

Sebastian Kodden

BE A HERO

More enthusiasm for yourself
and your organization

Colophon

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Foreword

Foreword

The path I have taken in my private life and my career has been anything but predictable and standard. From lawyer to board member at an insurance company, from entrepreneur in recruitment services to executive coach. On this path, my motto has always been: "Make choices, live intensely, work hard." This motto has been an ideal constant for me, something to hold on to.

I see a lot of my attitude to life in this book by Bas about HEROes. This attitude—who do you want to be, being aware of that and taking control—determines to a large degree if you experience happiness and engagement in your life and work and achieve results. In this book, Bas explains really well what determines work engagement and whether you're using your given talents to achieve performance.

If you want to know how you can become more engaged in your life and your work, this book is a must-read for you! The book can help you look at yourself and your potential from a different perspective. As an executive coach, I therefore recommend this book to all the people I coach.

The book contains inspiring quotes and practical checklists that will activate your brain and stimulate your motivation. Its contents will automatically lead to valuable conversations about personal leadership and taking control. Only when you know which destination will mean success for you and your organization, will you know what path to take. The way will become clear, you will not take as many detours and you will spend less time going in circles.

Each individual will choose their own valuable elements from the book, but I think it will help anyone who reads it to take the next step in their personal development. To become a person who does more, who is always aware of what and how they want to achieve and who takes responsibility for it. In short, a true HERO!

Petra van Trommel-Obèr LL.M, executive coach

Co-owner and director of: Success Group, executive coaching & consultancy, assessments and mediation Astorium, recruitment & secondment

Preface

Preface

Fifteen years' worth of entrepreneurship: it's done. Over thirty thousand hours of buckling down, of falling and getting back up. From living room to diverse other locations and everything in between. But also of fifteen years of study and research, eventually resulting in a PhD. What once started with the goal of improving my enterprise – after all, there is nothing so practical as a good theory (Lewin, 1951) – ended years later in a position at Nyenrode Business University, where I currently teach ambitious professionals in the field of leadership and personal development.

The question I suddenly asked myself during a break between classes hit me like a keeper who unexpectedly has to deal with a counter goal; what had I really learned during all those years of practice and study and which theory had I experienced as truly important? What was the real essence, why had certain things worked out well and others not at all in my practice? What had I enjoyed? And was the practice consistent with the various theories that I had gained over the years?

In his book *Outliers* (2008), bestselling American author Malcolm Gladwell underwrites the statement of Swedish psychologist Anders Ericsson (1996) that you can only arrive at successful insights after having conducted at least 10,000 hours of practice. In my case, these hours had been completed three times over – both in terms of practical experience and theoretical knowledge; it was high time to take stock.

Gladwell's book and Anders Ericsson's 10,000 hour concept provided a starting point for writing this book and for finding an answer to questions such as: which management theories have proven to be valuable during the past years? Which organization and management aspects actually lead to more work enjoyment, better performance and a higher chance of success? I hope to answer these questions, not only for myself, but for others as well.

In order to improve yourself, you must first have a vision and learn from mistakes made in the past, to subsequently continue your own development, as former hockey coach Tom van 't Hek once told me. To continue in line with Ericsson and Gladwell: 'Inspiration is great, but transpiration is better.' You will often encounter these key terms in this book: developing vision, determining your goal – the inspiration – but also booking the necessary hours – the transpiration.

Preface

Special thanks to my doctoral supervisor Prof. Dr. Rob Blomme – director of the Center for Leadership and Management Development at Nyenrode Business University – for his faith in me and the wonderful help and guidance during these past years. You are my example!

My warm thanks also goes out to all those who have dedicated their positive energy to this book, each in their own way. I would especially like to mention: Christel, my parents, my brother Berndt, Boudewijn, Edwin, Ineke, and many other family members and friends.

Finally, I would like to thank my heroes for the unforgettable encounters and their many quotes which I was able to use for this book.

Writing this book turned out to be an amazing journey. For all those who wish to read the book, whether despite or thanks to Confucius' words: 'it's better to travel one mile, than to read thousands of books', I hope that this journey with, and alongside, heroes will create a lot of positive energy.

