



Hay Hill Highlights

Thriving in the executive world





Hay
Hill
Partners

Hay Hill Partners is a business coaching and executive mentoring firm focusing exclusively on working one to one with business leaders. Our clients are typically board or Exco members and their direct reports. We each combine thirty years of business experience, a psychological understanding and a focus on well-being to help our clients find authentic, positive and sustainable ways forward.

For more information about Hay Hill Partners please visit www.hayhillpartners.com or contact us at our offices:

29 Farm Street
London W1J 5RL
Tel: +44 (0)20 3008 7560

www.hayhillpartners.com

Thriving in the executive world

Introduction

Working in business today can be very intense. In many sectors the traditional pattern of good times and bad times seems to have been ironed out by an intensity from the speed of change and the diversity of business challenges. As tough becomes the new norm, executives have responded with the grit and resilience one would expect, focusing on the personal strategies that will help them overcome, endure and survive. But what if leaders, were to add another dimension to being resilient - what if they were to aim to thrive? What would change for them and their organisations?

Thriving is about flourishing, growing and being 'fed' by life. It is an expansive experience that can support clear thinking, ingenuity and innovation. Thriving can help a leader absorb the body blows even in the most difficult of times, ensuring they remain confident, calm, open minded and balanced. Seeing a leader thrive can be infectious and inspiring to those around them. It can generate a positive energy and help set a constructive tone that lifts and builds a sense of possibility for the leader, their teams and their organisations.

Conversely, regularly pushing through can contribute to an executive being reactive, directive or visibly stressed which throws a shadow across the organisation that brings things down. This can often be a consequence of what we call an *endurance* mindset.

'Thriving is about flourishing and flying despite everything. Knock backs don't cut through. It is possible to navigate challenges without a personal cost. It is contagious to those around you.'

Senior executive, financial services sector

To date, there has been a lot of focus on building an executive's resilience, their ability to overcome difficulties and to bounce back from adversity. Individuals have sought to improve physical and mental resilience through exercise, eating well and, for some, meditation and mindfulness. These aspects have an important place, but the mental framework and context underlying this approach is one of endurance. Executives with an endurance mindset drive themselves, and often others, harder and harder which over time can be depleting. What is the impact of an endurance mindset over an extended period of time on organisations, teams and an executive's personal sense of fulfilment and happiness? Ultimately, is this the way we want to live and lead? As we face an uncertain future, looking to thrive rather than merely survive could be a very important element of providing real leadership at a time of significant disruption to business and society.

How do you thrive when working under extreme pressure? This is a question we have been exploring

in our coaching over the past few years. For this article we have drawn on our experience of working with C-Suite executives running successful organisations alongside insights from interviews with senior leaders. The aim is to create a route map and a practical guide to thriving. Like all maps and guides you may already know some of the territory – what this article aims to do is meld current theories on the good practices that build personal resilience, along with some potentially new ideas to help create an integrated approach to thriving.

As we face uncertain times a leader who is not just enduring but thriving can be key in creating a positive and constructive tone for an organisation.

An overview

Often leaders get caught by an endurance mindset – highly driven without taking account of what is detracting from their well-being and what could enhance it. Sometimes, at least initially, it is hard to distinguish between the chase which is compelling and thriving. To thrive, an executive has to be willing to face inwards, accept who they are and make clear, realistic and positive decisions about how they choose to move forward. Looking at the whole self is an essential prerequisite of thriving, which partly involves aiming to be all you can be. This is a concept that originates in Carl Jung's work on self realisation and one that is often used in helping people to reach their full potential – in coaching top athletes, for example, and in our work with our executive clients.

What helps an executive, or indeed any individual, thrive is unique to them – however, there are some generic practices that can provide a framework. Below, we set out some of those factors, which we expand upon in the rest of this article. Some of the suggestions are purely practical and often simple while others are more psychological. While the psychological are less tangible and a little harder to identify, once they are truly grasped they can facilitate a paradigm shift that allows the individual to make thriving second nature.

