targeted changes in key areas. Many of the strategies in this book are simple and easy-to-apply, yet they pack considerable punch.

It was actually some significant personal benefits gained from some simple self-applied strategies that inspired me to move shift my focus from conventional medicine to approaches that can transform wellbeing and health.

All Change

When I was a young hospital doctor, I had a pressing problem with fatigue. Some sleep deprivation no doubt contributed to this, but even when I snoozed my sleep debt away I felt I lacked the zip someone in his mid-20s should have. In particular, I would find my energy levels were highly variable, and I was prone to catastrophic ‘energy crises’ at certain times. A major danger time for me was the mid-to-late afternoon: Often at around 4.00 pm, I would feel the life drain out of me. Sometimes, I would even struggle to stay awake.

It’s perhaps easy to imagine that these symptoms were the inevitable consequence of the often-hecktic schedule I worked back then. But, in truth, my unreliable energy and afternoon slumps started many years before I ever set foot on a hospital ward in a professional capacity. When I look back, I remember having frequent issues with fatigue and lethargy in my teens.

When I was at medical school, for instance, I would find myself regularly ‘zoning out’ during lectures or nodding off in front of the telly on a Sunday afternoon. However, it was when I

started work as a doctor that my deflating energy became much more evident and inconvenient.

Seeing a long list of people in an outpatients' clinic can be challenging at the best of times, but it was made infinitely harder when my overriding desire was to lie down on the examination couch in the corner of the room and go to sleep. Even in the operating theatre, I remember occasionally having to press hard with the heel of one foot on the toes of the other just to spark some life into my wilting body.

One morning, I was doing the necessary checks on an elderly man who was due to have a minor operation later that day. I was struck by the fact that he had an energy and vitality considerably greater than my own, despite being almost 50 years my senior. My curiosity was piqued enough for me to remark: "Whatever you're on, I'd like some of". He responded by telling me that he put a lot of store in eating healthily, as well as regular cycling and keeping up his interests through reading and listening to the radio.

As a junior doctor, I did not feel in need of any more mental stimulation, and lack of activity was not my problem either (I was a keen runner back then), but it did occur that maybe my diet might be a bit of a blind spot. In my 6 years of study at medical school, I recalled not one single lecture on nutrition, and what I knew about this subject would have fitted comfortably on the back of a postage stamp.

Later that evening while out shopping, I found myself drawn to a carousel of books I had spied from outside a health food store. I bought a book on nutrition and read it over the next couple of days. Getting through the book quite quickly was a breeze because what I was reading appeared to make perfect sense to me. I became convinced that although I had previously thought my diet to be perfectly sound, conventional nutritional 'wisdom' had led me off in the wrong direction. I resolved to make some immediate changes here.

And I was very glad I did, because the impact it had on me was profound. My sense of wellbeing improved quickly and steadily to the extent that, within two weeks, I felt I had more energy than ever before in my adult life. However, the benefits did not end there, because just a few days into adopting my new diet, the itchy, red rash under my arms and on my torso that had plagued me on and off for many years disappeared (never to return).

Another happy side effect of my new diet was that the additional weight I'd acquired through 6 years' worth of a pretty rubbish diet (I was a typical student, and no stranger to KFC, kebabs, and Kronenbourg 1664 in those days) was shed in about 6 weeks. This happened, by the way, without hunger or deprivation, nor any increase in my activity levels. If you're wondering what sort of dietary changes could possibly have led to this transformation in my energy, wellbeing and weight, all is revealed in Chapter 1.

So changed was I by all this that I ended up leaving the traditional career path I was on to devote myself to helping people take their health into their own hands using natural self-applied means. In the beginning, I was principally interested in dietary approaches, but quickly my interest expanded into other areas too, including sleep, activity, light exposure and psychology. I witnessed countless individuals liberate themselves from long-term health issues such as fatigue, anxiety and depression, weight issues, joint and muscle pain, skin conditions, digestive discomfort and headaches - and all without recourse to medication or conventional means.

But, I discovered something else too: when individuals took approaches that addressed the underlying nature of their health issues (rather than merely treat their symptoms), not only would these often resolve, but they usually experienced benefits in terms of their energy,

general wellbeing and mental functioning too. Many would report that they felt more mentally and physically alive than they had in years (just like I had).

I began to wonder if there existed people who, although not sick enough to be called truly sick, were not well enough to be called truly *well* either. Might many people be wandering around in a subpar state as a result of lifestyle factors that could be simply rectified?

My curiosity was satisfied when, in 1996, I was asked to facilitate on a wellness programme for a global professional services firm. The delegates were senior members of the organisation, almost all of whom suffered from the sorts of wellbeing and performance issues that I now realise are endemic in the corporate arena. Some simple, sustainable changes in areas such as diet, activity, psychology and sleep reaped significant dividends for them in terms of enhanced vitality and performance. The results from the early programmes were so good that the initiative was rolled out nationally and, subsequently, internationally. The programme became part of the culture of the organisation and continues to run to this day.

Since the mid-1990s, I've been privileged to work with many different organisations in the UK and abroad. While there are certainly things that set businesses apart from each other, I have found the issues that this book addresses are common the world over and in all settings in which I have worked.

