

Chapter One

Why you need a daily operating system

If I asked you, 'What do you need to do to prioritise your health more?', I am sure you would answer with a version of the following. I need to:

- eat more vegetables
- drink more water
- sleep eight hours a night
- exercise daily or most days
- manage my stress better.

At a high level, most of us know what supports our health and what undermines it. Eating well most of the time, moving regularly, sleeping more and staying hydrated are all correct. The question is not whether we know this, but whether we are able to execute it consistently.

If knowledge alone were enough, very few of us would struggle, which is why the issue today is not necessarily a lack of information.

The problem is the growing disconnect between what we know we should be doing and what we're able to execute consistently in our lives. This doesn't mean there aren't things to learn—there is plenty that I will share with you in this book—but the biggest problem is the ability to perform those behaviours consistently, in a way that works for your life.

We have never had more access to expert knowledge, high-quality research and credible education around health and performance than we do right now via social media and podcasts, and yet, despite this, people are not healthier. They are not more consistent. They are not finding it easier to sustain behaviours when pressure increases or routines are disrupted. This is why the conversation needs to shift not just from *what* we need to do, but to *how* we do it consistently, particularly when life is busy, unpredictable and demanding.

Declarative versus procedural knowledge

There are two different types of knowledge. Declarative knowledge is knowing *what* to do. Procedural knowledge is knowing *how* to do it in the real world. Research I did during my masters comparing elite athletes with the general population found that, in both groups, declarative knowledge is largely there. What's lacking is the skills and strategies to turn that knowledge into consistent action.⁵

This is where the idea of a daily operating system comes in.

If knowledge alone is not the problem, then something else must be missing. What is missing is a system that helps translate what you know into the behaviours you can sustain even when life puts you under pressure.

For that system to work, it cannot be generic. It must be customised and tailored to your life, your constraints and the season you are in.

One size does not fit all

I believe another reason this gap continues to widen is due to how a lot of information is presented. Health advice can be packaged and over simplified (*e.g., just follow this exact ten-step protocol*). Sure, that protocol may deliver an impact while you force it into your life, but what happens when life gets busy or you get tired and you stop or skip some of the steps?

Forcing someone else's set-and-forget protocol is like wearing a tailored suit made for another body. The materials may be high quality and the design is great, but it hasn't been fitted to you, it does not move with you and it never quite feels right. With a set-and-forget protocol, the issue is the lack of personal context and customisation. It just forces something into your life without truly understanding where you are at. This is why customisation for your life, your constraints and your starting point is such a crucial step within your operating system.

The great news is that most principles for health and wellbeing are universal. The nuance sits in the application. Of the thousands of people I have worked with, I never forced a behaviour onto someone. I start by understanding their life, their constraints, their goals and what they are currently doing, and then help tailor the principle accordingly.

Take nutrition as an example, which is the first rhythm we will cover. One principle we will explore is pulsing protein intake, spreading it more evenly across the day, with particular attention to breakfast, which is an area where many people fall short. That same principle

can support a CEO wanting steadier energy, someone wanting to lose body fat and gain muscle, or an athlete looking to recover better or maximise performance.

But the application depends entirely on the individual. If someone is getting what they need some days, but not others, the focus is on how to help them adjust that. If they skip breakfast all together, the strategy will look different to someone who dabbles with fasting some days or who prefers something 'not too heavy' because they 'aren't that hungry in the morning'. Depending on where each person is starting from, the principle remains the same, but the application differs.

For the person who doesn't eat breakfast, the goal is to start having something to create the habit. For the person who is inconsistent with their breakfast, the goal is to standardise their morning more. For the person who wants something light, we might look at a protein smoothie, rather than eggs or salmon.

The principles stay the same, but the execution changes.

Hybrid work

The way many of us work has changed. Hybrid and flexible work have delivered plenty of benefits, including more autonomy and less time commuting, but it has also quietly removed many of the default rhythms and anchors that once supported more consistent behaviours.

Commute time plus office hours created a natural bookend to our days. Office-based work tended to support more consistent rhythms around meal and break times. And while fixed schedules were not perfect, they did provide clearer external cues around when work typically started or ended.

Without these cues, or by experiencing them less consistently, the lines between work and life have blurred. In the process, many of the external cues that once supported more consistent rhythms around when we eat, move, recover and switch off have been removed or become less consistent.

