

GET RESULTS

WITHOUT BURNING OUT

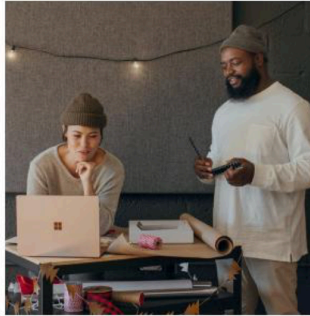
Written by Vanessa Dietzel and Laura Watkins

Most people know that consistently pushing themselves too hard diminishes their effectiveness and well-being over time. We have both fallen into this trap. So what does it take to kick some bad-ass goals without burning out – and have your effectiveness and well-being work in a virtuous cycle, rather than competing against each other? We call this being on the performance curve, which is the title of our book.

At its core, *The Performance Curve* is about a life well lived: in which people and organisations thrive as well as help each other reach their potential. It's a vision close to our hearts and why we wanted to consolidate in this book our experience in business, neuroscience, adult development psychology as well as more practical knowledge from breath and body-based traditions and therapies.

The key is to look beyond practical tips, such as productivity 'hacks', which usually just give us a temporary boost or help us spin our hamster wheel ever faster. Instead, the book lays out a systematic way for sustainably building our effectiveness every day: by developing our inner operating system.

Our inner operating system is the deep wiring that automatically drives us, including our ways of thinking (often called mindsets), our emotional



responses and our habits. The more we can become aware of this deep wiring, the more we can take charge of it to better deal with challenges, change and complexity. For example, if we are feeling overloaded, we will better understand why and how to manage it (or avoid it in the future).

In our experience, the most important aspect of this wiring is our deep needs and fears, which we call 'hidden drivers', because they drive a lot of the choices we make day-to-day, mostly without realising it. Continuing the example above of feeling overloaded, perhaps we struggle to set boundaries, stemming from a need to be liked and a fear of feeling rejected if we say 'no'. Or we may need to feel valuable, which drives our tendency to say 'yes', even when we are busy.

Our hidden drivers exert a powerful force in our brains: in particular, they can steer us into what we call 'protect mode', the fight-flight-or-freeze survival response. In "protect mode", we react quickly and automatically, rather than taking time to make deliberate, proactive choices about the best response in a given situation. It is like an autopilot with a limited range of emergency functions. This mode keeps us safe when facing immediate physical danger, like a tiger in the jungle, but it decreases activity in many parts of the executive centre of the brain, located in the prefrontal cortex. This reduces our ability to regulate our emotions, bring our best thinking to problems, and relate skilfully with others. It caps our effectiveness and limits what we can achieve when faced with the often complex challenges of modern life. And, if "protect mode" becomes our habitual way of operating instead of an occasional emergency response, we increasingly erode the well-being and functioning of our bodies and minds.

So, if we want to build a virtuous cycle of effectiveness

FLOW STATE

A mental state in which a person performing some activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus.

BURNOUT

Burnout happens when you're overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to keep up with life's tasks and needs.



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and well-being, one essential piece of the puzzle is to be able to spot when we are in protect mode and build habits that shift our brain into explore mode. In explore mode, our brain is firing on all cylinders to pursue opportunities and rewards. We can do the complex work of manipulating information in our heads, creating options, exploring perspectives, empathizing, and thinking through decisions. We can bring more creativity and intuition to tackle difficult issues and collaborate better with others, all of which also increase our well-being.

How do we access explore mode? One such habit is being able to spot our hidden drivers and direct the energy contained in them towards our goals. For example, when we are tempted to say 'yes' to something despite feeling overloaded, we might ask ourselves 'How can I say no in a way that strengthens our relationship?' or 'How can I be valuable here without overloading myself?'. By answering

those questions, we can meet our deepest needs, and boost both our effectiveness and our well-being.

If you'd like to explore these ideas (and a wide range of other methods for working with your inner operating system to increase your effectiveness and well-being), take a look at *The Performance Curve*. In putting the book together, we researched hundreds of scientific references and interviewed some remarkable characters, such as virtuoso cellist Yo-Yo Ma, CEO of Krug Champagne Maggie Henriquez, and international development and humanitarian leader Lorina McAdam. We hope you take inspiration from them as much as we have, to make your life truly well lived. We look forward to hearing what you think. ■

MORE INFORMATION

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Laura Watkins and Vanessa Dietzel are a powerful duo combining expertise in leadership development, business performance, neuroscience and holistic well-being. Laura has co founded and runs two leadership businesses, following on from her career at McKinsey, where she co-founded its European leadership practice. She has a PhD in Cognitive Neuroscience from Cambridge University. Vanessa brings unique insight from her blend of corporate experience, coaching, and teaching breathwork and yoga. She started her career with Boston Consulting Group and, for the past twenty years, has been working with leaders all over the world on their individual and organisational performance.