Uncommon Knowledge

If you read this book from cover to cover you will find in it many examples of information and advice that run counter to conventional opinion. You'll discover, for instance, evidence that challenges the ideas that starchy carbohydrates are ideal for ensuring sustained energy, that saturated fat causes heart disease, that sunlight causes melanoma, that controlling cholesterol levels is inherently important, and that the key to losing weight is simply to 'eat less and exercise more'.

While some of concepts in this book may come as a surprise or even a shock, I will present the evidence that supports them (the numbers in the text refer to specific scientific studies that are listed at the back of the book). If it's any consolation, every myth I explode in this book I previously believed myself. Only by taking nothing at face value (however seemingly credible the source) and going back to published research have I discovered that much of what is described as conventional 'wisdom' is anything but.

But, how could it be that we have managed to have been so misled about health – something that not just affects our lives, but our livelihoods? How do things so often get stated as *fact*, even though the facts don't stack up at all?

A Great Day at the Office is not political or a polemic, but I do think it is worth bearing in mind that health information and advice can be influenced by economic and commercial concerns. Quite simply, there is often money to be made in *misinformation* (be it deliberate and unwitting). A classic example of this includes low-fat and cholesterol-reducing foods, for which there is not a scrap of evidence that they benefit health (see Chapter 1).

The commercial aspects of health advice can, unfortunately, have another unwanted side-effect: It can keep useful and important information from our attention. Just as some erroneous ideas become popularised because there's money in them, some highly valuable ideas and strategies may not get the attention they deserve because there *isn't*.

For example, you'll see that sunlight exposure, overall, is linked with significant health benefits and relative protection from many conditions including heart disease and several

different forms of cancer. However, these facts are often drowned out by relentless stories about the supposed hazards of sunlight with regard to skin cancer. At the risk of sounding unduly cynical, could the explanation for this disparity be due, at least in part, to the fact that while sunlight is *free*, considerable commercial potential exists in sunlight *protection* (particularly sunscreens)? In Chapter 5, you can find evidence that suggests this is exactly how it is.

Other aspects of health that have limited potential for commercial exploitation and are therefore perhaps similarly neglected include certain breathing techniques, the impact of music on our mental state and performance, walking as an activity, and many of the tips that will help you get sound, restorative sleep. In fact, the great majority of the strategies contained in this book can be yours for little or no cost, but they have tremendous power to transform your health and efficiency.

Make it Easy on Yourself

For some of us, the idea of lifestyle adjustment and ‘being healthy’ conjures up images of restricted eating and exhausting and unsustainable exercise regimes. Relax - the recommendations in this book are not of that nature at all. For example, you will discover approaches in this book that will enable you to be functionally fit and strong with relatively little effort and minimal time investment. You’ll also see how hunger actually jeopardises weight loss, and also makes practically every aspect of life harder to boot.

Not only are the methods here generally easy and sustainable, many are downright *enjoyable*. You will see how some things that you may have hitherto regarded as the height of indulgence and perhaps laziness, like getting an early night, taking a nap, listening to music, or snoozing in the sun, have the capacity to help you be fitter, healthier and more productive.

Sometimes, people imagine that putting even a little time and effort into their work-life balance and wellbeing just cuts into work time and detracts from their productivity. Let me assure you that nothing could be further from the truth. Each of the many strategies in this book is designed to optimise your energy and effectiveness in a way that ensures you are significantly *more* productive than you are right now. What you put in is likely to be returned to you many times over in terms of enhanced output and the satisfaction you derive from your job. The potential ‘return on investment’ of these strategies is enormous.

A Great Day at the Office is about how to incorporate some simple tips, tricks and tools in your life that will enable you to get *more* done *more* quickly, but with *less* effort - and who wouldn’t like that?

How to Use This Book

There’s a lot of information *A Great Day at the Office*, and some parts will be inevitably more relevant to you than others. One way to approach this book, therefore, is to go first to the chapters that pique your interest. The short descriptions of each chapter in the next section are there to help guide you to the parts of the book that you feel you’ll get the most out of.

As you read, you’ll see that many of the areas covered in this book interconnect. For example, what we eat can affect our sleep. Sleep can also be influenced by light exposure, and both of these things can have an impact on our mood. Certain mood states can affect sleep, of course, and lack of sleep can actually drive hunger and food choices. And these are just a few examples.

I've added cross-references throughout the book, so starting in one place may point you to other information that perhaps had no special interest for you to begin with. However, if you have been led somewhere by the text, then the chances you'll find something useful for you there, so I suggest 'going with it'.

Another approach, of course, is just to read the book from cover-to-cover. Even if you feel 'sorted' in a particular area, it would be unusual if you did not gain a tip or two in each chapter that could make all the difference.

Each chapter includes a summary in bullet-point form. These are designed to help you remember key learning points. If you like, you might return to these summaries from time to time so that they may serve as useful reminders.

Do bear in mind, though, that you do not need to do *everything* suggested in this book and get it *all* right to derive major benefits in terms of your energy and effectiveness. I recommend starting with the things that seem most relevant to you and that you feel inspired to act on. You could, if you wish, always add new strategies later.