Utrecht, July 2017
Sebastian Kodden

Introduction

Introduction

Heroes have always fascinated me: people who had accomplished something special or who seemed to be on their way to accomplishing something special. Those who did not seem to have any doubts and pursued their passion with positive energy. I loved to see their engaged attitude in life. As the son of a PE teacher, sports heroes especially had my attention. My heroes became my examples and many years later they formed the inspiration for this book, which I wrote with, and about, them.

I grew up in Raalte, Salland, and spent my childhood mostly on the regional tennis courts. Thanks to my father's background, my brother and I were privileged enough to try out all types of sport and, in doing so, to discover our talents. Eventually, tennis turned out to be my greatest passion. I spent many happy hours playing, also to improve myself. I took my first job years later as a tennis teacher. In the end, my engagement for this job was too low. I realized that there had to be more to life than the local tennis courts. Unfortunately, my parents couldn't help me this time and I had to venture out on my own to find my path. When I was seventeen, I left for Groningen with the realization that I had no idea what I wanted to study and what I should be doing. The lack of focus was exhausting.

Years after completing law school with some difficulty, I studied Business Studies, once again in Groningen, which I enjoyed so much more. By then, I had become an entrepreneur and I realized that my legal background, knowledge, and managerial skills were not enough. During this new study program, I was handed many theories on leadership and personal development and I absorbed it all with great eagerness. These were my subjects, this was my passion...I was unstoppable! I handed over my enterprise to free myself up for my studies, this time at Nyenrode Business University.

In 2011, I received my PhD for research on the topic of engagement. After fifteen years of entrepreneurship, I still felt that, despite all my experience and studies, I still hadn't been able to put the finger on the sore spot and hadn't been able to answer the question; why do certain people and enterprises succeed while others don't? Until I came into contact with the concept and theory of engagement in 2009. Schaufeli & Bakker (2001), both connected to Utrecht University at the time, define engagement as 'a positive, affective-cognitive state of supreme satisfaction characterized by vitality, dedication, and absorption.'

Introduction

I realized that these personal characteristics had made the difference for my childhood heroes, and not the fact that they had much more innate talent than the immediate competitors. It was also due to this engagement that I had achieved certain goals and failed to achieve others as an entrepreneur. Certain matters had been draining my energy, whilst I could hardly let other projects go because they kept pulling me in and forced me to complete them successfully. Vitality, dedication, and a capacity for absorption in your work are universal conditions for success. Your personal heroism is within reach if you pursue it with enough energy and engagement and don't give up before you've achieved your goals.

This book is about heroes and engagement. Or rather, a combination of the two. In this book, I've shaped the engaged person with the concept of the HERO: an acronym that stands for the 'Highly Energetic Responsible Operator'. HERO takes the theory of engagement as its basis and bridges the gap between (top-level) sports and management and personal leadership theories. As former PE teacher and current PhD in business, I noticed that many aspects of the engagement theory, which I had been researching for years, can be found equally in (top-level) sports. The aspects of vitality and dedication are, for example, vital to engagement: these aspects are also crucial for sporting achievements. For entrepreneurs, the same is true. The many similarities between engagement and sports were a reason for me to ask various Dutch sports heroes about their experience with aspects such as vitality, dedication, and engagement.

'ENGAGEMENT IS A **POSITIVE STATE OF SUPREME SATISFACTION** THAT IS CHARACTERIZED BY VITALITY, DEDICATION, AND ABSORPTION.'

– Wilmar Schaufeli & Arnold Bakker

Introduction

With practically applicable management theories, personal experiences, and encounters with highly engaged people, this book hands you a step-by-step plan to move from thought to action, allowing you to energetically take charge of your life. It is intended for anyone who is looking for new energy, passion, and engagement in their life. The book can also be aimed at managers trying to make their organization flourish by creating a positive flow.

