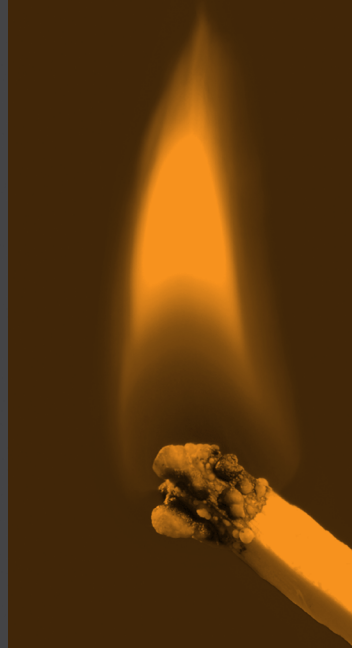
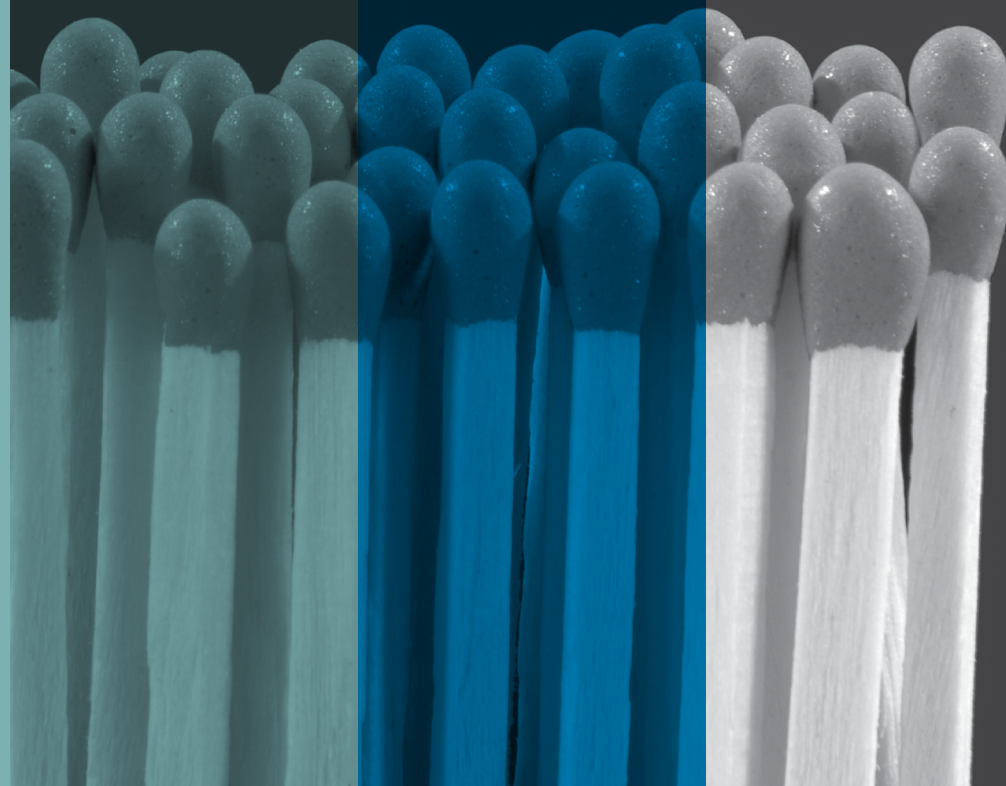


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# 🛡️ Ignite, Don't Incinerate:

## Leading For Results Without Sacrificing Mental Health

BY DANE JENSEN, COO, AND PEGGY BAUMGARTNER, DIRECTOR OF TRAINING

One of the hardest parts of being a manager is balancing the pressure for results with what is good for people. We talk to managers all the time who struggle with this balance—who want to make sure they ‘hit their numbers’, but worry that they are burning out their people (or themselves) in the process.

Beyond most managers’ desire to do what’s right, the growing discussion on mental health in the workplace (alongside a brewing legal storm) has significantly raised the stakes for getting this balance right, as we laid out seven months ago in [No Pressure, No Diamonds: Reconciling Mental Health With High Performance](#).