Detracting, enabling and thriving factors

We have grouped the practices into three areas – the first two focus on putting in place some firm foundations that can work alongside the thriving factors:

Detracting factors

These are things that are depleting, that take a disproportionate amount of mental or emotional energy or can cause a sense of dissatisfaction that if not addressed makes thriving hard. An example of a detracting factor might be an introverted executive with a gruelling schedule of evening events, who does not create space to recharge.

Enabling factors

These help create a positive basis from which an executive can thrive, but don't on their own result in thriving. For example, eating healthily can help an individual feel physically well, but in itself will not enable them to live fully.

Thriving factors

These are things that help a person feel whole, that they are being all they can be. Thriving factors can be intangible, for example, a feeling of well-being emanating from doing something positive that meets a deeper sense of purpose. These factors tend to create a more open and wide-ranging quality of attention and experience that moves closer to thriving.

These thriving factors can be further sub-divided into four groups:

- 1. Retaining a view of the broader context**
- 2. Having a range of relationships and positive connections**
- 3. Connecting to your full best self**
- 4. Proactively creating mental space.**

Thriving is partly a numbers game. An executive needs to identify a range of thriving factors to draw on and move between as the situation or their mood dictates. These, along with the other factors, need to be brought together into an established practice or system that works because it operates in a number of different ways and on different levels.

'You take a complete approach to how your life comes together with being an executive. It is a bit like being a professional athlete.'

CEO, technology, media and telecoms sector

Lastly...

A word of caution; often successful time-poor executives make a task of doing things well. Applying this to thriving can reduce or obscure some of the mental benefits. There is a balance to be struck between the level of focus needed to identify and apply the factors whilst still connecting to a deeper sense of self, and not tipping the whole process into a 'to do' list.

The life force behind thriving can also be suffocated if an executive's intent is purely to perform better as a leader. In the case of thriving, the approach is more effective when better performance is the outcome not the objective.

There are some practical factors that will prevent or enable thriving. With those taken care of, the thriving factors come into play. The executive should have a range of these to draw on as situation and mood dictates.

Detracting factors

Detracting factors not only deplete a disproportionate amount of mental and emotional energy, they often also take away from an individual's sense of self and well-being. An executive typically knows what detracts but an endurance mindset and keen sense of responsibility may lead them to feel they should 'suck it up', push through and recover at a later date.

Identify what detracts - the things that take away from well-being are very personal. On the work front this can include factors such as the time the working day starts or ends, not taking a break in the day, loss of autonomy over meetings in the diary or travel schedule, or the approach taken to networking, functions, and business dinners.

Having identified the detracting factors, the next step is recognising then accepting their impact and developing a clear positive plan of action. At the heart of this is the executive giving themselves a real choice, and in doing so 'honouring' their sense of self. For instance, for introverts, who gain energy from spending time alone, this may mean limiting the number of business dinners in a week, or working from home first thing the next day to recharge. During an executive retreat it may mean taking time to step away in the coffee break or leaving it a little later before going to the bar. For an extrovert, who gets energy from being with people, it might be making sure that when they need

to do something that is more of a solitary activity, such as detailed preparation for a board meeting, they timetable in some related conversations with colleagues and their network to avoid too much time alone.

Let go of the quick fixes - avoiding comfort eating or self medicating with alcohol and drugs is also important, even though these routes can offer what feels like much needed quick relief. Talking about medicating in this way is often uncomfortable and a difficult area to deal with. However, left unchecked it can have consequences for happiness, well-being, longer-term health and relationships. Quick fixes can also potentially get in the way of looking for what could be more fulfilling.

Recognise digital overload - permanent connectivity is something our executive clients refer to repeatedly and we all know what the issues are with being constantly available. Many executives have a number of devices and a variety of applications through which they can be accessed. Some feel obliged to be available and in contact all the time. Others feel slightly addicted to the constant stimulus. Some experience both.

Being highly connected can, over time, lead to feeling scattered or finding it hard to focus and switch off. At worst, a person can feel mentally trapped and may also adjust their life to be constantly on call. Disconnecting at points can

be essential for a sense of mental freedom and to have a positive experience of connection to self and others. Having some planned downtime in the evenings or at weekends can be a helpful approach. One executive has a basket in the hall where all phones are put on arriving home. Another took a digital break on Saturdays.