Why consistency is so important

Consistency does not mean doing the same thing every day or living a rigid, robotic life. It means having enough structure to support you regardless of variation, disruption or curveballs. I often think of this like bumpers in a bowling alley. They are there to stop every ball from ending up in the gutter.

This is what I believe is the sweet spot. Structure that creates stability without rigidity. Rhythms made up of behaviours that work for your life, that allow for adaptability without requiring perfection or an all-or-nothing approach. This is what I refer to as *structured flexibility*.

When we stop seeing consistency as a set of perfect conditions and see it as clarity on the behaviours that are most important to our health, energy and performance, something shifts. It becomes less about waiting for the ideal day and conditions and more about identifying the opportunities that already exist to execute those behaviours.

Consistency also matters because it allows us to leverage momentum rather than rely on willpower or motivation. Instead of deciding each day whether you feel like taking action, the decision has already been made. For example, you do not need to rely on motivation to go to the gym. In your operating system, you train three times a week. One of those sessions is on Wednesday morning, it is in your diary and your week is structured around it.

The energy lie we have all been told

Most of us believe our biggest constraint is time. If only we had more hours in our day, more space in our calendar or fewer competing demands, we would finally be able to prioritise ourselves and be more consistent with our health.

But time is not the real constraint, energy is. In a *Harvard Business Review* article, Tony Schwartz and Catherine McCarthy made the point clearly: ‘time is finite, but energy can be systematically expanded and renewed’.⁶

Energy determines how you show up every day, the quality of your decisions, your emotional regulation, your patience, your focus and essentially what you can manage in your day. When energy is good and stable, we make better choices almost effortlessly. When our energy drops, our standards drop with it, and everything becomes harder and more exhausting. Under fatigue and pressure, even our good intentions become inconsistent or more unreliable.

We have been sold a lie about energy.

Energy is not something you either have or do not have. It is not about springing out of bed ready to go. It is not a personality trait or a reflection of how driven you are. Energy is something you create through the decisions you make and the systems you build every single day!

Think about your phone. If you want it at 100 per cent in the morning, you need to plug it in, give it time and avoid draining it overnight. If you forget, or only half charge it, you cannot expect it to perform the same way the next day. Your energy works the same way.

It's worth mentioning that there are different types of energy. Performance psychologist Jim Loehr described energy as multidimensional with four key aspects:

1. Physical energy determines the quantity of energy you have available, your basic capacity to meet the demands of the day.
2. Emotional energy shapes the quality of that energy, whether you operate from curiosity and challenge or from pressure, threat and frustration.
3. Mental energy directs where your energy goes, your ability to focus, prioritise and stay with what matters.
4. Spiritual energy provides the force behind it—your sense of meaning, values and why the effort is worth it.⁷

These four dimensions are interconnected. When physical energy is depleted, focus and emotional regulation suffer. When emotional energy is constantly driven by stress, mental clarity declines. When work lacks meaning, even when we are well-rested, we can struggle to sustain effort and output.

Tip: Energy and recovery are two sides of the same coin

Energy is something you create. When you identify what reliably builds your energy and you do this consistently, your energy becomes more stable and predictable.

Recovery is what allows you to repeat this day after day. It is where you reset, downregulate and recharge so your energy can be sustained. Recovery is not the opposite of performance, it is what makes consistent performance possible.

Why your body and brain need rhythm

There is a reason predictable patterns matter so much for health and performance. The body and brain function best when there is rhythm, expectation and a degree of regularity, rather than constant uncertainty or guessing. When key behaviours such as eating, movement, sleep and recovery happen at roughly the same time, energy can be directed toward thinking, decision-making, creativity and emotional regulation instead of on navigating what comes next.⁸

Chaotic days, skipped meals, sporadic recovery and inconsistent routines create subtle physiological strain over time that accumulates. The result of this? Fatigue increases, focus becomes harder to sustain and everything requires a bit more effort and energy each time.

This is why a well-designed structure feels stabilising and supportive, and provides you with more space and capacity for other things. It also reduces the number of decisions required to get through the day and lowers the energy cost of simply operating.

