# Hope Is A Longevity Strategy

6 MIN READ

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# Here’s why peak performance requires more than grit.

For much of my career, I chased the high of “inbox zero” like others might chase their next fix. The euphoria of clearing my task list, the surge of meeting an impossible deadline, the warm glow of another late-night “great work” email from my boss—these were my drugs of choice.

I was addicted to achievement as identity: as long as I achieved, I “knew” I was worthy or valuable. Each notification, each deadline, each win fed a hunger that never seemed to subside.

I remember standing in my kitchen one Sunday morning, my coffee growing cold as I responded to “urgent” emails. My husband asked me if I wanted to go for a walk, and I gave my usual response: “Just need to finish this one thing.” There was always one more thing.

But always being two steps ahead of what I needed to be doing next meant I was never fully present. The weight of performance was constantly on me, and that pressure overshadows everything so you can’t be yourself. Despite what I told myself, I did not have endless attention, energy, and time to give to my work. My system ran on scarcity and fear—fear of inadequacy, fear of obsolescence, fear of worthlessness.

If you know anything about the economics of scarcity, you know what happened next. The rules of scarcity dictate that when limited resources are consumed at unsustainable rates, depletion sets in.

## The Ripple Effect of Depletion

The depletion that comes from burnout isn’t just tiredness—it is persistent fatigue that sleep can’t touch. It’s staring at your screen, reading the same paragraph four times without comprehension. It’s existing in an emotional neutral—neither happy nor sad, just… there.

It’s becoming numb when feeling seems too costly, while paradoxically having small frustrations trigger disproportionate responses. It’s the subtle transformation of “Why not?” into “Why bother?” as possibility slowly surrenders to resignation.

In my relentless drive to perform, I normalized depletion, modeling that behavior for the people who worked with and for me, further entrenching it in the culture of work. When a leader is depleted, the impact touches everything and everyone.

Team dynamics shift as connection gives way to transaction. Meetings become performative rather than generative. Collaboration disappears, because it depends on team members investing discretionary energy beyond their assigned tasks—and there is none to draw on. The team’s collective intelligence fragments into individual survival modes.

Teams can’t innovate from a place of exhaustion, and organizations can’t transform from a place of burnout.

## Why Purpose Alone Isn’t Enough

Humans everywhere, in every industry and at every level, seek purpose and meaning from work. Research shows that having a strong sense of purpose can lower our risk of cardiovascular problems, reduce our risk of stroke, and even help us live longer.

And yet for so long, we’ve been approaching purpose all wrong. We’ve treated it as a corporate statement rather than a lived experience, as something to proclaim rather than practice, as an organizational asset rather than a human need. We’ve turned purpose into performance theater.

This strips the work we do of its very meaning—and the end results are the opposite of engagement and improved health outcomes. Instead, it leads to diminished performance, organizational cynicism, and inevitable depletion.

# Hope Is A Strategy, Not Sentiment

When people don't have hope, they literally cannot see possibilities for change or different behaviors. The brain in a depleted state narrows its focus to surviving the present, not creating the future.

Hope requires energy—the energy to imagine different possibilities, to take risks toward a better future, to sustain effort through inevitable challenges. That energy comes from wellbeing.

The relationship works in both directions. Wellbeing creates the capacity for hope, and hope reinforces the practices that build wellbeing. Together, they create a regenerative cycle where energy creates more energy and possibility creates more possibility and human capacity expands rather than depletes.

This isn't abstract theory. We can't hope our way to wellbeing. We need to build wellbeing as the foundation for genuine, sustainable hope. Only then can hope become more than an aspiration—it can become a strategy.

## Struggling Well

We need a complete reimagining of what it means to not be okay. Struggling isn't a character flaw—it's part of being human in complex, demanding environments.

The goal isn't to never struggle but to struggle well: to use difficulty as information rather than judgment, to seek support rather than isolation, to see challenge as temporary rather than defining.

At the heart of this transformation is a fundamental shift from hope as emotion to hope as strategy. Hope isn't blind optimism. It's a cognitive resource that enables us to connect present actions to future outcomes, to imagine what doesn't yet exist but could.

When you're languishing, caught in the gray zone, hope as strategy means actively envisioning what sustainable living could look like for you specifically, then taking concrete steps toward that vision.

Each small boundary becomes an experiment in sustainability. Each recovery practice becomes an investment in future capability.

# A Short Hope Practice: The Three Pathways Exercise

The "Three Pathways" exercise strengthens pathways thinking by identifying multiple routes to goals. Use at the beginning of problem-solving meetings, during one-on-one coaching, or when teams feel stuck on a challenge.

1. 1 Identify a current challenge or goal.
2. 2 Set a timer for three minutes and generate as many potential pathways to this goal as possible, without evaluating them.
3. 3 Review the list and mark the three most promising options.
4. 4 For each of these three pathways, identify one potential obstacle and a way to overcome it.

And remember: Hope without wellbeing is just toxic positivity, pushing harder while pretending everything's fine. We end up performing optimism rather than genuinely experiencing possibility. Hope is the visualization of a future state. It's more tangible

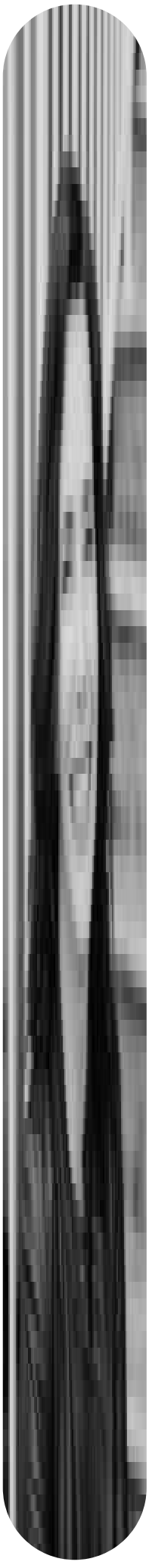
and goal-oriented than related emotions like optimism and empathy. When you hope for change, you can "see" exactly what you want, and that helps create a roadmap to get there. This—you reading this—is one of the first steps. Let's do it together.

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