It is known that having a digital cut off at least an hour or two before bed stops the blue rays from screens interfering with the melatonin production needed for sleep. Using a mobile as an alarm clock may not be a good idea as it is tempting to look at emails just before bed. Also, a mobile device by the bed can be an unhelpful symbol of the demands of the outside world. It is worth thinking about whether to return to a traditional alarm clock and keeping electronic devices completely out of the bedroom.

Deliberately dialling back on superficial engagement with social media and the internet, trading it for time that feels well spent or just time free of intrusion can also be helpful.

Even when an individual knows what detracts from their well-being, a keen sense of responsibility may lead them to feel they should 'suck it up'.

Enabling factors

Most executives put effort into enabling factors. Indeed these are the things that often come to mind when an executive thinks about looking after themselves. Whilst they often get the most attention, the practices often also fall by the way side under extended pressure so it is worth noting what they are as they are important foundations for thriving.

Invest in physical and mental health

- this can increase both the stamina and the ability to process the stress and pressure associated with a senior role. As we know, exercising, eating well, mindful practices and making the space to sleep are all important. For many executives this is where we see them putting their effort. Whilst all these things are a good investment, these practices alone are rarely enough to thrive. For those operating under extended pressure this may only help them survive.

Take a complete break on holiday

- we know a complete break from work helps with recharging mentally and physically, but senior executives rarely do this. Some leaders aim to get close by compartmentalising contact with the office to, for instance, an hour first thing in the morning. Some take holidays that require so much focus they find it hard to think about work – skiing, cycling or diving are obvious examples. In recent years, we have seen a few clients starting to disconnect completely while on holiday. They are only available for

the most urgent and important things, such as a takeover bid. This can be a very positive and liberating experience, not just for the executive and their holiday companions but also their direct reports. Taking a real break requires the executive to delegate fully, and in doing so gives their direct reports a notable development opportunity to take on their role – an experience many welcome. This in turn can bring the benefit of strengthening the capability of the team.

Have a financial plan B

- it is critical that an executive feels financially free. For many executives when they think of losing their job or not getting a bonus or long-term incentive they expected, they think of the impact on their family. With potentially a large mortgage, school fees and financing a comfortable lifestyle it can feel like there is a lot at stake. When things are hard at work these personal considerations can amplify the pressure. It can be liberating to have a financial plan B, which essentially lays out how discretionary personal spending could be adjusted if income levels dropped or stopped. It can be helpful to talk about this with the relevant people at home so the plan is agreed in advance. Refreshing the plan regularly so it is current, maybe yearly, is important.

An allied, simple and obvious idea is to build up a specific, dedicated pot of money to support the same lifestyle for a period of time without any income. One executive wanted a symbol for his pot of money so he

decided not to replace his car and the car park outside his office served as an ongoing reminder that he was there through choice, and ultimately he was free. Having a financial fall back can make it feel easier to make difficult decisions.

Enabling practices such as exercising, eating and sleeping well and having a financial fall back plan are a good investment but alone are rarely enough to thrive.

Thriving factors

Having addressed the detracting and enabling factors, an executive needs to identify factors that help them thrive. Here too, what helps a person thrive is personal but we have found it is helpful to explore four areas that operate in different ways. The aim is to identify at least five thriving factors that work for an individual. Having at least five means there is choice, which is important as their appeal and power may vary depending on the situation and the mood of the executive. Over time the relationship to the thriving factors may change and it may be necessary to identify new ones.

Below are the thriving factors grouped into four areas.

Thriving Factor 1. - Retaining a view of the broader context

We all know it is important to keep things in proportion but being

human we can lose perspective. Thinking about what really matters and having real clarity around that can make a big difference in keeping above the fray. Ideas about how to keep that clarity include:

Continue to learn and cultivate curiosity – being really curious about customers and what is happening in the organisation, as well as continuing to learn about business generally, not only deepens knowledge but helps an executive stay connected and current and has the potential to take them beyond themselves. Giving the brain something else to work on can take a person to a different place and help cultivate an open mind. An open orientation is generally a more relaxing and vibrant position from which to engage.