Predictable patterns give the body a reliable baseline to work from, even when our days and what we will be facing is unpredictable, which conserves energy and helps expand our tolerance. It makes flexibility possible without it becoming exhausting. Like an operating system, the basics are handled quietly in the background, freeing capacity for everything else.⁹

It's time to get off the reactive rat race

Do you think you live reactively or proactively? In my experience, most of us are living reactively by default. We respond to the demands of the day as they arise, make decisions on the fly and hope there will be enough left in the tank to recover later. We eat when there is a gap in our diary. We rest only when we're exhausted or sick. We skip meals or movement when we get busy and promise ourselves we will 'start again Monday' or 'tomorrow' or 'when this project is delivered'. Sound familiar?

This reactive loop is incredibly common. In the short term, it's easier to just go with the flow, but this inconsistent, reactive way of living, which is generally the result of what other people need from us at work or home, is eroding our energy and capacity and not allowing us to recover properly.

When we miss what's important for our needs, like a lunch break away from our desk with a nourishing meal, and instead replace it with something we quickly scoff down in front of our computer mid-afternoon, we are not only putting everything before ourselves, but we are making small reactive decisions that are slowly compounding to leave us feeling exhausted and always behind. Additionally, when recovery is treated as a response to depletion rather than a planned investment, we spend most of our time hovering just above empty like the person who always runs their car petrol range down to the last 5 kilometres and then frantically looks for the closest petrol station.

If this all sounds familiar, there is no judgement here. Honestly, I see this pattern repeatedly in my work, and I spent years operating like this myself, so I not only help people make this switch, but I have also done this myself.

Do you know a Gary or a Sarah?

I bet you know a Gary or a Sarah. Or maybe you recognise yourself in one of them. Gary, the CFO, is brilliant, driven and consistently performing. Sarah, the COO, is equally brilliant and driven and just as impactful.

Both are high performers who carry significant responsibility. Over time, however, the difference becomes more obvious.

Gary performs without chaos. He is consistent, produces sustainably and rarely runs on fumes. Sarah still delivers, but she is often pushing too hard, running on empty and holding things together through sheer effort.

The difference between Gary and Sarah is not capability or technical expertise, it is that Gary operates proactively, and Sarah lives reactively.

Proactive living means deciding in advance how you will protect energy, rather than responding once it is already gone. Gary builds recovery and energy into his days and weeks. He does some movement each morning before he gets to work, he has a set and protected lunch break. He also has a sauna a few times a week, and he goes to a health retreat once a year—not to fix his burnout, but to stay ahead of it. Sarah on the other hand is often seen having lunch at her desk around 3 pm, if at all. Recovery only happens when her body forces her to stop and she gets sick. Eventually, she takes the burnout holiday just to reset, which really just gets her back to baseline.

The biggest gap between Gary and Sarah is a daily decision to live proactively rather than reactively. Because the truth is, every day you get to decide how you operate. This book is designed to give you the tools to choose the former.

Why the shift from reactive to proactive is so important

This is one of the most important shifts you can make. Moving from operating reactively to proactively does not require as much of a dramatic change as you might think. It begins with awareness, structure and being intentional.

This is also where most of us get stuck. We understand that energy matters, but we don't know how to consistently protect it in the context of real life because we are often benchmarking against what we can do in an ideal situation, rather than in our reality.

For too long, health and wellbeing have been framed as hard work, discipline and sacrifice. Something that must be forced, endured or squeezed in when time allows. Sustainable energy is built by choosing the path of least resistance, by aligning behaviours with biology, by creating conditions that make good decisions easier, not harder.

If energy is the true currency of health and performance, then the behaviours that create, optimise and sustain it must be intentionally designed into our day. That does not come by accident or by living reactively, it comes by being proactive. The best solution I have seen to help this switch is to have a daily operating system that adapts with life's demands.

The chapters that follow are built on this idea. Energy is not found, it is created, and creating it requires consistency and structure that allows for flexibility and adaptability, especially when life is full.

Sprint versus marathon thinking

Do you love watching the Olympics? I do! I particularly enjoy tuning in to the 100-metre sprint to see who the fastest man or woman on the planet is.

Beyond the swagger, the glitz and the glam, what really stands out is how these athletes are built. Sprinters like Noah Lyles are built for power and speed, with explosive muscles and short bursts of maximum output for a very brief window of time. Everything about a sprinter's body screams explosive power!