HERO: 'HIGHLY ENERGETIC RESPONSIBLE OPERATOR'

The sources of inspiration and energy that heroes can be, form the central theme of this book. As a teacher at the Nyenrode Business University, I teach the theory of engagement to young professionals, where I make ample use of practical examples gained within my own business. I tell them how important the various aspects of engagement have been, both within my own organization and to me personally, and the impact they had when things went wrong. I also address the reasons why the life lessons of a number of my heroes were so important to me and how they taught me to carry on and gain new energy. My students were the ones to encourage me to write this story down as a book.

I owe a great deal to my heroes. Not only for sharing their life stories and performances with me and for the energy they have given me to carry on, but also because some of them were willing to complete this book with me.

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Engagement

1 Engagement

Be engaged, be happy, as the theory of engagement teaches us. To feel that you are doing exactly that where your unique talents and interests lie and where you make optimal use of personal and work-related energy sources. Who does not want to be engaged? And which manager does not desire to have engaged employees? In tough times, engagement provides extra energy to cope with stressful situations, making these employees invaluable to the organization they work in. However, studies into engagement show that almost 90 percent of the employees interviewed experience this work and life joy to a lesser extent, or not at all. In fact, many professionals indicated in my studies that they felt their engagement being drained because their talents were not appreciated and valued or due to the rigid company structure.

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'88 PERCENT OF THE EMPLOYEES
INTERVIEWED **IS NOT ENGAGED.**'

Prof. dr. Arnold Bakker

What makes a person 'engaged' and which conditions allow him to perform optimally? To what extent should you display vitality and dedication to tap into that energy and passion every single day? And can engagement be learned/taught and/or encouraged? These are all questions that could help us do the things we enjoy with more vitality and dedication, or to help us stop doing the things that only create stress and negative energy!

Vitality, dedication, and absorption

The theory of engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2001; Bakker, 2010) posits that an engaged employee has a highly positive attitude that is characterized by an unparalleled zest for life, energy, the will to work, and to commit themselves fully. In the words of Schaufeli and Bakker: 'engagement refers to a positive, affective-cognitive state of supreme satisfaction that is characterized by vitality, dedication, and absorption.'

1 Engagement

This allows the employee to achieve special performances. Those who are engaged, are open to new ideas, are both physically and mentally healthy, look for their authentic talents, and start every new (work)day with plenty of energy and a zest for life. This is not only pleasant for the individual themselves, but also inspiring for their immediate colleagues, and beneficial to the organization.

Therefore, the first step to becoming a HERO is the following:

Become a HERO- Step 1

Discover and develop your authentic talents.

Your zest for life and energy will increase significantly.

The state of supreme satisfaction is characterized by vitality, dedication, and absorption, three terms that may not immediately be clear. *Vitality* refers to the brimming of energy, feeling fit and strong, and being able to work inexhaustibly for long periods of time. *Dedication* refers to a high level of involvement in your work: the work is inspiring and evokes feelings of pride and enthusiasm. Finally, *absorption* refers to being absorbed in ones work, in a pleasant way, during which time stands still and it is hard to detach oneself from it.

I had completed various growth scenarios with my own enterprise, but I have also been forced to implement necessary reformations. I have provided leadership for many people, but I have also had to say goodbye to some of them. The double uniform of entrepreneur and leader, and that of shareholder and manager, has often created internal conflict. Later, I experienced that the eventual result always came down to engagement, both mine and that of my employees. Employees who demonstrated more or less engagement truly made the difference between success and failure.

The theory proved to be true, also for myself. To live is to learn and to learn is to live, as I have experienced.

1 Engagement

Figure 1.1 presents the model of engagement and shows the means you need to become engaged. Sources of energy and task demands will be discussed separately in chapter 6.