The good news is that you don't need to become a cross between Mother Theresa and Sigmund Freud to succeed in this brave new world. With a few adjustments to your leadership style, you can create environments that are good for results **and** good for people.

Coaches in elite sport routinely create environments in which their athletes will put in work well beyond what normal humans could bear—while at the same time building the physical and mental well-being required to perform at high levels. In athletics, *healthy* high performance is the only kind of sustainable high performance that is possible.

We call the coaches who are successful in creating these healthy high performance environments Igniters—and we can all learn from them.

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### PRESSURE IS POWER

Much of the recent mental health discussion has focused on 'de-pressurizing' environments. As we have said before: pressure is not just inevitable—but actually essential—in environments where high performance is expected.

The wrong approach to Healthy High Performance is to focus entirely on removing pressure. The road to high performance is paved with pressure. Growth is not possible without stress.

While there are clearly limits to the pressure that individuals can handle (especially over time), Igniters recognize that the wrong approach to healthy high performance is to focus entirely on removing pressure. The road to high performance is paved with pressure. Growth is not possible without stress - and growth is what makes work worthwhile.

Instead, Igniters play an active role in protecting against surges in pressure by coaching people to transform pressure into growth. They monitor the pressure people are experiencing and pro-actively take action to help people view and handle the pressure in a way that builds their resilience and sense of personal power. Igniters coach people to become increasingly resilient in the face of high expectations.

Practically, what does this mean for you as a leader?

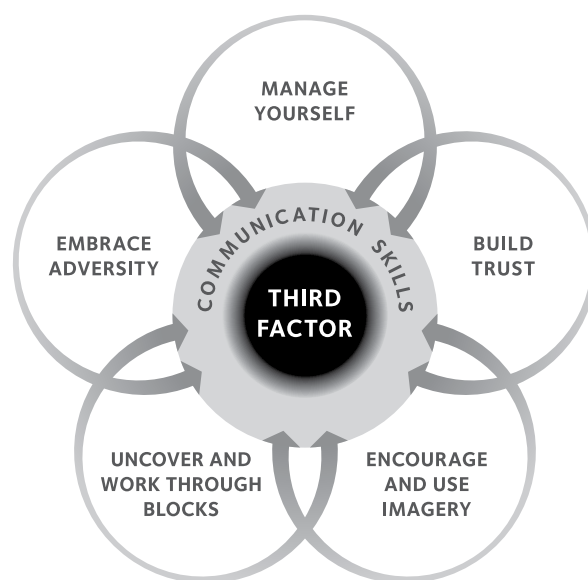
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### IGNITING HEALTHY HIGH PERFORMANCE: FIVE IMPERATIVES FOR LEADERS

Our work, anchored in research conducted by Dr. Peter Jensen for his book [Ignite The Third Factor](#), isolated five practical imperatives for leaders to become Igniters.

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Figure 1: Ignite The Third Factor Leadership Model



#### 1. **MANAGE YOURSELF (SO OTHERS DON'T HAVE TO)**

You are the critical conduit between the organization's overall energy level and your people. One of the valuable roles you can play is as a Surge Protector—modulating the power coming through the lines. Most importantly, it's ensuring that, through your behaviour, you don't become an additional source of stress and pressure for your people. This is not about protecting your people from what is actually going on but rather buffering them from organizational surges in energy that could negatively effect their motivation, commitment, and satisfaction with their own work.

**To do this effectively**, you need to understand your impact on others and take conscious action to manage your emotions and energy. To do this, consider taking a look back at the personal resilience tool-kit we discussed in last quarter's article [Power Converters: What Elite Athletes Know About Resilience](#).

**2. BUILD TRUST** Tolerance for stress and pressure is significantly higher in environments where trust is present. Your team members need to know that you will balance results with what is good for them and that you will not put them in a position where they will fail or fry.

*To do this effectively,* you need to be the first to extend trust to your people. Andy Higgins, Canada’s most successful decathlon coach, tells a great story about throwing his car keys to a young athlete on the first day of practice and asking him to ‘go pick up the high jump pit from the other end of the field’. The athlete was very surprised that Andy trusted him with his car. What the athlete didn’t realize was that Andy had already started to coach him. What’s the equivalent for your team?