Now compare that with a marathon runner. They are just as impressive but built very differently. Athletes like Eliud Kipchoge are shaped by efficiency and endurance, with an ability to sustain effort for hours.

Imagine if they swapped events. How do you think Noah Lyles would go in the marathon, or Eliud Kipchoge in the 100-metre sprint? Probably not that great.

The truth is, very few people can do both well. The physical demands, energy systems, pacing strategies and recovery requirements are fundamentally different. Yet, today, we are all essentially expected to be world class at both. We are expected to sprint through our days with urgency and intensity, while also lasting the distance over the weeks, months and years.

As a result, most of us are operating in a state of always being on and always being available. We've got one hand and eye on the dinner table while we eat dinner, and the other on our phone and Slack channel. We check our inbox on the weekend while we are out to brunch with friends or family, or maybe at half-time during our kid's sport. The line between work and rest, being on and switching

off, has become increasingly blurred or non-existent for many. Trust me, I get it!

For a long time, I told myself that being available 24/7 was a strength. That being constantly available to the athletes I worked with, responding to messages at any hour, made me better at my job and in demand. Those porous boundaries came at a huge cost to myself and, in particular, my health. My nervous system was constantly overstimulated, and there was no real separation between work and life—it was all one big, overstimulating, exhausting blur.

I now see the same pattern repeatedly in the work I do with leaders and leadership teams. Leader wellbeing is one of the strongest drivers of organisational wellbeing and performance.¹⁰ When leaders operate in an always-on, reactive way, those behaviours cascade through teams. This is often referred to as the *contagion effect*. Energy, stress and behaviour spread, whether we intend them to or not. When leaders operate with clarity, intention and recovery built in, those patterns also ripple outward. When they do the opposite, the same happens.

This is why the way you operate matters, not just for you, but for the people around you: your family, your friends, your team. Without clear boundaries, there is no endpoint to effort. Your recovery is non-existent, your stress accumulates and, over time, your capacity erodes until you get rundown, burnt out or sick.

Burnout doesn't happen in one dramatic collapse, it happens through thousands of small mismatches between effort and recovery. What once felt manageable begins to feel heavy. Sure, you may continue to perform for a period of time, but it becomes increasingly exhausting or depleting. It feels like you are surviving, rather than thriving. This is the definition of death by a thousand papercuts! So many of us are operating like this.

Whether you like it or not, your daily behaviours compound and you cannot separate how you operate today from how you will feel in five years' time. The body keeps a quiet record of how often it is asked to push versus how often it is allowed to restore. And, as I learnt the hard way, operating unsustainably always comes at a cost.

One of the most useful principles I took from my time working in professional sport to help manage this is *periodisation*.

The principle of periodisation

Periodisation refers to the deliberate variation of load and recovery over time. Athletes do not train at the same intensity every day, every week or every month. Their training is structured in cycles, with different demands across days, weeks and longer phases of the year.

In team sports such as AFL, NRL, netball, basketball, rugby union or soccer, the year typically follows a clear pattern.

In pre-season, the goal is to build as much fitness and capacity as possible. The days are longer than at any other time of the year, and the training load is higher. Sessions are harder across the week, with a clear focus on developing physical fitness, strength and conditioning. This is where athletes do the work to expand what their body can tolerate later in the season.

In-season, the focus shifts to competing. Training becomes less about building and more about retaining. The priority is recovery, resilience and maintaining as much of the fitness and strength built earlier in the year as possible, while staying healthy and available to perform.

Off-season allows space for recovery and rest, without stopping altogether. Training volume and intensity come down, structure loosens, and both physical and mental fatigue are addressed. Movement continues, but in a way that restores rather than depletes, so athletes return to the next pre-season ready to build again.

In comparison, most of us operate in one mode—flat and linear at 100 per cent all the time. Every day is treated like a peak performance day. Meetings run back-to-back, stimulation is constant and daily recovery looks like Netflix on the couch while we scroll Instagram or TikTok.

The point here is not that you need to live like an athlete, but that there are lessons worth considering, such as how you can apply the principle of periodisation to your life. That might not be a day-to-day or week-to-week variation, but it might be reducing some of your commitments when you know you have a particularly demanding time at work.