Embracing the fact there is sometimes no right answer is often important in really enjoying a role more.

'It can be liberating to realise the more senior you are, the more impossible the role. No one can actually do it all and no one has all the answers.'

CEO, logistics sector

An executive who can say 'I don't know' or 'Let's figure it out' can find it a liberating experience not only for them but their immediate colleagues, offering the opportunity to socialise

the problem and benefit from a range of inputs.

Alongside this, it is important to recognise that senior roles bring with them a level of accountability, profile and visibility that can be scary and bring moments of real discomfort. Often when executives feel vulnerable in this way they see this as a personal weakness or failing when in fact it is just part and parcel of being in a senior role. It is important to accept this for what it is and not let it be derailing.

‘Everybody goes through moments of being really frightened. It is important to understand that if you push yourself it is going to be scary and you have to accept that as normal.’

Executive team member, information services sector

Define success – to operate at senior levels takes a considerable investment of effort, and work often becomes an important part of an executive’s identity. This poses the risk of being too defined by work and starting to measure personal success by positive feedback from colleagues, short-term performance at work or the financial measures of the business. This process of defining self by others’ assessment or financial measures we call ‘external referencing’. Because of the difficult

nature of executive roles, this way of thinking may create a fault line for thriving as it outsources power, agency and worth, rather than looking for it from within.

To counteract this, it can be helpful to define success more broadly, looking for measures that go beyond hard numbers and that are personally important. If it is unclear what these could be it can be helpful to start by getting involved in broader corporate initiatives. Examples include supporting an initiative around mentoring or apprenticeships, or getting involved in helping the organisation work out how to reduce its carbon footprint. If an executive can start to identify contributions that really matter to them they can then start to actively broaden their measures of success. This will help positively enrich their sense of identity and, if cultivated over time, will develop their ability to internally reference.

‘It is liberating to have a goal and game plan not expressed in terms of a role.’

Senior executive, financial services sector

An executive’s personal life can get eclipsed by the ongoing demands of a senior role so it can be worth adding some measures that relate to an executive’s personal life.

These could include getting home a number of times a week to put the children to bed, learning to paint or developing the fitness and capabilities to compete in a cycle race.

Whilst there are a few who find their executive life so rewarding they do not need much else, most find that to thrive they need a richness and fullness beyond their role. The reality is that with the demands of executive life it can feel hard to find the energy or make the time. This typically changes when an executive is really clear about what it is that they want to do. Having a view of what success would look like across all aspects of life in the longer term, such as five years, can help in giving and keeping a perspective. A plan focussed purely around material goals does not usually work.

Look for deeper meaning and

purpose – it is hard to thrive if an individual is merely going through the motions for personal financial and career advancement. Finding a deeper meaning or broader purpose in leadership can really lift it and generate an additional flow of positive feelings. The meaning or purpose needs to connect deeply at a personal level, so it is something that is important to the individual and may not therefore be part of the company's stated aims.

Examples here include the executive who looks to regularly use the platform they have to do some good for people in the organisation. This has included exploring how the organisation could hire more autistic

people and converting a meeting room into a place to rest for a staff member who wanted to work during a protracted illness. Another example is the executive who finds a deeper sense of meaning by increasing their focus on unlocking the potential of their team, empowering and developing them as well as fostering a highly collaborative approach. The positive impact on their colleagues' lives and the sense of joint endeavour is deeply rewarding and has also helped the business results. Very simply, an executive who is feeling good about what they do and sees the greater contribution that can come from their work can create a sense of profundity. This enhances a sense of well-being and can be energising too, not just for the individual but for the organisation they lead.

Defining success more broadly and finding a deeper meaning or broader purpose can be really energising and generate an additional flow of positive feelings that can be sustaining.

