

Book Review Courtesy of Halton Hills Library

Be Excellent at Anything

By Tony Schwartz ISBN: 978-1451610260 ©2011
Review by Beverley King, Halton Hills Public Libraries

Imagine you are the tortoise in the popular story about the tortoise and the hare. Today is race day. You relentlessly trudge along the race route as the hot midday sun urges you to stop and rest. But you press on without stopping. You passed the hare 15 minutes ago. That slacker was sleeping under a tree again.

You already know that the tortoise wins. You also probably know the lesson in the story. Slow and steady wins the race. Here's the problem though: it's not true. It's certainly not true in modern life. It's certainly not true if you want to get a lot done and enjoy your life at the same time. Tony Schwartz shows you exactly how you can do both in his book *Be Excellent at Anything*.

What do you do when the demands on you rise relentlessly and distractions seem infinite? Most of us hunker down and press on. We push harder. We stop taking breaks. We get less sleep and eat poorly. Instead of refuelling more frequently we just put in more hours and wonder why we feel miserable.

Tony talks about how many us are more vigilant about refuelling and maintaining our cars than we are about taking care of ourselves. He reminds us that the winner of the Indianapolis 500 is not the driver who drives the fastest most continuously. Instead, the winner is the one who "drives at the fastest speeds on the track, but also makes the most efficient pit stops along the way to refuel, change tires, and make mechanical adjustments and repairs."

Once we understand how we tend to react when the demands on us rise, then we can begin to change how we do things. Tony explains that it's important to understand that we are meant to pulse. In other words, nearly every system in our body operates rhythmically when it's

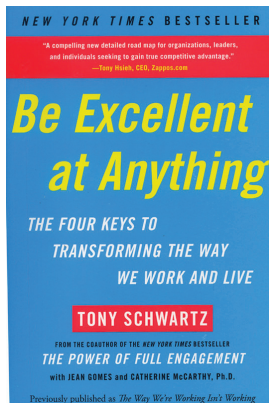
healthy. Breathing, digestion and our heart rate are common examples, but during the day we also oscillate every ninety minutes or so from higher to lower alertness.

If you understand and pay attention to these natural rhythms you can be more productive by simply working in blocks of time from between 45 to 90 minutes. After 90 minutes your body wants a break, so give yourself permission to stop and renew.

This is often where we struggle because building breaks into your workday is counterintuitive and countercultural.

In the story, the hare has the right idea. He's practicing renewal. When his renewal break is over he'll be refreshed and excited to sprint again. He's not a slacker. He understands how to be productive and enjoy it too. Tony's book is packed with many more insights and he includes action steps at the end of each chapter. He tells stories about how these principles have helped busy executives and even financial traders. I found many ideas that I've already started using. I'm sure you will too.

So don't be the tortoise and push through the hot sun. Be the hare instead. Rest for a few minutes and then sprint to the library to get this book!



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