In addition, you must understand limits and avoid putting people in positions where they will fail. Finally, nothing builds trust like extending influence and ownership over planning, problem solving, and execution to your team members. As a bonus—this can take work off your plate as well.

**3. ENCOURAGE AND USE IMAGERY** The stories that people tell themselves, and the images and emotions these stories create, can be highly destructive or hugely motivating and a wellspring for resilience. As a leader, it is invaluable to understand the power of imagery and help your people create and hold imagery that will serve their performance and well-being.

*To do this effectively,* you need to paint clear pictures of what is and what could be, help to create a line of sight from where they are now to where they have to go,

and help them translate the goals and expectations into a clear and compelling vision of the future.


**4. UNCOVER AND WORK THROUGH BLOCKS** Be on the look out for what is blocking people from moving to their next step or performing to their potential. Growth and progress are what makes work worthwhile. Be truly curious about uncovering blocks to higher levels of performance and pro-active in providing support to remove the blocks and empower people to move forward. And in the process, remember what we said about trust.

*To do this effectively,* you need to debrief every performance. If you do not debrief the good performances, you will be in no position to debrief the bad ones. The best way to debrief is to ask lots of questions (about both the observable performance AND inner world) and actively listen to the responses.

**5. EMBRACE ADVERSITY** Adversity creates strong emotions, and emotion is THE fuel for change and growth. The negative emotion experienced when going through adversity creates tremendous motivation to move away from something that is, and towards something that could be. As an Igniter you never want to miss an opportunity to capitalize on strong feelings. You have a tremendous role to play in helping someone see what it is they need to move toward and to support them in that movement.


*To do this effectively,* you must anticipate adversity and lay groundwork for recovery, build resilience in your people, and help them reframe adversity (i.e. see the opportunities in addition to the dangers) as soon as possible.

YOUR ROLE IN HEALTHY HIGH PERFORMANCE: IMPORTANT, BUT NOT ALONE




**THE POWER PLANT**  
THE ORGANIZATION

Regulates the overall level of 'current' in the system and provides access to support resources along with the 'permission' to use them



**THE SURGE PROTECTOR**  
THE LEADER

Acts as a firewall from 'surges' rather than an additional source of pressure, and takes conscious action to channel pressure towards igniting growth and development



**THE POWER CONVERTER**  
THE EMPLOYEE

'Converts' pressure into higher levels of performance through skilled use of a personal resilience toolkit

**HEALTHY HIGH PERFORMANCE**

Does the coach do it alone? No. In our June 2013 article, [No Pressure, No Diamonds: Reconciling Mental Health With High Performance](#), we introduced the overall Healthy High Performance model that lays out the role of the broader organization, your role as a leader, and the critical role employees play as 'power converters' in transforming pressure into performance.

In September 2013, we looked at the role of the employee in [Power Converters: What Elite Athletes Know About Resilience](#).

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## SURGE PROTECTORS UNITE

All performers, whether athletic or corporate, must deal with pressure from a variety of sources. The organization creates a certain level of pressure, an energy level that emanates through the entire organization. Sometimes its good energy, sometimes its negative; sometimes it comes like a big wave surging through at certain intervals and sometimes it's just a steady thrum.

You are the critical conduit between the organization's overall energy level and your people.

Often, you might feel that the organizational forces are so powerful that you can't possibly turn the tide in your group. While there are certainly limits to your influence as a Surge Protector (see the sidebar: Important, But Not Alone), the individual relationships you have with your people, and the team environment you create, are two of the biggest factors in determining whether the pressure and stress inherent in striving to be the best is transformed into growth and resilience, or towards stress and burn-out.

One of the world's pre-eminent organizational researchers, Margaret Wheatley, has convincingly shown that aware managers, in even the most dysfunctional organizations, can create pockets of healthy high performance (in *Leadership* and *The New Science*, for example). Don't let cynicism or a feeling of powerlessness stop you from taking action—you can make a difference.

*Performance Coaching's Ignite program teaches participants the leadership tool-kit used by elite coaches to build Healthy High Performance environments.*

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