Thriving Factor 2. - Have a range of relationships and positive connections

Human beings typically have a fundamental need for connection. Being a senior leader can obstruct this in a range of ways. With seniority, executives tend to find they are increasingly funny, interesting and

intelligent as people around them respond to their role and power. Money can distance executives from other people as they eat in more expensive restaurants and stay in better hotels, where well-trained staff respond to their every need. Being too busy and stressed can remove executives from the small interactions that connect people, such as talking whilst queuing for a sandwich or a coffee. Often, colleagues will not ask how you are – and indeed they may be hoping you are invincible! In all these ways an executive is not really seen for who they are. The gradual and subtle removal from everyday interactions can lead to a slightly hollow, disconnected feeling and loneliness. It is important to actively look for connections at a number of different levels to counteract this.

Connect genuinely with others –

it is easy to be too busy to really genuinely connect to others in the course of a day. Real moments of connection involve seeing another person and truly responding to them. The experience of these sorts of connections can expand our awareness to hold a more generous focus. It can feel as though we become larger than ourselves, lifting up from the self absorption that can happen when under pressure. There is evidence that small moments of genuine connection are not only psychologically sustaining but also positively impact upon our biology.

Have a support network – it is important to have one or two people who it is possible to speak candidly to and shout or rant in their presence,

if needed. This not only takes the pressure off but meets the very human need to be seen as you really are. The person needs to have some distance from the workplace so is unlikely to be a colleague in the same organisation. More likely it will be a personal friend, long-term business contact or coach.

See friends – whilst socialising can be good, it is important to not confuse it with connecting properly with friends. If a partner tends to make the social arrangements an executive can find weekends filled with socialising but not necessarily the level of connection that really matters to them. The executive needs to be clear which friends they need to see.

'You cannot be lazy in life. You have to invest and develop meaningful relationships.'

Executive team member, property sector

Having said that, it is easy and not uncommon for a busy executive to see friends infrequently and even to lose touch. One executive talked about being too busy to see friends and only realising this when they found themselves trying to make friends with their tennis coach. Whilst a tennis coach could be a good friend, in this case the executive's friendly overtures were because the person was there, not because there was a sense of connection or affinity.

The executive described feeling like a pale version of himself as he realised he was trying to be friends with a professional he was paying, simply because they were present.

Even when an executive does see long-standing friends they can find dealing with the responsibilities of running a business a distancing experience. It can make it hard to know where to start when asked the simple question 'how is work?'. Answering it could be boring to others or break the social connection by bringing a very different perspective to those who are not operating at the same level of seniority. Not responding to the question can over time can be isolating and create a distance in the relationship. Also the understanding, experience and high stakes decisions can make more ordinary matters feel less relevant, at worst even small. If others seem small it is definitely a warning light to look at ego and the kinds of connection an individual is having. When this happens it is important to find ways to reconnect. Re-focusing on the commonalities that brought you together and that have sustained the friendship can be one place to start. However, at the same time it is important to recognise people can grow apart. The bottom line is if an executive has moved on from their friends they need to find new ones. It is usually critical to spend time with people who 'get you', who you can connect to and who see you, not your position or money.

It is important to genuinely connect with others who really see you for who you are. This can happen in a range of ways from small encounters through to spending time with friends for whom money and position are not relevant.

Thriving Factor 3. - Connecting to your full best self

Connecting more deeply into the fullest and best version of yourself is predicated on a good level of self-awareness and can bring a vitality that is sustaining. There are a variety of ways to do this. They can sound obvious, but as noted earlier as executives become more powerful and the stakes become high it is easy to lose sight of these fundamentals. Within this category there are five areas worth exploring.

Play to signature strengths –

appraisals and reviews tend to focus on an executive's weaknesses. Yet in coaching we have seen there are often big gains to be had from a leader who knows their strengths and plays to them. It also tends to make them feel good. Positive psychology has taken the idea further, identifying twenty-four signature strengths that connect deeply into a person's sense of identity and being. Creativity and fairness are examples of these. Identifying one's own top three or four signature strengths and using them regularly can really feed a deep sense of self. Interestingly, there is some evidence that people feel more positive around those who are using their strengths.