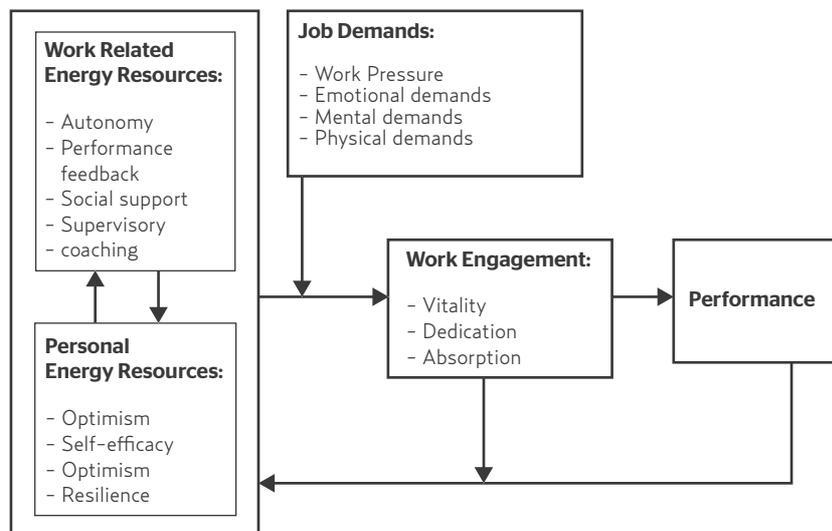


Figure 1.1: Model of engagement (Bakker, 2009)

Flow

People who are brimming with energy seem to find themselves in a flow, a concept that was elaborated on by American-Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Csikszentmihalyi was one of the frontrunners of positive psychology and is the pioneer in the research into flow. Back in the 1970s, he researched people's 'optimal experiences', a state in which people find themselves when they are highly focused and experience intense enjoyment. I think that everyone has experienced such a state at least once: you do your work without any trouble, you feel strong, you feel in complete control of the situation, and you feel you are able to perform to the very best of your ability. Both the realization of time and possible problems vanish and you seem to be outside yourself completely. As if you are being carried by a fast river without having to swim.

1 Engagement

Csikszentmihalyi discovered that people from a multitude of cultures, ages, and both sexes described pleasant experiences in similar ways. This gave rise to the first definition of flow: 'The state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1989). In his pioneering work *Flow. Psychology of the optimal experience* (2007), Csikszentmihalyi describes how this pleasant experience can be reached, namely by setting goals for yourself and taking on challenges. By optimally aligning your knowledge and skills with the work requirements you demand of yourself (figure 1.2).

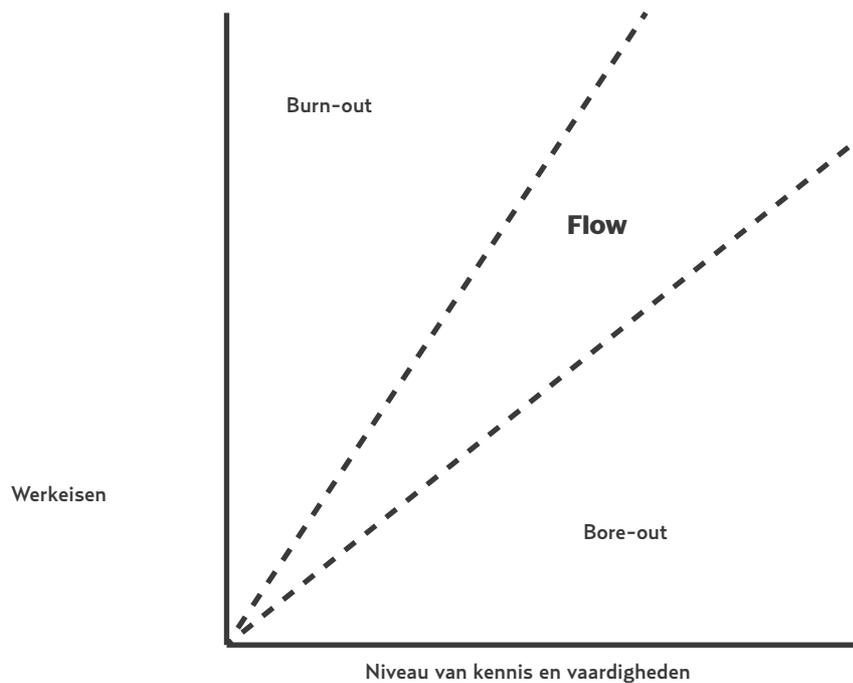


Figure 1.2: Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2007)

Research into flow at work shows that employees experience flow three times more often during work than during their spare time, whilst they actually feel happier in their spare time (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989; Rheinberg et al.,