A daily operating system bridges short-term performance and long-term resilience by introducing variation where life has become flat, building recovery in before depletion forces it, and allowing you to perform well today without borrowing from tomorrow. This is the shift from sprint thinking to marathon thinking.

Your daily operating system

Regardless of whether you enjoy putting together a flat pack from IKEA or not (I don't), one thing is certain—you need the instructions!

Try putting together furniture without them and you end up with spare parts, wasted time and something that never quite works the

way it should. That is exactly what is happening with health and performance right now.

We are being fed one-minute reels and TikToks every day, jumping from fasting to cold exposure, to breathwork techniques, supplements and new protocols, and if you are honest with yourself, that has probably become the bulk of your research. You find yourself piecing together tactics and behaviours without any overarching system or clarity on where you should focus your time, effort and energy.

The problem (in most instances) is not the strategies themselves, it is the lack of context being provided. They don't tell you the full story or take you from start to finish when it comes to breaking down how all these strategies fit together. Just like the IKEA flat pack without instructions, this approach lacks a clear operating manual, which brings us to what I believe is the solution: creating a personal daily operating system.

This concept is not new. In fact, it already governs many other areas of your life whether you realise it or not. Your phone, computer and the systems you rely on at work all operate this way. When an operating system is working well, you barely notice it; it quietly supports performance in the background. It only becomes obvious when it becomes outdated or requires updating.

Wellbeing is no different. Most of us only realise we don't have a system that is working for us when things start to feel difficult, inconsistent or when we are trying to level up and can't seem to make it stick.

At its core, having a daily operating system for your wellbeing exists to cut through noise and complexity and helps you be clear on what you need to operate well day after day. It helps you prioritise your health first, not as a luxury, but as the foundation that allows you to show up with energy, clarity and capacity across every other area of life.

The three core functions of your daily operating system

As we touched on back on page xxvi, in the context of your health and wellbeing, your daily operating system serves three core functions:

1. *Charge up*: How you create and sustain energy across the day. A big part of this is how consistent your mornings are, and what you do across the day to top up and sustain your energy.
2. *Capacity*: How you increase your capacity and ability to operate under pressure by building your stress tolerance.
3. *Charge down*: How you recover more effectively. This is about how you end your day, and how you build moments of recovery into the day and cadences across the year.

Your operating system is designed to support your energy, your capacity and your recovery. Together, these determine how you feel and perform today, as well as in the future.

The five rhythms

The five rhythms that make up your operating system are your nutrition, exercise, stress and recovery, sleep and connection.

I use the word *rhythms* deliberately as it gives the sense of flow, consistency and repeatability rather than rigidity or perfection. Rhythms are designed to work with your life, not against it, which is why this approach often feels easier and more sustainable than what you may have tried before. Remember, this is about choosing the path of least resistance.

Together, these rhythms, and the one or more behaviours in them, make up your daily operating system. That system provides you

with structure, priority and clarity around what matters most to your wellbeing. It helps you operate at your best by understanding what assists you in creating and sustaining energy, what lets you expand your capacity and resilience, and what improves your recovery.

This is also where the idea of an operating system can be misunderstood. It is not about rigidity or doing the same thing every day, in fact, the opposite is true. A daily operating system creates structure without rigidity. Most importantly, it is built for real life. Because it is adaptable, it meets you where you are, and most importantly, it is customised to *you*.

To bring this to life, here are two examples from my own daily operating system.

My exercise rhythm includes a mix of strength, cardio, walking and yoga across the week. Before having my daughter, this almost always happened in the morning, but now, that is not always possible, so I need to be more flexible. What stays consistent is that I move my body every day—even if it's just a short walk. The reason I do this is because it charges me up and helps me create and sustain energy. Other times, such as with an after-work walk, it helps me charge down from the work day. The rhythm provides structure, without locking me into one rigid way of doing things, which wouldn't work with this rhythm in this season of life. It gives me structured flexibility.

My sleep rhythm, on the other hand, is more structured. It includes consistent cues that help my body prepare to sleep. These include not drinking coffee after midday and not watching TV after 8.30 pm at night. If I am out for dinner, which doesn't happen much these days with a one-year-old, I opt for a 6 pm or 6.30 pm booking so I can still stick with the same timing and structure. Protecting my

sleep is high priority, as it helps me charge down and effectively recover each night, which also largely determines what my energy is like the next day.