Be the best version of yourself – setting an aspiration to be the best version you can be can bring a sense of rootedness. It is also a way to build up a reservoir of positive emotional experiences, which have been shown to help a person recover faster when there is a difficulty to deal with.

Being decent to others and on time are obvious places to start. Being too rushed, harried or tired can lead to a brusqueness and a sense of self-importance. Unapologetically bumping into someone, being abrupt to a waiter, not saying hello or bothering to smile are all actions that can lead to a diminished sense of self. This may sound a little obvious, but when an executive becomes important, colleagues and people around them start to tolerate shortness and rudeness. This can create a slippery slope as the executive is deprived of the normal feedback someone else would get.

Conversely, going slower and having micro-moments of doing the right thing can build a positive sense of self. Putting someone at ease, being polite, giving a smile. Through these small acts it is possible to start nurturing a constructive sense of humility and compassion that helps develop a more expansive sense of self.

Be true to yourself – this can be about sticking to what you believe in. Finding the courage to speak the truth can be hard, particularly in aggressive and hostile situations. Really facing the implications of a tough decision can also be important. One way to do this can be to talk

directly to those affected by the decision, explicitly recognising the implications for them and explaining the thinking behind it. This can all help build self respect and pride, which positively builds the sense of self.

'Authenticity is really important. There is no way some big decisions can be right for everyone. You have to face into it and talk to the people impacted. Explain the decision so they understand even if they don't agree with it. Recognise it is the wrong decision for them. Don't hide away from that.'

CEO, logistics sector

Cultivate a positive mindset – it can be helpful to actively cultivate a positive mindset. At the top, executives get the really difficult problems that cannot be solved elsewhere. With this continual flow of issues it is easy to get a bit worn down or to dwell on the negative. As one executive noted, developing a positive pragmatism that 'things are never as bad as you expect them to be' can be invaluable.

'With a positive mindset you will 'do' far more, faster, than by focussing on the negative. It takes self-discipline to have this mindset – a bit of work every day.'

Executive team member, financial services sector

Making a conscious decision to focus on small things that are genuinely positive can be very helpful. Indeed there is evidence that writing down three positive things about the day before going to sleep can really help in increasing positivity over time. We have found these positive things can make an impact even if they are quite small, such as really savouring drinking a good cup of coffee. Actively nurturing positive experiences can grow to create a more expansive approach to life.

One executive suggested when all else fails in a very difficult situation, or on a very trying day, fake it! Forcing a smile can send signals to the brain that can in that moment create a more positive mindset.

Remember it is not just about you – it is worth underscoring the point that with money and increased power the world can seem like it revolves around the executive. This starts to happen in small ways over time, such as a colleague slightly holding back when they disagree or being more effusive about an idea than it justifies. Because these things happen gradually they are easy to miss, so it is important for an executive to be actively aware of this possibility. Deliberately taking time to think how to develop and help others with their job and going out of your way to do so can be a good place to start to counteract it.

Actively playing to personal strengths can feed a deeper sense of self and have a positive impact on those around you.

Thriving Factor 4. - Proactively creating mental space

Under the pressure of a working week it is easy for the endurance mindset to become too dominant, leading an executive to plough on and start priding themselves on how much they have covered, potentially confusing action with progress in the process. When an endurance mindset takes over, being busy can be a badge of honour. A thriving mindset has different metrics, placing greater value on creating mental space. To thrive, the concept needs to come alive in a very practical way in the course of a working day. Creating mental space is a way to do this and four ideas follow.

Have regular micro-points of renewal

– having regular small moments of a few minutes to disconnect from work can help keep an individual fresher, grounded and connected to what is important. These small breaks can come from moments of silence, reflection or shifting attention to something that feels good. Examples include remembering something positive that happened recently, consciously breathing or simply looking at the sky or taking in the view. There is some evidence that silence restores the nervous system and can help build a mental positivity. These moments tend to work less well when they are used to graze on social

media or engage with the internet. The key point is it is not possible to thrive when really tired and these small breaks are important as there is evidence that continually mustering resources to punch through low points can over time increase exhaustion.