Your current season of life

Let me ask you an important question: are you benchmarking your health, habits and capacity against what is realistic for your life right now, or against the best you have ever been? This is a trap that can be easy to fall into, and, if I am honest, it is one I have fallen into myself recently.

After I gave birth to my daughter, I developed chronic back pain. At first, it was persistent but not that bad, and I assumed it would resolve with time and me doing the usual things like seeing a physio, getting regular massages and modifying my movement accordingly.

Instead of improving, the pain lingered and slowly worsened. After months of little progress and further investigations, including an MRI, I had to come to terms with where things were at. What I was asking of my body no longer matched the season of life I was in. Despite everything I had been doing to fix it, the pain was not improving, so something needed to change more drastically.

Part of that adjustment meant changing up the exercise I was doing and returning to the pool. Swimming and I have a complicated relationship. Years of early mornings and long sessions staring at a black line tend to do that. I am certain I reached my lifetime quota of staring at a black line in my teens.

Getting back in the water also involved overcoming plenty of mental hurdles, which included excuses like, 'Oh, I will have to wash my hair'. At first, the challenge was simply showing up. Then came

the comparison against the 15-year-old version of me swimming 5 to 8 kilometres per session, eight to nine times a week—not the 38-year-old version with chronic back pain, a one-year-old, broken sleep and an entirely different set of responsibilities.

That comparison was never going to be fair or helpful. What eventually shifted was the lens I was using. I reframed what swimming meant to me, so it was no longer about performance or output, which is what my DNA always knew it as, but about movement, process and maintaining my exercise rhythm, which is important for my mood, energy and overall operating system.

I am going to be honest, consistency with exercise is never something I have struggled with until this year. The back pain was a factor. Becoming a new mum was another factor. Figuring out a way to upgrade or change my exercise rhythm to fit this current season of life, including not only what I could do, but when I could do it, was a huge factor.

I had to learn to be more flexible and, while I prefer to exercise in the morning and get it out of the way, that isn't always possible right now. I needed to upgrade my exercise rhythm to have more flexibility while retaining the structure. This was not about having unrealistic expectations of myself, it was about figuring out what mattered to me, my wellbeing and what was possible for me right now.

This is a point I often emphasise in my work: *Sustainable progress rarely comes from doing more.* It comes from reducing friction, removing extremes and designing rhythms that are centred around being consistent.

The goal is not to recreate the best you have ever been, it's to meet yourself where you are right now and build from there. When your rhythms are designed for the life you are living, not the ideal one

you are benchmarking against, consistency becomes possible, and consistency, over time, is what compounds.

Lastly, the goal is not for you to do everything, it is to understand where you are, and what is realistic and sustainable. To support this, each section in this book will have an activity so you can take stock of where you are currently and start to piece together your operating system. This is a modified version of the life audit process I use with my coaching clients.

The other thing you need to know before building your operating system is what your body is already telling you. Most of us miss the early signs and only pay attention when things really get in the red or break—like me. In the next chapter, I will show you how to start listening properly, so you can build a system that fits your life as it is right now.

Activity

Take a moment to reflect on how you are currently operating by reflecting on these questions.

- How do you usually start your day? Is it consistent or does it vary? Think about behaviours like what you eat, what you drink, if you exercise.
 - How do your days typically end? Do you have a consistent routine before you go to bed or does it vary? Think about your behaviours before bed and note the time you go to bed on weekdays and weekends.
 - How well do you currently handle pressure? Do you feel stressed? Does it feel sustainable for the next few months or years or are you getting by week to week?
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Conclusion

Creating a daily operating system is about creating structure without rigidity. When you do this, your body and brain trust what is coming next. You waste less energy navigating chaos, and you have more energy available for the things that actually matter.

Chaotic behaviours and days quietly create physiological strain, which, over time, mean everything slowly requires a bit more effort and energy.

The currency central to your health and performance is energy, and when it comes to energy, this is not something you either have or you don't. It's something you create through daily behaviours. This is what the five rhythms that make up your operating system are built on, and they support the three key functions: how you charge up and create energy, how you build capacity to manage stress, and how you charge down to recover consistently over the days, weeks and months that make up your life.