Make space to focus – In the course of an intense day it is easy for the skills of constant partial attention and multi-tasking to be overused. Flipping between tasks can increase, as can typing whilst on the phone and apparently having a conversation. This gets in the way of the positive experience that comes from good quality thinking time, conversations and interactions. Moments of calm and even happiness can come from paying attention and focusing on a task or a person.

Make time for the big things – being busy it is easy to lose focus or shift attention to things that seem slightly easier. This can lead to an executive being spread too thinly and becoming unclear about what will make the most difference. Executives are talented and can competently turn their hand to many things, but aiming to focus on what only they can uniquely contribute often has a bigger impact and brings with it a greater sense of achievement. Those executives who regularly make time on a weekly or two weekly basis to review what is going often find they can keep clarity about how to maximize their contribution and impact.

Recognise the range of ways needed to think – the brain needs time to process, and without it thinking can feel cluttered and distracted. Constant stimulation can also increase anxiety. With the demanding pace of executive life it is important to make time to reflect, think and process.

Recognising the different kinds of thinking time, and actively creating the right space, is critical to help give a positive experience of self. This involves being able to trust oneself and be clear about whether an issue needs some focussed time, or whether the brain needs time to freewheel and connect the dots. Activities such as running, walking or taking a bath can offer quality alone time for creative thinking. Sometimes a complete break, such as time spent with friends, will allow your brain to recharge.

‘My brain usually locks down when I am under significant stress. I can free it up if I give it space. There are times when the best thing is to ram my weekend with personal things and hit the ground on Monday having had a mental break. Other times I need some time to really think an issue through. Sometimes when I need to think I will leave work early to go for a long run as I know it will come to me then. This is right for me and it is right for the business.’

CEO, financial services sector

Knowing how your brain functions best, and confidently acting on that, will add to a sense of fulfilment.

A thriving mindset has different metrics from an enduring one, placing greater value on creating space to focus and think.

One last thing

Laugh and have fun – the pressure and intensity of an executive role can easily wash away happiness and deplete vitality. It is easy for the job to stay inside the head in the evenings and at weekends, and squeeze the experience of the present. Bringing a sense of lightness and looking for things that are simply fun and enjoyable is essential. Fun is a form of self compassion.

Further reading and podcasts

Eat Sleep Work Repeat – a podcast on happiness and work culture curated by Bruce Daisley.

Flourish: A New Understanding of Happiness and Wellbeing, by Martin Seligman, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2011

Level 5 Leadership – The Triumph of Humility and Fierce Resolve, by Jim Collins, Harvard Business Review, 2001

Love 2.0: Creating Happiness and Health in Moments of Connection, by Barbara Fredrickson, Penguin 2013

Resilience Is About How You Recharge, Not How You Endure, by Shawn Achor and Michelle Gielan, Harvard Business Review 24th June 2016.

Signature Strengths Questionnaire
see www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu

Thrive Global - a website established by Arianna Huffington

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the many coaching clients and friends of Hay Hill who provided ideas, insights and introductions. We are very grateful to those who were interviewed in the course of researching this paper for their thoughtful contributions and input to early drafts.

Thriving in the executive world was researched and written by Jane Stephens with the input from her colleagues at Hay Hill Partners. Jane is a partner at Hay Hill Partners LLP and has been a one-to-one coach since 2006. During that time she has worked with executives and entrepreneurs from a range of listed companies, private-equity backed businesses, and professional partnerships. Jane can be contacted at jane@hayhillpartners.com.

About Hay Hill Partners

Hay Hill Partners is a business coaching and executive mentoring firm focusing exclusively on working one to one with business leaders. Our clients are typically board or Exco members and their direct reports. We each combine thirty years of business experience, a psychological understanding and a focus on well-being to help our clients find authentic, positive and sustainable ways forward.

For more information about Hay Hill Partners please visit www.hayhillpartners.com or contact us at our offices:

29 Farm Street,
London W1J 5RL

Tel: +44 (0)20 3008 7560